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Factories, Utopias, Decoration and Upholstery: On Utopia, Modernism, and Everyday Life

Antonis Balasopoulos

ABSTRACT
This essay explores the ways in which the notion of “everyday life” helps us stage a theoretically productive encounter between modernism/modernity and utopia within the context of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literary history. Taking Virginia Woolf’s critique of Edwardian writers as its starting point, it examines the hidden historical dimensions of the very idea of the everyday, its connection to modernity and, at the same time, to boredom as a specific symptom of that modernity. To illustrate the implications of this theoretical framework for literary study, I turn to two of the most emblematic texts of modernist and utopian aesthetics: James Joyce’s Ulysses and William Morris’s News from Nowhere. Whereas in Joyce, technical and formal experimentation becomes a means of capturing daily life (including utopian daydreaming) in terms of an oscillation between capitalist commodification and the restlessness of bored distraction, Morris grasps everyday life as both steeped in boredom and removed from the suffering and restlessness associated with it. Thus, utopia reverses the modernist logic of innovation, making “novelty” not a formal dimension of the literary text but one that pertains to its projected, anticipated content: life beyond the determinations of capitalist modernity.
To the extent that the nature of the relationship between utopian and modernist fiction has preoccupied literary history at all, such reflection has tended to be overshadowed by the devastating irony with which Virginia Woolf treats the fiction of H. G. Wells, among other prominent writers of the so-called Edwardian period. In two interrelated essays originally published between 1923 and 1924—"Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown" and "Character in Fiction"—Woolf inverts Arnold Bennett’s pejorative estimation of the modernists’ novelistic craft by pointing to the Edwardian’s own failure to live up to their standards, particularly when it comes to the crafting of fictional character. Above all, Woolf would argue, this failure consists in their inability to register the fact that “around 1910, human character changed” and hence, in their blindness toward the opacity and mystery of the ordinary, emblematized in a certain “Mrs Brown” Woolf claims to have encountered upon a railway carriage on a seemingly uneventful trip from Richmond to Waterloo.

In terms of their purely literary value Wells’s books are, Woolf remarks corrosively, among those leaving one feeling so incomplete and dissatisfied that “in order to complete them it seems necessary to do something—to join a society, or, more desperately, to write a cheque.” Utopian writing is heteronomous writing, writing that fails to draw aesthetic value from itself and that effectively compensates for this failure by offering its readers lofty ideals and ambitious projects for the future; its magnanimity is a result of aesthetic penury.

As for the reason for this penury, it is, in Woolf’s estimation, precisely the result of utopia’s blindness toward the richness and evasiveness of life as it is and as it is incarnated in the slight figure of Mrs Brown:

Mrs Brown, I have said, was poorly dressed and very small. She had an anxious, harassed look. I doubt whether she was what you call an educated woman. Seizing upon all these symptoms of the unsatisfactory condition of our primary schools with a rapidity to which I can do no justice, Mr Wells would instantly project upon the window-pane a vision of a better, breezier, jollier, happier, more adventurous and gallant world, where these musty railway carriages and funny old women do not exist; . . . where every citizen is generous and candid,
manly and magnificent, and rather like Mr Wells himself. But nobody is in the least like Mrs Brown. There are no Mrs Browns in utopia.\(^3\)

Unlike the modernist Woolf, to whom Mrs Brown made an “overwhelming” impression, “pouring out like a draught, like a smell of burning,”\(^4\) the staunchly Edwardian Wells instantly withdraws his gaze from her in order to “project” a utopian vision that both eliminates her and secretly aggrandizes him, for utopia effectively involves a narcissistic projection that always already gets rid of otherness (and an emphatically male narcissistic projection, at that). It is the apotheosis of a look that refuses to see, relishing, as it were, its own blindness. Writers such as Wells “have looked very powerfully, searchingly and sympathetically out of the window, at factories, at Utopias, even at the decoration and upholstery of the carriage.”\(^5\) But they have never seen Mrs Brown, whose existential and literary defender is then Woolf herself, armed with her own heightened sensitivity to the mystery of human nature, “this flying spirit” that constitutes “solid, living, flesh-and-blood Mrs Brown.”\(^6\)

Setting aside the remarkably orchestrated rhetorical play of these lines—wherein the train compartment’s window becomes now a narcissistic mirror, now a panoptic device, and in both cases a screen that blinds Wells’s and the Edwardians’ presumed gaze toward that which lies right before them—it is important to note that the logic of Woolf’s polemic against utopianism as one of the dominant genres of the late nineteenth century hinges on an extensive, if implicit, play with the categories of everyday life and boredom: The train ride upon which Mrs Brown is encountered is a purely quotidian affair, one of the innumerable unremarkable activities that constitute part of the experience of the city dweller; the scene upon which Woolf presumably happens is similarly devoid of drama, consisting in fact of nothing but spurts of seemingly indifferent conversation and silence between “Mrs Brown” and an eminently generic “Mr Smith”; the whole story of the encounter is self-disparagingly introduced as both “simple” and “pointless.” Indeed, the crux of the essay consists in revealing what is really at stake in Wells’s and the other Edwardians’ presumed boredom with such a scene, in their inability to see anything worth relating about it. It is precisely this presumed boredom that, through a striking inversion of perspective, makes Edwardian fiction boring. And it is the haste with which the Edwardian writer withdraws his gaze from that which he views as banally quotidian that prevents him from seeing Mrs Brown, who, sphinxlike, is in fact the personalized equivalent of
the enigma of everyday life itself: “For what, after all is character . . . when we cease to believe what we are told about her, and begin to search out her real meaning for ourselves? In the first place, her solidity disappears; . . . she becomes a will-o’-the-wisp, a dancing light, an illumination gliding up the wall and out of the window . . . . The most solemn sights she turns to ridicule; the most ordinary she invests with beauty. She changes her shape, shifts the accent, of every scene in which she plays her part.”

Yet there is something deceptive in the effectively binary logic through which Woolf’s essays juxtapose past and present, Edwardians and Georgians, utopia and modernism. For it is not simply that modernism itself will turn out, on closer inspection, to contain its own utopian impulse or that, conversely, much of the utopian fiction of the late nineteenth century would reveal a far more self-reflexive stance toward the problems of perception, description, and looking than Woolf is willing to allow. It is also that the aesthetic and ideological projects of both utopian and modernist fiction hinge on a dialectic between everyday life and boredom, in ways—and with implications—that Woolf fails to grasp or to account for.

In the first two sections of the remainder of this essay, I will lay the historical, philosophical, and theoretical foundations for a dialectical, rather than statically binary, examination of the relationship between utopia and modernism. This will involve an exploration of the terrain of mediations that is opened up by the two concepts Woolf’s essays mobilize, even without properly naming them: everyday life and boredom. My comparative reading of their import for the aesthetics and politics of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922) and William Morris’s *News from Nowhere* (1890) in the remainder of the essay will then seek to demonstrate that the passage from the late nineteenth-century novel to its modernist counterpart cannot be properly understood without an effort to make sense of the surprising affinities and telling divergences between utopian and modernist responses to the limits and possibilities of quotidian life, including the enigmatically utopian, if seemingly frightful, encounter with the experience of boredom.

Modernity and the Spirit of the Quotidian

The everyday, the quotidian, the mundane, the commonplace, the ordinary, the prosaic—so many words, so many ways of pointing to that which, in the
words of Maurice Blanchot, is simultaneously the “most difficult to discover.”

The everyday is “difficult to discover” in the sense of being difficult to find and to locate. “Where is it to be found?” Henri Lefebvre would ask of everyday life: “In work or in leisure? In family life and moments ‘lived’ outside of culture?”

“Everywhere and nowhere,” the answer appears to be—at any rate, “always elsewhere.” It is not even in the daily papers, Georges Perec would note, which “talk of everything except the daily.”Thus it is that the everyday is above all what “escapes” us. It is what we are paradoxically both “engulfed within and deprived of.” Phenomenologically speaking, the everyday is that which resists what Heidegger would call αλήθεια—unhiddenness or unconcealment. It is essentially the realm of absentmindedness, of “daily inattention,” or—as Blanchot describes it—“the unperceived, first in the sense that we have always looked past it” and “what we never see for a first time but can only see again, having always seen it by an illusion that is constitutive of the everyday.”

If the everyday resists discovery, in other words, it is because of the virtually automatic, distracted habits of perception that the everyday itself dictates; it is the everyday that renders itself elusive, covering itself in the veil of the always-already seen or familiar. Marxism, ever since Lukács, had a word for this self-veiling: reification. To the phenomenological critique of the opacity of the supposedly obvious it adds a dialectical one: “We penetrate the mystery only to the extent that we recognize it in the everyday world, by virtue of a dialectical optic that perceives the everyday as impenetrable, the impenetrable as everyday.”

By being “most difficult to discover,” the everyday is also deprived of the dignity of being a philosophical concept, a philosopheme. Philosophy, as Lefebvre would note, had after all mostly fashioned itself as a criticism of everyday life, one that equated the mundane and quotidian with the realm of unreflective existence, with the ensnaring in appearances and in the deceptions and lures of the senses, and hence with the inferior concerns and worries of “productive labour.” To the philosophical gaze, the quotidian is likely to avail itself as “an obstacle to the revelation of truth, an unavoidable triviality, the reverse of existence and the perversion of truth.” What it designates, philosophically speaking, is effectively the “non-philosophical.” Indeed, in his foreword to the second edition of the Critique of Everyday Life (1947/1958), Lefebvre complained that philosophers “ignored the book,” evidently taking it for a “critique of triviality” and therefore, almost inevitably, as “a trivial critique.” Yet philosophy does not remain guarded toward the everyday
simply because it regards it as synonymous with inanity and the reign of the trivial; it also senses the presence, within it, of a prohibitive inconsistency. If it is extraordinarily difficult to think the everyday, and therefore to speak of it philosophically, it is because the effort to do so promises to be doubly self-undermining: On the one hand, the labor of abstraction that the derivation of a concept requires threatens to simply redouble the reification that makes the quotidian veil itself; on the other, such labor would consist in a refusal of the opacity and lack of reflexivity that constitute the very life element of the everyday. Thought would thus find itself paradoxically at once too near and too far from what it attempts to think. Yet an effort to think the everyday must be made, for though it can never be fully assimilated to the philosophical, the everyday remains a concept, a means toward theoretical reflection on lived reality.

Signs, we know, signify by virtue of being placed within a network of minimal differences. We speak of the everyday, yes, but as distinct from what? Isn’t life precisely that which is lived every day? Isn’t it life itself in its totality that provides “the everyday” with its chaotic, conceptually unformalizable semantic content? Not quite, for though “in it are expressed and fulfilled those relations which bring into play the totality of the real,” they are expressed and fulfilled in a manner “that is always partial and incomplete”—and not transhistorically, either. In English, and according to the Oxford English Dictionary, the adjective quotidian began its life somewhere around the end of the fourteenth century and, inauspiciously enough, as a synonym for the daily periodicity of a disease, of an organic distemper. A second meaning, which preserves the sense of the “daily” without reference to recurrent symptoms, developed after the beginning of the fifteenth century. Sin is one of the emerging noun complements of the “quotidian”: like disease, it is an emblem of a regularity taken over by the pathogenic, by yet another form of the weakness of the flesh. After 1430, the adjective was increasingly nominalized, and its meaning expanded into the more modern acceptation of the “commonplace, mundane, ordinary.” As work and daily life were increasingly separated in the late feudal era, and as the culture of peasant festival began to decline, quotidian came to mean that which is nominally distinct from the realm of collective celebration and spiritual solemnity: it refers to work (1500), to “wantonness” (1625), to the “vulgar” (1534) and the trivial. The original counterpoint to the quotidian, then—and this is important in light of the notion’s later linkage to a peculiar type of epiphany, to a “profane illumination” that arrives suddenly
and, as it were, at all sorts of inappropriate times and places—is the realm of communal and religious experience, the experience of the festival that binds the community in common exposure to the sacred. This contrapuntal function, fundamental to the raising of the quotidian to the status of a distinct category, becomes clearly legible, as it were, only after the gradual disappearance of festival. Though the latter “contrasted violently with everyday life” in the peasant world, it was “not separate from it.” Traditional “everyday life,” life before the emergence of a distinct quotidian sphere, was in fact based on “non-separation,” on the “absence of differentiation in the cosmic order.”

Clearly, modernization signals a qualitative transformation in the meaning of the term quotidian. The older, organically inflected category of experience, as Fredric Jameson remarks, is broken into segments, each divested from intrinsic value, each therefore capable of simply being added to the next in a kind of endless parataxis. Emerging as the flip side or verso of modernity, the quotidian becomes emblem of all that is impoverished and impoverishing in the triumph of the division of labor. It is “what is humble and solid,” “undated” and “(apparently) insignificant,” whereas the modern “stands for what is novel, brilliant, paradoxical.” The two poles “mark and mask, legitimate and counterbalance each other.” Hence modernity does not properly speaking mark the emergence of a “quotidian” as such. Rather, it is the condition in which what used to be everyday experience is qualitatively denuded, quantified, and indifferently diffused. Yet, and for this very reason, modernity also marks the possibility of a synapse between a now omnipresent, homogenized, and omnivorously homogenizing quotidianism and a transformation in the conception of “spirit,” in which spirit (as the philosophical name for the precarious unity of the mental and the material, of the negative work of labor and the silent givenness of the natural world) can exist only improperly, in out-of-joint fashion, as something other than spirit.

Hegel’s famous remark that “the being of Spirit is a bone” in The Phenomenology of Spirit (1807) might be said to be the prototypical philosophical formalization of this specifically modern acceptation of the paradox involved in the modern quotidian—the co-implication of material triviality and access to the transcendental. In the literary domain, Charles Baudelaire’s prose narrative concerning a certain mystical halo that slips from the poet’s head and “onto the muddy asphalt pavement” (“Loss of a Halo,” 1869) may well be its most paradigmatic early aesthetic expression. Ironically, Lefebvre’s own youthful turn from Christian Catholicism to Marxism—based
as this was on his decision that “Spirit,” in the Hegelian sense of totality, is to be found not in church doctrine and ritual but in a Marxist and materialist critique of alienation—is itself testimony to the triumph of a specifically and irreducibly modern understanding of the everyday.36 But it is also important to recall Lefebvre’s well-known remark that everyday life is “in a sense residual,” that it is “defined by ‘what is left over’” after the removal of distinct, superior, specialized, and structured activities; “the standpoint of the totality” survives precisely in this residue.37 In the internally colonized zone of the quotidian,38 modern consciousness encounters totality (or Spirit) itself as devalued excrescence—an obstinate residualism that provides secret access to the unimaginable community of the modern city. Despite its association with banality or triviality (or, in fact, because of it, because of its distance from the conventionally and hence also impotently “spiritual”), the quotidian emerges as the only domain in which a simultaneously nostalgic and anticipatory relation to the collective may assert its presence.

The Dialectic of Boredom

By definition, epiphany is a fleeting state of exception within the mostly inarticulate and unreflective sphere of modern everyday life; boredom is far more characteristic of that sphere. Everyday life is after all mostly made of “recurrences,” as Lefebvre observed.39 It is the realm where serial succession, repetition, and the regularity of the pattern supremely assert themselves. The everyday is boring, and boredom is quite possibly its distinguishing feature as a modern dispensation of existence: the effective identity of the two terms is what most prominently comes forth when one reflects on the implicit dialogue between Blanchot’s 1969 remarks on “everyday speech” and Heidegger’s 1929–30 lectures in The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics.40 If Blanchot’s “everyday” “escapes every speculative formulation,”41 Heideggerian boredom emerges as “precisely” that which “we cannot manage to grasp,” “almost as though we were looking for something that does not exist at all.”42 If the everyday “belongs to a region where there is still nothing to know,”43 “in boredom we do not ascertain anything, nor do we grasp anything,” but are bound precisely by “nothing.”44 If the “essential,” “constitutive” trait of the everyday is to be “unperceived,”45 “being bored with” hinges on “the inconspicuousness of passing the time,” our inability to
even perceive the fact that we are being bored. If the everyday “is without a subject” but “does not belong to the objective realm” either, boredom is neither subjective nor objective but a “hybrid,” a mode of “attunement” between Dasein and world. If what is at play within the everyday is “the corrosive force of human anonymity,” its positing, instead of a subject, of an “anyone,” a “neither me nor, properly, the other,” and hence the utter impersonality of a simple “there is the everyday,” “profound boredom” necessitates an equally impersonal “it is boring for one”—“not for me as me, not for you as you, not for us as us, but for one.”

If, finally, the everyday is “a category” without which “one would not know how to get at either the hidden present or the discoverable future of manifest beings,” profound boredom impels the factically impoverished subject “toward the originary making-possible of Dasein as such,” so that the “telling refusal of all beings” becomes a negative path toward encountering their possibility “as a whole,” “in one originally unifying dimension of time”—the path to Spirit, a Hegelian might say.

It is thus anything but accidental that Blanchot describes “boredom” as “the sudden, the insensible apprehension of the quotidian” or as “the everyday become manifest.” And it is just as symptomatic that Heidegger advises us that in order to grasp boredom philosophically “we must follow what everyday speaking, comportment, and judgment actually expresses.” Indeed, Heidegger’s tripartite speculative typology of boredom is profoundly indebted to the raw material of the everyday, its “banal, yet quite spontaneous forms”: The listless waiting at the train station illuminates becoming bored by things; an only retrospectively (and enigmatically) dull outing with friends unveils the character of being bored without a determinate object; and walking “through the streets of a large city on a Sunday afternoon” furnishes a possible, provisional example of the most profound, ontologically resonant version of boredom. The phenomenology of boredom is the phenomenology of everyday life, just as the philosophical foray into the paradoxes of the everyday turns out to involve its grasp in terms of the quizzical nature of boredom.

Boredom, I said, is perhaps what is most characteristically modern about the quotidian. Paradoxically, it is in boredom that the historicity of everyday life is most dramatically grasped. This is what becomes apparent in chapter 5 of Heidegger’s The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics, which concerns the question of profound boredom for “our contemporary Dasein.” Briefly put, Heidegger’s answer to the question of where we stand with respect to profound boredom, and to the possibilities inherent in its awakening in and for
thought, is that profound boredom is precisely that which modern society most anxiously represses through all sorts of “bustling self-defense,” through its constant foregrounding of “needs” that “does not allow any need to emerge as a whole.” The modern obsession with novelty (or with novelties) is in this sense reactive, constituting an overly excited preemptive response to the experience of profound boredom. In frantically guarding against boredom by pursuing all sorts of demands, satisfactions, and stimuli, modernity paradoxically ends up making man both “boring to himself” and incapable of locating in this boredom the positive possibility of an increased receptivity to the need of Dasein to encounter itself. This is, then, the sign of the historicity of this particular malaise, its tendency to afflict our own society far more than less excitable ones: boredom is the price paid by the subject that no longer allows itself the time to encounter the unhomeliness of the world, busying itself with production and consumption so that it fails to encounter that which does not manifest itself directly. Like modernity, boredom develops conceptually almost simultaneously with the “quotidian”: if the latter changed meaning with the gradual waning of traditional festival life after the Reformation, boredom appeared in English only after the 1760s, largely as a replacement of the far more religiously oriented notion of acedia. As Joe Moran aptly notes, it “is a historically constituted feeling which developed . . . with the birth of modernity” and hence “cuts to the heart of the complex relationship between everyday life and modernity.”

Boredom, the quotidian, modernity—it is a conceptual triptych that only gains its full historical resonance with the addition of a fourth term: capitalism. For it is the capitalist mode of production that converts the commodification of novelty into a principle of mythical repetition, “in which the self-identical perpetually presents itself as the new.” And it is capitalist ideology that lends such boredom its peculiar, restless acuity by constantly conjuring before the subject the mirage of endless possibilities of fulfillment, vast arenas of tantalizing sensation, taunting mirages of pleasures lacking and pleasures to come (Baudelaire is, of course, the poet not simply of the modern everyday but also of modern ennui, its twin in the proto-capitalist universe of the Paris of the Second Empire; while Balzac is the earlier chronicler of those wild oscillations between hyperexcitement and restless boredom that urban ambition engenders). Not accidentally, and despite the chasm that otherwise separates his phenomenological critique from a Marxist one, Heidegger finds it necessary to speak quite literally of business when he seeks to render apparent the nature of
reactive busybodiness with which we try to fend off the experience of profound boredom: “This while of Dasein, i.e., its own time, is at first and for the most part concealed from Dasein, as what it simply uses up as it were, or else makes itself aware of in an inappropriate manner when it reckons with this while, calculates it in advance for itself, just as though Dasein itself were a business.”

“As though Dasein itself were a business”—it is not, but Dasein’s frenzied avoidance of itself is busy work and good for business: “leisure,” “entertainment,” and “distraction” are some of the names associated, principally by the so-called Frankfurt school, with what in Heideggerian terms is the profitable enterprise of keeping the self-contemplation of Dasein at bay. Or, to refer to Fredric Jameson’s pertinent analysis of the issue:

Ennui—the organic feeling of our inner vegetal time—wishes to be repressed, denied, ignored, concealed, and finally rationalized out of existence. That great break with nature constituted by the coming industrial capitalism or Weberian rationalization then at once brings its own myths and palliatives, its own alibis and objective irreals along with it, to cover over the rift it momentarily opened up. These new and historically original dimensions of concealment, of layers of appearance utterly distinct from existence itself, are of course the profit motive and the new and artificial role of money and abstraction in our societies, as well as the fetishization of commodities, the coming into being of a wall or fold of manufactured objects within which labor is hidden and yet from which it mysteriously emanates with all the mesmerizing fascination of value itself.

The Logic of Modernism

Where, then, could we place literary modernism within this square framed by modernity, capitalism, boredom, and the everyday? Perhaps—this will be my suggestion here—we could think of it in terms of a series of diverse and even mutually conflicting strategies through which writing responds to Dasein’s self-conversion into a ground for business—a processing center for the sundry stimuli generated by daily life in the commodity world that both reflects the restlessness of boredom and protects us from its potentially disruptive implications. Take, for instance, this sequence of
passages from the centerpiece of the modernist pantheon that is James Joyce’s *Ulysses*:

The priest went along by them, murmuring, holding the thing in his hands. He stopped at each, took out a communion, shook a drop or two (are they in water?) off it and put it neatly into her mouth. . . . The priest bent down to put it into her mouth, murmuring all the time. Latin. The next one. Shut your eyes and open your mouth. What? Corpus: body. Corpse. Good idea the Latin. Stupefies them first. Hospice for the dying. They don’t seem to chew it: only swallow it. . . .

Must be twenty or thirty funerals every day. Then Mount Jerome for the protestants. Funerals all over the world everywhere every minute. Shovelling them under by the cartload doublequick. Thousands every hour. Too many in the world. . . .

Mr. Bloom admired the caretaker’s prosperous bulk. All want to be on good terms with him. Decent fellow, John O’Connell, real good sort. Keys: like Keyes’s ad: no fear of anyone getting out. No passout checks. *Habeas corpus*. I must see about that ad after the funeral.65

These extracts, taken from chapters 5 and 6 (“Lotus Eaters” and “Hades”), orchestrate a paradigmatic exposition of a complex conceptual logic: Bloom, a Jew, observes the Christian rituals of communion and burial with a mixture of bored detachment and frantic associative activity. The spectacle of communion—an emblem of the mediation between the fleshly and the transcendent that the premodern festival enacted—remains precisely a spectacle, not a lived experience. Its distracted contemplation leads Bloom into fragmented but deftly interlaced reflections on language, the body, and death (*corpus* as Latin for “body” and as allusion to “corpse,” Latin itself as a dead language, and so on); to a contemplation of the global simultaneity of ritual, its mass production, as it were (“funerals all over the world everywhere every minute”); and, finally, to the profane realm of advertising (Keyes’s ad as something already prefigured by Bloom’s cynically professional remark on the “good idea” of using “Latin” to “stupefy” the believers, who “swallow” what they are given whole, much like the gullible victims of advertising). It is religious ceremony and capitalist industry, “capitalism as religion,” if one is to recall Benjamin:66 the advertisement, as ultimate sign of the vulgarly material, is organically fused with the rest of Bloom’s grimly materialist speculations on the way of all
flesh, themselves occasioned by the sheer boredom of collective rituals shorn of transcendence and rendered effectively meaningless from a spiritual standpoint, like so much raw material for the wanderings of the distracted mind.

At one extreme of the spectrum, then, we find something like the deployment of technical innovation (stream of consciousness, the sentence fragment, “free” association) as a means of capturing daily life in terms of an oscillation between the dreamworld of compulsive commodification and the restlessness of a consciousness caught in the clutches of bored distraction. In his discussion of *Ulysses*, Franco Moretti suggests that Bloom, significantly an advertiser by profession, passes his exemplary day in Dublin with his mind gliding from commonplace to commonplace, from digression to digression, in a kind of perpetual mixing of Dasein and business, mental overactivity and a profound resistance toward the possibility of the disruptively eventful.67 A ‘banality rate’ is thus established in Bloom’s mind: a regular, constant rhythm—two or three stimuli, one commonplace, two or three stimuli, one commonplace—that accompanies him throughout the day, offering firm support amid the throng of external and internal impulses... [H]is rather banal wishes, with nothing illicit about them, will be boring for psychoanalysis, but not for advertising... [T]he great novelty of the stream of consciousness consists in proceeding for pages and pages without the slightest revelation... In short, a *Ulysses* without epiphanies.”68

On the other hand, and at the other end of the spectrum, Proust’s project in *Remembrance of Things Past* evokes precisely that which Joyce’s “democratic materialism”69 negates, namely, the search for an “empty place” wherein memory can begin to unfold unhampered by the barrage of urban stimuli. While *Ulysses* presents us with a “crowded world,” “all noise and interference,” Proust’s narrator seeks the *epokhē* of the audible world, the suspension of the interferences of the outside.70 Significantly, this countergesture is encapsulated in a counterview of profaned communion:

I retrace my thoughts to the moment at which I drank the first spoonful of tea. I rediscover the same state, illuminated by no fresh light. I ask my mind to make one further effort, to bring back once more the fleeting sensation. And so that nothing may interrupt it in its course I shut out every obstacle, every extraneous idea, I stop my ears and inhibit all attention against the sounds of the next room. And then, feeling that my mind is tiring itself without having any
success to report, I compel it for a change to enjoy the distraction which I have just denied it, to think of other things, to rest and refresh itself before making a final effort. And then for the second time I clear an empty space in front of it.71

Whereas in *Ulysses* everything is ceaseless, metonymic motion—between images, stimuli, memories, wishes, styles, genres of discourse—Proust’s aristocratic world picture springs forth from a single, generative shock that arrests present time long enough to allow communion with the vanished world of the past. In between the two extremes, we find all sorts of attempts to explore the terrain between the banal and the revelatory (Dos Passos, Musil, Broch, Döblin, Woolf), with that commitment to “estranging the familiar” that provides modernism with its characteristic oscillations between bold iconoclasm and a high tolerance rate for banality and kitsch.

Such oscillations could be said to respond, if not correspond, to capitalism’s own dialectic of the everyday, split as this is between the dazzling innovations that transform daily life at the technological level and the banal repetition that sustains the stability of sociopolitical content (bourgeois parliamentarianism, corporate business, mediatocracy).72 In this respect, Viktor Shklovsky’s famous exposure of the presumed secret at the heart of the literary—the salvaging, at the level of writing, of aesthetic meaning from the otherwise unaesthetizing experience of daily chores in Tolstoi’s *Diaries*73—might also be said to convey the par excellence gloss of the redemptive impulse of the modernist project. Literary modernism legitimates itself as a “making strange” of the otherwise all-too-transparent, self-trivializing experience of the everyday, as the means toward a profound recognition that invests everyday life, for all its cesspools of boredom or distracted ennui, with a transcendent potential: Proust’s time regained, the vast formal and stylistic ambition of *Ulysses* as aesthetic compensation for the transcendence the novel’s actual content everywhere negates.

But this brings us to the question I raised when reflecting on Woolf’s response to the Edwardians: the question of the existence of a utopian impulse proper to modernism itself. This utopian impulse would of course consist in the operation of salvaging everyday life from the blinding self-evidence in which it seems to languish—an operation that in Woolf is certainly marked by the struggle against the profoundly gendered presuppositions of the very distinction between the “noteworthy” and the “trivial.”
Certainly, as Christina Britzolakis’s fine essay has shown, Woolf’s work does indeed furnish us with “ambiguously utopian forms of reflection, which turn on the intersection of everyday and epochal forms of awareness.”74 For Britzolakis, this ambiguous utopianism derives from a commitment to the exploration of new forms of intersubjective experience in the wake of the catastrophe of World War I and, hence, from a desire to restore to modernity a certain kind of compensatory utopian potential. The means through which this project is fleshed out, meanwhile, will turn out to have everything to do with a feminized quotidian, oscillating between, on the one hand, an “aesthetics of sublime expenditure” emblematized, for instance, by Clarissa Dalloway and, on the other, the more banal and less elevated discourses of consumer society and commodity spectacle that coalesce around her exemplary day.75

Yet this compensatory project does not quite exhaust the valences of “utopian” inherent in the everyday, for, as with the double extraction of the meaning of the term utopia itself, the everyday continues to signify negatively as well.76 Blanchot is once again exemplary in grasping the utopian underside of such negativity: “Is not the everyday, then, a utopia—the myth of an existence bereft of myth? For in the everyday we are neither born nor do we die; hence the weight and the enigmatic force of everyday truth.” For Blanchot, the utopian potential of the everyday lies in its anonymizing powers, in the “radical nihilism” through which it threatens to subject heroism, activity, or intention to “a power of dissolution” that yields neither the eternal nor the void but, rather, “eternullity,” a time voided from any concern with the existential pole of the subject and given over to the statistical sublime.77 This is in fact something of what Joyce attempts to convey when he presents Bloom’s fantasies of a personal, petit bourgeois utopia of leisure (Flowerville)78 through the medium of a fully commodified and subjectively denuded language:

In what ultimate ambition had all concurrent and consecutive ambitions now coalesced?

Not to inherit by right of primogeniture . . . but to purchase by private treaty in fee simple a thatched bungalow-shaped 2 storey dwellinghouse of southerly aspect, surmounted by vane and lightning conductor, connected with the earth, with porch covered by parasitic plants (ivy or Virginia creeper), halldoor, olive green,
with smart carriage finish and neat doorbrasses, stucco front with gilt agreeable prospect from balcony with stone pillar parapet over unoccupied and unoccupyable interjacent pastures and standing in 5 or 6 acres of its own ground . . . the premises to be held under feefarm grant, lease 999 years, the messuage to consist of 1 drawingroom with baywindow (2 lancets), thermometer affixed, 1 sittingroom, 4 bedrooms, 2 servants’ rooms, tiled kitchen with close range and scullery, lounge hall fitted with linen wallpresses, fumed oak sectional bookcase containing the Encyclopaedia Britannica and New Century Dictionary, transverse obsolete medieval and oriental weapons, dinner gong, alabaster lamp, bowl pendant, vulcanite automatic telephone receiver . . . servants’ apartments with separate sanitary and hygienic necessaries . . . pantry, buttery, larder, refrigerator, outoffices, coal and wood cellarge with winebin (still and sparkling vintages) for distinguished guests, if entertained to dinner (evening dress), carbon monoxide gas supply throughout.79

And Joyce goes on, in a fashion that is not easy to distinguish from what Woolf’s essays had identified with the moth-eaten descriptions of Wells and the other Edwardians, bent on scrutinizing “the advertisements; . . . how Mrs Brown wore a brooch which had cost three-and-ten-three at Whitworth’s bazaar.”80 What is at stake in the virtually intolerable boredom of such writing,81 however, is not simply or unambiguously anti-utopian satire, as in Woolf’s references to “factories and utopias.” For, to the extent that the affirmative aspect of such satire involves the renewal of faith in the humanist subject and her undying persistence—the rescue of Mrs Brown “at whatever cost of life, limb, and damage to valuable property”82—satire simply does not go deep enough. The modern quotidian is not sufficiently unmasked in its nihilistic negativity. To the extent that there is in Joyce a critique of quotidian alienation, it is therefore, and however paradoxically, the superannuated language of utopia that comes to its aid against Woolf’s rescue operation, for what clearly emerges as false here is precisely subjectivity, the idea that the subject can remain something inexhaustible despite the objective impoverishment of individual experience brought by the proliferation of alienating separations in the mode of production.83 The utopian impulse persists negatively,84 in the form of a critique of comfortably humanist anti-utopianism.
Utopian Neutralization

How is one, then, to grasp the place of utopian narrative proper vis-à-vis modernism’s contradictory relationship to a capitalist quotidianism in which the numbness of banality and the intensity of revelation, ontological and historical catastrophe, and the outburst of creative energy ceaselessly trade places and reveal each other as their secret content? How is one to restore to visibility a dialectic that has been largely suppressed by the fact that, in Jameson’s words, modernity can be read as “something of a spurious promise intended in the long run to displace and replace the Utopian one”?85 One might well begin with Michael E. Gardiner’s observation that, though “utopia” and “everyday life” are “usually construed as incongruous, even thoroughly incompatible phenomena,” there does in fact exist a strong and seldom theorized connection between them.86 For if utopias constitute representational fictions from which history seems to have vanished, with time reverting into “an empty, geological medium of horizonless futurity,”87 what is remaindered by the eclipsing of historical eventfulness is the realm of the quotidian as such, the quotidian as a realm without relief and without end. Utopia, Roland Barthes would note (in a manner that grasps the nonsatirically utopian dimension of the excruciatingly dull description of Bloom’s fantastic arrangements for Flowerville), “is measured far less against theoretical statements than against the organization of daily life.” Its textual mark is precisely “the everyday”—so much so, indeed, that “everything everyday is [already] utopian: timetables, dietary programs, plans for clothing, the installation of furnishings, precepts of conversation or communication.”88

It is this generically vital dimension, according to which utopian description amounts to a spectacle of pure everyday life,89 that is taken up and revalorized affirmatively by the fin-de-siècle utopian fictions that immediately precede modernism. Such fictions, as Matthew Beaumont has shown, attempt to respond to the problem modernism itself attempts to handle, namely, that of “conceptualizing a present” that capitalism has reified to such an extent as to make it seem “inaccessible to the habits of rational consciousness.”90 Hence, “a freshly complicated view of the relationship between Victorian and modernist aesthetics”91 would have to take into account the fact that utopias proper contain moments of an encounter with everyday life that is implicitly antagonistic to that of modernism, for in such moments the everyday shines forth as utopian to the extent that it is disalienated, purified from its sordid
dimensions so that its very boredom is somehow no longer boring: “I noticed both with these pretty girls and with everybody else we met, that in default of serious news such as we had heard at Maple-Durham, they were eager to discuss all the little details of life: the weather, the hay-crop, the last new house, the plenty or lack of such and such birds, and so on; and they talked of these things not in a fatuous and conventional way, but as taking, I say, real interest in them.”

The passage is taken from William Morris’s *News from Nowhere*, perhaps the exemplary utopian fiction of the fin de siècle and a text that manages to be at once anti-Victorian and nonmodernist, inimical to the literary domi-
nants that precede it no less than it is toward those that follow. It is a rather revealing textual instance: first, because in positing the eclipsing, within the utopian England of the future, of “news” (something Morris’s title already effects by way of the paradoxical formulation “news from nowhere”), it also critically preempts the subsequent modernist hypostatization of novelty, the cult of “making it new”; and second, because what it reveals through the hypothetical disappearance of “news” is the entirely (and paradoxically) new dispensation of an “everyday” that is at once thoroughly steeped in boredom and profoundly redeemed from its psychic implications. Boredom, more precisely, is something presented as a problem likely to afflict the novel’s reader, while within the fiction, characters are blissfully protected from its noxious effects. Hence Guest’s description registers his awareness that from our own standpoint the subjects of conversation among the Nowhereans are boring enough to compel him to synoptic abbreviation (“such and such birds,” “and so on”) but also insists that these same topics are, at the same time, fully engrossing to the Nowhereans themselves, who speak of commonplace affairs in exceptional fashion, “not in a fatuous and conventional way, but as taking . . . a real interest in them.” Novelty, to put it otherwise, obtains not at the level of form (as in modernism) but at the level of content, this last consisting in the speculative reconstruction of an affective experience that is acknowledged as at least partly impossible to convey to the reader.

To a conception of utopia in terms of an “education of desire,” one might then wish to add the importance of a parallel rehabilitation of habit—a category central to modern everyday life but sharply distinct from, and even opposed to, the subjective intensities of desire, even if it is, simultaneously, the site of its emergence. “Habit,” however, is now to be understood dialectically: for it is not reducible to deadening routine and mindless repetition as
it is from the standpoint of modernist Verfremdung, without also constituting a sign of the possibilities inherent in forward-looking adjustment, without becoming a means of contemplating the historical modifiability and adaptability of our psychic world, our sensibilities and ways of experiencing, and perhaps our physical senses themselves. As Morris’s text thus suggests repeatedly, the novelty in which it is interested involves precisely the possibility of a collectively meaningful transformation of the experience of the commonplace—a new structure of feeling vis-à-vis the everyday. This will not, however, and in contrast to modernism, be a matter simply entrusted to individual artistic invention but will be explicitly linked to the experience of political revolution itself—the narrative subject of that cardinal chapter entitled “How the Change Came.” Ironically, this tethering of the possibilities of the imaginary to the political Real of violent struggle brings Morris’s utopianism closer to the Real of early twentieth-century revolutionary politics than Woolf (who chastises Joyce for the “indecency” of his penchant to figuratively break windows) could legitimately be assumed to be.

Revolution, as Lefebvre would explain, is after all something that takes place when (and only when) “people can no longer lead their daily lives,” when, therefore, everyday life becomes collectively seized in its sheer unlivability. Revolutionary energies are therefore those that orient themselves both toward annihilating an everyday life rendered synonymous with intolerable oppression and misery and toward reorganizing it “until it is as good as new”—operations that Morris undertakes as well, even if he does so speculatively, under the auspices of a “what if.” As Lefebvre was to show in the domain of Marxist theory, the objective of a “critique of everyday life” was already nothing less than to pave the path toward “the revolution of everyday life” for the ambition to transform totality is also an ambition “for the transformation of life in its smallest, most everyday detail.” At the same time, however, revolution cannot take subjective hold, cannot fulfill itself as lived and organically internalized experience, until it becomes a quotidian affair, until it generates its own forms of habituation and adjustment. This dialectical complication is vital not only for a writer such as Morris but for a professional revolutionary such as Leon Trotsky as well: in 1923—a year after the publication of Ulysses and almost simultaneously with the publication of Woolf’s “Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown”—the latter would draw attention to the problem presented to revolutionaries by the category of habit. As he shows, it is vital, if the revolution is to survive the contradictions that have allowed it to
come into being, to accompany the political change of regime with a “critical transformation of morals,” even if this means a second, quotidian revolution against the tendency of “conscious creativeness in the domain of custom and habit” to occupy an only “negligible place in the history of man.”

Rising against a quotidianism organized as “daily passivity,” revolution is the historical and political attempt to create conditions under which “the creative aspects of life always predominate over the repetitive” and, hence, to abolish the alienation implicit in the very distinction between positively and negatively valorized spheres of life—between manual and intellectual work, mindless and mindful labor, activity and passivity, work and leisure, production and consumption, subjective experience and the material world.

To return to Morris, his proleptic utopian neutralization of the modernist response to the antinomies generated by the poles of capitalism and modernity, everyday life and boredom, will thus hinge upon the complete inversion of the canonical modernist positing of the relationship between everyday life and artistic form: whereas in modernism it is the task of the aesthetic now to invest the flat uneventfulness of the quotidian with the intensities of aesthetic creativity, now to register the vitiation of representational labor by the dumb automatisms of the everyday, in Morris it is, rather, the transformation of the everyday by political revolution that transfigures the import and destiny of aesthetic work within a refashioned quotidian. While visiting the future incarnation of Morris’s own abode, Kelmscott Manor, Guest notes something not quite about upholstery—if one is to recall Woolf’s sarcastic quip on Edwardian novelistic descriptions—but about tapestry, the very material Morris made a name in designing: “We sat down at last in a room over the wall which Ellen had caressed, and which was still hung with old tapestry, originally of no artistic value, but now faded into pleasant grey tones which harmonized thoroughly well with the quiet of the places and which would have been ill supplanted by brighter and more striking decoration.”

Postrevolutionary everyday use transfigures the originally artistically indifferent tapestry into an art form suitable to its newly minted social environs. The apotheosis of artistic labor from the standpoint of socialist revolution is precisely this fading away into life, its simultaneous fulfillment and overcoming as specialized activity, its beneficent self-forgetting, as it were. Art is aesthetically justified by returning to the realm of pure means, which is to say, by subtracting itself from the hellish cycles of exchange and from a regime of sense according to which artistic representation and the representation of
value in the commodity are always fatally intertwined. At the same time, this fading away of artistic work into disalienated and collectively inflected sensory experience depends on an ontological dispensation that is by no means to be confused with our own baleful relation to the impact of time on matter and on affect, based as this is on the sense of quantitative attenuation, entropy, and death: “Though the strangeness and excitement of the happy and quiet life which I saw everywhere around me was, it is true, a little wearing off, yet a deep content, as different as possible from languid acquiescence, was taking its place, and I was, as it were, really new born.”

But this is not yet a full account of the import of everyday life for Morris’s text, which could be said to present itself as a literature of the quotidian fit for those who have apparently achieved what Stephen Daedalus only longs for—to wake up from the nightmare of history. For, however ironically, News from Nowhere is also a text that Nowhereans would not have been prone to write: “How is it that though we are so interested with our life for the most part, yet when people take to writing poems or painting pictures they seldom deal with our modern life, or if they do, take good care to make their poems or pictures unlike that life? . . . How is it that we find the dreadful times of the past so interesting to us—in pictures and in poetry?”

It is a fateful question, one that effects a further turn of the dialectical screw: For what makes Morris’s utopia profoundly modern is not simply its conscious engagement with the problem of the everyday; it is also its anxious reflexivity about the limits of any effort to imagine the everyday “from the standpoint of redemption”—a reflexivity with inevitable (and damaging) consequences for the ability of the utopian text to fully expunge the antinomies that torment modernism itself. Clara is only the first of a series of characters who dramatize the contradictory relationship of utopian society to narrative, to the extent that they serve as projections both of the abiding desire for narrative pleasure and of its scandalousness in a context where pure quotidianism has rendered individual subjectivity virtually impossible. It is perhaps realistically understandable that Guest, the narrator, can still tremble “with excitement” when he hears the account of what preceded the great change from the mouth of Nowhere’s historian, Hammond, even though this account is largely one of human suffering and bloody violence. But what is one to think when Hammond confesses that when “people began to settle down after the war,” “a kind of disappointment” crept over them, for fear of lapsing into “a dull level of utilitarian comfort”; or when Clara startlingly chastises Hammond for
the fact that his talk of “past miseries” makes his audience of utopians “long for something we cannot have”; or when the “grumbler” whom Guest meets complains that the “books of the past days” are “much more alive than those which are written now,” while his granddaughter more soberly objects that the “cleverness and vigour” of past “story-telling” hide “something loathsome”?110

And how is one to interpret the fact that Ellen, the Nowherean whom Guest is romantically attracted to, expresses her fear that “times may alter” and her fellow citizens “may be bitten with some impulse towards change”111 that would paradoxically risk annulling radical change itself?

As expressions of a residual antinomy that the text cannot resolve, these enigmatic instances are so many manifestations of Morris’s persistent awareness of the fact that a fully uncontaminated utopian quotidianism could not, even if it were imaginable in the first place, but make for fundamentally boring literature in these nonutopian times. For such literature would lack not simply eventfulness but also any need for those satisfying formal and stylistic defenses modernist fiction marshals against its own portrayal of lives submerged in the tepid waters of everydayness. However much utopian authors like Morris might want to insist that “a social order incapable of producing interesting and exciting stories will not necessarily be itself either uninteresting or tedious,”112 News from Nowhere suggests that even such authors may not be entirely convinced of the security of a distinction between the domains of “story” and “social order”—and not without good reason, since in utopian literature the redeemed, future “social order” exists only in the domain of a fictive speculation; it is precisely a text.

Always-Already Postmodernist? Ontologico-political Questions

If the threat of boredom is one that Morris manages by projecting it onto the aesthetic and political dilemmas of the inhabitants of Nowhere, it is also a real-world issue perennially posed by the reading of utopian fiction. Indeed boredom, as Jameson remarked, may well be “one of the deepest fears motivating political anti-Utopianism.”113 The fact that the threat of “totalitarianism” has been retrospectively—and quite ahistorically—located in texts that know nothing of its Cold War ideological presuppositions certainly raises a question: What if the “totalitarianism” that a host of anti-utopianisms in the last sixty years has identified114—and condemned—in utopists ranging from
Plato to Morris proved to be simply a displacement and a political recoding of the fear of boredom, itself much exacerbated by the addiction to novelty in post-Fordist, late capitalist culture, generative as this is of subjectivities for which the falling rate of affective investment requires compensation by ever more dramatic and “intense” varieties of experience.115

If this is true, then the conceptual arsenal of anti-utopianism might be not simply a response to utopia’s stubborn aesthetic archaism but also a defense mechanism against its receptivity to an everyday that can only appear to us as irredeemably boring—as boring as the life of the working class itself, which has “only everyday life to live.”116 A properly dialectical rethinking of the matter, however, would also posit the case that there is something secretly utopian in boredom itself. Writing in the same year when Woolf’s essays on the Edwardians were jointly published, Siegfried Kracauer devoted to boredom an essay that anticipates crucial elements in Heidegger’s 1929–30 lectures on the subject: in it, he juxtaposes the “vulgar boredom” of daily drudgery, which “neither kills” nor awakens humanity to “new life,” to an “extraordinary, radical boredom” wherein we could experience a liberating weariness “with that which exists without really being.”117 Such boredom would offer an exit from the overbearing listlessness of modernity, for it would constitute “an unfulfillment from which a fullness could sprout”:

If . . . one has the patience, the sort of patience specific to legitimate boredom, then one experiences a kind of bliss that is almost unearthly. A landscape appears in which colorful peacocks strut about, and images of people suffused with soul come into view. And look—your own soul is likewise swelling, and in ecstasy you name what you have always lacked: the great passion. Were this passion—which simmers like a comet—to descend, were it to envelop you, the others, and the world—oh, then boredom would come to an end, and everything that exists would be. . . .118

Kracauer does not conclude these ecstatic lines before declaring the badly utopian character of this vision of an immanent transcendence of boredom.119 He notes that this longing for Being, rather than for pacified and regulated “existence,” is only ephemeral. Its insubstantiality makes the vision impotent and ridiculous, a “bagatelle” occasioned by unrelieved boredom and thus boring in itself. But the preoccupation with what Kracauer
calls “radical boredom”—with boredom radicalized into a cipher of properly utopian desire—is not exhausted in the sphere of individual longing. Boredom is also the site, as Joe Moran observes, of the possibility of recovering “the traces of a communal everyday life which ordinarily remains invisible.” Writing on Benjamin, Moran notes that for the German Jewish thinker there existed in modernity a “fruitful inactivity and inertia” that were putatively radical to the extent that they bore “the potential to undermine the hallucinatory power of the commodity and awaken us from the ‘dream-filled sleep’ of capitalism.” Dialectically recharged, boredom could thus work as an alarm clock, making us “realize that the tedium of eternal sameness—capitalism’s endless search for novelty and innovation which is in fact merely an endless repetition because it always takes a similar form—can be broken.”\(^{120}\) Sustained to the point where it blocks the operation of the regimes of meaning-making and meaning-dissolving under capitalism, receptivity toward boredom might well be the royal path to disalienation: the genuine—if from our current perspective truly frightful\(^{121}\)—ontological sign of the remote shores of utopia. Is not the meaning of the otherwise inexplicable subtitle of Morris’s novel—“An Epoch of Rest”—a reference not to the absence of labor (of which there is much\(^{122}\)) but to the total elimination of its humanizing negativity in a “world reduced to daily life as such . . . in which only the everyday exists, without great projects or indeed any very substantial relationship to the future and to action”?\(^{123}\) In such a world, human activity—both collective and individual—may well persist, but inopercably, in that state of “neutralization”\(^{124}\) that links human and animal in the sheer pleasure of mimetic play:

For the cat, what is the possible use for the ball of yarn? It consists in freeing a behavior from its genetic inscription within a given sphere (predatory activity, hunting). The freed behavior still reproduces and mimics the forms of the activity from which it has been emancipated, but in emptying them of their sense and of any obligatory relationship to an end, it opens them and makes them available for a new use. . . . The activity that results from this thus becomes a pure means, that is, a praxis that, while firmly maintaining its nature as a means, is emancipated from its relationship to an end; it has joyously forgotten its goal and can now show itself as such, as a means without an end.\(^{125}\)
Read, as it were, against the grain, as depositories of the hope in a pure, deinstrumentalized everyday, utopias might be said to articulate the claims of ontological “restfulness” against our subjective addiction to the normalized and self-disavowing nihilism of commodity capitalism. In that sense at least, they countermand their indisputable formal conservatism by attacking and exposing the conservative underlying logic of our own dearly cherished excitement and pleasures—including, prominently, our readerly ones.

Notes

This essay is dedicated to the memory of my colleague and friend Nephie Christodoulides.

2. Ibid., 44.
3. Ibid., 44–45.
4. Ibid., 41.
5. Ibid., 47–48.
7. Ibid.
8. For a panoramic exploration of these issues in utopian and modernist writers, see the essays in Rosalyn Gregory and Benjamin Kohlmann, eds., Utopian Spaces of Modernism: British Literature and Culture, 1885–1945 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).
25. See Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, 13: “The Quotidian is a philosophical concept that cannot be understood outside philosophy; it designates for and by philosophy the non-philosophical and is unthinkable in another concept. . . . [I]t is not the product of pure philosophy but comes of philosophical thought directed towards the non-philosophical, and its major achievement is this surpassing.”
40. Interestingly, as Michel Trebitsch shows, Lefebvre’s own earlier and far more systematic theorization of the everyday may also be indebted to Heidegger, who was in turn arguably influenced by Lukács. See Trebitsch, “Preface,” xviii–xix, xxi.
47. Blanchot, “Everyday Speech,” 244.
55. Ibid., 93, 109, 135.
56. Ibid., 163.

60. Though there are good sociohistorical reasons to maintain a distinction between ennui and boredom, at the same time. See Moran, “Benjamin and Boredom,” 169–70.


67. Declan Kiberd’s “Ulysses” and Us: *The Art of Everyday Life in Joyce’s Masterpiece* (New York: Norton, 2009), on the other hand, would read such a passage as simply showing us Bloom’s “lively” imagination (81). Kiberd, who celebrates Joyce’s text as “a modern example of wisdom literature” (31), underplays the import of the twin forces of commodification and formal fragmentation at work in *Ulysses* in favor of a celebratory and effectively ahistorical conception of the text in terms of its vision of a balance between intellectual life and the life of the “average man,” spirituality and materialism, and so on. Ironically, Kiberd thus ends up repackaging “Joyce’s masterpiece” as a high-literary self-help manual, somewhat in the mode of Alain de Botton’s similar enterprises.


75. Ibid., 122, 130, 134.
83. See Jameson, “Ulysses in History,” 146–51.
84. As Heggland correctly notes, Joyce “demonstrates little faith in the ability of the novel to represent the contours of a utopian community” (“No Less than a Planet,” 187).
88. Roland Barthes, Sade, Fourier, Loyola (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 17; and see Fredric Jameson, Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions (London: Verso, 2005), 188.
93. On News from Nowhere’s hostility to “virtually every aspect of ‘the great tradition’ of Victorian fiction,” see Patrick Brantlinger, “News from Nowhere: Morris’s Socialist
Antonis Balasopoulos: Factories, Utopias, Decoration and Upholstery

94. See Jameson, Singular Modernity, 126–27.
95. The term originally derives from the work of Miguel Abensour and was introduced into English in E. P. Thompson’s discussion of Morris. For an exploration of its implications for reading Morris, see Ruth Levitas, The Concept of Utopia (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), 123–50.
101. Lefebvre, Critique of Everyday Life, 226.
103. Debord, “Perspectives for Conscious Alterations in Everyday Life,” 234, 244.
105. Ibid., 205; emphases added.
106. Joyce, Ulysses, 28.
107. Morris, News from Nowhere, 146.
110. Ibid., 176, 178, 191, 193. See also 199, where the “grumbler” states his preference for Thackeray’s Vanity Fair over Nowherean literature.
111. Ibid., 233.
113. Ibid., 184, 188.
118. Ibid., 334.
121. See Jameson, Seeds of Time, 123.
123. Jameson, Seeds of Time, 190.
126. Alain Badiou relevantly notes: ‘As for ‘nihilism,’ we shall acknowledge that our epoch bears witness to it precisely in the way that by nihilism we understand the rupture of the traditional figure of the bond. . . . Our time indubitably sustains itself with a kind of generalized atomism because no symbolic sanction of the bond is capable of resisting the abstract potency of Capital. . . . If one takes ‘nihilism’ to mean desacralization, Capital, whose planetary reign is beyond any doubt . . . is certainly the only nihilistic potency of which men have succeeded in being the inventors as well as the prey. Yet for Marx, and for us, desacralization is not in the least nihilistic, insofar as ‘nihilism’ must signify that which declares that the access to being and truth is impossible. On the contrary, desacralization is a necessary condition for the disclosing of such an approach to thought. It is obviously the only thing we can and must welcome within Capital” (Manifesto for Philosophy, trans. Norman Madarasz [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999], 55–56).
Sex in Utopia: Eutopian and Dystopian Sexual Relations

Lyman Tower Sargent and Lucy Sargisson

ABSTRACT
In this article we explore two sex-related questions. First, what have the authors of utopias and dystopias said about sexual behavior and relationships in their works? In examining this question, we seek to identify different modes of sexual behavior or relationships that have been presented as characterizing the good or bad society. Second, what is the role of sex in utopia and dystopia? Is there a sexual element of how to get from here to there? Can changes in sexual behavior and relationships help bring about the good society? In order to explore these questions we consult a large number of primary sources, and our discussion begins with a broad-brush survey that establishes some early norms and variations from the canon of utopian thought. Two recurrent themes emerge from this survey: the first concerns a tripartite relationship among sex, sexuality, and gender. The second concerns sex and control. Both themes reinforce key modes of sexual behavior, which are explored in the final section of the article, where we undertake a deeper consideration of sample texts from three authors: Marge Piercy, Robert Rimmer, and Alex Comfort.

KEYWORDS: utopia, eutopia, dystopia, sex, sexual relationships
Utopias and dystopias cover almost every imaginable subject, and utopian scholars have discussed many of them, but while gender and gender relations have been considered at length, sex and sexual relations have not. And we would like to know what sex and sexual relations will be like in utopias and dystopias. Of course, the simple answer for eutopias—a lot of whatever we like best—and for dystopias—none of whatever we particularly dislike—are flawed because we have been socialized in a bad society and utopian and dystopian relationships may be very different, although our guess is that dystopia may be closer to the here and now than eutopia. In this article we ask two related questions. First, what have the authors of utopias and dystopias said about sexual behavior and relationships in their works? In examining this question, we seek to identify different modes of sexual behavior and relationships thought by authors to characterize the good or bad society. Second, what is the role of sex in utopia and dystopia? Is there a sexual element of how to get from here to there? Can changes in sexual behavior and relationships help bring about the good society?

Our discussion begins, by way of background and to establish some early norms and variations, by identifying common sex-related themes that emerge across the centuries of utopian thought. This section extends from the sixteenth into the nineteenth century. We then look at some examples from the mid-nineteenth century to the twenty-first century to illustrate the way things changed. Two recurrent themes emerge from this broad-brush survey: gender and control. Each theme reinforces key modes of sexual behavior, including different forms of repressive and socially structured power relationships, such as heteronormativity and patriarchy. Commonly, but not invariably, dystopias resist these power relationships by magnifying them, while utopias depict better alternatives. Finally, we move to a deeper consideration of a selection of texts from Marge Piercy, Robert Rimmer, and Alex Comfort. Each of these texts has canonical or highly influential status, is still relevant today, and explores the themes in the broader survey.
Gender Relations

The first, most apparent, and most prevalent theme raised by discussions of sex in utopia is the relationship between sex and gender. Gender relations have been an important theme in Western utopian literature from the time Thomas More published his *Utopia* in 1516. They are related to sexuality—and sexual relations in canonical utopias have been overwhelmingly heterosexual. *Utopia* provided what was to be the dominant model for such relations in the Western utopian tradition: it was heterosexual, hierarchical, and patriarchal, with sexual intercourse taking place only within marriage. A telling example within *Utopia* is that on feast days wives bow down to their husbands and children to their parents and ask for forgiveness for any faults. While More took the unusual step for the time of educating his daughters, such egalitarianism does not appear in *Utopia*.

The need to control is apparent in *Utopia*—More was well aware that sexual attraction was more powerful than the laws and institutions of even a good society and found it necessary even in the land of Utopia to include the severe punishments of slavery and death for sexual relations outside marriage. And for quite some time most utopias had similar regulations. For example, in Thomas Lupton’s *Siuqila* (1580) the man and the woman are both stoned to death for adultery.

There were a few exceptions, even in the sixteenth century. For example, the famous Abbe de Thélème scene in Rabelais suggests that the monastery, one of the models for More’s *Utopia*, might have been more open sexually than it was normally represented to be, and, of course, it was. Also, Montaigne’s cannibals represent a generally good society presented as actually existing in the New World that challenged the accepted mores of sexual behavior by sharing women.

Feminists have long argued that marriage structures sexual relationships into “fixed” gendered roles, and the first utopian novels that presented alternatives to the dominant tradition were works questioning marriage, with the earliest, such as Mary Astell’s *A Serious Proposal To the Ladies* (1694), suggesting a secular women-only community without the least suggestion of any sexual activity. A similar work is Sarah Scott’s *A Description of Millenium Hall* (1762). The idea of the good life without sex or with very little sex crops up regularly, and celibate (or supposedly celibate) religious communities were, and are, common.
With the exception of some French extraordinary voyages that depicted hermaphrodites and some works called pornotopias or somatopias depicting a woman’s body as a utopia, one of the earliest works that suggests that no marriage (with its patriarchal structure) did not mean no sex is James Lawrence’s *The Empire of the Nairs* (1811). Among the Nairs a couple who dances the last dance together usually spends the night together, although Lawrence says that the same couples often arranged to have that last dance; but there was no such expectation, and both men and women tended to have multiple lovers.

In the early nineteenth century Charles Fourier wrote a book describing the sexual relations in an ideal phalanstery. Although *Le Nouveau monde amoureux/The New Amorous World* remained unpublished until 1967, he had suggested in *Théorie des Quatre Mouvements et des Destinées Générales/The Theory of the Four Movements and of the General Destinies* (1808) that a varied sexual experience would be the norm in phalansteries, and later Victor Antoine Hennequin published *Les amours au Phalanstère/Love in the Phalanstery* (1847/1849), which also suggested that phalansteries would not be limited to monogamous relations. At about the same time so-called sex radicals emerged in a number of countries arguing against marriage and in favor of freer sexual relations. In the United States Calvin Blanchard, author, publisher, and bookseller, wrote a number of utopias proposing abolishing marriage and the establishment of completely free and varied heterosexual sexual relations.

Twentieth- and twenty-first-century utopias continued to pursue and explore the ways in which gender roles and relationships are shaped and reflected by sexual relationships. Katharine Forrest’s *Daughters of an Amber Noon* (2002) is a case in point. Here, Forrest revisits the imaginary society that she created in her *Daughters of a Coral Dawn* (1984) and revisits again in her *Daughters of an Emerald Dusk* (2005). *Daughters of an Amber Noon* juxtaposes a dystopian patriarchal (heterosexual) society with a eutopian lesbian feminist one. Homosexual men in this dystopian society are regarded as an “infestation” and “emasculated.” The patriarch’s storm troopers are hypermasculine, with chemically enhanced testosterone levels that induce sexual aggression and violence. A heterosexist, male-only, messianic doomsday cult, “The Shining,” is growing at a rate of ten thousand members a day and advocates the murder (by burning) of women who use artificial insemination, birth control, or “Estrova” sperm substitute. These phenomena are firmly linked
in the narrative to “anti-female rhetoric,” to the view that the main function of women is to serve and reproduce. Religion, reproduction, sexuality, race, ethnicity, poverty, and material deprivation are all potent ingredients of the toxic cocktail of ideas combined in this misogynist cult.

Suzy Mckee Charnas’s Holdfast series—Walk to the End of the World (1974), Motherlines (1978), The Furies (1994), and The Conqueror’s Child (1999)—depicts a similarly patriarchal society in which sexuality forms an important part of the dominant ideology. In this case, male homosexuality is the norm for loving sexual relationships. In the male town of Holdfast, women are enslaved, kept in “slave pits,” fed a gruel containing human flesh, and used almost solely for breeding (although some “perverted” men use women, known as “house-pets,” for heterosexual intercourse). Conqueror’s Child, the fourth book in the series, depicts the world after a slave revolution in which women now hold power. The tables are turned, and power relations are reversed, but homosexuality remains the norm (women love women and use men for procreation).

Sexual norms reflect and reinforce gendered power relations in these stories, and this is a common and effective use of sexuality in feminist fiction. It is also used as a device in some queer fiction. For example, Will Self’s satirical short story “The Principle” (2007) inverts a repressive norm. This story depicts a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who has slipped away from his community for a transgressive night on the town. He spends it dancing with a young woman, who is not of his faith. Later he returns home to his family of many “wives,” a group of “fourteen fat old queens,” somewhat regretting that his faith insists on compulsory and polygamous homosexuality.

Technology often enhances the power relations that contextualize sex in utopian fiction. So, for example, women’s bodies in a patriarchal society might be surgically enhanced, the better to provide sexual satisfaction for their male partners/users. Several contemporary utopias of sex speculate on the idea that we can craft or purchase a “perfect” body in which to enjoy “better” sex. This usually ends up as an antipolitical and illusory escape: a mindless gratification of false desires while the world continues unchallenged and unchanged.

This is stretched to the extreme through the motif of robot sex, which is a common theme in twentieth- and twenty-first-century utopian fiction. Examples can be found across most genres of future-oriented films, ranging from the American blockbuster, such as Stephen Spielberg’s fantasy A.I. Artificial Intelligence, to Japanese anime, such a Mamoru Oshii’s Innocence: Ghost in the Shell 2. Both depict sex androids whose function is
to serve and satisfy their clients. And often the activities of these androids and robots support a firmly delineated gender regime. Some of the more recent contributions twist the male/female human/robot power game—Karl Iagnemma’s “The Upgrade” (2007) begins conventionally, by imagining an idealized female robot lover, programmed to satisfy her male human owner.\footnote{19} The male protagonist has given up on real women because they keep leaving him—he prefers robots: “How could I miss women? I had my job, I had my apartment, I had Katrina.”\footnote{20} She has been designed to his own specification—real human hair, eyelashes, and brows, with “Indonesian hair from the lowlands outside Jakarta”; and “of course, she was gorgeous. . . . She was better than human: more beautiful, crushingly beautiful.”\footnote{21} She is also utterly compliant, programmed for domestic chores and to perform in a wide range of sexual positions. Perfect. Dissatisfied, he decides to have her upgraded. The upgrade malfunctions; Katrina develops more and more human characteristics and eventually walks out on him.

In utopian imaginations, technology is often used to develop alternative methods of procreation. Alternative reproduction (i.e., reproduction without heterosexual sexual intercourse) is, for some, an emancipatory dream because it enables gender separatism.\footnote{22} Geoff Ryman’s short story “Birth Days” (2003) is an example.\footnote{23} “Birth Days” depicts a utopia in which men can actually reproduce. The story opens in a near-future heterosexist society, and the protagonist, Ron, has just come out (by mistake) to his mother, on his sixteenth birthday. At the age of twenty-six he is working as a research scientist on a (dystopian) project to provide a genetic cure for homosexuality. Ten years later, he has devised the means to grow a placenta inside his own bowel. He is pregnant and living with two husbands in Mosquerio, Brazil. By the end of the story, homosexual (male and female) same-sex reproduction has become widespread. Family structures have changed. “Birth Days” connects and disrupts gender and sexuality, tracing and severing links between gender and reproduction, sexual orientation and gender, including gendered social behavior, roles, and institutions.

**Sex and Control**

In what are generally thought of as the classic dystopias, sexual relations are manipulated as a mechanism of social control. In Evgeny Zamiatin’s We (1924)
each person is assigned a sexual partner who is supposed to reflect the needs of both people. They are told how frequently and with whom they can have sex. In Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932) promiscuity forms a means of keeping people content. And in George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) sex is represented as an unpleasant duty that people would avoid if they could. But none of these policies worked. In *We* D-503 wants X-330 rather than his assigned partner, O-90. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* Winston Smith wants Julia, whom he describes as a “rebel only from the waist downward,” because Julia enjoys sex and, with her, so does Winston. And in *Brave New World* the Savage, raised outside the society, believes in romantic love and finds promiscuity appalling. Bernard Marx, on the other hand, is not attractive to the women he wants and is never content. These classic dystopias suggest that sex is more powerful than the state.

Contemporary dystopias make the same suggestion. James Morrow’s “Auspicious Eggs” (2000), for example, imagines a rigorously controlled society in which the Roman Catholic Church is responsible for monitoring reproduction. All sex in this society is supposed to be reproductive—marriages exist, but extramarital sex is compulsory. This is administered through the “Sacrament of Extramarital Intercourse.” All forms of nonreproductive sexual intercourse (including homosexual sex, masturbation, and intercourse with your wife when she is not ovulating or with your husband when his sperm count is low) are strictly banned. The Church also certifies “acceptable” children. These children have passed a “Sacrament of Reproductive Potential Assessment.” Unacceptable children (with unsatisfactory sperm or ovary scans) are subjected to the “Sacrament of Terminal Baptism” and are drowned, in the font, by the priest. This is an utterly repressive sexual regime in which ideology and state-sanctioned violence combine to control sexual activity and reproduction. Sexual control is writ large in dystopian literature.

Eric Del Carlo’s “To Love and Riot” (2001) provides a modern take on this perennial theme. It tells the story of a group of state storm troopers. They belong to an elite and highly specialist military force, which is dispatched by the all-seeing state in extreme circumstances of civil unrest. They have a particular specialty for which the state has occasional need. This story is set in a world in which sex has ceased to occur. Reproduction is accomplished through cloning, and the sexual drive has been genetically suppressed. And the population is, on the whole and for most of the time, passive and happy: “civilized citizens of the city that artfully balanced lives, that are intellectuals,
craftspeople, thinkers that are cared for, that are state educated, that achieve, that make art and commerce, that are the pinnacle of the species.’” This is a perfect world, and these are perfect people, except, of course, it is not, and they are not. Every now and again the repressed carnality of the population erupts, and these serene and carefully cultivated citizens lose control and enter a state of mass hysteria. They then riot, destroying everything around them. This is where the special talents of the storm troopers come into play. Chemically enhanced and hypersexual, they sexually satisfy everyone in the crowd, and most of the story depicts a graphic and multiple orgy of oral, vaginal, and anal sex: “We’re the shock troops of the flesh.” They perform across and within genders without discrimination, stimulants permitting multiple and sustained services, until the desire of the crowd is sated. The people are pacified, and equilibrium is restored. Del Carlo depicts sex as an irrepressible and inevitable force that disrupts so-called utopian order and perfection. And this, the story suggests, is a good thing.

Marge Piercy’s Woman on the Edge of Time

Thus far, we have identified a number of key themes, clustered under the headings of gender and control, in our survey of sex in utopia. We now want to deepen our analysis and pursue these themes more thoroughly by examining some sample texts in more detail. Our first selection is Marge Piercy’s Woman on the Edge of Time (1976), which has assumed canonical status in feminist analyses of utopianism and is central to the theorization of critical utopias.

Many of the themes and concepts mentioned in the section above are raised and developed in Marge Piercy’s Woman on the Edge of Time. Piercy imagines three alternative societies. One is the present of the protagonist, Connie, whose life is impoverished and disempowered. Connie exists near the bottom of a recognizable contemporary U.S. society characterized by ethnic, cultural, gender, and class inequality and extreme poverty. The eutopia of Mattapoisett, in contrast, is an ecologically conscious and egalitarian society. The third society is a dystopian future in which all the negative things happening to Connie in her own time have produced a radically unequal and environmentally degraded society. Sex provides a window into each of these societies, and the ways in which sexual relationships are practiced,
normalized, and institutionalized reflect the values and power relations of each of these futures.

In Connie’s present, sex is associated with gender subordination and entwined with ethnic, racial, and class inequality. This is apparent through Connie’s own experiences of sexual exploitation and violence (beaten by one husband, tricked into a sexual relationship by an employer) and is firmly embodied in the form of her niece, Dolly, who has been turned to prostitution by her boyfriend. She agrees because she wants to keep him. Still, she dreams of quitting and having his baby. Sex in this context is demeaning to all participants. The woman experiences anxiety, obsessive concern with the appearance of the body (if it does not look “right,” no one will want her), neurosis, and self-loathing. The pimp is focused on violence, domination, and profit. The clients are insignificant, just men with needs to be exploited.

Sex in this account is associated with defined gender roles: woman is mother, object, and/or the means for the satisfaction of (male) desire. Connie’s friend Sybil asks her: “Do you want to be a dumb hole people push things in or rub against?” (85). Connie has experienced “good sex” in her life: pleasurable, erotic, exciting, and orgasmic sex with men she loved. She has also experienced sex as a form of exploitation and violence. She has lived with the consequences and became pregnant as a student. The white student who was the father of her child dumped her, and she lost her prospects for good employment, and became a family disgrace.

From this grim present Connie “visits” the two futures, dystopian and eutopian. In the dystopian future Connie visits the apartment of a woman (Gildina) who is defined by sex. Her body has been altered (she would say enhanced): “a cartoon of femininity, with a tiny waist, enormous sharp breasts that stuck out like the brassieres Connie herself had worn in the fifties—but the woman was not wearing a brassiere. Her stomach was flat but her hips and buttocks were oversized and audaciously curved” (288). She is a prostitute, “kept” by (and for) a state employee: “Contract sex. It means you agree to put out for so long for so much” (289). This society is heterosexual, patriarchal, and deeply hierarchal. Both parties have some rights in the sex contract; for example, the woman can sue if the man breaks the contract (unless he can prove negligence or adultery). Gildina views her contract as beneficial because it gives her an apartment and sufficient means to afford
chemical enhancement, surgery (re-ops), and recreational drugs, which she uses, heavily. But she has no autonomy (“Don’t you ever go out?” “Out where? Cash [the man Gildina is contracted to] seals me in most of the time” [290]). And she is driven by anxiety about what will happen when her contract expires (hence all the re-ops).

Sex in this future reflects a rigidly structured and radically unequal society. “Richies” live “off surface” on space platforms high above the polluted atmosphere of Earth, and their lives are prolonged by chemical and surgical procedures, including organ transplants. “Middles,” like Gildina, have some rights and prestige (she lives on the 126th floor). “Duds” at the bottom of the hierarchy are described as “walking organ banks” (291). Every aspect of life is ordered, structured, and heavily policed.

In the eutopian future sexual relationships are very different and not subject to monitoring or legislation. For example, Connie encounters two youngsters (aged about six or seven) who are “seriously engaged in an attempt to have sex together” (138). She is surprised that nobody stops them and is asked, Did she never play sex games as a child? “Our notions of evil center around power and greed—taking from other people their food, their liberty, their health, their land, their customs, their pride. We don’t find coupling bad unless it involves pain or is not invited” (139).

Early in the narrative, we learn that there are no norms regarding sexual orientation in this eutopia. Connie asks Luciente, her visitor from Mattapoisett: “‘Do you like women?’ Luciente is puzzled: ‘All women?’ Luciente looked at her with that slight scowl of confusion. ‘Oh, for coupling? In truth, the most intense mating of my life was with a woman named Diana. . . . But it was binding, you know, we obsessed. Not good for growing. We clipped each other. But I love Diana still and sometimes we come together. . . . Mostly I’ve liked males’” (64). People in Mattapoisett find it strange when Connie uses sexuality to categorize people—and especially when she does so in a derogatory sense. On one occasion she remarks on the relationship between Jackrabbitt and Bolivar:

“It seems like everyone is careful not to say what seems real obvious to me—that Jackrabbit and Bolivar have . . . well, they’re both men. It’s homosexual. Like that might bother a woman more.”

“But why?” Parra looked at her as though she were really crazy. “All coupling, all befriending goes on between biological males, biological females, or both. That’s not a useful set of categories.
We tend to divvy people up by what they’re good and bad at, strengths and weaknesses, gifts and failings.” (214)

Sexuality is not a relevant criterion for social categorization in this society. Indeed, the act of social categorization is avoided. This is a community that values both individual and collective autonomy, freedom, and choice and has destroyed old hierarchies and categories including the categories of sex and sexuality. This removes key indicators that shape Connie’s sense of self. In her society it is part of the definition of a woman that her function is to attract, catch, and keep a man; service him sexually; and in a good relationship actually enjoy a positive sexual relationship with him. In Mattapoisett these norms and expectations no longer exist.

Most people in Mattapoisett have more than one lover, or “sweet friend,” at any one time. Luciente has two: Bee and Jackrabbitt. These relationships are stable and mutually affirming most of the time but are not without complications. For example, Luciente experiences jealousy at Jackrabbitt’s intense relationship with a former lover. On the other hand, Luciente is aware and supportive of the sexual love shared one evening between Connie and Bee. This sexual encounter is a healing experience for Connie, returning confidence and pleasure in her body and making her feel loved and valued. She has enjoyed the physical experience and feels emotionally affirmed by the encounter. Both the actual act of sex and the context in which it occurred are “good.”

The eutopian society of Mattapoisett has developed a technology that destroyed one final sex-related stereotype: woman as mother. On one of her early visits to this community, Connie is shown the “brooder”: “Here embryos are growing almost ready to birth.” . . . He pressed a panel and a door slid aside, revealing seven human babies joggling slowly upside down, each in a sac of its own inside a larger fluid receptacle.” She is revolted: “Connie gaped, her stomach also turning slowly upside down. All in a row, the babies bobbed. Mother the machine” (102).

A number of significant steps have occurred here. First, sex has been separated from reproduction. Second, women’s bodies no longer have a reproductive function. Third, the genetic bond between parent and child has been severed. The embryos are developed from a community gene pool and not from biological parents, and the concept of biological parent is redundant: “It was part of women’s long revolution. When we were breaking the old hierarchies. Finally there was one thing that we had to give up too, the
only power we ever had, in return for no power for anyone. The original production: the power to give birth. Cause as long as we were biologically enchained, we’d never be equal. And males would never be humanized to become loving and tender. So we all became mothers. Each child has three. To break the nuclear bonding” (105). Everyone benefits from parenting in this narrative. To become a (male or female) co-mother is a matter of personal choice. There is no sense of ownership between parent and child, no exclusive mother-child relationship, and (practically) none of the neuroses of alienated motherhood. A further step, deeply significant to this eutopia’s agenda of eliminating prejudice and inequality, is the severance of ethnicity, race, and culture. Connie describes the gestating children of Mattapoisett as “multicoloured like a litter of puppies without the stigmata of race and sex” (106). While each community has its own ethnic culture (“Wamponaug Indians are the source of our culture. Our past” [105]), the members of each community are not racially defined. There is no genetic bond among culture, ethnicity, and race. The significance of all this for our study of sex in the good society is best formulated in negative terms: sex no longer ties women (or men) to their biology. It no longer reproduces anything, including children, race, or gender. Genes, privilege, status, and material goods are no longer passed from parent to child. Sex ceases to become the basis of biological and social reproduction. This changes the meaning of sex.

So what is sex for, in this new society? What is its function? It is a form of physical love, but it is not the only form of physical love. The people of Mattapoisett touch each other, frequently and freely, with nonsexual affection. On the occasion of Connie’s first visit to the community house in Mattapoisett she is alarmed by this physical familiarity: “They were literally patted into their seats, and she found herself cramped with nervousness. Touching and caressing, hugging and fingering, they handled each other constantly” (76). In her adult life, Connie associates touch with sex, but this touching is not sexual. This is the affectionate touch of friends.

Sex in Mattapoisett is a form of relationship. It may be an occasional or one-off encounter (expressing fun, joy in another’s company, healing, deep affection, or just strong physical attraction), or it can be part of a binding and lasting relationship. It is not casual, but it can be lighthearted and short-lasting. It is not callous and is never an exercise of power. It is physically and emotionally affirmative. This, Piercy suggests, is good sex in a good society.
Robert Rimmer’s Sexual Utopias

In 1966 Robert H. Rimmer published *The Harrad Experiment*, a novel told through the diaries of four students (two men and two women) at Harrad College, where each student is assigned a roommate of the opposite sex. The purpose of the arrangement is to produce “a new sexually oriented aristocracy of individual men and women who were free of sexual inhibitions, repressions, and hate, and were thoroughly educated into the meaning and the art of love as distinguished from the purely sexual relationship.” The students, who were thoroughly vetted and extremely intelligent, take classes at local universities plus a five-day-a-week course on human values. They are also required to take one hour a day of physical education, which has to be done in the nude. The only explicitly stated limit on sexual activity is that the girls can only have one partner between periods so that, if pregnancy occurs, the father will be known, and if pregnancy occurs, the couple are required to marry. Obviously, there is a strong emphasis on contraception.

The diaries explore the thoughts and feelings of the four people, none of whom have much or, in some cases, any sexual experience, as they become more comfortable with their roommates and their first sex with each other. This is, of course, wonderful but does not in all cases follow from or result in the love relationship that the theorists of the experiment hypothesized. What happens, which is hardly surprising, is that having experienced good sex they all want more good sex and some of them want it with other partners as well. Jealousy is temporarily rampant, and there is much switching of roommates.

The novel then follows six characters (three men and three women) through the rest of their careers at Harrad. In the second year they are introduced to a sexual technique used in the late nineteenth century by the Oneida Community as a means of birth control and described by the founder of the community, John Humphrey Noyes, in his book *Male Continence* (1872), which the Harrad students are required to read. The technique, known as *coitus reservatus*, requires the man to withhold ejaculation while remaining in the woman for an extended period. In the Oneida Community where it was successfully used as a method of birth control, the man would ultimately withdraw without ejaculating. At Harrad it is used primarily as a means of extending pleasure for both partners, with the man ejaculating as usual, but after considerably longer than usual, and therefore requiring other means of birth control.”
The three couples, all of whom have married their Harrad partners, although not their original roommates, manage to get accepted to graduate, law, and medical school in Philadelphia, where they purchase a large house and settle in for the period of their further education. Two of the women give birth shortly after they move to Philadelphia, and the third gives birth not long after. They then conclude that they want some sort of group relationship until they graduate, and after discussing a number of possible arrangements, they decide to switch partners each week.

The Harrad Experiment gave Rimmer a career describing alternative sexual relations, and for the rest of his life he published utopias depicting a variety of such arrangements. He extended the Harrad College model in The Premar Experiments (1975) and Harrad/Premar Becomes the Love-Ed Solution (2000), both of which use the conceit of presenting the novel through diaries. In The Premar Experiments (“Premar” refers to premarital), Harrad College expands its experiment as described in the earlier novel to include an ethnically, financially, and racially diverse population living communally. In the earlier novel all the people were white and of similar ethnicity, but in The Premar Experiments the sexual relations include an ethnically and racially diverse population. In this novel the students are divided into three groups, the first being first-year students attending college and living in a special residence with roommates of the opposite sex, just as in the earlier novel. The second group lives communally and work their way through college by alternating periods of work and education. The third group, which lives communally with the second, includes those who completed secondary school in vocational programs and will undertake further education in their chosen area. In these communities partners change on a regular basis so that everyone will have four different partners throughout their time there. The system is designed to ensure that at some time everyone has a partner from a different race. Since there are relatively few black participants (and no other group is mentioned), the numbers do not work terribly well.

While the emphasis is still on heterosexual sexual relations, The Premar Experiments is much more broadly utopian, both as a result of the communal living arrangements and because the communities are established in poor neighborhoods with the explicit intention of being a catalyst for the revitalization of the area. In Love Me Tomorrow (1978), which is Rimmer’s most complete utopia, the sexual relations are extended, for the first time, to include relationships that are not heterosexual, but the focus of the book is
as much on economic and political changes, with one of the main characters representing himself as the reincarnation of Edward Bellamy (1850–1898), the author of *Looking Backward: 2000–1887* (1888) and *Equality* (1897), among other utopias. The premise of the novel, which is set in 1996 and has a “sleeper awakes” motif like *Looking Backward* and *Equality*, is that inflation has continued to rise and, as a result, most people are poor. This leads to the establishment of Love Groups or corporate marriages, which Rimmer had presented in his 1968 novel *Proposition 31* and can include lesbians or gay men, and Care Groups of senior citizens banding together to ensure their continued independence. Prostitution has been legalized and regulated in thirty-nine states. Prostitutes are now known as “sexual companions” and work in “companionship homes,” and there is also a group of higher-level and -paid sexual companions who are licensed therapists as well.35

**Alex Comfort: The Politics and Joy of Sex**

Although today Alex Comfort tends to be remembered as the author of *The Joy of Sex: A Cordon Bleu Guide to Lovemaking* (1972) and *More Joy: A Lovemaking Companion to The Joy of Sex* (1973), he was a polymath.36 Two of his utopian novels, *Come Out to Play* (1961) and *Tetrarch* (1980), are at least partially about sex.

*Come Out to Play* is a critique of centralized power, a major theme of Comfort’s work, and the way it attracts warped people and warps those who were not warped before they got caught in its tentacles. Simplified, the argument is that if bureaucrats and their partners are taught to be better at sex, everyone will be better off, and part of the novel presents such a scenario. Set in this context, *The Joy of Sex* and *More Joy* are political works as well as guides to better sex. And *More Joy* includes a short section on sexuality and politics roughly from an anarchist viewpoint under the heading “Selfishness”:

Some people might think that this is a prosperous middle-class book, meant to help prosperous middle-class white people experiment with sensuality, purely personal experiences and kicks in a world that is rapidly going to hell on wheels. Quite the reverse is the case. . . . Of course good sexual experiences are easier to achieve for prosperous
people who have privacy, contraception, leisure and control over their lives. So is good medical care. But at the same time, acquiring the awareness and the attitudes which can come from [good sexual] experience doesn’t make for selfish withdrawal: it’s more inclined to radicalize people.\(^{37}\)

Comfort makes several claims here about sex and politics. First, he claims that socioeconomic context matters: good sex is easier to attain in a context of material comfort. Class matters; wealth matters. But second, he claims that good sex can have an ideological function (in that it can, as he puts it, “radicalize” people). He goes on to argue that an eroticized experience of the world can generate a focus on other people’s needs as well as close attention to our own, free and independent thinking, and a profound resistance to political bluff and dogma.

Contrarily, bad sex creates and reflects destructive (manipulative, dominating, or careless) attitudes toward other people, which are epitomized in high capitalist society: “The obsession with money-grubbing and power-hunting is quite largely fueled by early distortions of body-image and of self-esteem—distortions that carry over into a whole range of political behaviors, from hating and bullying people to wrecking the countryside for a profit you don’t need and can’t use. In fact, most great powers are now run by a minority of sick people, suffering from their inability to eroticize and hence humanize their experience, who use the rest of us for play therapy.”\(^{38}\)

His most utopian statement in More Joy takes this approach to its conclusions. Imagining a whole generation of eroticized people, Comfort envisages a very different culture: “A generation that has eroticized its experience will be radical in quite a different vein—environmentalist, science-based (because you need to study human biology to know why you function) and hopefully as ungovernable by non-people as the American Colonies were by King George. If your widened self-experience and experience of others leave you an unreconstructed Middletown don’t carer, it wasn’t widened enough or human enough.”\(^{39}\) Comfort had earlier made the same points in a review of The Kinsey Report. He argued that Kinsey shows that those who favored the most restrictions on sexual activity were the least likely to have regular sexual relations and those favoring the fewest restrictions were the most sexually active, and Comfort argues that much of the anti-sex argument can be characterized as the “sour grapes” position.\(^{40}\) In Sex in Society Comfort writes, “No
form of sexual behaviour can be regarded as unacceptable, sinful, or deserving of censure unless it has demonstrable ill effects on the individual who practices it or on others,” and *Tetrarch* reflects that approach. In her analysis of Comfort’s anarchism, Carissa Honeywell says that “put simply, for Comfort, the frustration of positive emotions such as sexual desire led to their expression as destructive ones. Sublimation, according to Comfort, caused the diversion of the repressed desire into a compensatory desire to have power over others and regulate their conduct,” and Comfort makes that a specific theme in *Tetrarch*.

In *Sex in Society* Comfort quotes approvingly (albeit leaving out three paragraphs from the middle of the quotation) from Gordon Rattray Taylor’s *Conditions of Happiness* (1949) on the sort of society that might make for a happy life. Taylor writes, as quoted, “We begin to get a picture of a country with a scanty, scattered population, neither concentrated in great towns and cities nor spread quite evenly over the land as in a primitive farming community... here meeting for some functional, productive purpose, there subordinating productive purpose to psychological considerations... a decentralized and ‘demechanized’ community which, nevertheless, makes full deliberate use of machinery and technology to serve its purpose.” This suggests the sort of society that Comfort felt might provide the conditions in which a good life could develop, and to a degree *Tetrarch* presents such a society.

*Tetrarch* is, in essence, a quest novel. In it a couple from our time are transported to the “Fourfold World” during sexual play, and the novel follows their experiences there. Most of the novel focuses on Los, where they arrive initially, which is under threat by the power drive of a sexually frustrated man who wants to take away the sexual freedom of the Losians, whose standard greeting is “Did you love well?” or just “Loved well?”

The sexual fantasies that the couple were acting out in play when they were transported—she a slave girl, he a soldier—temporarily become part of their identities in Los. This reflects Honeywell’s statement that “play behaviour was for Comfort a cohesive force and, he argued, offered the possibility for discharge of certain forms of aggression.”

The Fourfold World is essentially without machinery but uses what they call “inner space technology,” or the ability of adepts to influence or control events around them, and the woman is a powerful adept. The quest focuses on the search for a missing crystal that will help defeat the dystopia
of Verula, which is ruled by an authoritarian government and the church and is anti-sex.

In addition to visiting Verula, the couple got to Tharma, which is an innocent eutopia where sex is the focus of life, which, for all their couplings together, with others, and in multiples, they find too limited. They also visit Hell, which is an extreme version of Verula where the believers in anti-sex religions go after death. Of course, as in most quest novels, the crystal is found, Los is saved, Verula is reformed, and a force sets off to conquer and eliminate Hell.

**Sex and Utopia Conclusion: What Did We Learn?**

The first thing we learned, or had reinforced, was that utopias differ and context matters; what is considered good or bad sex depends on other aspects of the utopia. The institutions and practices of utopias vary over time and depend on cultural contexts and personal beliefs. We also learned, or again had reinforced, the simple fact that sexual relations are important, something that is very clear in the dystopias. Margaret Atwood, writing about *A Handmaid’s Tale* (1985), has said, “The sexual point in my book would seem to be that all totalitarianisms try to control sex and reproduction one way or another.” And, she might have added, they ultimately fail, which makes the point about the importance of sex for utopia and dystopia very clear.

But in addition to these points that we knew already, or at least discovered that we knew when thinking about the texts, some other points come through very clearly. Looked at historically, the treatment of sexual relations in utopia has changed very dramatically, from an aspect of a hierarchical, patriarchal society in which sexual relations reproduced the power structure (in dystopias, they still do) to a gender-equal assertion of the right to act freely that challenged (and still challenges) the power structure. Also, within free and equal sexual relations, anything goes that all participants freely choose, although it is generally agreed that such relationships should be caring. Such changes would constitute a sexual revolution, but revolutions, both sexual and nonsexual, have a tendency to end up benefiting only some people. The beneficiaries of the "sexual revolution" of the 1970s, for example, were men. The change in attitudes that is still growing toward sexual relations that are not heterosexual is clearly a revolution in the making. But while these changes in attitude and behavior are welcome, they do not constitute utopia,
even as yet a sexual utopia. Change is both slow and uneven. Many men want to have sexual freedom but do not want “their” women (wives, girlfriends, daughters) to have it. And even though the acceptance of same-sex relations has grown enormously, they are still rejected by many.

The clear point is that while freer, more caring, and egalitarian sexual behavior and relations may be part of utopia, they are not all of it. Comfort makes the argument most explicitly, Rimmer suggests it, and Piercy depicts it most clearly. Sex can take us a long way, but it cannot get us where we want to go. But the relationship between sex and the good society makes one point very clear. One of the standard criticisms of utopias is that they give us no idea of how to get from where we are to the utopia, but where sex is concerned, there is absolutely no reason that each and every one of us cannot start behaving as utopia tells us we will behave in utopia—treat your partner as an equal, be caring, and have fun.

**Notes**


2. There were of course utopias before More and outside the West that dealt with gender relations, but while they raise some of the same issues, they also differ in significant ways.

3. The one institution in *Utopia* that is sometimes evinced as an example of gender equality, showing a couple considering marriage to each other in the nude, is undermined by the fact that all the reasons given in the text are flaws in the woman.

4. Those who suggest that More was presenting a “perfect” society in *Utopia* might usefully reflect on the need for such severe punishment.

5. Thomas Lupton, *Siuqila. Too Good, to be true: Omen. Though so at a vewe, Yet all that I tolde you, Is true, I upholde you: Now cease to aske why For I can not lye. Herein is shewed by waye of Dialogue, the wonderfull maners of the people of Mauqsun, with other talke not frivolous* (London: Henrie Bynneman, 1580), 61.

6. Of course actual sexual practice in Europe was much more varied than the ideology represented it as being.


10. Le Nouveau monde amoureux was much more explicit about the variety.


15. Ibid., 51.

16. Ibid., 179.


20. Ibid.

21. Ibid., 41.


27. Ibid., 15.


31. This technique figures in an earlier utopia based on the Oneida Community. In *After the Strike of a Sex; or, Zugassent’s Discovery with the Oneida Community* (1891) by a member of the community, George Noyes Miller, Zugassent’s discovery is *coitus reservatus*. Miller also published *The Strike of a Sex* (1890), in which women go on strike for “ownership over our person,” specifically control of maternity. The technique is also used under a different name in Aldous Huxley’s *Island* (1962).

32. This title appears only on the title page; everywhere else it is *The Love-Ed Solution*.


35. *Harrad/Premar Becomes the Love-Ed Solution: K–16 Sex and Education for the 21st Century* (San Jose: Writers Club Press, 2000), one of three books Robert Rimmer published in 2000, the year before he died, is based on the conceit that Harrad/Premar has been generally accepted and that what he calls “Love-ed Charter Schools” provide education from age five through the end of secondary school. These schools give students a very thorough education in what he calls “caring” sex and relationships, with a very strong emphasis on contraception, but without any actual experience of intercourse. In all his books, Rimmer says that intercourse should not occur before seventeen, and in this novel pregnancy disqualifies both people from further education in the Harrad/Premar system. Rimmer published other books, both fiction and nonfiction, about group sex or group or “corporate” marriage. Other works focusing on group marriage are *The Love Explosion* (1980) and *The Byrdwhistle Option* (1982). While Rimmer includes the possibility
of bigamous marriages, he is careful to avoid any reference to polygamy, and in his
group marriages he only refers to couples joining together. Oddly, from a twenty-first-
century perspective Rimmer seems conservative. The Harrad Experiment gave rise to some
communal experiments, with three known to have used the name Harrad, Harrad East,
Harrad L.A., and Harrad West, with Harrad West the best-known of these communities.

36. Comfort was a poet, novelist, scientist, and anarchist theorist, and as a result of
his wide-ranging activities, he is hard to place. He was a medical doctor with training in
psychiatry, earned a Ph.D. in biochemistry, and was awarded a D.Sc. for his pioneering
work in gerontology. Throughout his life he was active in scientific research, was a
practicing doctor, and wrote poetry and novels as well as social commentary. He was
"an aggressive antimilitarist" whose opposition to World War II led him to be formally
blacklisted by the BBC, and he consistently advocated resistance and disobedience to
established authority, including his own medical profession. He also wrote a play, Cities of
the Plain (1943), and three novels—Come Out to Play (1961); Tetrarch (1980), which is based
on the mythology created by William Blake (1757–1827); and The Philosophers (1989)—
which are utopias and at least partially about sex.

37. Alex Comfort, More Joy: A Lovemaking Companion to The Joy of Sex (New York:
Crown, 1974), 133.

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid., 134.


42. Carissa Honeywell, "The Anarchist Philosophy of Dr Alex Comfort," in A British
Anarchist Tradition: Herbert Read, Alex Comfort, and Colin Ward (London: Continuum,
2011), 121.

43. Comfort, Sex in Society, 151.


45. Honeywell, "Anarchist Philosophy of Dr Alex Comfort," 123.

46. Margaret Atwood, "An Open Letter from Margaret Atwood to the Judson
Independent School District," in In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination
Organizing the Impossible: Constitutional Law and Practice in Icaria

Theodore Georgopoulos

ABSTRACT

Icaria is one of those rare moments in social history when the Utopian dream has been tested in political and social practice. Based on legal settlements, the Icarian experience at Nauvoo offers a unique opportunity to check the relationship among law, utopia, and dystopia. The essay scrutinizes the key features of the Icaria’s constitution and analyzes the problems related to the enforcement of a Utopian constitution in a real social and political context.

KEYWORDS: law, Icaria, constitutionalism

The creation of what were called “Icarian communities” in the United States during the second half of the nineteenth century is probably one of the most fascinating and dramatic attempts in modern social history to realize a Utopian dream and to succeed in radical social reform. Classified among the examples of Utopian communism, the Icarian case is particularly interesting for both its fundamental ideas and its attempt to realize the Utopian claim. The Icarians—that is, the followers of the Icarian Utopia—rejected
violence as a means of establishing the new Utopian order and had faith that
goodwill and legal settlements would allow this realization. This at least was
the approach of Icaria’s founder, the thinker Etienne Cabet.

It all started with the publication in 1840 by Etienne Cabet, a French
lawyer and deputy with antiroyalist ideas, of the Voyage en Icarie, a book
influenced by More’s Utopia. In his Voyage en Icarie, Cabet describes the
daily life of Icaria, a society that has rejected both monarchy and liberal
democracy. Political organization is based on the model of semidirect
democracy. The founding concept of the Icarian Republic is the abolition
of individual property and the establishment of a community of goods.
The community is the unique owner of the means of production and pro-
duces all that people need. Apart from work, the most important activity
and value is education. Access to knowledge is granted to everyone, young
and old. Machines have contributed to limiting the duration and the physi-
cal effort of daily work, a factor that facilitates educational activities for all
people. In the light of these conditions, Cabet describes a place where hap-
piness is ensured for everyone and no competition, jealousy, or exclusion is
conceivable.

In France, the book was a best seller according to the standards of its
time. Although it never united major political thinkers in terms of com-
mon action or even intellectual dialogue, French craftsmen were particularly
seduced by its Utopian ideas. The desire to realize their dreams pushed a
certain number of these skilled workers to emigrate with their families to
the United States in order to found Icaria. Although at the beginning Cabet
was solely stimulating this desire through his writings, mainly in his journal,
Le Populaire, and preparing the expedition, the failure of his political plans
in France in the aftermath of the 1848 revolution forced him to join some
480 Icarians, already awaiting their illustrious leader on the other side of the
Atlantic.

From the very beginning, the ambitious purpose was to progressively
establish a Utopian republic that would become a state under the U.S.
Constitution. This is why, upon arrival at Nauvoo in western Illinois, where
land and buildings were bought from the Mormons, the Icarians adopted their
constitution on February 21, 1850, and sent it to the Illinois secretary of state,
who signed the certification that recognized Icaria as a legal corporation.

Though, at first, the realization of the Utopian dream seemed so close, from 1853 to 1855 things changed dramatically. For a number of reasons,
misery and disregard toward the Utopian values were prevalent among the Icarians, and obedience to Icarian laws became more and more difficult to ensure. Faced with the threat of collapse, Cabet asked for a revision of the 1850 constitution, in order to concentrate political power in his own hands and put Icaria back on track for the realization of the Utopian dream. The majority, however, were opposed to his plans, and after several months of struggle and profound division, the Nauvoo Community broke up. Cabet with his followers left for Saint Louis, where he died upon arrival, at the age of sixty-eight, on November 8, 1856. The Icarian communities survived him, the last one being dissolved in 1898 in Iowa.

The particular interest of the Icarian Utopia lies in its dramatic story. If it had simply remained a theory in its creator’s mind, it would have been no more than a stimulating but naive version of nineteenth-century Utopian theories. Since Thomas More’s Utopia, many recognized thinkers—contemporaries of Etienne Cabet—have delivered their version of a Utopian society. Secular communities were even created on the basis of these ideas. What makes the Icarian question unique, however, apart from its relative popularity among middle-class groups, is the fact that the “experiment” proved to be more than a simple, enthusiastic, short-lived plan. Icarian communities continued to exist fifty years after the departure of the first Icarian expedition from the harbor at Le Havre.

The attempt to realize the Utopian dream has capital importance for the apprehension of the Utopian question from a legal perspective. Traditionally, the relationship between law and Utopia is examined in terms of legal rhetoric, which offers a very interesting field of analysis for both the Utopian claim and the legal phenomenon. Law suggests a never-coming ideal world, where legal claims would already be realized, whereas Utopia is largely based on deontological statements. In the case of Icaria, however, there is more to explore, for the Utopian project moved from legal thinking to legal practice. Upon arrival at Nauvoo, Illinois, the Icarian Community adopted its constitution and based its social life upon institutions and statutes according to the original Utopian project. In other words, public institutions and legal settlements based on the constitution stood as mechanisms that would lead, in the long run, to the realization of the Utopian society of Icaria.

Another element that enhances the legal interest in the Icarian experiment is Cabet’s legal background. A reasonably successful lawyer, he
committed the usual sin of legal scholars by trying to resolve all problems of mankind through law. Both the perception of Utopian society in his Voyage en Icarie and the organization of life at Nauvoo were based on a fully elaborated legal system. Law, especially constitutional law, was not merely a factor in the realization of the Utopian project; it was the vehicle for it.

The purpose of the essay is not to appreciate the 1850 Icarian constitution in the light of traditional constitutionalism. Besides, in the case of Icaria we are not looking at a constitution in terms of a national-scale constitutional settlement. On the other hand, Icaria’s “experimental socialism” and its relatively long practice offer a unique opportunity to analyze the place and the use of constitutional law in a Utopian context. From the beginning the idea was to create communities that would eventually form a state. Article 8 of the Icarian constitution clearly stated that the community “is destined to become a City and a State obedient to the general laws of the United States.” In this sense, a reading of the Icarian constitution helps us to understand better both the fundamental ideas that prevailed in a Utopian community, with the ambition to become a state entity, and their enforcement in legal practice.

In other words, an analysis of Icaria’s constitutional framework allows us to scrutinize the question of the (impossible) realization of Utopia through law. After all, the crucial question is whether a constitution, any constitution—defined as the fundamental legal instrument for the organization of a self-governing political unit—proves to be efficient and adequate in a specific space and time. Constitutions live, prosper, evolve, and die with the political entities to which they give birth. This is also true in the case of Icaria. In this context, the essay scrutinizes the key features of Icaria’s constitution and analyzes the problems related to the enforcement of a Utopian constitution in a real social and political context.

Utopian Constitutionalism in Icaria

The expedition to the United States and the foundation of the Icarian Community in Nauvoo had a very precise objective: to realize the Utopian society described in Cabet’s book down to the very last detail. Of course, material conditions and the specific context of the U.S. Midwest in the nineteenth century did not allow the reproduction of an exact model of
Icaria in terms of size, architecture, and various technical achievements. Besides, the Utopian society described in the *Voyage en Icarie* is supposed to be the final achievement of a long struggle and, possibly, a bloody history. The realization of the Utopian society was also preceded by a transitional period of necessary dictatorship exercised by the enlightened leader Icar—a figure who certainly depicted Cabet’s ambitions. These elements did not, however, deprive the Icarian model as established at Nauvoo of the core elements of its original constitutional conception. The 1850 constitution and its executing laws reproduced with remarkable precision the model of government, the institutions, and the values of Cabet’s ideas.

In terms of political philosophy, the basic idea in Icarian Utopianism is what we could call communist egalitarianism. The fundamental principle that all people are equal is not accompanied by the consecration of individual freedom. Equality is the founding idea as well as the legitimate source of Icaria’s institutions and legal regulations. In order to ensure this equality and eradicate competition, crime, and, above all, unhappiness, the Icarian Community, following the model of *Voyage en Icarie*, was modeled on the basis of the “community of goods.” Wages (Art. 60), public salaries (Art. 61), and taxes (Art. 62) were abolished as a direct consequence of the community of goods. The economy was exhaustively planned, and so was social life.

This idealism is completed by the omnipresence of the state. Contrary to nineteenth-century anarchists, such as Proudhon, and communists who rejected the state as a form of social organization in the long run, Cabet’s conception of the “perfect society” was based on the state’s omnipresence. The state, as the legal figure of the community, is the sole owner of the means of production, while it takes care of all its citizens. In this sense, all aspects of social life need to be regulated, including education—one of Icaria’s most fundamental values, second only to equality and work—the publication of books, art, leisure, architecture, and even clothing, not to mention the economy, of course. This paternalistic apprehension of the state resulted in the making of a very detailed constitution at Nauvoo and confirmed the Icarians’ belief, starting with Cabet himself, that law was the key to success.

The constitution numbered 183 articles, its size being justified by the need to obtain the necessary ratification from the U.S. authorities. As Cabet clearly stated in his writings, even after arriving at Nauvoo, the Icarian Community was founded on a new social contract, which was its constitution. If the contract was new—and it was!—the use of legal tools and Icaria’s constitutional
design were far from being original. Icarian constitutionalism is based upon the methods of nineteenth-century European constitutionalism.

Therefore, the element of sovereignty, a core element in postrevolutionary France’s constitutional debate, is present in the Icarian constitution. It coincides with the community to which it belongs (Art. 110). This popular sovereignty dictates the democratic regime of Icaria. Indeed, full power was vested in the General Assembly, in which all male adults participated with equal voting rights (Art. 119). This predominance of the General Assembly did not, however, reach the point of excluding the principle of separation of powers from Icarian constitutionalism. It simply led to the establishment of a hierarchy between powers with a legislative predominance, which is an element to be found in French constitutional design until the end of the Fourth Republic. In other words, no system of strict separation of powers was established. The constitution stated that “there are two great powers: the legislative and the executive” (Art. 114), which were “necessarily distinct and separated” (Art. 115), with the executive being subordinate to the legislative (Art. 116). As for the judicial power, it was entrusted to the General Assembly (Art. 118), a decision that resulted in an overwhelming concentration of power in its favor.

The decision was legitimate: since in the Utopian context of Icaria the community of goods was ensured, abuse of power and political struggle were eliminated. Consequently, there was no need for checks and balances. Of course, Cabet never stopped reminding people that he had graciously declined special “dictatorial” power and accepted from the very beginning that the elected president—Etienne Cabet, of course—would share power with a five-member executive committee called the Comité de Gérance and elected for a year.

The most spectacular and important example of parallelism between European national constitutionalism and the Icarian constitution relates to the method of constitutional law that was fully embraced by the Icarians. Constitutional supremacy was the cornerstone of the Icarian creation at Nauvoo. All members of the community as well as institutions—which coincide, in fact, under the regime of direct democracy of Icaria—were bounded by the rules established in the constitution. Its legitimacy derived from its unanimous adoption by the members as well as from Cabet’s unquestionable authority. Constitutional supremacy was further confirmed and enhanced by the particularly strict procedure of constitutional amendment. In order to
ensure the stability of Icaria’s political system and above all its fundamental values, the constitution was out of reach for two years, for it could be revised only at two-year intervals (Art. 176) and then only by a majority of three-quarters (Art. 183).

Finally, Icaria’s legal system was based on the logic of the hierarchy of norms: the constitution was completed and executed by “organic laws”—especially the regulations for the General Assembly—ordinary laws, and administrative measures of law execution (Arts. 125 and 126). In other words, the key features for constitutional practice and constitutional compliance seemed present.

The Question of Coercion

Despite its good intentions and its resemblance to state constitutions, the Icarian constitution lacked the necessary efficiency to impose its commands on the group. In terms of legal positivism, coercion is a prerequisite for law enforcement. Without going so far as to affirm that law exists only when it is violated—and thus sanctioned—one needs to admit that the realization of law cannot be fully ensured without sanction.

In the case of constitutional law especially, this need is even more critical, for it refers to the society’s fundamental values. Legal positivists surely exaggerate when they argue that it is constitutional adjudication that ensures the effectiveness and legal authority of a constitution. The enforcement of constitutional norms is entrusted to all public institutions—legislators, agencies, courts—which are in charge of implementing the constitution through the exercise of their powers and within the limits equally fixed by this same constitution. Constitutional law stands as a program and as a source of legitimacy for all political actors. In this sense and especially in the case of democratic constitutions, citizens and more generally individuals are invited not simply to comply with constitutional constraints but also to act toward the realization of the objectives fixed by the fundamental legal text of the society organized as a state.

This enforcement cannot, however, be simply entrusted to the good faith and the internal predisposition of individuals either in respect of the fundamemtals or for pursuit of the common political objective. This is exactly the major contradiction of the Icarian experiment and a major cause of its failure. The project was based on the transcendental and almost metaphysical omnipresence of the state’s hand and eye in all aspects of social life.
Everything needed to be programmed, from the dress code to the content of education given to the youth and to the (homogeneous) style of furniture. All these public policies had the constitution for common reference, which, according to Cabot’s perceptions, was the matrix for happiness for individuals. By replacing individualism with the community of goods, the Icarian constitution proposed a precise as well as a new political project.

The more revolutionary a political project is, the more imperative appears the need to ensure effective implementation. To stay within the limits of socialist ideas, it should be recalled, coercion in the sense of enforcement of superior will is a key element for their realization. Marx clearly understood that by proposing the dictatorship of the proletariat as a transitional form of the state toward the creation of a classless and stateless communist society. Communist regimes were also aware of that, as illustrated by their installation of mechanisms of state coercion that far outstripped those of liberal democracies.

In the case of Icaria, however, this dystopian perspective proved to be impossible. Despite the statement that the minority should conform to the majority’s will, the Utopian character of the project dictated the limits of constitutional constraint. Icaria was a dreamworld opposed to violence and oppression, relying upon the common knowledge that happiness for everyone could not be achieved except through the well-being of the community. This approach deprived the Icarian constitution of effective protection against imprudence and opposition to its claims. Of course, expulsion and public contempt (Art. 169) were available forms of sanction, and according to records they were used quite frequently. Nevertheless, public contempt was not always efficient, especially when the “delinquent’s” attitude was shared by a large number of members of the community, whereas expulsion was sometimes resented as more of a salvation than a punishment by those who remained behind. Studying the personality of Cabot, one has to admit that the founder of Icaria probably flirted with the idea of installing mechanisms of coercion, but he knew that neither the members of the community who sailed to Nauvoo on the winds of their Utopian dreams nor U.S. courts that had jurisdiction over the general development of the community would have accepted sanctions such as imprisonment on behalf of Icarian public institutions. Consequently, the success of the Icarian experiment merely relied on the goodwill of the community’s members. Commitment is certainly both necessary and strong in Utopian communities, but it is not sufficient.
Constitution Without Transcendence

Underlying the discussion on constitutional constraint a far more important question is at stake. Constitutional constraint is both the condition and the expression of constitutional rules’ axiomatic supremacy. The constitution’s transcendental quality toward other legal prescriptions is a necessary element to structure the legal order and govern a political entity in a rule of law.39 This transcendence guarantees the stability, predictability, and—at least in democratic regimes—accountability of public authorities and their actions.

Icaria’s constitution, however, lacked this necessary transcendental character. Owing to its Utopian character, not only did the values of the community fix the objectives of public policy and the limits of public action, as happens with any deontological order such as a legal system. The constitution took these values as read for all members of the community. In this sense, the question of a transcendental constitution was meaningless. Law enforcement was entrusted to everyone, for everyone was a “vehicle” of constitutional ideals.40 Therefore, regulation relied upon internal will and self-engagement.

In this context, one can realize the fundamental difference between a Utopian republic and a direct democracy, such as the Athenian Republic. Law, especially constitutional law, does not simply guarantee citizens direct participation in government. It considers that every single citizen has equal legitimacy to interpret and enforce constitutional rules. But a constitution that is not out of reach is—in the real world—a constitution that is subjectively (and yet authentically) interpreted by every member of the community, for his or her will has equal value with the will of the others.

Thus, the Icarian constitution established in the fields of Illinois was not a model of social behavior and political government that would prepare the realization of the Icarian dream, to which Cabet had probably aspired. It was a real Utopian constitution, relying basically upon Icarians’ goodwill. Methodologically, this was the only choice that was faithful to the Utopian project. Politically, however, it was suicide.

The Discrepancy Between Values and Social Reality

Lack of coercion and constitutional transcendence can certainly explain constitutional failure in a liberal democracy as well as in tyranny but not in a Utopian republic. In fact, talking about the need to ensure compliance to
legal rules is by definition strange to Utopia, for no violation of the Utopian principles is possible in the ideal world.41

Generally speaking, the constitution stands as a symbol for the society established as a state (or community),42 a sort of registry where the fundamental values of the society are solemnly recognized.43 This apprehension of the constitution is readily inspired by social contract theories. The system of fundamental values does not have a simple “moralizing” effect. It stands as a political manifesto, a program of objectives that guides the action of public institutions as well as individuals.

But this function should have more than a utilitarian character. The concept of a social contract suggests its adoption by the citizens and their devotion at least to its fundamental principles. In the case of democratic constitutions especially, this relationship is a key element in their legitimacy. More generally, the constitution integrates—or should integrate—common values as long as they are shared by individuals and reflected in social practice. Conversely, as an output, the constitution offers the necessary conceptual tools and basic values to define public policy and social action. In other words, the constitution permits the society to crystallize its aspirations.

It does not seem, however, that the constitution’s role is purely descriptive. Behind the acclamation of fundamental values and the constitution’s symbolic mission stands a deontological claim. Constitutional law describes values that correspond to real aspirations. In other words, constitutional principles are not tautological prescriptions. They are claims demanding respect, for they express real need or desire.

This is exactly where the Icarian constitution failed. By trying simply to describe the project, it did not take into account personal or socioeconomic elements. Icarians came to Nauvoo with their individual needs, desires, skills, and imperfections. The fact that they shared the same dream for the realization of Icaria was certainly enough to make them abandon their previous lives, settle down in a new land, and organize themselves into a community. It did not, nevertheless, suffice to ensure union. The “community of goods,” this fundamental element of Icaria’s social and political system, was a value that was established under its constitution. Whereas all Icarians had accepted the social contract based upon this principle, they proved to be far more reluctant to embrace the institutions and practices dictated by this value.44 As several Icarians wondered in order to justify their opposition to Cabet and eventually
the abandoning of the community, “Did we travel 3,000 leagues in order not to be free?”

In this context, according to the Icarian constitution, all members of the community were obliged to work the same period of time on different interchangeable tasks without special recompense for their productivity and without their inclination or skills being taken into account. The community of goods meant equal respect for all tasks. As stated by the Icarians themselves, this led progressively to indifference and to the abandonment of the quest for happiness. But happiness—collective and individual—is the purpose and thus the legitimate source of a constitution, especially a Utopian one.

Moreover, members of the Icarian Community were obliged to work and live under conditions that were completely alien to them. Most of them were French, skillful workers or handicrafters, living in cities. They found themselves struggling for survival in the huge fields of an unknown country whose language they did not even know and under harsh climate conditions. Of course, the constitution is not to blame for these misfortunes. Nevertheless, its role in the drama is displayed by its incapacity to guarantee long-term prosperity or even satisfaction to the majority of the Icarians either by adapting economic and political life to the specific socioeconomic context or, inversely, by modifying the latter.

Cabet’s blind trust in law further amplified the gap between Utopia and reality. Already in his Voyage en Icarie, the exhaustive organization of economic, social, and even personal life through legal statements is depicted as an adequate method for the realization of Utopia. The adoption of the Icarian constitution at Nauvoo was based on the same idea. Cabet probably had no choice. In order to proceed with the realization of the Icarian project, he needed discipline and control over the community. Thus, the respect of Icaria’s laws was a constitutional principle of major importance. On this basis, every aspect of Icarian life was regulated in detail, leaving no space for individual initiative, creativity, and adaptation. The constitution that is not flexible is, however, condemned to failure. The U.S. Constitution’s longevity is largely explained by its adaptability through time, from the Civil War to the depression era and the Cold War up to today’s challenges. But in order to be flexible a constitution needs to be vague enough so that public authorities as well as individuals can still act and exist under its authority in fluctuating circumstances. Icaria, on the contrary, relied on suffocating constitutional regulation.
The Transformation of Icarian Constitutionalism

The exhaustive legal regulation of all aspects of social life, including personal behavior, is very revealing with regard to the political project of Icaria. As Cabet had clearly stated, the key to the realization of the Utopian society was not liberty, which actually enhances inequality and injustice among individuals, but, rather, happiness itself.

Contrary to liberal constitutions whose fundamental philosophical and political background is to ensure the protection of individuals against abuse, the Icarian constitution can be qualified as a “eudaemonic” constitution. Though its legal function was no different than that of liberal constitutionalism—that is, establish permanent institutions and, thus, rationalize the exercise of power while explicating the key features of the social contract—Utopian constitutionalism directly seeks happiness for everyone. This means that individual perfection disappears in the Utopian ideal and common will by definition expresses everybody’s aspirations.

The deficit in individual liberty was not only a major reason for the Icarian Republic’s failure. It was also the major argument used by the group opposed to Cabet to defy the order that he wanted to establish. In order to avoid insurrection, Cabet had instituted a system of informants delivering intelligence to him about all elements of Icarians’ lives. By the end of 1854, financial problems further enhanced frustration toward Cabet’s administration. Moderate alcohol consumption, smoking, fishing, and hunting should be allowed, according to the Opposition, as part of French traditions. Complaints about the exhaustive and fruitless regulation of social life, as well as the fear of Cabet’s tendency to rearrange constitutional settlements in order to concentrate power and obtain power to coerce, were in fact arguments based on the liberal claim. When the Icarian Opposition cried out “unconstitutional!” against Cabet’s efforts to go against the revision process provided by the constitution, they stood up for their liberty as guaranteed by the establishment of a stable, predictable, and transparent political process through constitutional rules. The legal rules, as established in the Icarian constitution, automatically became a guarantee for individual liberty and an instrument against political violence. Constitutionalism—which practically means the establishment of rules that transcend the will of political actors—became an instrument of moderation vis-à-vis political power. But this is a major function of modern liberal constitutions. Thus, the scope of the Icarian constitution shifted from Utopian to liberal.
This transformation automatically changed the function of the constitution as well. It was no longer a charter of Utopian values, the text that described the dreaming world. It was now, like constitutions in liberal democracies, the legal framework in which the political game was played. Constitutional law especially sets permanent institutions and fixes the rules of political struggle for opposing groups to get access to these institutions and control decision making. The conflict born of Cabet’s effort to change the constitution and concentrate power eventually introduced political parties—Cabetists and the Opposition—with radically different views on the shaping of Icaria’s political and social organization.

From that moment, constitutional law was apprehended in three distinct and yet closely related manners: (1) As a legal instrument, it provided stable mechanisms for the process of asserting power; (2) as a rule of behavior for political action, it fixed the criteria to check the players’ attitudes and legitimated opposition to any (“unconstitutional”) divergence from this model; and (3) as a political objective, it resumed political struggle around the question of constitutional amendments according to the aspirations of each group.

The Utopian flame that was the spirit of Icaria’s constitution had gone out.

The Naivety of the Icarian Constitution

These elements allow understanding of the major problem of the Icarian constitution. Behind the discontinuities previously stated there is a huge misunderstanding between Etienne Cabet and his disciples. In fact, the constitution adopted by the Icarians at Nauvoo stayed too faithful to the dreaming society described in *Voyage en Icarie*.

Given its Utopian character, the Icarian constitution treated individuals as ahistorical subjects, forming a homogeneous group, ready to act as one person. But Icarians were not tabulae rasae. Like all human beings they lived at a certain time under specific social, economic, political, cultural, and even geographical circumstances. In this sense, they had already developed social reflexes that did not necessarily coincide with their good faith for the realization of Utopia. Upon their arrival at Nauvoo, all this social and cultural background needed to be forgotten in the name of equality.

Contrary to equality in liberal theories, Utopian equality is not limited to granting equal opportunities and, eventually, intervening through
affirmative action. Equality is ensured through uniformity, and uniformity cannot be reached without the imposition of the same standards in all aspects of social life on everyone. This is what Icaria’s constitution tried to achieve, and it absolutely failed to do it.

The same problem affects another aspect of the Icarian Community at Nauvoo. Cabet was most probably aware of the risks of communication and interaction of the community with the outside world. Nevertheless, he knew from the very beginning that he had no choice, for two major reasons. First, in order to ensure new entries—an element that meant human resources and entrance fees—he had to accept the possibility of Icarians dropping off the membership list. Indeed, from 1848 to 1856 about two thousand individuals entered the Icarian Community at Nauvoo, but the average population never numbered more than 400 to 450 members. Second, the economic survival of the community called for “import/export” activities with the neighboring population. But these two factors of communication with the outside world necessarily placed the Icarian Community within its arena.

Robert P. Sutton is perfectly right when he asks: “Once the initial oppressors and oppression were left behind in France, what enemy, so important a uniting force in any community, could take its place?” The question is of vital importance in terms of political science and constitutional reading. The authority of the constitution is forged in the flames of common struggle to protect one’s ideals. In the case of the Nauvoo Community, however, the enemy was not at the gates; it was inside. As Sutton again puts it, “In America Icaria’s nemesis was vanity, materialism, and selfishness. Virtue and dedication marks the ‘true Icarian’ from the conceit of the apostate.” Faithful to its Utopian vocation, Icaria needed to win the moral struggle first of all. But this fight brought the political struggle inside the walls of the community. The common identity was definitely lost—and the constitutional authority along with it.

More generally, the community could no longer satisfy one basic condition of its Utopian claim: purity. It was confronted with the continuous entrance of new members, ideas, and habits as well as with comparisons. Faced with this fact, the constitution had two possible ways of reacting to it: rely on coercion and authority in closing the communicative ports and punishing “dangerous” and undesirable attitudes or integrate the new elements into its normative and symbolic grasp. Because of its Utopian—and, thus, ahistorical—nature, the Icarian constitution failed to do either.
These elements remind us that law, especially constitutional law, is in reality more a process than a group of statements. Stemming from a perpetual cross-fertilization of ideas and moral values, caught between political conflicts and compromises, standing between idealistic statements and the exercise of power, responding to aspiration, necessity, and even misfortune, constitutional law and practice are the result of a highly complex political and social process. By imposing a rigid constitutional charter, conceived exclusively in Cabet’s mind, without previous political struggle but only passive consent, and based on pure Utopian claims, the constitution was condemned from the very beginning. Utopian ideas can transcend historicity. Law cannot.

Conclusion

It is beyond doubt that from the legal standpoint, and especially in terms of constitutionalism, the Icarian experiment seriously misjudged both the function of law and its relation to the social reality. Does this mean that the impossible coincidence between Utopian conception and legal realization deprives the question of the relationship between law and Utopia of any academic or practical interest?

Not at all. The Utopian claim remains the moving force for legal design and the legitimate source for compliance with law. Besides, the claim of social reconstruction goes—politically as well as methodologically—far beyond the usual ambitions of constitutional settlements. One should not forget that totalitarian regimes that succeeded in establishing an order for a shorter or a longer period were based on the use of force and, therefore, on oppression. The Icarian experiment, however, rejected violence and relied on the kindness of human nature, its thirst for happiness, and the pedagogic as well as deontological functions of law. In this sense, and despite its final failure—after fifty years of practice, which arguably is a success per se—Icaria stands for the out-of-reach horizon that makes political and legal journeys seem worthwhile.70

One must, thus, recognize that in the will of the Icarians who crossed the Atlantic and America to found a Utopian republic and in the social struggle to which they devoted their lives as well as the future of their children, there is more than a simple case study or a legal incident. The most important legacy of Icaria’s dramatic and fascinating story is that it shows how Utopian dreams
can leave the static world of books and become legal settlements and a claim for peaceful social reform.

Notes

In memory of Professor Robert P. Sutton. Many thanks to Professor Jeff Hanks and the Center for Icarian Studies, University of Western Illinois.


3. The book was first published in 1839 under the title *Voyages et aventures de Lord William Carisdall en Icarie* under a pseudonym, before its publication with the author’s name in 1842, entitled simply *Voyage en Icarie* (Paris: J. Mallet, 1842). It has been translated into English under the title *Travels in Icaria* by Robert P. Sutton (Macomb: Western Illinois University Press, 1985) and then by Leslie J. Roberts, with an introduction by Robert P. Sutton (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003).


9. Deontology is defined here according to the work of Jeremy Bentham: “The principle, then, on which Deontology is grounded is the principle Utility; in other words, that every action is right or wrong—worthy or unworthy—deserving approbation or disapprobation, in proportion of its tendency to contribute to, or to diminish the amount of public happiness” (*Deontology or the Science of Morality*, vol. I [Longman, Rees, Orme, Browne, Greene and Longman; and Edinburgh: William Tait, 1834], 21).


13. For example, industrial development is a key issue for Icarians’ well-being (ibid., 101).

15. According to Art. 26 of the constitution, “The Icarians proclaim natural Equality, social or civil and political, without any privilege. They recognize all to be equals in law and duty.”

16. Article 56: “In the Icarian Community property is not individual, but social, common, undivided.”

17. A good example of this intrusion of law and control in all aspects of Icarian life is depicted by the letters exchanged between Cabot and Emile Baxter, presented in Robert P. Sutton and Rulon N. Smithson, “‘Mon Cher Emile’: The Cabot–Baxter Letters 1844–1855,” *Western Illinois Regional Studies*, 1979: 20, especially 37, where Cabot explains that it is impossible for Icarians to bring any personal belongings even if they were related to their personal skills, such as a piano, for in this case a piano should be given to everyone and the community could not afford it. The prohibition on hunting and fishing for pleasure is also another example of this suffocating, almost dystopian, situation: Cabot, *Colonie icariéenne*, 195–96.


23. As for women, Art. 120 of the constitution provided them with a consultative voice.


28. Art. 175 clearly stated: “The Icarian People have necessarily the right to amend and modify the Constitution. But they can, in their interest, draw up rules and forms for the purpose of preventing the exposure of the Constitution to changes which are too precipitate or frequent.”


30. The difference in the adoption of “organic” and ordinary laws is not stated in the constitution, which practically means that they are distinguishable on the sole basis of their object.


36. Ibid., 80–81.

37. Ibid., 88.


40. Emile Vallet, *An Icarian Communist in Nauvoo* (Springfield: Illinois State Historical Society, 1971), 27. Vallet had been a member of the Icarian Community as a child and reports: “As [the Icarians] had the same rights, the same duties, the same privileges, they naturally thought themselves authorized, entitled to watch, to detect, to mention the negligence, the errors, the lack of skill, the want of economy, the wasting and squandering, the abuse of authority of some of the officers.”


46. Cabet, *Voyage en Icarie*, 100.
47. On this kind of paternalism (that is, total control of one’s choices) as a major threat to liberty, see Isaiah Berlin, *Liberty*, ed. Henry Hardy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 181–82.
48. According to pt. 42 of the constitution: “L’obéissance à la loi est l’exercice de la liberté.”
55. Ibid.
56. A Resolution of the General Assembly of the Icarian Community for the Expulsion of Cabet, October 25, 1856, Center for Icarian Studies, University of Western Illinois, Macomb.
57. Friedrich A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 178: “The [U.S.] constitution was . . . conceived as a protection of the people against all arbitrary action, on the part of the legislative as well as the other branches of government.”
58. Cabet states that the existence of the Opposition Party is “inconsistent” with and “a contradiction” of the Icarian principles, “a monstrous fact” (*Colonie icarienne*, 206).
59. M. J. C. Vile says: “The essential point about constitutions is . . . that they may channel political behaviour in certain directions rather than others, that the ordinary citizen will not be subject to the whims of good or bad men, but will have some certainty of essential continuities of action when the personnel of government changes” (*Constitutionalism and the Separation of Powers*, 2nd ed. [Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1998], 328).
61. Etienne Cabet himself was very clear on this point, as he stated: “Les incovénients de cette dissidence et du relâchement introduit pendant mon absence, deviennent si nombreux et si graves que je crois devoir proposer, sur la fin de 1853, une réforme icarienne pour revenir à la pratique des principes icariens” (*Colonie icarienne*, 141).
62. Cabet, however, seems to have understood that the key to Icaria’s success was the children who would receive an education according to Utopian ideals and without being “contaminated” by the moral weaknesses of the outside world: ibid., 200–201.
63. Shaw, *Icaria*.
65. In terms of Berlin’s “negative” and “positive” freedom (Liberty, 169–70), Utopian equality arguably justifies the total abolition of the second one (“freedom to . . .”), for desire is eradicated in the Utopian context (Cabet, Colonie icarienne, 175). As for negative freedom (“freedom from . . .”), Icaria at Nauvoo preserved a core area of liberty in private life.
66. Cabet, Colonie icarienne, 173.
68. Despite its extrapolating character and its exaggeration, Carl Schmitt’s distinction between “friend” and “enemy” remains useful for understanding how communities with strong ideological identities are constructed: The Concept of the Political, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
69. Sutton, Les Icariens, 147.
Transcendental Meditation and the Remaking of an Iowa Farm Town

Joseph Weber

ABSTRACT
The Transcendental Meditation movement bought a bankrupt Presbyterian college in Fairfield, Iowa, in the 1970s and established its own university and settled a community of about two thousand followers there. The movement transformed the town’s culture, politics, and social life. Followers, however, have grayed, and the movement’s numbers nationwide have dwindled. Transcendental Meditation leader Maharishi Mahesh Yogi died in 2008. Now, like many other Utopian communities before it, the Fairfield group faces possible extinction. I look at the impact the community has had and ponder its likely future.

KEYWORDS: Transcendental Meditation, Fairfield, Iowa, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Maharishi University of Management, TM

At first blush, the town square in Fairfield, Iowa, seems no different from hundreds like it that grace small communities from New England to California. It has a pretty gazebo where bands play, a stretch of grass ideal for sunbathing, and a monument to historic local events, and all of it is
surrounded by businesses that offer clothes, medicine, food, and, perhaps, a
drink or two. Such town centers are so classically American that Disney and
Hollywood have turned them into clichés, timeworn settings for amusement
parks, Fourth of July celebrations, political speeches, and romance.1

But a closer look at the heart of Fairfield shows how far this place is from
ordinary. Hard by a couple of real estate sales offices and kitchenware shops is
the Health and Wholeness shop, a retailer of herbal teas, aromatherapy prod-
ucts, and “total health solutions” said to be inspired by ancient Eastern teach-
ings. Nearby, Thymely Solutions offers extracts, homeopathic remedies, and
“heaven in a bottle” in planetary gem elixirs that offer “infusions of solar and
lunar light with ‘blueprints’ of rare and superior quality gems.” Two vegetar-
ian places serve up savory Indian food on other corners of the square. Across
the way, the Revelations used books shop and eatery stocks well-thumbed
copies of a dazzling array of spiritual texts along with mysteries, sci-fi, and
other fare.

Walk into Café Paradiso, an espresso bar and coffee shop that doubles as
a small concert hall for the indie likes of the Roches and Wendy Waldman,
and one is apt to overhear conversations a far cry from any found in most
of Iowa. Talk of auras, mind–body connections, crystals, and novel health-
restoration approaches may ring out, along with less ethereal conversations
about music and undergraduate and graduate student life. A visitor may hear
chatter about visiting mystics or speakers in town promoting programs such
as Brennan Healing Science, something “based on the living dynamics of
our Human Energy-Consciousness System and its relationship to the greater
world of which we all are intimately a part.”2

A good number of the residents of Fairfield—up to a quarter of the
9,500 or so here, by some estimates—regularly train their minds on realms
far beyond this pleasant farm town, which dates back to 1839. Devotees of
the late Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and his Transcendental Meditation (TM)
movement, they gather by the hundreds—more than a thousand at a time
on some days—to meditate together twice a day in sprawling golden-domed
buildings at Maharishi University of Management, a college a short hop from
the town square. Some residents, preferring to “transcend” privately, do so in
posh newer homes scattered around town that comply with the guru’s archi-
tectural principles—with east-facing entrances said to foster enlightenment,
affluence, and fulfillment, not the fear, destruction, and quarreling suppos-
edly bred by south-facing entrances. Some such homes carry price tags well
above $500,000, far above the reach of most longtime locals. Some can be found in Maharishi Vedic City, a new town created by devotees just outside of Fairfield, which is home to the Global Country of World Peace and other TM movement affiliates. Hundreds more meditators, brought in from India expressly for the purpose, meet to meditate and chant in Maharishi Vedic City each day, for hours at a stretch. 

This southeastern corner of Iowa is the unlikely U.S. home of TM. From here the movement that burst onto the global scene when the Beatles took to the guru in the late 1960s has touched several million people worldwide. For many, the touch was a glancing one, a few sessions that cost as little as a few dollars or more than $2,500, depending on when one signed on. For their investment, the curious learned a simple relaxation-based technique, got a mantra, and were urged to meditate twice a day for twenty minutes at a time. Many fell away when promises of better mental and physical health and expectations of material success bore little fruit, or they moved on to more or less pedestrian pursuits. But for a few thousand people—a constantly shifting group of passionate followers—the exhilaration of meditation and the sense of belonging to a group that promised to usher in world peace meant a far deeper commitment. This meant advanced studies in Europe or India, the pursuit of Yogic Flying—a belief in meditation-induced levitation—or missions to meditate in dangerous places around the world. For some, it meant a move to Fairfield.

Like the founders of some other Utopian communities, the migrants brought with them a sense that they could spur great change in the world. Broadly, the TM movement sought to change history simply by creating groups of people all around the world who would come together to meditate. By that action alone, the devotees held, they could lower the temperature on an overheated world. Locally, in Fairfield, they sought to bring together their guru’s esoteric knowledge, to spread it worldwide through those they would educate at their university, and to promote meditation far and wide. They sought, too, to create a place where meditators would find hundreds of kindred spirits, joined by their common interests in promoting peace and study of the guru’s teachings.

Curiously, in Iowa they found a state that has attracted several Utopian communities animated by religious or spiritual concerns. The Amana Colonies, populated by German Pietists in the mid-1800s, flourished for decades not far from Fairfield. Amish communities have made their mark on
the state. And from the late 1980s to the early 2000s Hasidic Jews thrived in Postville, bringing ways of life into a northeast Iowa town unfamiliar with their cultural and religious practices. They operated a slaughtering business, packaging and selling religiously mandated kosher food nationwide, until federal authorities raided the business over concerns about undocumented workers. For the most part, Iowans have proved tolerant of newcomers, though frictions sometimes arose between these communities and the outside world. That has been true, too, for the TM practitioners, whom some longtime Iowans even now label as “roos.” The term, derived from guru, denigrates the meditators, suggesting that they are mindless followers of their late leader. Fairfield is a modern test case in tolerance.

Fairfield became a magnet for meditators beginning in 1974, a time when the stars aligned just right for the TM movement. Flush with contributions, the movement bought the campus of bankrupt Parsons College that year to become the home of its American university. The lure grew in 1979, when the guru issued a call for meditators to move to Iowa so that they could gather together daily in the belief that their group meditation would spread peace across the United States. The movement built great golden domes on the Maharishi University of Management (MUM) campus to accommodate the group meditation sessions.

While some of the faithful just passed through, as students at MUM or visitors who came for periodic gatherings, others stayed. They built families and careers—in some cases, creating major businesses that employed many non-meditators from Fairfield and beyond. The adherents anchored their lives around TM, studying Vedic knowledge and taking advanced training in meditation.

They are a diverse lot. Among them are Laura Bordow, who abandoned the affluent suburbs of Chicago’s North Shore in 1983 to give her newborn son a less materialistic place—a spiritual place—to grow up. There is Richard Beall, an Ohio farm boy who aspired to a life as a professional baseball player and wound up teaching TM in Ohio, California, and even Bulgaria. Bordow and Beall took leading positions in the movement’s prekindergarten-through-twelfth-grade school, the Maharishi School of the Age of Enlightenment. Then there is Eric Schwartz, who was smitten with the TM movement while in college and wound up changing schools—moving from tony Amherst College to the less prestigious University of Massachusetts—so that he could pursue meditation. With no business training, he built Cambridge Investment Research, a company
that now employs hundreds and serves financial planners nationwide. The meditator ranks include Pamela K. Slowick, who found more meaning in TM than in her academic pursuits and so quit Hampshire College to join the movement, a step that led her over time to run for Congress from Arizona for a movement-related political party and to open a homeopathy shop in Fairfield. The town’s mayor, former New Yorker Ed Malloy, is a meditator, as are several city council members. The group also includes co-authors of the Chicken Soup for the Soul series of inspirational books, about a dozen of whom live or have lived in the Fairfield area.

The cultural changes TM devotees wrought in Fairfield are profound. When locals wanted to have a good time before the TM movement arrived, for instance, their choices were pretty narrow: a county fair in the summertime, maybe a movie downtown, a football game at the high school, or perhaps a stop at a local watering hole. But those choices have broadened dramatically. Residents in recent times could take in videos such as *The Science of Miracles: The Quantum Language of Healing, Peace, Feeling and Belief* at the Fairfield Public Library. They could attend benefit concerts to raise funds for Tanzanian orphanages and efforts to promote sustainable farming in Africa. They could join in on live telecasts with an Ayurvedic physician presenting “Love and Prana II: Karma, Kama, Vajikarna and Kamagani” or spend time with a Hindu priest as he performed predawn sacrificial fire ceremonies to seek blessings from the god Shiva. Such ceremonies, called Yagyas, were aimed at pleading for world peace, neutralizing “negativity,” and promoting health or overcoming “planetary afflictions.” Participants did need to bring washed fruit and flowers and avoid meat and egg products for the day.

Fairfield, whose glories were once Parsons College and a National Guard detachment, has changed a lot since TM’ers took over the campus. It is true that the 34th Army Iowa National Guard Band, based in town, still performs in front of the quaint old gazebo in the town center on Memorial Day. And the Trojans take the field at the high school every fall, facing off against such rivals as the Keokuk Chiefs and the Mount Pleasant Panthers. But Fairfield’s small-town character has expanded to embrace the cosmopolitan tastes of people from both U.S. coasts and big cities, as well as newcomers from scores of countries around the world.

Not everyone is happy about the changes. Some nonmeditators bristle that the TM’ers have hijacked the town culture, turning it into a kind of spiritual mecca–cum–big-city boomer haven in the Midwest. Certainly, the
meditators have had an influence exceeding their numbers. “Over the years it has become more pronounced in Fairfield,” a church secretary, who is not a meditator, told me in mid-2011: “It seems to be more a majority thing.”

That impression stems from the all-too-visible impact the meditators have had on big swaths of the town’s social life. The meditators, many of whom brought money, a baby boomer sense of rebelliousness, and an appetite for big-city music, art, and entertainment, have made their marks everywhere. Their imprint is apparent in art, with several galleries now showcasing local work and the chance for residents and visitors to enjoy a monthly First Fridays Art Walk, an event set up by a TM’er from California in 2002. Their influence turns up in food, too, so Fairfielders now feast on Indian delights, wood-fired pizza, and Moroccan curry. Retailers responded, opening outlets to pitch Maharishi Ayurvedic medicines that compete with conventional offerings at the more familiar Hy-Vee Drugstore.

Popular entertainment, too, has been overhauled. The Fairfield Arts and Convention Center (FACC) now showcases such documentaries as American Meat. The independent film lambastes industrial farming and would likely generate little fan support among Iowa’s bigger growers. Visitors can also view exhibits such as Healthy Pollinators Are Essential for Super Foods and Medicinal Plants in the FACC’s biodiversity learning and activities center.

To be sure, some staple shows that appeal to “townies” can be found in the FACC’s Sondheim Center for the Performing Arts. Among recent offerings were “In the Christmas Mood with the Glenn Miller Orchestra” and “An Evening with Mark Twain.” But East Coast refugees moving up in their baby boom years would make for a more likely audience for the “Tribute to Frankie Valli,” a show that celebrated the Four Seasons, a New Jersey musical group from the 1960s. And, certainly, few townies would rush to a talk by Mahendra Kumar Trivedi, an Indian mechanical engineer whom supporters say can change the molecular structure of cancer cells, radioactive water, viruses, bacteria, fungi, and so on (“More than 4,000 scientific studies have been done to verify his gift to heal,” one backer gushed). And despite the $100 cost, meditators flock to such programs as a one-day silent meditation retreat at the FACC led in mid-2011 by Amma Sri Karunamayi, a Hindu spiritual leader and repeat visitor to Fairfield. The program was designed to help participants “realize the truth that you and your Divine Mother are One.”

The FACC itself might never have opened if not for meditators, some of whom rallied behind nonmeditating locals to get it built. The 57 million
cultural center, an ambitious effort for the town, opened in 2007 and promptly went into the red financially, leading to a management shake-up the following year. The “jewel of Fairfield,” as boosters call it, featured the 522-seat Sondheim theater, offering a stage for music, comedy, dance, and national touring performances. It provided a venue for local concert and chamber music groups and community theater. The convention portion of the building, with twelve thousand square feet of meeting space, offered full catering and banquet options. Voters in 2010 bailed out the center’s finances in a contentious special election, clearing the way for the FACC to tap a city fund so that it could pay off the $5 million debt. The city took over the center. In its opening years, the center could not cover its debt service from revenues and donations alone, and it still depended on donations, some of which came from meditators and their businesses.9

For some in town, the FACC’s solvency, like just about all other subjects of controversy in Fairfield, became a meditator-versus-nonmeditator matter. Critics among the townies were appalled by what they saw as imprudent management and poor planning in, first, building such a big center. To many it seemed unneeded in Fairfield, which is still a place of modest incomes (the median household income sits below $35,000, with nearly 22 percent of the population living below the poverty line, according to the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2010 count).10 For many, Fairfield is also a place of small-town tastes. “When they see a facility of this size, people feel, ‘That’s not us,’” a former FACC business manager told me. It did not help that the planners took on a hefty amount of debt and then failed to stage enough moneymaking events to cover the costs. The idea of having to go to the town for a vote to pay off debt was galling to many, especially to locals who did not warm to the cultural offerings there. “It was very divisive on many levels,” said the former manager, a nonmeditator who had not used the center herself until she took a job there, because it did not offer enough to capture her family’s notice.

During much of its early days some locals refused to come to events at the center because they saw it as a place chiefly serving meditators. Their attitude was rooted in misunderstanding, one of the co-founders, nonmeditator Suzan Kessel, told me in an August 2011 interview. “It is totally a community venture and nonpolitical, although people try to make it political,” said Kessel, an artist and a fifth-generation Fairfielder. She and a nonmeditator friend, Sally Neff Denney, got the idea to create the center in the mid-1990s, when the Fairfield Art Association lost exhibit space in town.
But Kessel, mindful of the need to have broad support for the FACC, carefully sought out a mix of meditators and nonmeditators to back the facility from its earliest days. While she believed that a center could have been built without meditator backing, she wanted to rally support from all segments of the town. “Sally and I interviewed certain meditators before we brought them on board,” Kessel recalled: “We didn’t want the issue to come up, and we selected several that were very strong supporters of the project both in their time and their money.”

Challenging as the situation is, the center’s managers have strived to offer a mix of events to serve all corners of the community. While some offerings draw only meditators, the managers try to put on productions with broader appeal. For instance, “Ricky Nelson Remembered,” a show by the twin sons of the late singer, packed the house with both meditators and nonmeditators. By contrast, a show by country stars Larry Gatlin & the Gatlin Brothers was aimed more at townies, as was a display of mixed martial arts fighting inside a cage. The managers also opened the facility to education groups, which staged math competitions and history exhibitions, as well as to area entrepreneurs. Looking for financial solid ground, they sharply boosted the number of events they host.

Indeed, the FACC has become a symbolic way to unite the community. Many nonmeditators were irked at TM’ers in 2001 when they knocked down, rather than rehabilitated, the Barhydt Memorial Chapel on the Maharishi University of Management campus. The chapel, a stately stone building on the National Register of Historic Places, had towered over the campus and was its signature image from about 1910 on. It was a place of many weddings and a venue where alums of Parsons College recalled events ranging from convocations and student theatrical productions to required chapel attendance. But the building needed work and did not suit the administration’s plans for the campus. Backers could not rustle up an estimated $1 million to move it. So, to preserve the memory of the chapel after it was leveled, backers arranged to install Barhydt’s grand organ in the FACC’s Sondheim Center. Further, boosters raised funds to install stained-glass windows from the structure in an area of the FACC that serves the Parsons College Alumni Hall, a hall of fame for the school. 11

Celebrities have performed in Fairfield from time to time. That is thanks to the TM movement, which rocketed to prominence in the 1960s and 1970s with the help of famous names. James McCartney, son of longtime TM supporter
and former Beatle Paul McCartney, made his American debut at the Sondheim Center in late 2009, for instance. “The audience, heavily weighted with aging 60s boomers, went wild when the 32-year-old singer/guitarist walked on stage with Light, his band,” reported the Hawk Eye, an Iowa newspaper." Another TM backer and baby boomer favorite, Donovan, joined the younger McCartney. Thanks to the movement, Fairfield also hosted the reconstituted Beach Boys, including original band member and longtime meditator Mike Love, and Moby.

Filmmaker David Lynch, who has emerged as a persuasive front man for the movement in the absence of a charismatic successor to Maharishi, brings out the stars. Some appeared in Fairfield in conjunction with Lynch’s “Change Begins Within” weekends at MUM. Stars as disparate as British comic Russell Brand and Paul McCartney, Ringo Starr, Sheryl Crow, Eddie Vedder, and Ben Harper appeared at fund-raising events in New York City for Lynch’s foundation. Brand, serving as master of ceremonies at a December 2010 fund-raiser at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, told the crowd that TM “has been incredibly valuable to me both in my recovery as a drug addict and in my personal life, my marriage, my professional life.” Indeed, he said, an idea had just popped into his brain “the other day while I was meditating which I think is worth millions of dollars.”

The David Lynch Foundation for Consciousness-Based Education and World Peace, founded in 2005, touts TM as a way to address vexing social problems. The meditation technique, Lynch maintains, can help people who are homeless, as well as veterans, Native Americans, and prisoners, along with students in troubled schools, who are served by the Center for Wellness and Achievement in Education. “At-risk populations suffer from epidemic levels of chronic stress and stress-related disorders—fueling violence, crime, soaring health costs, and compromising the effectiveness of education, health, rehabilitation, and vocational programs now in place,” the foundation says on its website.

Lynch told the New York Times that he took up meditation in the early 1970s, when he was having marital problems with the first of his four wives:

“I had a whole bunch of personal anger that I would take out on her,” he said. “I think I was a weak person. I wasn’t self-assured. I was not a happy camper inside. Two weeks after I started, my wife comes to me and said, ‘This anger, where did it go?’ I felt a freedom and happiness growing inside. It was like—pooof!—I felt a kind of smile from..."
Mother Nature. The world looked better and better. It’s an ocean of unbounded love within us, so it’s real hard to get a conflict going.”

(As the Times noted, the couple, nonetheless, divorced a year later.)

To promote TM, Lynch developed collaborations with school districts across the country. His foundation has worked with public, charter, and private middle schools and high schools in cities including New York City, Washington, D.C., Atlanta, Detroit, Chicago, Tucson, San Francisco, and Los Angeles to encourage the technique during the school day among students, teachers, and administrators. The foundation Web site is chockablock with video testimonials from officials who say that TM reduced disciplinary problems at inner-city schools that contend with gangs and who say that it improved student performance. One student speaks of how the dread she once felt about school has been replaced by enthusiasm about going. Another high school student credits it for his success in sports. “I get disturbing thoughts washed away,” says a third: “When you come out of meditating, the problem is just gone.”

Lynch, who proselytizes for TM as aggressively as any missionary, has provided videos on his site that attack head-on the idea that TM is a religion. The videos quote school officials as saying that the practice has nothing to do with religion. Sporting a crucifix on her necklace, one administrator notes that she was a “naysayer” about TM because of her religious beliefs, but she then praises the practice for making “a great and significant difference.” She says, “I’m telling you now I am a believer.” Religious questions have come up about TM for years, dogging the movement at least since a federal court in New Jersey in 1977, in the Malnak v. Yogi case, ruled that the teaching of TM and the Science of Creative Intelligence—the movement’s dogma—was “religious in nature.” Critics deride TM as Hinduism Lite, but meditators say that the Vedic knowledge that led to the meditation practice predates Hinduism.

Lynch’s group rebuts the critics, however, with testimonials that emphasize the practice’s success in fostering calmness, stress reduction, and focus. The religious elements evident in the movement in Fairfield—mentions of bringing heaven on Earth, “His Holiness” Maharishi, and the Divine—do not figure into the foundation’s approach. Instead, the Quiet Time Program it backs emphasizes the simple twice-a-day meditation technique, saying that student participants score higher on intelligence tests, close the achievement
gap, improve test scores, and have higher graduation rates compared with students in control groups. Meditating students also show reduced stress levels, anxiety, depression, violence, and substance abuse.

While interested in such outreach efforts, the Lynch foundation has directed much of its largesse into TM operations outside of American public schools. Legally based in Fairfield but with its main offices in New York and Los Angeles, the foundation reported that in filing year 2011 it took in $8.26 million in net revenue and gave away $4.34 million. Its largest single grantee, getting $1.83 million, was the Center for Wellness and Achievement in Education, which provides the Quiet Time meditation program in California schools. Most of the $4.3 million, however, went to TM-related institutions based in Fairfield, including the Maharishi School for the Age of Enlightenment, Maharishi University of Management, the MUM Research Institute, and the Maharishi Foundation.

Movement insiders may have had some say over how the money was allocated. The president of Lynch’s foundation when the grants went out was John Hagelin, who directs the Institute of Science, Technology and Public Policy at the Maharishi University of Management. A Harvard-trained physicist, he also has served as minister of science and technology of another arm of the movement called the Global Country of World Peace. And he ran three times for president of the United States on the Natural Law Party ticket.

Celebrity backers such as Lynch have been integral to the movement for more than forty years. Maharishi labored in the United States to promote the technique and his teachings from the late 1950s on, but his biggest successes came after the Beatles embraced the practice and visited the guru in India in 1968. Images of the flower-bedecked musicians, sitting cross-legged in Indian garb at the guru’s ashram, popularized the idea around the world. None had quite the same recruitment power afterward, although some celebrities continued to talk up the practice. Radio shock jock Howard Stern, for instance, spoke about how meditation saved his mother’s life after she took it up in a battle with depression while he was in college. As Stern told talk show host David Letterman in February 2011, his mother had seen Maharishi on a talk show and was “transformed” and “elated” by the practice. She took Stern to a TM center, at age eighteen, and he began what became a lifelong meditation routine, too. “I find it very relaxing,” said Stern. He also said that he lived with TM’ers in an Armonk, New York, monastery for a while in his early, poorly paid, days in radio. Stern’s trademark coarseness was missing
in 1985 when he interviewed Maharishi, a session where he said that he felt “reverential” toward the guru. 21

Over the years, TM’s celebrity backers have included Hollywood’s Clint Eastwood, Mary Tyler Moore, Gwyneth Paltrow, Laura Dern, and Hugh Jackman. Backers have also included business leaders such as designer Donna Karan and hedge fund magnate Ray Dalio, who brought in people from Fairfield to train employees at his $140 billion Bridgewater Associates, LP, firm in meditation. CNN journalist Candy Crowley, a meditator who co-hosted a Lynch foundation gala in 2010, delivered a commencement address at MUM in May 2012, exhorting graduates to “be honest and demand honesty in life.” 22 Former CNN anchor Soledad O’Brien welcomed guests on her morning news show, such as hip-hop entrepreneur Russell Simmons, who touted TM. Similarly, ABC anchorman George Stephanopoulos showcased TM movement backers. Talk show host Ellen DeGeneres has offered testimonials. Actor Stephen Collins, who served on the board of the Lynch foundation, brought his message to Fairfield in 2010, when he spoke warmly about TM at graduation ceremonies inside one of the golden domes on the MUM campus.

Along with playing host to celebrity adherents of TM, Fairfield has welcomed political stars at times. Candidate Barack Obama came to town when trolling for votes in 2007, for instance, and he warmed the hearts of meditators by bemoaning a national “empathy deficit.” Among his crowd-pleasing lines here, according to politico.com, was: “Somehow we have lost the capacity to recognize ourselves in each other.” 23

Now, however, the baby boomers and others like them who flooded into Fairfield from Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, and points overseas are graying. Their movement is at a turning point, its fate uncertain. Their guru died in early 2008, leaving behind a leadership structure but no successor with anywhere near his charisma.

These days, an air of uncertainty afflicts the movement. Supporters, including some serving at high levels in movement institutions, wonder privately about whether their leaders are making the right choices, whether they are adapting to times far different from when they joined as idealistic twenty-somethings. Is their movement destined to remain passé, a throwback to the days of bell-bottom jeans and tie-dye shirts? Or can it adapt and find ways to spread the wisdom and practices that the guru’s followers say are timeless?

To be sure, TM still commands attention and garners financial support from its coterie of celebrities, many of them boomers who came of age with
the movement. Media star Oprah Winfrey meditated for her Oprah Winfrey Network cable TV audience in early 2012 in a long, admiring program about “America’s Most Unusual Town.” Some of the famous stop by Fairfield at times.

But the worry for insiders is whether the movement is on a flight path all too familiar to historians who have studied the life cycles of intentional communities and religious or cultural movements. Many do not survive for more than a few years past the retirements, deaths, or disenchantments of their leaders or a large number of followers. The Unitarians and freethinkers who created American Transcendentalism, including such intellectuals as Ralph Waldo Emerson, failed to make a go of Brook Farm and the Fruitlands communities in Massachusetts in the early 1800s. A bit later, the Oneida Community in upstate New York—plural marriage practitioners whose unconventional mores infuriated neighbors—dissolved after founder John Humphrey Noyes sought to hand over leadership to his son. And not far from Fairfield, in eastern Iowa, German Pietists of the mid-1800s established the colonies, which thrived for nearly eighty years—one of the longest runs of any such groups. Today, about four hundred Inspirationists, as they are called, live in and around the Amana Colonies, less than a quarter of the peak population of 1,813 members in 1881. The seven towns carry on mainly as tourist sites.

Already, signs of strain are showing up in the TM movement, many involving people in Fairfield. Internal frictions, including an intolerance of dissent, have led to what amounts to excommunication of longtime backers. Some former followers now provide anti-cult therapy to help practitioners pull away. A small but vocal group of critics derides the movement regularly on Web sites with names such as TM-Free Blog and The Honest Truth About TM. And ex-devotee Judith Bourque in 2010 published Robes of Silk, Feet of Clay, a tell-all book about her secret love affair with Maharishi in the 1970s that alleges other assignations by the supposedly celibate guru at the peak of his prominence.

More troubling for insiders, few second-generation members—including some educated at movement schools from childhood through college—seem interested in taking top leadership roles. Perhaps worse, they lack the opportunity to do so, as sixtysomethings hang onto power. Some of the young people, moreover, reject doctrines that took TM well beyond a once-popular simple meditation technique. They look askance at such beliefs as the idea...
that practitioners could defy gravity and hover off the ground unaided. Some who spoke with me but declined to be identified for fear of causing tension with other community members even bristled at the notion of following a guru at all, preferring to school themselves in esoteric wisdom from many sources.

Furthermore, enrollments have been problematic at the Maharishi University of Management and the Maharishi School of the Age of Enlightenment, which serves students from preschool to high school. After peaking at 3,231 in 1989, enrollment at MUM slipped to 1,133 in an official reported count in fall 2012, and most were grad students. Just sixty-three undergraduates earned degrees from the university in 2012, while 193 students collected master’s degrees, and five earned doctorates. At the Maharishi School—located on a corner of the MUM campus and designed initially to serve university-affiliated meditators—enrollment has dropped from as many as seven hundred students in the early 1990s to about two hundred. Class sizes in some lower grades are now down in the single digits.

Financially, the movement has seen better days, too. Long gone are the times when Maharishi and his followers could jet around the world, drawing tens of thousands of supporters whose payments helped buy property in several spots across the United States as well as in areas such as the TM world headquarters in Vlodrop, Holland. Recent filings in the United States from several arms of the movement suggest that most of its American assets, net of liabilities, as of the latest accounting are worth about $193 million, down from $270.9 million as of the end of 2008 and much less than the wealth that former devotees say the movement once controlled. (Regrettably, no full accounting of the often-secretive movement’s fortunes has ever been made public, so comparisons are difficult. But the movement was once awash in cash and real estate, including downtown buildings in major U.S. cities such as Chicago. Its assets appear to be less so now, even though the late guru in the early 2000s was collecting as much as $1 million each from some wealthy donors.) Reports in publications such as *India Today* suggest that millions of dollars were plowed into twelve thousand acres of land across India, including in prime areas such as Delhi and Goa, and heirs of the late guru and followers have battled over the legacy ever since the guru’s death.

Perhaps as a result of the tumult and the lack of strong central direction, marketing and recruitment efforts are a shadow of what they once were. Where college groups once promoted TM to legions of curious American
students from coast to coast, StudentMeditation.org in early 2013 listed outposts on just fifteen campuses in the United States and four abroad. While the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the Mormons) and the Church of Scientology hawk their wares with well-produced TV commercials, TM has fallen below the radar. For their part, advocates say that the movement is working quietly—but effectively—in such areas as persuading corporations to offer TM as a benefit to employees and with such groups as the veterans administration to provide meditation as therapy for trauma-tized war veterans. It is just less of a retail, storefront operation now, one advocate said, and more a wholesaler, providing TM teachers in strategic areas where needed.

Decline, of course, could prove troublesome for Fairfield residents, including the seekers who moved to Fairfield to raise families, build businesses, open churches and a synagogue, and put in their daily meditation sessions. Some TM’ers take a cool attitude about it—it does not matter if the movement dies, they say, since the knowledge the guru imparted will live on. The guru himself lives on in a bevy of videos. Still others—townies long hostile to the “roos”—say that the movement cannot fade soon enough, even if that means all those odd shops and trendy restaurants shut their doors. As for MUM, the campus might make a nice regional medical complex or some such if the school goes bust, the critics say.

As the New Age businesses now in downtown Fairfield suggest, the tastes of MUM students and meditators are different. Nonetheless, TM’s electric effect on Fairfield cannot be denied. Largely because of the changes the TM’ers have wrought, Smithsonian Magazine ranked it seventh on a list of the twenty best small towns to visit in 2013 (between Petoskey, Michigan, and Los Alamos, New Mexico). The magazine quoted James Moore, manager of the town’s all-volunteer, solar-powered radio station, KRUU-FM, and a poet, musician, tennis teacher, and meditator, as saying: “Fairfield is one of the deepest small ponds you’ll find anywhere.”

The TM movement shook up the little town’s economy, political structure, and entertainment scene. It turned a bankrupt college campus into a busy international place that, over the decades, thousands have called their intellectual home. It spawned businesses that reached into high-tech areas, finance, and telecommunications, as well as into novel creative and artistic realms, that local farmers and factory workers could never have imagined. Fairfield, just a short piece down the road from the farmhouse, in Eldon,
where artist Grant Wood painted *American Gothic* in 1930, has become a far different place under the movement’s influence.

Furthermore, like some other Utopian groups, the movement has sought to broadcast its messages of physical and mental well-being and global peace far from its home base. Its efforts to proselytize, however, have ebbed since its peak recruitment days in the 1970s, when thousands flocked to see the guru in his prime. While some devotees, especially celebrities, continue to plump for TM’s style of meditation, some Fairfield meditators predicted in conversations with me that the movement will die with the baby boom generation. If so, Fairfield could wind up someday as a place where the curious visit meditation halls and homes that amount to monuments to a guru whose fleeting fame reflected the hopes and dreams of a singular American generation but proved unable to outlive it.

**Notes**


3. For more information on Maharishi Vedic City, from the point of view of city boosters, see http://www.vedicity.net/, accessed October 25, 2013.
6. For general information on the Art Walk program, see http://www.fairfieldartwalk.org/, accessed October 25, 2013.
7. See http://www.mail-archive.com/fairfieldlife@yahoogroups.com/msg189496.html for one Fairfield enthusiast’s view of Trivedi and http://trivedifoundation.org/ for general background, both accessed October 25, 2013.
25. For background on the Amana Colonies, see http://www.amanaheritage.org/history.html, accessed October 25, 2013; and for richly detailed accounts of Utopian communities, see Donald E. Pitzer, ed., America’s Communal Utopias (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).
27. The 1989 officially reported enrollment total was somewhat inflated by counts of meditators who used the golden domes on the campus regularly enough that the campus authorities enrolled them as students. See the National Center for Education Statistics, http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter/.
28. For more detail about the Maharishi School of the Age of Enlightenment, see http://www.maharishischooliowa.org/.
29. For recent Form 990 filings, required of tax-exempt organizations, see http://www.guidestar.org/ or http://foundationcenter.org/findfunders/990finder/. Assets, liabilities, salary information, and other financial details are spelled out in such filings. The $193 million net asset figure includes assets held by the Maharishi Global Development Fund, the Global Country of World Peace, and Maharishi University of Management, as well as smaller organizations including Maharishi Global Administration Through Natural Law, Maharishi Foundation USA, Maharishi Purusha Program, Brahmananda Saraswati Foundation, and the David Lynch Foundation for Consciousness-Based Education and World Peace. For the organizations as a group, the assets overall declined from the end of 2008 (the year the guru died) through the most recent periods for which reports were available in August 2014. Declines were reported by the Maharishi Global Development Fund and the Maharishi Purusha Program, while rises were reported by the others, although the most recent filing dates varied between 2011 and 2013 for the groups. Michael Spivak, treasurer of the university, noted that MUM’s assets—worth $37.75 million as of mid-2012—had risen more than $8 million over the prior ten years and that the school had acquired or built more than $26 million worth of land, buildings, and equipment in renovating its campus in that period. Further, he said that the university is independent of other organizations in its governance and its financial arrangements.


As You Like It: The Thin Line Between Legitimate Utopia and Compensatory Vacation

Ryan Farrar

ABSTRACT

This essay argues how Utopian thought can serve as a useful method for analyzing the plays of William Shakespeare, using As You Like It as an example. As a pastoral comedy, As You Like It features the Forest of Arden as a setting that is described as fostering values that are associated with the utopian visions of the sixteenth century. However, while characters such as Duke Senior celebrate the culture of Arden's brave new world, the behaviors of his men and the antics of Jacques and Touchstone call the utopian status of the forest into question. In this essay, I examine very carefully how Shakespeare dramatizes the problems facing the utopian imagination during the Elizabethan era through the conflicts of each character's attitude.

KEYWORDS: utopia, Shakespeare, Arden, dystopia

1. The Utopian Concept

We dream of new worlds. Such worlds do not yet exist, are only imagined to exist, or will never exist. Many long to catch a glimpse of these worlds becoming
or at least the shadow of their possibility. For all our insubstantial dreaming, we come to realize that we also dream of situations that exist in real space and time and are within the scope of human enjoyment. To seek what we know as familiar, common, and desirable signifies how easily the pun shifts between the *u*- of *utopia* and the *eu*-. The *eutopia*, the good place, can be capriciously imagined as the result of one’s subjection to experience and desire. With any eutopian construction, the good place is “to be seen as a matter of attitude, as a kind of reaction to an undesirable present and an aspiration to overcome all difficulties by the imagination of possible alternatives.” However, the *utopia*, by nature, is an elusive nonplace. Fredric Jameson avers that “the obligation for Utopia [is] to remain an unrealizable fantasy.” The paradox of utopias, then, is that new worlds can never be imagined without first absorbing some features of the one that currently engages us through our physical senses. Indeed, Utopian scholars such as Jameson declare that “even our wildest imaginings are all collages of experience, constructs made up of bits and pieces of the here and now. . . . It suggests at best Utopia can serve the negative purpose of making us more aware of our mental and ideological imprisonment.” As such, a (e) utopian fantasy does not always neatly line up with a grand, ideal, or magnificent design. Indeed, it is closely knit up in the want for advancement where a person holds close to shaped desires for what he or she may lack. For desire is an amalgamation of the self and the environment.

Eutopia, in this sense, can be an actual place where people want to be—that is, a place wished for that is built upon preexisting wishes. Whether the wish for it comprises a radically different society or one of exceeding familiarity, a place out of reach impresses upon people a desire to change themselves or be changed in hopes to achieve a better lived experience. Lyman Tower Sargent attests to the claim, writing: “I do not think it necessary to assume a common ‘human nature’ to conclude that the overwhelming majority of people—probably it is even possible to say all—are, at some time dissatisfied and consider how their lives might be improved. If we are hungry, we dream of a full stomach. If we are sexually frustrated, we dream of sexual fulfillment. If we are frustrated by something in our society, we dream of a society in which it is corrected.” The absence of fulfillment and satisfaction propels the cogs of human action toward filling the cavity of our wants with an idea or a material that we can call substantial. However, different people devise different dreams, and this process creates discord between the clarity of a subjective vision and those who perceive a vision as heavily opaque.
The danger of both types of places, the nonexistent utopia and the existent utopia, then, rests in desire’s potential to lead us into depressive, dystopian entanglements rather than the wished-for liberation toward which desire propels us. While we each form ideas as to how a society should operate, for others and/or ourselves, the realities of social practice, which ultimately diverge from our own fantasies, often compel us to compromise our ideals in order to fit the political landscape. We manipulate the prevailing hierarchical structures for the purpose of cultivating the individual advantage and, in doing so, obstruct the opportunity to entertain alternative societies that could promise a better existence. When the lust for control, power, and advancement increases exponentially, dystopias (i.e., bad places) begin to sprout and cause suffering for characters subject to the whims of oppressive vices.

As a matter of course, Utopia remains a challenging project that can lead people either toward liberation from the prison of the present or into an even more wretched type of enslavement. For individuals, imagining or arranging situations pleasing to the ego can result in personal paradises or personal utopias. With utopias being subjective, their design can place individual or exclusive interests over those of the commonwealth, even if those interests exist only in fantasy. However, fancies of this caliber pivot on the subject’s placement and arrangement within the structure determining social value at any given time. These arrangements inherently fall short of an actual utopia and rebuff an acknowledgment of what Jameson has called “the prison-house of language.” To resist being imprisoned by the simulacra of utopia, despite its apparent inevitability, critical thought remains the primary method for chiseling away at obstacles separating civilization from the unattainable, if not untenable, utopia. Michael Bristol asserts that “the very notion of criticism demands open-endedness, doubt, and genuine curiosity as fundamental to any real knowledge.” Utopian studies, I think, maintain a flexibility allied with the pursuit of progressive ideas about the nature of desire and how to quench it.

In delineating Utopia as a critical approach, it is important to note the different ways Utopia as a term can be used in literary criticism. In this essay, using Utopia with the capital letter denotes an umbrella term that indicates all that is contained in the Utopian literary genre. Using the term in this manner extends its designation to include all its forms: eutopias, utopias, dystopias, and other variations such as heterotopias or
cacotopias. In the instances where references to the lowercase term are made, *utopia* indicates the familiar denotation of good/nonplaces or eutopia. In approaching Utopia from this broadened scope, I defer to the work by scholars such as Lyman Tower Sargent and Tom Moylan positing the definition’s dragnet.

Colloquially, people think of *utopia* as a term that synonymizes its dreamworlds with places of perfection, but to equate the two concepts remains erroneous at best. I have paid witness to this error time and time again when teaching courses on or having everyday conversations about the topic. In discriminating between utopia and perfection, Sargent works to dispel this widespread misconception: “Perfect, perfection, and their variants are freely used by scholars in defining utopias. They should not be. First, there are in fact very few eutopias that present societies that the author believes to be perfect. Perfection is the exception not the norm. Second, opponents of utopianism use the label *perfect* as a political weapon to justify their opposition. They argue that a perfect society can only be achieved by force; thus, utopianism is said to lead to totalitarianism and the use of force and violence against people.” 9 Perfection does not equate with utopia. Instead, ideas regarding utopia describe either better alternatives to a present order or a dialectical operation that intends to work toward such alternatives. To call them “perfect” effectively closes off the possibility for the change and progress that utopias customarily anticipate.

To keep change more open, there are descriptive terms closer in relation to perfection that can more appropriately bear associations with the Utopian genre, such as *ideal* and *fairy-tale.*10 These terms keep utopias open to change by abstractly presenting a conception of bettering that remains elusive and out of reach but worth pursuing. Situations in plays that correlate with the pursuit of ideals or the fabric of fairy tales portray the utopian pursuit of actualizing desired effects as being reached in lofty and extraordinary ways. Such scenes in literature affect the potential for desired effects to be realized in the audience’s life outside the plays’ fiction. They reveal the potential that the utopian imagination can have for individuals to achieve happiness as much as they also demonstrate how effects to the contrary can reveal the dystopian potential of competing desires. Utopia, then, remains a versatile concept that keeps its followers panting after its elusive, unobtainable features while also spurring them to beware those who would abuse the vulnerability that results from their imaginings.
In accounting for the abuse, this essay directs an equal amount of time to performing dystopian analyses alongside its utopian ones. The primary meaning of and reliance on dystopia relates to the construction of the word, which literally translates to “bad place.” The traditional genre form of dystopian literature features worlds that “offer a detailed and pessimistic presentation of the very worst of social alternatives,” and in my analyses, I demonstrate how the hallmark vices belonging to the genre consistently appear in Shakespeare’s art. The plays are discussed as having dystopian qualities where characters use language that speaks contrarily to the reality of their actions, expressing pleasantries in situations that are rife with malicious intent. This also includes situations where nefarious plans are apparent and direct. Dystopia, then, takes on a role as important as utopia in reevaluating and further understanding the aesthetics of the plays.

In order to properly elucidate Utopia’s presence in Shakespeare’s drama, I discuss Utopia in a broad manner that incorporates the realms of wish fulfillment, desires, dreams, fantasies, and nightmares into the term. Jameson incorporates these terms into his own discussion of utopia in Archaeologies of the Future, and the reasoning for their inclusion remains sound. Wishes, desires, dreams, and the like perform pivotal functions in shaping and reshaping identity within a subject’s social system, acting as catalysts for the transformations related to Utopia. In some cases, these realms of thought keep characters hopeful in anticipation of a time when their station may change from a position of discontent to one that provides more social acceptance, security, and pleasure. In fact, these desires are given free rein on occasion in the forms of holidays. Particularly for Sargent, part of utopia’s roots belongs to festivals such as Carnival and the Feast of Fools as well as myths involving “golden ages, arcadias, [and] earthly paradises.” These associations certainly speak to the power of wishes and fantasies when discussing utopia in Shakespeare since these festivals, myths, and holidays are featured at one time or another in his plays. On the other hand, nightmares and enemies to wishes and desires can put characters on alert as to how they interact with society, as a mistaken action may plunge them further into discontent and eradicate their hope entirely. Whatever perceptions characters act upon, they tend to act in the interest of their own wishes or the interest of others. The material conditions of the characters’ society determine how they pursue or temper the wishes and desires that drive them beyond their present situation.
2. Utopian Language Games in Shakespeare’s Plays

In turning the pages of William Shakespeare’s plays, readers witness utopian wishes in action in the sense that they explore the tension that results from the competing ideals, fantasies, and behaviors of their dramatic characters. In many cases, the plots present characters who are down and out with fortune and are placed in a position to change their status from low to high; otherwise, they are given the opportunity to transform their relationship to society entirely. What remains fascinating today regarding these characters is not so much their motives as it is the tools and means the antagonists and protagonists use to maneuver through the ideological barriers to their desires; it could also be the fact that such desires result in part from the social assembly of an Elizabethan/Jacobean system in the first place. As Stephen Greenblatt points out, “At some level we know perfectly well that the power of the prince is largely a collective invention, the symbolic embodiment of the desire, pleasure, and violence of thousands of subjects, the instrumental expression of complex networks of dependency and fear.” The production of desire in this manner echoes the workings of the modern age, except that the power of production belongs to private corporations and media, instead of kingdoms. Desire now springs from the offerings of a global market, and people navigate it in search of items or relations that will improve their quality of living. In Shakespeare’s plays, too, the characters manipulate the collective invention of rank and distinction in order to create attitudes in others that will benefit their goal to change their situation or their society.

With collective forces driving the plays, the characters’ individual wishes inherently come into conflict with the wishes of other characters, whether socially noble or not, and the resulting tensions lead to cerebral and physical duels. In these contests, the players compete in a game of wits for a chance to enjoy the fruits of a personal or collective utopia. As a result, some utopian visions will overtake others. One common adage in Utopian discourse, which Maria Varsam echoes, is that one person’s utopia is another’s dystopia. Whatever the attitude toward a design, unified societies in the plays become unstable when Shakespeare’s characters employ language and arrange situations to satisfy their wishes, with or without regard for the nation’s well-being.

To reflect on the importance of language games is to center on the stakes of each individual or collective utopia. In the plays, these utopias
are individual, in that singular characters seek to create circumstances that serve their own interests, but also collective, in that these interests result from the construction of an agreed-upon order that operates on the service and compliance of others. To illustrate these social dynamics in the work of Shakespeare, I explore ideas regarding utopia and dystopia as they arise through various motifs and themes that run consistently throughout the plays. These motifs range from carnivalesque inversions of gender and class; to the use of Machiavels, characters who employ immoral stratagems while appearing moral; to the treatment of themes such as love, revenge, isolation, power, and fate.

The contests that Shakespeare’s characters participate in rely on language games of double meanings that tie into the problems commonly confronted in Utopian studies. These meanings create an ambiguity regarding which political attitudes are expressed in the plays. In terms of dystopia, these games tend to detach a character’s words from his or her truer actions and dynamically reveal the unceasing conflicts among appearances, intentions, and realities. Equally prominent, though, are games that display the utopian potential of plays that subtly uncover and express unrealized desires, whether for love, equality, or leisure. In effect, the language in the plays functions as a means of either improving a character’s situation within the existing hierarchy or achieving a desired object or social arrangement that exists outside of it, thus working toward a utopia for the scheming character or, unwittingly, a dystopia, depending on the character’s social descent or ultimate outcome. Through soliloquies and divided scenes, the audience gains an intimate knowledge as to whether characters employ their language for virtuous or ignoble ends. They then observe how the winners of language games ascend in rank or realize a desired situation for themselves and/or their associates, whether temporarily or permanently, while losers may start the play complacently, satisfied with an honorable position or pleasing situation, only to suffer a tragic fall or complete loss of status, which they may need to regain if they have survived the initial displacement. One of the primary language games of the plays, then, involves which personal utopia can be achieved and maintained the longest, how characters decide to shape or mold their social position to the time’s expectations in order to achieve their objectives, and at what cost they are willing to actualize their own wishes.
3. Arden’s Utopian Space and Its Troubling Substance

Authors who tend to write utopias are often charged with overvaluing escapist fantasies disconnected from reality. Skeptical opponents of utopia tend to view the worlds that the utopist envisions as straying so far into an excess hope for actualizing ideals that anti-utopists may cry out that the new, radical terrains visualized in the genre too much neglect human nature and are thus grossly unrealistic. Utopias in these circumstances are said to amount to no more than pipe dreams or phantasmagoria. In holding such attitudes, the anti-utopists reduce the transformative power belonging to utopia to a worthless, idle exercise that relegates utopian thought to the level of crazed fancies such as Fourier’s seas of lemonade. Yet the field of Utopia retains more complexity than a simple binary opposition of the ideal versus the real, more complexity than anti-utopists are willing to recognize. Instead, Utopia is a dialectical method for improving upon the problems facing society, as opposed to a method for coercing people into a certain culture through authoritarian methods. Fátima Vieira distinctly details the function of utopia, writing: “Since it is impossible for [humankind] to build an ideal society, then [we] must be committed to the construction of a better one . . . . Utopia is thus to be seen essentially as a strategy. . . . Taking mainly the shape of a process, refusing the label of an ‘impossible dream,’ utopia is a programme for change and for a gradual betterment of the present.” In line with Vieira, Utopia works as an ongoing conversation that aims at problem solving by positing solutions for social woes, which muddles the traditional attitude that Utopias propose blueprints for ideal societies. If a solution does not suit a situation, an honest utopist keeps an open mind to revising and reconsidering all social and political possibilities.

Perhaps Shakespeare toys with both this dismissive attitude toward utopia and the attitudes of utopia’s adherents in titling his Arcadian comedy As You Like It, playing on the sense that Utopia finds its basis on the utopist’s subjective attitude. Using the Forest of Arden’s utopian space as a canvas, Shakespeare blends its ethereal qualities with the realism of the characters inhabiting it, making for an unstable Arcadia. In constructing the Forest of Arden, Shakespeare paves a space in which a social fantasy uncharacteristic of Elizabethan society can blossom. Duke Senior and his followers view the forest as representing a prelapsarian paradise that proves to be a favorable alternative
to courtly life. In spirit, they forgo hierarchical observance and laud egalitarian principles that they see as permeating from the forest. However, the deposed court’s practices do not always reflect the principles they praise. In fact, the court’s appearance in Arden may exhibit all the gloss of an Arcadian utopia, but its members’ continued deferential behavior toward authority, along with the commentary of characters such as Touchstone and Jacques, undercuts the utopian and egalitarian sentiments associated with the space they inhabit. While the Duke’s company finds the forest to be a propitious setting in comparison to the stifling city, their inability to dispense with courtly behavior problematizes their utopian enthusiasm. Ultimately, Shakespeare’s pastoral comedy challenges conventional expectations as he combines a mode of utopian optimism with a mode of artistic realism, creating a dissonant conflict between the two.

The conflict between the court’s attitude and the behavior of its members in As You Like It characterizes utopia as a semiotic operation that is complex and ambiguous in its practice. Not only does Shakespeare comingle the utopian space with both utopia’s doubters and believers, he also shuffles characters in and out of the space at the play’s end, further accentuating its instability. Regarding the play’s ending, audiences experience difficulty in understanding Arden’s transformative capacity. First, Duke Senior and his followers appear to deny the Arcadian utopia they wholeheartedly embraced after resolving to take leave of the forest in order to return to the city and their positions of state. For Duke Senior and his followers, then, the space that postures as carrying utopian potential gets reduced to a mere vacation spot. As Cathy Curtis notes, “When the usurping brother Frederick experiences a sudden conversion of character in the forest, turns to religious life and decides to abandon the pompous court, Duke Senior readily takes back the crown and indicates that he will return to his ducal life.”¹⁸ Second, while Arden seems more like a holiday space for Duke Senior, Frederick’s and Jacques’s indefinite stay in Arden may reinforce its utopian status. As much as the utopian space of Arden gets tossed around from one group of characters to the next, the retentive power of Arden to sustain its influence over its inhabitants becomes dubious.

Amid the pastoral nature of the comedy As You Like It, the Forest of Arden offers a utopian sanctuary for Duke Senior and his company, who, after Duke Senior is deposed by his brother Frederick, seek refuge under the forest’s canopy. Talking about the Duke in the forest, Charles the wrestler describes Arden’s utopic quality as that of a revitalized “golden world,”

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like that described by Ovid in *Metamorphoses* and Hesiod in *Works and Days* (I.i.114). In line with one of Sargent’s views of utopia, the forest qualifies as a utopian space because it is “nostalgic in that [it] looks[s] back to an idealized past” while also including themes revolving around “a simpler life and getting a better balance between the city and country.”

So, what is meant to be a time of despair and loss of status takes a contrary direction as the Duke and his retinue bask in the Edenic atmosphere of the forest.

Nevertheless, what qualifies the idyllic country location as Utopian does not simply result from a direct contrast between it and the dismal city, a common trait of the pastoral genre, but, rather, from the differences marked between the forest’s prospective potential for communal order and civilization’s mainstream hierarchical order. In his opening dialogue in the play, Duke Senior is enchanted by the forest’s verdure and openness as he delights in the absence of the court’s pretentious gaudiness and ritual observances while inhabiting the forest. He observes the space’s ripeness for fostering a pleasurable alternative to the court:

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Now, my co-mates and brothers in exile,
Hath not old custom made this life more sweet
Than that of a painted pomp? Are not these woods
More free from peril than the envious court?
Here feel we not the penalty of Adam, . . .
And this our life, exempt from public haunt,
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything. (II.i.1–5, 15–17)
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The forest is endowed with a spirit that later centuries would identify as Romantic, and the stifling signs of the oppressive court no longer impose on the Duke and his company. Instead, the trees, brooks, and stones have replaced the emblems and banners that signaled the prestige of hierarchy and nobility with the vitality of the natural world wedded to a prelapsarian joy. Rather than being led to a personal hell following usurpation, the men retreat in reverse to a sort of Garden of Eden, with fantasies of repealing Adam and Eve’s grievous sin and negating the original cause for all human strife. Harold Bloom, despite some of his misguided positions, rightly shares the company’s enthusiasm for the forest, remarking, “I am delighted to observe that the forest of Arden is simply the best place to live, anywhere in Shakespeare.
You cannot have an earthly paradise and still have a stage comedy that works, yet *As You Like It* comes closest."20 The space of Arden gets commended as a pastoral paradise for the Duke and his men, and the aura of utopia inhabits Arden as its residents hail a mythical past into the present.

In feeding his utopic fantasy, the Duke describes his company as communing with each other free from the frivolities of rank and distinction. The strongest indication of a utopian absence of hierarchy manifests itself in the first lines ("Now, my co-mates and brothers in exile") that Duke Senior speaks, in which he addresses his followers as fraternal equals. Commenting on those lines, David Bevington contends that they suggest "a kind of social equality that [Duke Senior] could never know in the cramped formality of his previous official existence."21 Also, the direct reference to a prelapsarian condition intimates a return to an idle paradise where Nature’s beauty serves as a better substitute for the insipidity of the tongues, books, and sermons that belong to the rigor of institutional religious orders. In effect, Arden exists as a place of relaxation apart from the stress of appearances imposed on the court’s members. In a metatheatrical fashion, the space of the play in this sense offers the same relaxation as Arden, allowing a holiday for both the noble characters in the play and the audiences attending it.

A complication arises in calling the Duke’s experience solely utopian. Arden certainly inspires language characteristic of a utopia. In fact, in the Duke’s lines exists a promise for a realm where people can embrace one another’s humanity without needing to heed stational dress codes or hereditary privileges. However, in any vision bearing utopian qualities, statements of such radical optimism can easily betray the dream they express by operating as a mere compensation for a loss. For example, once the Duke finishes his jovial reflection, Amiens immediately responds, saying, "Happy is Your Grace / That can translate the stubbornness of fortune / Into so quiet and so sweet a style" (II.i.18–20). In these lines, it is quite possible that Amiens genuinely admires the Duke’s appreciation for nature and liberty in the forest. However, depending on how the lines are performed, they can subtly draw attention to the fact that the Duke may express his enthusiasm in order to mask the despair that results from his displacement. As a man of high standing, it is understandable that Duke Senior would not want to show weakness or defeat after being usurped. Whether he is genuinely excited by the forest or compensating for his loss of status remains unclear; in fact, both possibilities are very antinomic in arguing for them.
Reading the Duke’s egalitarian sensibility as speaking to a utopian effect on his train also becomes dubious when the Duke’s followers at various points contradict the spirit that the Duke senses in the forest. For instance, when the followers address Duke Senior, the court’s formalities still persist, in that they never cease addressing him as “my lord” as opposed to using a signifier free from courtly associations. While the newly formed foresters may strike us as utopian, we begin to wonder if the forest really has taken possession of the Duke’s and his followers’ spirits or vice versa. Maybe the characters carry the utopian qualities and populate Arden with their attitudes. In line with Eagleton’s ideas about the play, the scene may show the court as “trac[ing], narcissistically, one’s own subjective moods.” In fact, despite the “golden world” impression given about the Duke’s experience in Arden, not everyone is content. The First Lord informs the Duke that another follower, Jacques, remains unhappy among them, which illustrates how the camaraderie fails as a homogeneous experience. Even Jacques’s unhappiness appears to taint the utopia sprouting from the forest because rather than being troubled by his discontent, Duke Senior and his followers merely laugh at him derisively, which demonstrates a lack of the unity and harmony belonging to utopias. There may be truth, though, in Jacques’s view of the Duke’s and his followers’ treatment of the forest animals as horrid and unbecoming of paradise when he calls them “usurpers, tyrants, and what’s worse, / To fright the animals and to kill them up / In their assigned and native dwelling place” (II.i.61–63). Jacques’s criticism strongly suggests that while the Duke’s train stays happy in and infatuated with Arden, the whole pack of them may disrupt and taint the forest’s natural order.

If the deposed court’s presence encroaches on the residence of natural life, it appears to do so only from the perspective of Jacques, “a social satirist and a mocker of Arden,” whose contemptus mundi worldview seems to skeptically test the amount of goodness that appears to occupy the utopian space. Challenging Jacques’s criticisms, Bevington draws attention to how the utopian aspects associated with the location may actually reside more in the goodness of the characters themselves. Touching on Orlando, for instance, Bevington claims that “the vision of a regenerative Utopia secretly abides in the heart of this courtly creature,” and this statement applies to other relationships in the play as well.

In the case of Orlando, there resides a sense of Utopia, in that he craves to correct the dystopian injustice he suffers in Oliver’s care by elevating himself
to a level of prosperity worthy of his family’s name. Oliver tyrannically and jealously denies him an education and makes him eat with the servants while professing brotherly care of him to Charles the wrestler (I.i.146–147). Oliver’s hypocritical behavior makes the relationship a dystopian one because he rhetorically postures as a caring brother in public while his private actions force Orlando into a despondent state that moves him to contrast his treatment to that of livestock, which he believes are treated better (I.i.6–24). The abuse of Orlando is clear, in that his older brother cuts off all avenues to him that would permit Orlando to advance socially, like his brother Jacques. Orlando illustrates his condition to Adam, the family’s elder servant, in the play’s opening scene, in which he portrays a relatable situation for audience members who may endure similar treatment as a result of primogenitary customs or suffer due to being forced to live at a peasant’s station while feeling capable of more. After enunciating his discontent, Orlando discloses to Adam a desire to resist his condition and appeals to his lineage, saying, “The spirit of my father, which I think is within me, begins to mutiny against this servitude” (I.i.21–23). The memory-driven threat escalates to violence when, a few lines later, Orlando grasps his oppressive brother by the throat, proving that he will not yield to Oliver’s abusive authority. The role of memory in this capacity compares prominently with the various revolutions that resist tyrannical governments in modern dystopian literature such as Jack London’s *The Iron Heel* (1908), Ayn Rand’s *Anthem* (1937), or Kurt Vonnegut’s “Harrison Bergeron” (1961). For early modern England, then, Orlando’s behavior resembles that of the dystopian protagonist.

Orlando’s resistance to his brother’s dystopian treatment ambivalently appeals to two entirely different audiences. It does so because the invocation of his father performs two separate functions: it instills in him both a resilience to tyranny and an inherent nobility that gives him the power to ascend back to his rightful place. In one sense, the memory can reinforce conservative social expectations since it can justify the preservation of social distinctions through the succession of bloodlines. Orlando as the son of an aristocrat looks to maintain distinction by claiming the privilege due to a man of his pedigree. At the same time, the resistance may also speak to a collective contempt for the unwarranted repression of citizens within Elizabethan society. During the time of the play’s performance, this message could certainly speak to the poorer subjects. According to Chris Fitter, “Overseers of the Poor” arbitrated social control, “classifying the poor as deserving
or undeserving” and “enjoy[ing] discretionary powers to supplement—or otherwise—the income of workers paid too little to survive: a brutally substantial number.” While highlighting the appeal to the poorer citizenry, Fitter also points out the ambiguity, saying that “Orlando is correspondingly abusive of the lower classes.” Orlando’s expression of prejudice may serve to appease the higher-ranked audience members as it simultaneously, yet subtly, draws critical attention to their own abuses of laborers. In fact, Fitter himself asserts that Orlando is a contrary figure, in that, “offensive in his whining genteel insistence on the insulting insufficiency of the wealth bequeathed him, comically hapless in his deictic sightlessness, he yet echoes the language of underclass resentment, and embodies the exciting spirit of active resistance.” Though Orlando may not desire a complete reformation of the national order, he does desire a radical change in his own treatment, which, according to Bevington’s perspective, bears Utopian marks. The desire to perceive an injustice and wish to correct it speaks volumes to the development of utopia. As seen here, though, the perception of justice is far from blind and is instead heavily embroiled with the expectations of a particular class and rank, which may disregard a lower and less privileged group of people.

Indeed, there must be some utopian appeal in Orlando for Adam to so readily forsake his service in Oliver’s house and surrender his savings in order to follow Orlando into Arden. The gesture certainly affects Orlando enough for him to declare, “Oh, good old man, how well in thee appears / The constant service of the antique world, / When service sweat for duty, not for meed!” (II.iii.56–58). Echoing the Duke’s prelapsarian reference earlier in Act II, Orlando shows a nostalgia for “the antique world” in the form of a servitude based on ideal loyalty rather than serving for profit, which Orlando goes on to critique as a sign of the time’s wretchedness. He thereby indicates that Adam’s attitude toward service is not widely held, making him an invaluable asset to his exile. Yet, if we accept Fitter’s intriguing reading of this scene as robbing the groundlings of carnival pleasure by portraying Adam as a Puritan masochist, a figure worthy of scorn, then the utopian aspect of Adam’s service may scandalously carry a conservative message that co-opts the utopian image, making him a dystopian toady. Fitter’s uncommon reading, though, comes across as counterintuitive to the plot, which goes to great lengths to emphasize the virtuous natures of Orlando and Rosalind. Considering these strains, Adam’s service embodies true loyalty and virtue in
order to demonstrate how people can construct utopian relations by simply demonstrating genuine care for one another.

While this scene extols Adam and Orlando’s camaraderie and cheer, the stark reality of the pair’s experience of exile eventually blemishes the utopic portrait of fidelity and harmony that they embody. The forest is a space filled with beauty, but the appearance deceives, as characters such as Adam, Orlando, and Oliver are forced to confront the treacherous and harsh reality of the wild. After Orlando wanders in the forest with Adam for a while, his praise of “the antique world” in Adam eventually gets turned inside out when suffering visits them. In Hesiod’s Golden Age, from which the golden world derives, “the golden race died a painless death that overtook them unawares, a death presaged neither by illness nor even by aging.” Orlando and Adam, far from experiencing this kind of ataraxy, face the very real pain that accompanies a brush with death. After succumbing to hunger and fatigue, Orlando desperately resorts to a caricatured state of primitive hostility as he draws his sword against the Duke and his court, demanding food.

Upon the pair’s entry into the forest Adam and Orlando are initially inspired by the image of a golden world, but that quickly dissolves in the face of hunger, and it is not until the pair encounters civilizing forces that they enjoy a paradisiacal experience. Just as quickly as Orlando holds the Duke’s company at the point of his blade, he sheathes his sword when they treat him kindly. Ashamed, he tries to excuse his behavior, claiming that “bare distress hath ta’en from me the show / Of smooth civility,” which further emphasizes how both Utopia and civilization can either merely act as artificial coverings and repressive apparatuses for the more animalistic drives in humans or serve as the very force that attempts to bridle those drives (II.v.95–96). It is at this particular moment that the utopian power found in the virtues of the deposed members supernaturally announces itself. In the face of the court’s cheerful civility, Orlando quickly transforms from a rabid, animalistic thief back to his former, good-natured identity. His transformation suggests that in spite of his hardships, an unseen providence is at work and provides chances for civility to recognize itself in others, attesting that such a power is necessary to repress humanity’s baser instincts. Rather than explicitly champion a religious transformation, the scene gives proof to Feste’s words in Twelfth Night, when he says to Olivia that “anything that’s mended is but patched; virtue that transgresses is patched with sin, and sin that amends is but patched with virtue” (I.v.44–47), meaning that virtue can be a disguise for sin or, in
reference to *As You Like It*, civility can mask the baser nature of humans. In quickly and obligingly providing for basic needs such as food, the Duke and his followers give occasion for camaraderie, harmony, and cooperation, which stunt Orlando’s desperate violence.

By the time Oliver seeks his brother Orlando out in the forest, the romance aspects of the plot play out in a fairy-tale fashion while also carrying with them very real implications. In nearly being bitten by a green snake, a symbol of Oliver’s jealousy of Orlando, and devoured by a ravenous lionness, Oliver awakens, as if by some religious visitation, to Orlando’s goodness when his younger brother intervenes and saves the would-be assassin from certain death. His brotherly heroics bear dimensions of both the pastoral romance and the fairy tale since Oliver’s conversion from tyrant to comrade happens in a rapid instant as a fissure in his complacency when his life is put at stake and spared. The utopian turn speaks to the powerful theme of forgiveness that pervades the play, especially when Frederick, in another fairy-tale turn, later gives up the dukedom for a religious life, returning the legitimate order to its original bearer, Duke Senior.

The causes for Oliver’s benevolent turn also carry realistic dimensions that throw a crux into the neat interpretation of these moments as fairy-tale redemptions. For instance, do Orlando’s actions really transform Oliver’s attitude in an instant, or is the change gradual? In relating his story of the lioness attack to Rosalind and Celia, Oliver describes his appearance resting under the tree as that of “a wretched, ragged man, o’ergrown with hair,” suggesting that he too has suffered from hunger on a par with that which Orlando and Adam endured (IV.iii.107). Furthermore, the repentance could partly result from Oliver suffering tyranny firsthand, recognizing its overbearing nature when Duke Frederick abruptly seizes his lands and turns him out to the forest to find Orlando (III.i). In other Shakespeare plays, such as *Measure for Measure*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *The Winter’s Tale*, and especially *King Lear*, characters holding higher positions are commonly brought to lower standings in order for a lesson to be realized that functions to amend a flaw they possess. This dynamic certainly applies to Oliver, who now lacks the tools to continue his tyranny. Thus, he must either change genuinely or, as Orlando says, put on “the show / Of smooth civility” and adapt to new values if he is to survive in Arden and receive welcome in Duke Senior’s company.

While the ethos of characters such as Duke Senior, Orlando, and Rosalind perhaps carries more of the utopian spirit than the Forest of Arden, this does
not entirely deprive the forest of its utopian power. Besides, the cheeriness of the Duke’s court takes its cue from Arden’s verdant surroundings, and only an enchanted space like the forest created through dramatic illusion could explain Hymen’s inexplicable arrival in Act V. Also, Frederick’s sudden conversion to a religious life after entering the forest with an army intent on killing Duke Senior could only result from the wood’s bewitching influence, producing the seeming divine intervention of a religious old man who persuades Frederick to abandon his unlawful station.

The manner in which these conflicts resolve keeps the nature of utopia in the play ambiguous. Duke Senior and his attendant lords may revel in the freedom away from the court, but the utopia they enjoy dissolves as rapidly as a carnivalesque occasion as they return to the normal order from which they were exiled. In fact, Kristian Smidt points out that there is a disparity between the renewal of status at the end and the various devotions of the Duke, his followers, Celia, and Oliver to the pastoral way of life. The dissolution threatens to undo the utopian dimension by reducing it to a restorative vacation for Duke Senior rather than a radical change in social relations. For conservative nobles attending the play, this would certainly be a satisfying conclusion since the Duke’s rightful privilege is restored and the radical order is extinguished. However, like many of Shakespeare’s plays, the conclusion leaves the utopian potential that does surface in the play both open and closed to the characters. It is closed to Duke Senior, but his younger brother Frederick may show that the forest’s utopia can remain accessible if his being “converted / Both from his enterprise and from the world” means a spiritual hermitage in the woods, where he may enjoy more permanently what could not last for Duke Senior and his company. Yet the utopian potential of the forest for Duke Senior also remains artistically available. As in Twelfth Night, when Viola is not seen to return to her maiden weeds, at the end of As You Like It we never see Duke Senior and his company leave Arden’s boundaries, impressing his existence there in the collective memory of the audience (V. iv. 160–161).

Other problems regarding the play’s utopian status arise when accounting for the roles of the play’s fool, Touchstone, and malcontent, Jacques. While the popularization of a utopia with a changeable, open government was not explicitly outlined until H. G. Wells’s A Modern Utopia (1905), the outside positions of Jacques and Touchstone offer the chance for a premodern, satirical critique of Arcadian virtue and those supposed to practice it. While this is more the case with Jacques, Touchstone also serves a similar role as a
realistic taint on the forest’s dreamlike qualities. Robert Bell asserts that “both are intruders in Arden,” and Bevington agrees, adding that “[Touchstone] and Jacques are not touched by the play’s regenerative magic.”31 Considering how the majority of characters acclimate to the Arcadian culture, Touchstone and Jacques remain relatively aloof, which gives them the agency to criticize the behaviors of other characters, because they believe, however mistakenly, that their perspectives are not compromised by vice or folly. They manipulate the forest’s culture in a courtly way that caters to their desires.

While the court may take respite in their newfound refuge in Arden, Touchstone relies on his courtly learning to undercut the utopian foundations of the forest’s rustic “clowns.” Yet this does not limit Touchstone from also mocking the customary practices of the court he serves as he slyly deconstructs the boundaries between the country’s and the city’s manners, creating a paradox of contradiction and noncontradiction in his conversation with Corin the shepherd. Eagleton agrees, stating that in As You Like It “Shakespeare deconstructs this binary opposition [between Nature and culture; or in this case, city and country] showing how each term inheres in the other.”32 Discussing the preferability of the court to the country with the shepherd, Touchstone offers a series of deft contradictions that undercut Corin’s own appreciation for the country by evaluating certain qualities within the context of each respective locality. The contradictions explain why Touchstone can claim that bucolic solitude offers pleasure for an individual desiring contemplation away from city crowds at the same time that city crowds offer diversions away from the madness of a lonely mind (III.ii.11–21).

From such paradoxical logic, Touchstone jestingly chides Corin’s idyllic lifestyle, saying that he risks damnation by not having ever attended court to learn good manners. Corin adroitly defends his lack of city manners as a utopian way of living and describes the country and the court as separate realms adhering to different codes:

Those that are good manners at the court are as ridiculous in the country as the behavior of the country is most mockable at the court. (III.ii.43–46)

Potentially subversive, Corin’s sentiment suggests that the court’s practiced rituals do not outweigh the country bumpkins’ uncouth conduct in worth
but, instead, that the two operate as equally independent ideological fields, which, in a utopian way, undermines the nobility’s belief that it serves as a paragon for all human behavior. This is merely one interpretation, though. Corin’s lines can also be seen as rigorously conservative, betraying the seemingly utopian discourse by reinforcing the need for segregated social spheres between nobles and commoners, which denies social permeability. This interpretation would definitely align with the attitudes coded by Elizabethan sumptuary laws that protected the boundary between high and low ranks, and it can serve as a potent example of utopia being co-opted to maintain the status quo.

Corin’s utopian lines may also admit a kind of ignorance that places him in a dystopian situation since they do not take into account the reality of the nobility’s presence in the forest. Despite Corin’s appreciation of the separateness of social spheres, the noble ranks, embodied by Duke Senior and Frederick, are implicitly encroaching on the lands that Corin and the other peasants inhabit, effectively shrinking the boundaries of the country’s sphere. The nobility’s presence reveals the possibility that Corin’s words may be ironically dystopian. While he enjoys the simplicity of rustic living, he fails to understand the court’s ambition to control resources and is too passive to try to understand it. As You Like It, in this sense, may quietly dramatize the results of land enclosures over the past century that some intellectuals, including Sir Thomas More, had suggested were a major source of social strife. Where the rustic population lacked ground to protest against the nobles, the nobles could smoothly acquire lands to which they lacked an inherent right.

In fact, in his exchange with Corin, Touchstone appears as a dystopian emissary of the court who tries to reorient Corin’s values and inadvertently devalues the court’s superiority. He argues that Corin should adopt the court’s manners for his own betterment, which in itself subliminally functions to satirize the court’s pompous vogue as being just as mean and dirty as the countryman’s way of life. Through a range of comparisons, Touchstone directs Corin into seeing the similarities between country dirtiness and courtly dirtiness. In one example, he says that sheep grease is as “wholesome” as human sweat and that tar from sheep surgery is less base than civet perfume since civet derives from a cat’s anal pouch (III.ii.52–53, 63–65). While these accusations obviously needle Corin, they show how noblemen can be on a par with countrymen in terms of grotesque baseness. Nobles cannot cease to sweat, and their finer perfume of civet literally comes from feline extremities.
While nobles regard themselves as highly placed in the great chain of being, their practices and bodies continue to speak to human grossness, which undercuts their elevated sense of worth and illuminates the economic disparity that results from their prejudice.

Proceeding with similar jests, Touchstone, acting as a voice of realism, further underscores the animalistic side of humanity as the basis of humor in his discussion with Corin. In their dialogue, he perverts the honesty of Corin’s utopic expression about enjoying his pastoral lifestyle by pointing out the double meanings of the shepherd’s words. In the exchange, Corin says:

Sir, I am a true laborer: I earn that I eat, get that I wear, owe no man hate, envy no man’s happiness, glad of other men’s good, content with my harm, and the greatest of my pride is to see my ewes graze and my lambs suck. (III.ii.71–75)

This rustic passivity certainly expresses a pastoral peace of mind to Corin, even if the instability of this living space escapes Corin’s detection. For humor, though, Touchstone tries to undercut his contentedness by accusing Corin of pimping out his livestock for his living, which purports to put him on a par with an unscrupulous flesh-peddler. Throughout the play, while shepherds and nobles live blithely in the forest, Touchstone tries to bring their chimerical perspectives back to solid ground. To do so, he resorts to bawdy jokes, acting as the antithesis to the idealism of the pastoral romance and Petrarchan love. Ultimately, he associates with the filthy loam as opposed to the celestial skies, and like the gravediggers and the melancholic prince in Hamlet, he demonstrates how all people have a fair share in the world’s baseness.

Jacques, similar to Touchstone, has an attitude that departs from the utopian optimism and idealism of those inhabiting Arden, in that he posits a vision that is pessimistically utopian. In some instances, he serves as a depressive stock character, a sort of precursor for characters such as Marvin, the Paranoid Android, in Douglas Adams’s The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy (1978). As the one to put a damper on others’ good times, Jacques acts as the obnoxious dissenter who can never be fully satisfied with any social situation. As any extreme school of social thought usually seems absurd and potentially dangerous to others, so does Jacques’s pessimistic utopianism meet with derision from his cohorts. Indeed, Rosalind, in a caustic repartee,
asserts that “those that are the extremity of either [melancholy or laughter] are abominable fellows and betray themselves to every modern censure worse than drunkards” (IV.i.4–6). She is saying that his extreme melancholy effectively becomes odious as the annoyance it produces characterizes him as pretentiously self-righteous. The First Lord’s report to Duke Senior introduces Jacques as a character by describing his pathetic identification with a hunted-down stag, which would seem to present Jacques as a kind of equivalent for a modern-day, preachy vegan attending a barbecue whose purposes seem self-serving.

In the play, Jacques’s behavior hinges on a sense of what he feels to be his overlooked genius. In a manner similar to Touchstone exposing humanity’s animalistic impulses for humor, Jacques uses the killed stag as a dystopian analogy for himself. On the surface, he suggests that Duke Senior’s usurpation of the forest outweighs Duke Frederick’s vileness in usurping the dukedom. However, not really so condemnatory of the Duke, Jacques actually uses the incident to transmute the stag into a metaphor for a discarded outsider, in this case himself, forgotten by the “flux of company” (II.i.52). The lack of recognition saddens him, a view that Rosalind later mocks in an anecdote, quipping, “I fear you have sold your own lands to see other men’s. Then to have seen much and to have nothing is to have rich eyes and poor hands” (IV.i.20–22). He even tries to persuade Rosalind that his brand of melancholy does not fit into the current social order, using various negative references to common occupations (IV.i.9–19). Thus, from the Utopian perspective of Jameson, Jacques is the maniac or oddball, in that he is “a deformation readily enough explained by the fallen societies in which [he] had to fulfill [his] vocation,” who, being misunderstood, is ridiculed.34

However unpleasant Jacques’s ornery personality is for everyone else, it may make him the most genuinely Utopian character. In his exchange with Duke Senior concerning satire, for instance, Jacques lays out a hope for a better world achieved through satiric criticism. Showing his kinship to Touchstone, Jacques confesses, perhaps jocularly, that he longs to serve as a fool, proclaiming that “motley’s the only wear” (II.vii.34). He goes on to claim that he would have fantastical abilities if he could regularly act as a fool, stating:

Give me leave
To speak my mind, and I will through and through

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Cleanse the foul body of th’infected world,
If they will patiently receive my medicine. (II.vii.58–61)

Considering the theatrical privilege of jesters during the early modern period as the wisest of characters (“The fellow is wise enough to play the fool” [Twelfth Night III.i.59]), Jacques hopes to enact a utopian transformation in the world through the satiric derision of vice in order to obliterate the behaviors depressing him. In playing the fool, Jacques desires the immunity granted to courtly fools to freely criticize immoral behavior, and, like a salesman, he claims that he can deliver to others a utopian remedy for everyday vices if he were assigned such a role. In Jacques’s apology for satire, he suggests that his type of witticism can cause no ill for good people since it will only strike the nerve of those who bear guilt for committing the vices he ridicules. In claiming this, he moralizes to Duke Senior about the shape moral behavior can take when widely prescribed, taking advantage of Arden’s alternative space to offer his own alternative ways of living.

The utopian spirit seems to inhabit “the golden world” culture of the Duke’s court at Arden, but how much their utopia fails to measure up to its ideals remains unknown. The ideals of negating pride and pomp mostly spring from the commentaries of the borderline anti-utopian Touchstone and the radically Utopian Jacques. If we could categorize Touchstone under any Utopian mode, it would be a body utopia like that of the licentious land of Cockaigne due to his promiscuous desire for the rustic Audrey. For Jacques to remain in the forest appears to suit his radical disposition. I like to imagine him remaining on the margins of his society, preaching all the more about humanity’s ills, constantly meditating on the ways to develop a panacea for all of them, even if they are misguided.

With regard to how the treatment of station affects the audience, the ending of As You Like It, like many of Shakespeare’s plays, remains both tidy and subversive. From the conservative stance, the play echoes Elizabeth I’s doctrine of passive obedience, which basically objects to a rebellion against an established order by equating usurpation with treason, delegating consequences to the transgressors in accordance with the ruling monarch’s will. This doctrine gave divine sanction to the queen to condemn her opponents as treasonous and deem the British status quo as God-appointed and better than any social alternative. The weddings at the end appear quite conservative and characteristic of a traditional happy ending where good cheer for the
newlyweds is meant to bestow joy to the audience as well while removing any dissembling disguises or ill will. Also, the theme of forgiveness appears to reverse the effects of the Duke’s overthrow and Orlando’s maltreatment as Oliver and Frederick receive amnesty from a kind of grace that pardons them through repentance. Conservatively, the reconciliation allows the legitimized order of the Duke to return to his place, and Orlando appears to receive the respect due to a man of his breeding. However, grinding against the reinforcement of conservative conventions, a new order appears to be brewing in the forest with Jacques and Frederick. In this sense, then, the play appeals to early modern audiences of both high and low stature, in that the dual messages in the ending aim to satisfy their respective fantasies, as they like it, affirming both an order that rewards privilege and one that redefines it. Thus, the play presents ideas that speak to anticipations of an ideal livelihood at the same time as it tempers that anticipation with society’s realistic qualities.

Notes

1. For one of the most widely cited sources regarding the definition of utopia, eutopia, dystopia, and other related terms, see Lyman Tower Sargent, “The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited,” *Utopian Studies: Journal of the Society for Utopian Studies* 5 (1994): 1–37.
4. Ibid., xiii.
5. Ibid., 7: “Yet a third way in which individual and collective time come to be identified with each other is in the very experience of everyday life, according to Roland Barthes the quintessential sign of utopian representation: ‘la marque de l’Utopie, c’est le quotidien.’”
10. For Sargent’s comprehensive outline of what associations Utopia has, see ibid., 11–12.

14. I adapt the idea from Maria Varsam, “Concrete Dystopia: Slavery and Its Others,” in *Dark Horizons*, ed. Tom Moylan and Raffealla Baccolini (New York: Routledge, 2003), 204–5: “Because of the range of visions, one writer’s eutopia is another writer’s dystopia, an issue that remains problematic in the history of interpretation of texts ranging from Plato’s *The Republic* to modern-day works.” Varsam is not alone in this perception. See Gregory Claeys, “The Origins of Dystopia: Wells, Huxley, and Orwell,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Utopia Literature*, ed. Gregory Claeys (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 108: “There is of course something in the argument that, just as one person’s terrorist is another’s freedom-fighter, so is one person’s utopia another’s dystopia.”

15. Utopias in general are sometimes erroneously assumed to feature classless, antihierarchical societies. While the feature certainly belongs to many utopian designs, an abolishment of hierarchy and class is not a prerequisite trait of utopia. The long-standing tradition of Utopian literature consistently contradicts the assumption. Examples include, but are not limited to, Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516), Francis Bacon’s *New Atlantis* (1627), Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* (1888), William Morris’s *News from Nowhere* (1890), H. G. Wells’s *A Modern Utopia* (1905), B. F. Skinner’s *Walden Two* (1948), and Ursula Le Guin’s *The Dispossessed* (1974).


20. Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1998), 205. I call Bloom’s perspective misguided at times because his interpretation of Shakespeare’s plays tends to arbitrarily close off alternative ways of reading the artwork. He is an essentialist with a narrow perspective regarding how to understand the playwright. Even as he advocates certain readings, he makes simple, irresponsible mistakes that should embarrass him, such as confusing Trinculo with Stephano when he analyzes *The Tempest*. The pair may be interchangeable on a humorous level, but the distinction between the characters should not escape scholarly attention.


24. Bevington, introduction to *As You Like It*, 152.

26. Ibid., 120.
27. Ibid., 122.
28. Ibid., 123–24.
32. Eagleton, William Shakespeare, 90.
33. From Thomas More, Utopia, trans. Ralph Robinson, ed. Wayne Rehborn (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2005), 29: “Therefore, that one covetous and insatiable cormorant and very plague of his native country may compass about and enclose many thousand acres of ground together within one pale or hedge, the husbandmen be thrust out of their own, or else either by covin and fraud or by violent oppression, they be put besides it, or by wrongs and injuries they be so wearied that they be compelled to sell all.”
34. Jameson, Archaeologies of the Future, 10.
Pop Goes Utopia: An Examination of Utopianism in Recent Electronic Dance Pop

Carter F. Hanson

ABSTRACT
When dance music cultures converge and start to gain cultural momentum, they tend to produce utopian impulses. Well-documented historical examples such as early underground disco and hip-hop communities, as well as contemporary underground rave collectives, demonstrate that localized dance music cultures can generate viable utopian aspirations and even progress. But can mainstream electronic dance pop that aims for mass audiences and wide radio airplay also produce utopian impulses or explore utopian possibilities in a meaningful way? This article examines the recent explosion in popularity of electronic dance pop (2009–11) as a response to the global economic recession. Many recent dance hits imagine utopian environments of blissful release by narrating the interaction among dancers, the DJ, and the dance floor. I argue that the confines of the pop radio format prevent this type of dance hit from fully harnessing the capacity of electronic dance music for utopian expression. To assert the possibility of commercial dance pop engaging critically with utopian potentialities and transcending the sensualist utopianism featured in most mainstream hits, I examine the recent dance pop of the Pet Shop...
Boys, which displays a wide-ranging concern with utopianism as social dreaming as opposed to the physical pursuit of jouissance.

KEYWORDS: popular culture, popular music, utopian anticipation

In his monumental work *The Principle of Hope* (1959), the prominent Marxist philosopher of utopia Ernst Bloch (1885–1977) argues that many of the world’s cultural forms, such as music, transcend their ideological conditions of production to express “dreams of a better life.” Great music, Bloch asserts, fulfills the utopian function by anticipating the transcendence of human alienation: “Music is that art of pre-appearance which relates most intensively to the welling core of existence . . . and relates most expansively to its horizon.” Bloch celebrates the classical tradition of Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms as anticipating human fulfillment “as if it were already more than mere hope.” In this article, I argue that contemporary forms of Western dance music that focus on bodily movement and pleasure also legitimately communicate utopian desire. Rather than the beat-heavy but substanceless music its detractors assume it to be, dance music responds to cultural pressure points with identifiable utopian energies. Disco and hip-hop in 1970s America (particularly New York City) and the free rave movement in late 1980s–early 1990s Britain are three examples where dance musics and their attendant cultures (at least in their earlier, more underground forms) coincided with utopian impulses for liberation, equality, nonviolence, community, and pleasure, over and against alienation. Recently, beginning in 2009, electronic dance pop made a major resurgence in the United States, in terms of sales, artist recognition, radio airplay, and chart impact, after three decades of mainstream resistance to the genre. During this same period, DJ- and club-based electronic dance music (EDM) also gained enormously in popularity, with North American EDM musicians such as Deadmau5 and Skrillex achieving starlike status. While a certain amount of overlap exists between dance pop and EDM, particularly in the way pop borrows stylistically from EDM, dubstep being the latest prominent example, singer/star-based dance pop and EDM are largely separate strands of electronic music. EDM’s Deadmau5 (Joel Zimmerman), for instance, considers his live shows very different from pop and expresses resentment at pop stars’ attempts to appropriate or mimic the EDM scene. Throughout this essay, while I will make numerous references to DJ-based EDM for purposes of comparison, the music under consideration falls within the dance pop genre.
I contend that the rise of dance pop in the United States reflects utopian desires in the face of economic recession; instead of “merely” exhorting listeners to dance, recent dance hits by Lady Gaga, Kesha, Usher, and others project an alternative utopian space beyond the reach of economic hardship. My analysis of popular dance hits from 2009 to 2011 suggests that while the lyrics of these songs do express utopian desires for human fulfillment (albeit highly escapist and apolitical desires), outside of a communal club setting they do not lead to utopian anticipation. The utopian vistas opened up by electronic dance music depend largely upon a combination of highly rhythmic percussive beats and communal dancing experienced over a duration of time (hours, not minutes). While hits by Lady Gaga and Usher are certainly played in some dance clubs and could form part of such an experience, their wide popularity as pop songs, resulting in mass radio airplay and digital downloads, means that they are primarily heard by individual consumers as discrete songs. Moreover, mainstream popularity effectively removes these hits from the “ownership” of underground club or rave cultures that explicitly seek utopian transformation through dance. The very popularity of dance pop, then, seems to work against its use as a meaningful vehicle of utopian anticipation or praxis. However, to explore the possibility that dance pop can achieve relative mainstream appeal while also engaging in meaningful acts of utopian social dreaming, I turn to the recent electro-dance pop of the Pet Shop Boys as music that transcends the purely physical pursuit of ecstatic pleasure, or *jouissance*.

**Rise of Electronic Dance Pop in the United States, 2009–2011**

The renewed mainstream popularity of electro-dance pop in the United States, which was fueled by the recent economic meltdown, received its initial jump start from American hip-hop artists who successfully overcame an entrenched cultural resistance to both electronic and dance-based music. Compared with the situation in the United Kingdom and Europe, the mainstream popularity and radio airplay of dance music have long lagged far behind in the States. But starting around 2009, that lag began to diminish with surprising speed as hip-hop and R&B artists, who dominate the American charts, gravitated toward music aimed directly at the dance floor. The Black Eyed Peas epitomized this move; their enormously successful album *The E.N.D.* (2009) completed the group’s decade-long evolution from rap/hip-hop artists to dance pop, party anthem mavens. In April 2011, the English dance producer known as Artwork
remarked on “hearing the sound of European dance music infiltrate American hip-hop and R&B during the last few years: . . . ‘We’re talking about music that was big over here [Europe, the United Kingdom] 15 or 20 years ago. . . . Hip-hop and R&B have been around for a long time pretty much unchanged. It’s good to see people’s views opening up and wanting to hear something new.’” Artwork’s assessment indicates the centrality of hip-hop to America’s recent embrace of electronic dance pop, an embrace that further exacerbates the challenge hip-hop poses to the decades-long supremacy of rock ideology. The reasons why America for so long rejected or ignored the dance music popular in Europe are centrally grounded in this ideology. Due in part to the extreme backlash against disco in 1979, American music producers (and music fans) have had greater investment in the supposed superior authenticity of rock music versus the inauthenticity of dance music. Johan Fornäs writes that the notion of “authenticity is frequently used to distinguish rock from pop, as rock ideologists defined the values of the folk and/or art genuine against commercial substitutes.” The endless mechanical 4/4 beat and constructed sexuality of 1970s disco, on the other hand, highlighted, as Simon Frith contends, “the very artificiality of the disco experience. . . . Disco made no claims to folk status; there was no creative disco community. The music was, rather, the new international symbol of American consumer society.” The demise of disco restored rock to its place as the authentic music of expression, while dance music retreated underground, disparaged as black and/or gay music. Though synth-heavy British new romantic/new wave pop made a significant impact on the American charts in the 1980s and continued “the challenge to gender-related conventions in popular music initiated by British stars of the 1970s such as David Bowie,” dance culture struggled to return to the U.S. mainstream. By far the most successful resurgence was the mid-1990s rave movement, which spawned industry promotion of “electronica” as a way of capitalizing on groups such as techno-rockers The Prodigy. The impending dominance of electronica forecasted by industry observers, however, never materialized. Anti-disco sentiment and the enormous popularity of grunge rock beginning in 1991 meant that well into the late 2000s, dance pop and electro groups remained largely a sideshow, with numerous styles falling short of the mainstream. For instance, in 2001–2, the heavily hyped electroclash scene “went from Next Big Thing to Last Little Fad within a year,” with acts such as Fischerspooner and Miss Kitten failing to reach wide audiences. Again in 2008, the disco revival and “nu-disco” sounds of Hercules and Love Affair and
Heloise and the Savoir Faire generated a club scene and critical acclaim but no mainstream recognition in the United States.12

In conjunction with the ascendance of rock-centric authenticity, homophobia also suppressed the popularity of dance/pop music infused with an ambisexual or gay aesthetic. Jake Shears, the very out lead singer of Scissor Sisters, a New York City disco group that has scored a #1 and nine other U.K. hits since 2004 but remains largely invisible at home, noted in 2006: “Britain and Europe they love their gay pop stars, but America does not.”13 Corroborating Shears is the fact that when pop vocalists such as Boy George, George Michael, and Ricky Martin came out as gay, their U.S. popularity plummeted. Though American acceptance of gay artists has improved marginally since 2006, musically the climate has changed dramatically in just a few years. Since 2009, electronic dance pop—defined here to include radio-friendly hip-hop and pop star/pop group dance music—has exploded on American airwaves. New pop singers such as Lady Gaga and Kesha launched to stardom, and established performers, such as Jennifer Lopez, rejuvenated their careers with a slew of catchy dance hits that five years earlier would likely have been consigned mostly to clubs.14 In large urban areas, dance beats dominate the airplay rotations at many radio stations. Living near Chicago, I routinely skip between three major Top 40 stations (96.3 B96 FM, 103.5 Kiss FM, 101.9 The Mix FM) all playing mostly the same music, nearly all of it electronic and dance-based. Whereas several years ago I would rarely encounter dance music on the radio, today it is mostly what I hear. Billboard’s summation of the year 2010 in radio, “If you listen to top 40 radio but aren’t into club music, you’re basically out of luck,” signaled the extent of hip-hop’s success at undermining rock’s ideology of artistic superiority.15

The global recession of 2008–9 created a cultural shift that seized on hip-hop’s increased use of dance beats, pushing dance pop to a mainstream dominance that extended well beyond the genre of hip-hop and positioning it as a possible vehicle for utopian expression. As the form of music most directly associated with bodily pleasure, dance music has always been an antidote for personal forms of heartbreak, as well as the collective experiences of social injustice, alienation, bigotry, and/or economic fear and collapse. As the birthplace of disco and hip-hop, New York City in the early 1970s epitomized the dystopian environment that induces the desire to forget but also the creative urge to reinvent. Peter Shapiro begins his excellent history of disco, Turn the Beat Around, by emphasizing that “while disco may have sparkled with diamond...
brilliance, it stank of something far worse. Despite its veneer of elegance and sophistication, disco was born, maggot-like, from the rotten remains of the Big Apple. “Shapiro catalogs the corruption, ineffectual leadership, gang violence, drug wars, immigration influx with corresponding white flight, empty tax coffers, landlord disinvestment, and racial tensions that in a matter of a few short years turned early 1970s New York City into a tornado of despair and decline. “But while,” Shapiro writes, “the remains of New York’s infrastructure were withering away, its artists and musicians produced a groundswell of creative activity that aimed to reclaim the city. . . . [I]n reality discotheque and discontent go together like glitterballs and rhinestones. Not just in the sense of dancing one’s blues away (which, of course, is part of it), but also in the sense that disco—that music now most redolent of cheery knee-ups and good-time girls dancing around their handbags—could have emerged only from the dark underground of a society on the brink of collapse.” The reclamation of dance pop in 2009 did not originate from the underground, but where it clearly echoed disco was in the experience of economic hardship and joblessness, anger at politicians and Wall Street, and the prevailing mood of fear and uncertainty. In summer 2009, Times columnist Sophie Heawood reported from the Balearic island of Ibiza, a famous party mecca, on a disco night at a club, where “an excited audience have waited until 3am to see Sister Sledge, who arrive on stage to wild applause, long-legged and glamorous as ever. They belt out Lost in Music, He’s the Greatest Dancer, and We Are Family. It’s July 2009 and disco is back, baby, back. But why are people going all Saturday Night Fever now? Lead singer Joni Sledge says that people turn to disco when the world is full of bad news, and that right now we want to hear real voices and real tunes again. When the world is burning, the glitterball starts turning.” (Note the irony that Sledge defends disco, long derided as artificial, artless, and crass, as “real” music and singing over and against contemporary club music.) Heawood’s assessment of the disco revival as a response to economic gloom is equally applicable to the ascendancy of up-tempo dance music in the United States. Commenting on the strength of the DJ-based EDM concert market in 2012, Rolling Stone editor Jonathan Ringen suggested that “part of that [success] is simply the simple fun of gathering with others to dance to music made just for dancing. . . . But there’s also a sense of release from bad economic news, the ongoing wars and just the sense that the world is a scary place.” Dance music tacitly acknowledges the gravity of recession economics by relentlessly urging listeners to stay in motion and focus on something other than their troubles. Pop star Kesha
discusses her music’s relation to economics by explaining, “I’ve been broke multiple times in my life, and instead of feeling sorry for myself, I find it’s an opportunity to get a little more crafty and celebrate things that aren’t necessarily monetarily related. All I want to do is make people feel good.”

Escapism, the desire to simply make people “feel good,” undoubtedly pervades dance pop in large measure, but is there any kind of broader utopian impulse at work in this music? And if so, how is it articulated? In what follows, I examine how recently popular U.S./U.K. dance hits triangulate the dancer–dance floor–DJ into an idealized, albeit ephemeral and sensualist, recession-free utopian space. I then argue, by examining the cultural, temporal, and sonic differences between mainstream dance pop and rave/club DJ-based performances, that dance pop cannot replicate the utopian anticipatory consciousness opened up by communal, subcultural dance experiences.

Dancer–Dance Floor–DJ: Recent Dance Pop Hits

The most noticeable commonality among the many mainstream dance hits released between 2009 and 2011, besides their fast tempo, is that they are songs specifically about dancing. Lady Gaga’s first single, “Just Dance,” kicked off this trend; many artists followed with similarly themed hits, including Cascada, “Evacuate the Dancefloor” (2009); Sean Kingston, “Fire Burning (On the Dancefloor)” (2009); Kesha, “Tik Tok” (2009) and “We R Who We R” (2010); Flo Rida, “Club Can’t Handle Me” (2010); Usher, “More” (2010); Usher featuring Pitbull, “DJ Got Us Fallin’ in Love” (2010); Taio Cruz, “Dynamite” (2010) and “Higher” (2011); Jennifer Lopez featuring Pitbull, “On the Floor” (2011); and Britney Spears, “Till the World Ends” (2011). Dance songs about dancing are nothing new, dating back in the rock era to at least 1960, when Chubby Checker covered Hank Ballard’s “The Twist” and set off a dance revolution. But the sheer number of popular pop songs about dancing all charting more or less simultaneously is unparalleled since the height of 1970s disco. As music intentionally produced to induce people to dance, contemporary pop is by definition concerned with bodily pleasure. Pleasure itself forms the central pursuit of dance music and dancing. Jeremy Gilbert and Ewan Pearson use Roland Barthes’s psychoanalytic distinction between plaisir—“ordinary pleasure constituted within the horizon of meaning”—and jouissance—the transcendent, indescribable presubjective and prelinguistic bliss characterized by
a child’s “effectively unmediated relation to the mother’s body”—to denote the pleasure dynamics of contemporary dance music.\textsuperscript{23} Because jouissance “is often thought of as a pleasure which operates particularly at the level of the body’s materiality,” dance music has been seen as the pursuit of jouissance, but Gilbert and Pearson refine this by noting the overlap between linguistic and prelinguistic pleasure in a way that aptly describes the type of dance pop about dancing that dominated charts starting in 2009.\textsuperscript{24} Gilbert and Pearson argue that “almost any time that lyrics serve to organize the ways in which we relate to a piece of music, it is plaisir which is being experienced. We might think of those vast numbers of house and disco tracks which have lyrics with no more purpose than to exhort us to dance, to ‘feel the rush,’ to chase ecstatic moments, as operating at the very border between plaisir and jouissance, pointing us quite carefully from one realm of experience to the other, generating as such their own very specific types of pleasure.”\textsuperscript{25} Recent dance hits ride this border between plaisir and jouissance, inciting the listeners through lyrics to dance and to lose themselves in a wash of blissful sensation. As Kesha sings in “We R Who We R,” “We’re dancing like we’re dumb . . . Our bodies going numb.”\textsuperscript{26} The characteristic, now almost clichéd, gesture of this kind of ecstatic pleasure is putting one’s hands in the air. Flo Rida, Kesha, Usher, Taio Cruz, and many others either command listeners/dancers to perform this gesture or describe doing it themselves, not as a dance move per se but as an expression of pleasurable surrender to the music.

Additionally, all of the songs mentioned (and many of the videos produced for these songs) spatially locate the dancing in question on a club dance floor, as opposed to some unspecified setting. The verses of Lady Gaga’s “Just Dance” relate the narrator’s experience of being in a club—losing her phone, checking out the other dancers, asking, “How’d I turn my shirt inside out?”—more than they focus on dancing itself, which is the subject of the chorus.\textsuperscript{27} The lyrics of Jennifer Lopez’s “On the Floor” are all about dancing, and Lopez explicitly locates the action “in the club.”\textsuperscript{28} In narrative terms, the setting of these songs (the club) merges with the ostensible plot (dancing), and the two become equal in importance. The conflation of dancing and the club environment as constituting one holistic experience tends to emphasize the communal nature of dancing pleasure. Kesha’s chart-topping “We R Who We R” takes this approach, including the listener as a participant in all of the dancing: “Tonight we’re going hard / Just like the world is ours / We’re tearing it apart / You know we’re superstars.”\textsuperscript{29} Kai Fikentscher defines the social
dancing done in a club as a “collective performance” where “sharing the space available for dancing, the dancers perform in relation to each other.”

Dancing as a collective performance “encompasses the notion of music consumption while, at the same time, transcending it. The dancer is not merely a consumer, but rather a participant and performer in and of the musical event as well.” The club-specific setting of recent dance pop elevates dance from a series of rhythmic physical movements to a social narrative where dancers engage with each other in a range of activities, from displays of skill, friendly competition, and energy/stamina (from the common refrains of “going hard” or “don’t stop”) to forgetting one’s troubles and the discovery of sexual attraction. Whatever the particularities of their lyrics, all of these pop songs situate dancing pleasure as something experienced by an individual but also shared and dispersed among a group.

Other than a highly skilled dancer who captivates an audience with his or her moves (as in Sean Kingston’s “Fire Burning,” Flo Rida’s “Club Can’t Handle Me,” and Usher’s “More”), the person most responsible for creating pleasure on the dance floor is the club or rave DJ. The DJ’s recent emergence as a common referent in popular culture is perhaps the surest sign of dance music’s subversion of the rock-centric argument about artistic superiority. Pervasive digital technology and the international popularity of numerous songs, such as Kesha’s “Tik Tok,” in which a singer directly addresses a DJ, pushed DJ culture into the mainstream. In the slow and lengthy bridge in “Tik Tok,” Kesha’s persona speaks not to the listener or a lover but to a DJ: “DJ, you build me up / You break me down / You got that sound / Yeah, you got me / With my hands up / You got me now / You got that sound / Yeah, you got me.” “Tik Tok” situates the DJ as the source and manipulator of sonic pleasure, in which the song’s protagonist loses herself through dance. As an improvisational metamusician, as Brewster and Broughton define him or her, the DJ as performer interactively fuses music and dance, dancer and dance floor, into one single performance experience that Fikentscher describes as the “disco experience.”

Many recent dance pop hits attempt to narrate the entirety of the “disco experience”—a dance song about dancing, the dance floor, and the DJ—as a way of creating a vision of a better, alternative world or a reality of fulfillment. These hits manifest “wishful images,” however escapist or self-fixated, of a different and better life, which Bloch considers viably part of the realm of utopian wishing. Jennifer Lopez’s “On the Floor,” for instance, depicts a
group of “party people in the club” who dance ceaselessly: “We never quit, we never rest on the floor / If I ain’t wrong, we’ll probably die on the floor.” In the chorus, Lopez encourages the listener to adopt this same mode of life, singing, “Dance the night away / Live your life and stay young on the floor.” The fantasized and frenetic world of the club, positioned against the mundane pressures of reality outside, posits a nocturnal yet timeless utopian space that preserves youth. The song invites an adrenaline-laced feel-good amnesia, similar to the intent of Lady Gaga’s “Just Dance,” which, as Gaga explained in 2009, is “a happy record. Maybe the record will be appreciated more now [that] there are lots of people who are going through rough times, losing jobs and homes.” But unlike Gaga’s record, which describes, as Sal Cinquemani writes, “the kind of clueless, desperate train wreck you’re likely to encounter getting wasted at any dive on the L.E.S. [Lower East Side] at four in the morning,” “On the Floor” focuses insistently on a physical space where people can, through endless motion, experience a collective sense of jouissance and envision a more sensually gratifying life. Usher’s “DJ Got Us Fallin’ in Love,” though more centered on dancing as a prelude to romantic attraction, evokes a similar ethos of the club as sanctuary from an oppressive reality. Usher begins by setting the scene: “So we back in the club with the bodies rockin’ from side to side / Thank God the week is done, I feel like a zombie gone back to life / Hands up, yeah suddenly we all got our hands up, no control of my body.” Combining the common pop song eulogy on the weekend with the hypnotic pleasure of dancing, Usher projects the club as a temporary utopian zone masterminded by a DJ.

Both Lopez’s and Usher’s songs exemplify the utopianism typical of recent dance hits, whose brand of wishful image is of a nightlife world where the only effort needed to transcend the recession is to stay in motion. At the same time, the songs belie the ephemeral nature of their utopian vision with their sense of urgency. Usher sings, “So dance, dance like it’s the last, last night of your life, life,” and Lopez repeatedly urges the listener, “Don’t stop keep it moving.” The apotheosis of this refrain is Britney Spears’s apocalyptic “Till the World Ends,” which attempts to extend the cocoon of the disco experience ad infinitum: “See the sunlight / we ain’t stoppin’ / keep on dancin’ till the world ends.” Each of these hit songs implies that once the dancing stops, any “fulfilled moment” of jouissance ends and utopia will implode in on itself. In narrative terms, recent mainstream dance pop imagines a hermetically sealed world; to dance in a dance club is the limit of its
vision and, as such, offers a reprieve for tonight but little generative hope for the future. Discussing Bloch’s view of utopia as a function as opposed to a merely descriptive concept, Ruth Levitas writes, “Utopia, as the expression of the Not-Yet-Conscious, is vindicated in so far as it reaches forward to the real possibility of the Not-Yet-Become; it is thus actively bound up in the process of the world’s becoming, and an anticipation of the future (rather than merely a compensation in the present).” The dance pop under discussion, with its highly limited range of narrative signifiers, operates unabashedly as compensation and hence as what Bloch derogatorily terms “abstract” utopia. But dance pop, like EDM, does not function solely (or even primarily) as narrative; it is also a sonic and physical experience.

Two distinct questions arise with regard to utopianism when considering dance music experiences and the pop music that celebrates those experiences. First, to what extent can the synchronicity among dance music, its performers (dancers and the DJ), and the dance floor produce utopian hope, utopian intentional communities, or objective-real utopian progress? And second, can contemporary dance pop music, which attempts to narrate and package this “disco experience” for mainstream consumption over the radio, produce the same or similar effects? During the 1970s disco gay underground and in legendary post-disco clubs such as the Paradise Garage (1977–87), the triad of dancer–dance floor–DJ actually generated tangible alternative utopian spaces: “In a drab district in southwest Manhattan, [the Paradise Garage’s] owners created a private world based on disco’s original ethos of loving equality. In stark contrast to the harsh city lights outside, the Garage represented freedom, compassion and brotherhood. It was as much community center as discothèque.” The pursuit of jouissance, not simply on a personal level but in the collective and democratic context of the dance floor (Rolling Stone declared disco highly “democratic” in 1979 because “the dancer is the ultimate star”), produced something far more utopian than the sum of the “disco experience’s” individual parts of dancer, dance floor, and DJ. As Shapiro writes, “In a sense, in the discotheque the ’70s practiced what the ’60s preached: The communion offered by the dance floor was the embodiment of the vision of peace that the ’60s yearned for.” During the emerging rave movement in late 1980s Britain, a new generation, fueled in equal parts by house music and the drug Ecstasy, found that raves, all-night or multiday events featuring continuous EDM and dancing, effected a jouissance of the presymbolic order that desexualized the dance floor and opened up a liberating escape from the phallocentric norms
of British culture. Gilbert and Pearson analyze rave culture’s “deconstructive jouissance” of the dancefloor—a place where the dissolution of certainty and identity is experienced as pleasure, where gender and sexuality can be suspended, looked at from different angles and possibly reworked.”

In the past decade, anthropologists and religious studies scholars have looked extensively at the ongoing social and spiritual practices of rave cultures that meld varieties of trance EDM with utopian ambitions. Giles Beck and Gordon Lynch’s ethnography of the “conscious partying movement” in the United Kingdom shows how various fringe networks of trance music producers, promoters, artists, and activists coalesced in the early 2000s around the desire to “re-focus attention on dance events as creative opportunities for cultural, political, and spiritual transformation.” Though diverse and informally linked, conscious partying movement participants share a “broad sense of collective identity . . . a basic shared political agenda based on ecological, social justice, and loosely anti-capitalist concerns” and a spiritual discourse centered around “oneness, energy, [and] immediatism.” Anthropologist Scott Hutson argues that the powerful spiritual awakenings experienced by many ravers during trance states of altered consciousness induced by rhythmic drumming and constant dancing are legitimate instances of “spiritual healing” and frequently lead to the desire for better communities. One raver interviewed by Hutson remarked that EDM in a rave context gives one “the human ability to dream while awake,” recalling Bloch’s theory of daydreams as a potent manifestation of the Not-Yet-Conscious—an individual’s preconscious and creative anticipation of a potentially realizable future. Hutson’s analysis of raver testimonials, rave rituals, and graphic design reveals a distaste for society as presently constructed and simultaneous affinities for primitive and futuristic communities: “Together, idealization of the past and interest in the future creates an incendiary combination of 1) what is seen as a model society (the past), and 2) the prospect of such a society’s reenactment (the future). This combination [resembles] what Eliade . . . has termed the ‘myth of eternal return’: the nostalgic desire to return to an original, primordial time and place—a paradise.” While rave scholars readily admit that rave “activism” and idealism are easily ridiculed and often remain latent, Robin Sylvan asserts that the “utopian feelings glimpsed in the heat of peak rave experience [have been] articulated into . . . a coherent ideology symbolized by the acronym PLUR, which stands for peace, love, unity, and respect.” Sylvan argues that rave culture, as opposed to the 1960s American counterculture
that made a virtue of “dropping out” of the mainstream, “sees itself as an alternative model that solves [the contradictions of mainstream culture], a working template for a healthy, harmonious, sustainable, and spiritually conscious culture,” and points to flourishing West Coast underground rave communities such as Rhythm Society and Moontribe as examples.

Rave scholarship reveals (without addressing the matter directly) how radically different trance EDM used in a rave context is from dance pop packaged for mainstream consumption. Besides its focus on the religious and spiritual dimensions of raves, rave scholarship emphasizes subcultures. Raves are (frequently elaborate) subcultural gatherings, not just a DJ mixing electronic dance music. The transformative experiences that many ravers attest to having while dancing to EDM occur at rave events, not at home. Hence, from the disco underground of the early 1970s to current rave communities, the utopian potentiality of dance music seems to emerge from within subcultures, not from disembodied music on the radio. Commercial dance pop, especially when consumed outside of a club setting, cannot replicate the two vectors that have historically converged to produce utopian energies: the cultural synergies of a rave or underground nightclub and the sonic characteristics of dance music mixed by a rave or club DJ. Due to their wide popularity (and notwithstanding their extensive play in clubs), the pop songs under discussion were consumed largely in isolation (people driving in their cars or listening to an MP3 player). With the exception of Lady Gaga’s first single, “Just Dance,” these hit songs did not have long underground gestation periods before making it big; they were seemingly everywhere at once. As such, it is harder to claim that these songs first “belonged to” or were used by certain dance music cultures in a way that had utopian resonance. Widespread popularity not only increases the percentage of people who will listen to dance music alone, removed from a dance floor; it also decreases use by utopian-minded underground dance cultures averse to the mainstream.

Additionally, while contemporary dance pop may narrate and express the wish fulfillment of the “disco experience,” the sonic and temporal restrictions of the pop song/pop radio format prevent its production. Historians of dance music stress that modern forms of social dancing, such as disco and hip-hop, where the dancer dances solo as opposed to in pairs, came into existence with the percussive “break.” Early disco DJs unlocked the dance potential of pop, rock, and soul music by isolating and greatly extending the percussive breaks of songs, transforming three- or four-minute songs into longer rhythmic tracks.
that were then mixed seamlessly into other tracks to form an expansive dance odyssey. This difference helps explain why a song such as MFSB’s Philly soul classic “Love Is the Message,” while a terrific instrumental, does not have the same effect on the radio as it did when Nicky Siano mixed it at the Gallery in 1974 to rapturous response. Music theorist Mark Butler argues that “contemporary pop music is, to a large extent, the domain of the miniature. Most of the songs that one hears on American commercial radio, for instance, are closely constrained in length, rarely lasting more than four minutes[, and] each single is constructed efficiently from a small amount of musical material.” While some radio stations do feature extended DJ sets where dance music is mixed, nearly all pop radio stations play short, discrete songs in a predetermined sequence. In a club or rave setting, however, DJs and dancers actively respond to each other over time. Referring to what he terms the “epic dimensions” of EDM performances, Butler notes that “DJ sets almost always last for at least one hour; however, sets ranging from two to six hours are not uncommon.” Kai Fikentscher argues that within this “epic” time frame, musical rhythm operates as the “synchronizing element” that creates the “dynamic relationship between music and dancing.” Rhythm regulates the interactive energy shared between dancers and DJ and produces what underground clubbers refer to as a “vibe”:

Music, as structured in the DJ booth, travels to the dance floor as a sonic phenomenon. The dance, manifest as a phenomenon more physical than sonic, is in turn structured by each individual dancer. Collectively, all dancing on the floor creates a collective energy that feeds back to the DJ booth. . . . This loop of nonverbal interaction between DJ and dancers . . . is what helps shape a vibe. The vibe coming from the DJ booth may propel a dancer onto the dance floor, or may cause him or her to change the energy level of the dance. Conversely, the vibe from the dance floor may determine the programming in the DJ booth. . . . Vibe thus describes a collective energy that can be experienced on an individual basis as well. Vibe may in fact be that form of energy that collapses the boundaries between individual and collective musical experience, an energy made possible when the music transcends the acoustic realm and becomes physical.

Fikentscher’s discussion of vibe as an energy undergirded by rhythm that “collapses” individual and collective experience signals, I would argue, the
way that dance music in a club setting opens up utopian anticipation of better possibilities. The anticipatory quality of the club/rave experience (as opposed to being merely compensatory) is central to its communal nature and is based on the formal shaping of EDM itself. Nearly all EDM tracks feature multiple “breakdowns,” sections of a “track in which the bass drum is absent” (before being restored). Breakdowns occur in pop songs as well but are very brief, whereas in EDM tracks breakdowns typically last eight to twelve measures and frequently go on for more than a minute. Butler focuses on a particular type of breakdown he calls “withholding the beat,” where a DJ cuts out the bass drum during a live performance, as opposed to the typical breakdown created by the track’s producer. When a DJ withholds the beat, Butler argues, audience interplay is an essential part of [the] phenomenon. The crowd seems to actively anticipate the return of the beat; during its absence, they look toward the DJ as if to see what will happen next, and their dancing becomes tentative or breaks off. When the bass drum comes back, however, they dance with greater energy than in any other portion of the track, while enthusiastically expressing their appreciation to the DJ. . . . The DJ heightens the audience’s desire for the beat, which represents the music in its most essential form, by taking it away and giving it back at carefully controlled intervals.

As Butler’s analysis indicates, anticipation and uncertainty—experienced individually and collectively based on the question “What will the DJ do next?”—distinguish an EDM dancing experience from the experience of a dance pop radio playback, where every iteration of a song is exactly the same. In addition to breakdowns when DJs most actively manipulate the texture and meter of a track to heighten crowd anticipation, EDM tracks also feature much longer intros and outros than the pop (especially pop radio) genre allows. In these transition phases, the DJ typically blends two tracks, as the audience attempts to discern what the incoming track will be. Between intros/outras and the breakdowns, when the DJ restores the bass drum and builds up to the melodic “core”—the most texturally dense parts of a track where the main synth, drum, and bass lines are all in play—the dancers’ energy is at its peak, and anticipation is fulfilled.

Butler’s analysis of the structural properties of EDM, informed by music theory, connects with Fikentscher’s discussion of vibe in its emphasis on the
anticipatory interactivity between dancers and DJ. While claiming a direct causal link between dance floor anticipation and utopian anticipation would overreach, the anticipatory element of EDM is integral to the vibe that transcends individual experience and leads to the spirit of collective well-being and desire for communal oneness that results from prolonged dancing and prolonged exposure to rhythmic percussion. In this way the sonic qualities of EDM are arguably “bound up in the process of the world’s becoming, and anticipation of the future” in a way that dance pop removed from the club environment cannot replicate. Nevertheless, to dismiss entirely the ability of dance pop to engage utopian impulses overlooks its capacity for lyrical plenitude. While most contemporary dance pop focuses almost entirely on the kinetic pleasure of dancing, and sensual gratification more generally, to argue that dance pop can speak to a wider vision of utopianism, I turn now to the more politically attuned invocation of utopian possibilities in the music of the Pet Shop Boys, which expresses a wider vision of hope but also of ambivalence about the failure of utopian plans and dreams.

Pet Shop Boys, Utopianism

The music of English electronic pop duo Pet Shop Boys, while similar to recent mainstream pop hits in its penchant for up-tempo dance beats, differs significantly in much of its subject matter, specifically here in its long-running and wide-ranging concern with utopianism. Where the hit makers discussed above broach utopian desire by essentially encouraging dancers to keep their eyes closed to the world and just keep dancing, Pet Shop Boys discuss utopian possibilities with their eyes fully open to social and political currents. Though Pet Shop Boys’ music has been influential within certain dance music subcultures, their approach to dance music also allows for the contemplation of utopian possibilities at a remove from the dance floor. Taking their body of work as a whole, Pet Shop Boys fulfill pop music’s potential to speak meaningfully to the human desire for utopian fulfillment while also achieving mainstream popularity.

Formed as a synthpop group in the early 1980s by Neil Tennant (vocals) and Chris Lowe (keyboards), Pet Shop Boys has always created output highly attuned to club-land dance floors. Though they were dismissed by some early on as purveyors of superficial, anemic synthpop, music journalists soon
recognized a nuanced, critical eye beneath the surface sheen: “Rather than being overly political, or celebratory of the excess around them in the 1980s, the Pet Shop Boys managed to look both ways at the same time, documenting the materialism and opportunities of the decade, while registering a nagging disquiet at the state of the country. Their image—Tennant as suited raconteur, Lowe as impassive lad in expensive casualware—was a superbly arch piece of branding that made a virtue of their apparent unsuitability for the pop world.” In the decades since, in addition to racking up forty Top 20 hits in the United Kingdom, Pet Shop Boys solidified their sensibility of combining pop and “high” art with collaborative side projects such as the musical Close to Heaven (2001) with playwright Jonathan Harvey; a score for Eisenstein’s 1925 silent film Battleship Potemkin (2005) with the Dresdner Sinfoniker; a ballet, The Most Incredible Thing (2011), based on the fairy tale by Hans Christian Andersen, produced with Sadler’s Wells Theatre, playwright Matthew Dunster and choreographer Javier de Frutos; and a musical narrative of the life of computer pioneer Alan Turing, A Man from the Future (2014), produced in collaboration with Turing biographer Andrew Hodges and performed with the BBC Concert Orchestra and BBC Singers, with spoken narration by actress Juliet Stevenson. And before and after Neil Tennant revealed his homosexuality in 1994, Pet Shop Boys wrote touching elegies for the AIDS era (“Being Boring,” “Dreaming of the Queen,” among others), documented what Fred Maus terms the “double-voiced” guarded language of homosexuality, and successfully launched gay aesthetic and political identity issues into the wider mainstream.

Given that Pet Shop Boys’ career far predates the recent boom of EDM’s and dance pop’s popularity, that their music differs stylistically from both new pop stars such as Kesha and established stars such as Usher, and that their fan base skew older, it is fair to question whether the group fits in a discussion of recent dance music. I argue that Pet Shop Boys rightfully belong due to their sustained interest in dance music trends and continual release of dance music, extending from their long-running Disco series of dance/remix albums (Disco was released in 1986, Disco Four in 2007) to 2013’s dance album Electric to numerous dance mixes of their own songs. In the United States, after their chart success in the late 1980s (from “West End Girls” through “Domino Dancing”), Pet Shop Boys lost some popular appeal but have remained a steady fixture on the Billboard Dance / Club Play chart, becoming the fourth most successful dance act in the history of that chart. Moreover, Pet Shop Boys still receive
radio airplay in England and Europe, but in the United States the group is heard almost entirely in dance clubs. The two singles from their 2009 album Yes, for instance, “Love Etc.” and “Did You See Me Coming?” received no radio airplay in the United States, but both songs topped the Billboard Club Play chart. So though their U.S. fan base is much smaller than Lady Gaga’s, proportionally the percentage of people who consume their music in dance clubs is far greater.

Running amid Pet Shop Boys’ long career trajectory is a consistent engagement with notions of utopia/dystopia, a concern seemingly at odds with the normative assessment of the duo as being aloof, ironic, and camp. The perception of aloof detachment admittedly owes much to the group’s own visual imagery: the never-smiling Chris Lowe hidden behind hat and sunglasses, the iconic early televised performances on Top of the Pops with Tennant immobile and understated and Lowe looking bored playing a synthesizer with one hand. Mark Butler has analyzed in detail the tension between the apparently “self-consciously inauthentic” irony and camp aesthetic of Pet Shop Boys found by many journalists and what he considers the group’s move “beyond” the binary of rock authenticity/pop artificiality “to construct an authenticity of its own.”66 Tennant himself also objects to the assumption that he is always being ironic, as well as the easy association of Pet Shop Boys as camp because he is gay: “That does happen, [like] when Victoria Newton writes in The Sun about me going for a drink with David Walliams, she says ‘You don’t get much camper than that.’ I’m not a very camp individual at all. There are lots of straight people who are camper than me, David Walliams for one. But there you are. People like their gay entertainers to be outrageous and outspoken. It’s a desexualized stereotype and it’s feminine. It’s not threatening.”67 Similar to the authenticity that Butler finds beneath the irony in which Tennant and Lowe supposedly cloak themselves, there lies an earnestly hopeful but also wistful view of utopian possibility. Nowhere is this more apparent than in their hugely successful 1993 cover of the Village People’s “Go West.” Butler remarks that the Village People’s original 1979 version “describes the migration of gay men to the West coast of America in the 1970s, a time when gay liberation—and disco—were in full bloom. It presents the West as a utopia where freedom can be fully achieved.”68 Pet Shop Boys’ version of “Go West” makes “the theme of place as liberation much more explicit,” with the addition of lyrics about “making a stand” in order to find the “promised land,” so that the West represents political freedom from
oppression. But, as Butler notes, Tennant’s signature nasal vocal delivery and his muted interaction with the backing male chorus (as opposed to Victor Willis’s original gusto version) imbue the song with a post-AIDS loss of innocence. Chris Lowe, who devised the idea of covering the Village People, explains that the tension between utopian idealism and resigned loss was part of his original conception: “I thought [“Go West”] would be a good song . . . about an idealistic gay utopia. I knew that the way Neil would sing it would make it sound hopeless—you’ve got these inspiring lyrics but it sounds like it is never going to be achieved. And that fitted what had happened. When the Village People sung about a gay utopia it seemed for real, but looking back in hindsight it wasn’t the utopia they all thought it would be.”

Pet Shop Boys’ 1997 U.K. hit “Somewhere,” a dance version of the Bernstein/Sondheim song, covers similar utopian terrain as “Go West,” in part because both songs are sung in the first-person plural. The lyrics for “Somewhere,” “There’s a place for us . . . We’ll find a new way of living / We’ll find a way of forgiving,” emphasize the communal nature of the desire for, and belief in, a better future. Both songs also feature the future tense (uncommon in pop music, which stresses pleasure on demand, where everything happens “tonight”), which indicates a dissatisfaction with how things currently are, a willingness to defer immediate gratifications that might compensate for true fulfillment, and what Bloch terms the anticipatory consciousness of the Not-Yet-Become. In a documentary film coinciding with Pet Shop Boys’ residency at the Savoy Theatre in 1997, Neil Tennant says of “Somewhere”: “It’s actually the same theme as ‘Go West.’ It’s about finding promised land. It’s one of the constant themes of pop music, actually . . . So many pop songs come out of being fed up with an urban situation, with violence and chaos and prejudice. ‘Go West’ is one of those kind of songs, and ‘Somewhere’ is one of those kind of songs.” Despite the absence of the call and response between Tennant and the male chorus of Broadway singers that makes “Go West” rousing, “Somewhere” arguably plays as a more hopeful song, in that Tennant’s singing is more assertive and 

Almost a decade after “Somewhere,” on their most political album, Fundamental (2006), which lampoons Tony Blair’s relationship with George W. Bush in the U.K. Top 10 hit “I’m with Stupid,” Pet Shop Boys turned to the language of dystopia in the song “Integral” to register their hostility toward
the Labour government’s plan to require national ID cards containing individuals’ biometric data. Reacting to the ID card scheme, Tennant described “Integral” as “a *1984* song that specifically quotes the specious argument, which comes from the government and the public too, that if you’ve done nothing wrong you’ve got nothing to fear. I hate the whole idea of, ‘Your papers please. We do not and should not have that in this country.’” 

Tennant cites Orwell, but in the song the text he is actually referencing, as an avid student of Russian history, is Yevgeny Zamyatin’s dystopian classic *We* (1924), which depicts a far-future totalitarian OneState, where all citizens live in glass buildings under total surveillance. The lyrics of “Integral” borrow heavily from the imagery and rigid rationalism of *We*, as does the song’s title, which is the name of the spaceship designed by the novel’s mathematician protagonist, D-503, for the purpose of placing “the beneficial yoke of reason round the necks of the unknown beings who inhabit other planets.” 

Tennant expresses concern with England’s move toward omnipresent state regulation by echoing the supposed virtues of OneState. Between the verses, Tennant chants: “Sterile / Immaculate / Rational / Perfect . . . All under / one sky / unchanging / one season.” In the second chapter of *We*, D-503 admires the logical perfection of a completely blue sky: “I am sure that I am right in saying we love—only such a sky as this one today: sterile and immaculate.” Over the course of the novel, D-503’s unquestioned belief in the total subsumption of the individual into OneState is shaken to the point that he begins resisting state directives, an outcome that clearly dovetails with Pet Shop Boys’ protest of the ID cards bill. While “Integral” focuses on the timely political debate of individual privacy rights in the age of terrorism, by inverting their more frequent use of utopian imagery and invoking the distant future imagined by *We*, Pet Shop Boys retain their concern with the long view. If we go down this road of eroding civil liberties, what will England become?

While Pet Shop Boys often go against prevailing music trends, with their 2009 album *Yes*, they moved in the direction of polished dance pop and returned to the question of utopia at just the same time that the hip-hop-inflected dance pop of Lady Gaga and Kesha went mainstream in the United States. Comparing tracks from *Yes* with the recent popular dance hits discussed above reveals Pet Shop Boys’ interest in utopianism as *social dreaming*, following Lyman Tower Sargent’s definition of the term, as opposed to the solely physical pursuit of jouissance. Two songs in particular, “This Used to Be the Future” and “More than a Dream,” respectively lament the outcome of the future imagined by
utopianists of the 1960s and reaffirm a belief in the possibility of utopian realization. “This Used to Be the Future” differs from the other songs under discussion in that, while it has a rather fast tempo, featuring a sixteenth-note layer of rhythm, the overall rhythm is not conducive for dancing. The song does not appear on the Yes album proper but was included on the limited-edition bonus disk entitled etc. Also, Chris Lowe joins Tennant on vocals, as does Philip Oakey of the Human League, each singing alternating choruses and bridges:

Pet Shop Boys, “This Used to Be the Future,” partial lyrics

Verse 1: (Tennant)
I can remember when this was the future
where it was gonna be at back then
Why don’t we tear the whole bloody lot down
and make a new start all over again?

(Lowe)
I can recall utopian thinking
bold mission statements and tightening of belts
demolition of familiar landmarks
promises made and deals that were dealt

Chorus 1: (Tennant)
This used to be the future
where it was at back then
Let’s tear the whole bloody lot down
and start all over again

Bridge 1: (Oakey)
But that future was exciting
science fiction made fact
Now all we have to look forward to
is a sort of suicide pact

Bridge 2: (Tennant)
Was it the dear old future
that created the problems we face?
How do we deal with the fall-out
of the age we used to call space?
Verse 2: (Tennant and Oakey)
I can remember planning for leisure
living in peace and freedom from fear
Science had promised to make us a new world
religion and prejudice disappear

(Tennant and Lowe)
25 I can remember when this was the future
where it was gonna be at back then
Now religion and nuclear energy
have united to threaten. Oh God! Amen.

The viewpoint of “This Used to Be the Future” derives from Tennant’s very un-pop-starish age—he was born in 1954 and lived his youth in Newcastle in the 1960s and early 1970s. Tom Moylan argues that “in the decades after World War II . . . Utopia rose, again, from the ashes of obscurity . . . . Filled with hope after the defeat of fascism . . . people around the globe began to give real shape to their collective dreams.” This generalized sense of optimism and opportunity, change and progress, is captured in the lines of the first verse: “I can recall utopian thinking / bold mission statements and tightening of belts / demolition of familiar landmarks.” More specifically, remembering the future as it presented itself to his youthful imagination (an imagination captivated by watching Doctor Who), Tennant focuses on the seemingly unlimited potential of science in the space age to remake the world into a secular paradise, a focus pointedly emphasized by the retro-futuristic synthesizer palette used in the song.

The young Tennant’s hopeful, and undoubtedly naive, view of techno-utopia recalls a long prophetic tradition of scientific deliverance dating back to at least the 1830s, when the German American socialist and inventor John Adolphus Etzler wrote The Paradise Within the Reach of All Men, Without Labor, By Powers of Nature and Machinery (1833), an incredibly sanguine treatise on the potential to create “blissful paradises, where all is splendor, beauty and delight . . . where you may lead a life of continual feast, free of labor, of want and fear of want,” simply by inventing machines to harness the unlimited power of the wind, waves, tides, steam, and sun. Tennant’s lyrics echo Etzler with uncanny similarity in verse 2, singing, “I can remember planning for leisure / living in peace and freedom from fear / Science had promised to make us a new world.” The optimistic anticipation expressed in “This Used
to Be the Future,” of course, hinges and turns on the verb phrase “used to be.” By 2009, Tennant’s youthful expectations of the future have been fully eclipsed by present realities and feelings of betrayal. The promise of a seemingly imminent “new world” of scientifically wrought peace and prosperity seems chimerical now in a globe filled with religious/ethnic conflicts and states with nuclear arsenals or nuclear ambitions. Tennant is left with a mix of angry disgust (“Let’s tear the whole bloody lot down”) and pensive speculation as to whether the very kinds of techno-utopian dreams and agendas he cherished as a youth are responsible for the world’s current problems. “This Used to Be the Future” ends by positioning Pet Shop Boys as formerly naive but now disgruntled debunkers of utopian myth. Yet, as explicit as the song is in dealing with utopianism as a failed exercise in social dreaming, it is not Pet Shop Boys’ final word on the subject.

“More than a Dream,” an up-tempo track from Yes with danceable rhythm and lush synth and piano melodies, serves as the counterpoint to the disenchantment of “This Used to Be the Future.” The song validates the album’s affirmative title and cover art, a tick (or check) as one might write when ticking “Yes” on a ballot, made out of eleven blocks of color, one color for each track on the album:

Pet Shop Boys, “More than a Dream,” partial lyrics

Verse 1:

Coming soon
something good
Something we can share
Understood

Could be better news
we can share
Something’s coming soon
I hear it everywhere
(Live it) It’s the story of our lives

Chorus 1:

I believe we can change
We can make it more than a dream

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And I believe we can change
It’s not as strange as it might seem

Verse 2:
In the air I can feel
something magical becoming real
From the other side
looking in
Come on throw the dice
and tonight we’ll win

Chorus 2:
I believe we can change
We can make it more than a dream
And I believe we can change
It’s not as strange as it might seem

Bridge:
Driving through the night
just you and me
Faster than the pale moonlight
Something’s calling
Calling us away
Do you believe
Heaven is a better place?
We’ll be there in a heartbeat.

The lyrics of “More than a Dream” are not profound; there is none of the reflective nostalgia or analysis that makes “This Used to Be the Future” interesting as narrative. Rather, the song’s strength lies in the conviction that utopian change is “coming soon.” Like “Go West” and “Somewhere,” “More than a Dream” looks to the future, but that future is much more immediate and within reach. The time of fulfillment in “Somewhere” is “someday”—hoped for but not imminent—whereas imminence is the essence of “More than a Dream”; as Tennant sings, “I hear it everywhere” and “We’ll be there in a heartbeat.”

“More than a Dream” posits two utopian trajectories toward the promised “something good.” The first, and more metaphysical, trajectory, as
represented in the verses, indicates that the approaching utopian moment is coming into existence independently of the protagonist’s agency. The protagonist can apprehend it, perceives that the coming goodness can be shared with his companion, feels assured of experiencing it, but does not actively bring it into being. That being said, the protagonist’s conscious belief that the world is not ontologically complete but still in the process of becoming something new and better, seems critical. The expectation and hope that anticipate utopia, Bloch argues, are an “intention towards possibility that has still not become: this is not only a basic feature of human consciousness, but, concretely corrected and grasped, a basic determination within objective reality as a whole.”87 The chorus presents a very different trajectory, in which the protagonist directly asserts the intention of agency to bring about utopia. The repeated line, “I believe we can change,” is the song’s most unique feature, one that positions “More than a Dream” against the normative hip-hop ethos of “taking what’s mine,” where pleasure is seen as an entitlement to be taken, never asked for. Contrarily, “More than a Dream” strikes a tone of humility by daring to suggest that maybe it is not other people who are the problem, a far cry from the pop-punk arrogance embodied by performers such as Pink or Lily Allen, whose album *It’s Not Me, It’s You* (2009) pithily captures this attitude.88 Recognizing the necessity of self-examination and change to moving utopia past the simply latent stage of social dreaming, and by stating a belief in the possibility of such change, Pet Shop Boys dialectically challenge their own conclusion from “This Used to Be the Future,” where social dreaming leads only to reactionary modes of reality.

**Conclusion**

By bringing the conceptual subject matter of utopia and dystopia to the fore in their recent mainstream and popular music (as well as throughout their career), Pet Shop Boys engage communities of fans and critics in utopianism, the act of social dreaming, in a more intentional and cerebral way than other recent mainstream dance pop hits. This is not to claim that simply by dealing with utopian topoi on a lyrical level, Pet Shop Boys produce tangible moments of utopian progress. As Mark Butler, Simon Watney, and others have pointed out, the “sense of community among gay men” that Pet Shop Boys’ dance music helped create occurred on the club dance floor; in this way their music
operates on the same kinetic level within the “disco experience” as EDM and
dance pop club hits. But by focusing on the notion of social dreaming as such,
as opposed to the urgent pursuit of jouissance or the wishful image of
an endless nightlife, Pet Shop Boys demonstrate that, irrespective of how spe-
cific dance music cultures appropriate it, contemporary electronic dance pop
has something significant to say about utopia and something to contribute to
the world’s repository of hope.

Notes

I would like to thank my colleague Joseph Bognar, chair of the Department of Music at
Valparaiso University, for his valuable help and insights.

2. Ibid., 1070.
3. Ibid., 1103. For a thorough reading of Bloch’s utopian philosophy, see Ruth Levitas,
profile of Deadmau5 (Joel Zimmerman), Eells writes:

Three months ago, at Miami’s Ultra Music Festival, Madonna asked the audience,
“How many people in this crowd have seen Molly?”—a barely coded way of saying,
“Who here is on Ecstasy?” Zimmerman raced to Twitter to voice his disapproval,
saying, “Are you so fucking uncreative after a 30 year career you have to resort to
drug references?” Today, he says his beef wasn’t so much about a 53-year-old pop
star trying to co-opt a trend (“You want to be ‘hip’ and ‘cool’ and ‘funky grandma’?”
he says. “Fine. It’s not my place to say you’re irrelevant”) and more that she was
hurting a scene that’s just starting to recover from the News-at-11 fear mongering
that shut down raves in the Nineties. “If you’re gonna come into my world,” he
says, “at least do it with a little more dignity.” (50)

detailed discussion of the issue of authenticity in rock versus disco.
7. Johan Fornäs, “The Future of Rock: Discourses that Struggle to Define a Genre,”
8. Simon Frith, Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure, and the Politics of Rock ‘n’ Roll (New York:
9. Stéphane Girard, “(Un)originality, Hypertextuality, and Identity in Tiga’s


14. Jennifer Lopez’s “On the Floor” (2011) was her first U.S. Top 10 hit in nine years. Between 2005 and 2007, four of Lopez’s singles reached #1 on the *Billboard* Dance chart but received little to moderate airplay and hence charted lower or not at all on the main *Billboard* Top 100 Singles chart.

15. Monica Herrera, “The Great Pop Boom,” *Billboard*, December 18, 2010, 8–16. While no single reason can fully account for the ability of black hip-hop artists to establish EDM as the mainstream norm where white artists failed, I would argue that hip-hop’s distinct visual aesthetic is a principal factor. White electronic artists have traditionally presented themselves as a band or duo with a fronting vocalist and one or more keyboardists. Depeche Mode in their 1984 (*Some Great Reward*)-to-1990 (*Violator*) heyday epitomize this look—with Dave Gahan singing in front of Martin Gore, Alan Wilder, and Andrew Fletcher, all on keyboards. The absence of guitars and drums intentionally contradicted all prevailing notions of what it meant to be a band. Stéphane Girard has analyzed the “un-phallic” and overtly technological appearance of synthesizers in contrast to the electric guitar (“[Un]originality, Hypertextuality, and Identity in Tiga’s ‘Sunglasses at Night,’” 112), which as Steve Waksman notes, is meant to appear as a natural extension of the performer’s body, and for decades, Americans (and radio programmers) in large measure rejected the electronic aesthetic as artificial and gay (*Instruments of Desire. The Electric Guitar and the Shaping of Musical Experience* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999], 5). Hip-hop singers and rappers, however, especially in the last ten to fifteen years, tend to present themselves in both name and visuals as solo brands—50 Cent, Missy Elliott, Snoop Dogg, Usher—not as part of a band or collective (the Black Eyed Peas being a notable exception), although there is constant cross-collaboration between them. Unlike pioneering rap groups *Public Enemy* and *Run DMC*, which prominently featured DJs, today’s hip-hop stars have producers, who, like Timbaland, may be famous but who generally operate behind the scenes. Hip-hop *music*,
then, as opposed to vocals, tends to be invisible. Visually, all attention is on the singer/rapper, not on who is making the music or how it is made. By removing most or all of the apparatus of electronic music—synthesizers, drum machines, mixing boards, DJ turntables—from videos and/or live performances, hip-hop brought electronic music into the mainstream somewhat by sleight of hand.

24. Ibid.
25. Ibid., 65–66.
29. Ke$ha, “We R Who We R.”
31. Ibid., 60–61.
35. Ibid.
41. Levitas, *Concept of Utopia*, 87.
42. Brewster and Broughton, *Last Night a DJ Saved My Life*, 272.
44. Shapiro, *Turn the Beat Around*, 190.

47. Ibid., 341, 346.
49. Ibid., 39. See also Levitas, *Concept of Utopia*, 87.
52. Ibid., 139.
53. “Just Dance” was released in the United States on April 8, 2008, and became a club hit before debuting on the *Billboard* Hot 100 in August (#76) and taking twenty-two weeks to reach the top spot on January 17, 2009. See the Chart Archive at http://www.billboard.com.
57. Ibid., 178.
59. Ibid., 81–82; my emphasis.
61. Ibid., 92.
70. Ibid., 11.
75. Harrison, “Pet Shop Boys Talk for Britain,” 106.
78. Zamyatin, We, 5.
80. Pet Shop Boys, “This Used to Be the Future,” on Yes, etc., Astralwerks 5099969 64713, 2009, compact disc.
82. Pet Shop Boys, “This Used to Be the Future.”
83. In Harrison, “Pet Shop Boys Talk for Britain,” Tennant and Lowe discuss their fondness for Doctor Who. Tennant recalls that during his childhood, “every Saturday night on BBC1 we had Doctor Who followed by Dee Time and then The Monkees” (106).
85. Pet Shop Boys, “This Used to Be the Future.”
86. Pet Shop Boys, “More than a Dream,” on Yes, etc.
87. Bloch, Principle of Hope, 7; my emphasis.
Interview
"There Is No Silence": An Interview with Marge Piercy

Elton Furlanetto

ABSTRACT
This is an interview with Marge Piercy that took place in October 2012 on Cape Cod, Massachusetts.

KEYWORDS: interview, contemporary dystopias

Born in 1936, Marge Piercy was raised by “a typical patriarchal working-class family in inner-city Detroit” (1982, 6). A bout of German measles followed by rheumatic fever took young Piercy out of the streets and put her in contact with the world of books. Always curious, she participated in her school committee’s fight for improvements, and she later earned a scholarship to study at the University of Michigan. One of the most relevant aspects of her youth was the impression she had of herself: Piercy has written that she “felt the wrong shape, size, sex, volume level, class, and emotional coloration” (1982, 117). At university, in the fifties, things did not change, and “everything that moved [her] at first contact (Whitman, Dickinson) turned out to be déclassé or irrelevant to the mainstream, the tradition” (Piercy 1982, 114).
The decade of the 1960s would be a watershed in Piercy’s experience, as well as that of many others in her generation who later became involved in utopian thought and practice. The social changes that unfolded in the United States and worldwide inspired her and put her in contact with others who were equally committed to fight for a different world. As a result, she became active in the civil rights, women’s, and antiwar movements. In an earlier interview, Piercy observed: “As there were movements that arose, and occasion to do things, I duly arose. Since I’ve been fifteen I’ve identified with the Left, and racism was a big festering sore out of my childhood I had to think about and deal with. I cared about women’s issues before I could understand them. For so long I lacked a vocabulary. I’m something but what that something was, I didn’t know” (1982, 143).

Piercy began writing as a child and kept on doing so throughout the most difficult periods of her life. Her first poetry collection, Breaking Camp, was published in 1968, and her first novel, Going Down Fast, in 1969. Since then, she has written and published more than forty titles, including seventeen novels, eighteen collections of poetry, a play, and nonfiction. Three of her books were written in collaboration with her husband, Ira Wood.

I was introduced to Piercy’s work early on in my studies of science fiction, when I first read her two most celebrated novels, Woman on the Edge of Time (1976) and He, She and It (1991). Both are based on a combination of positive and negative imaginative projections of the future. Woman on the Edge of Time includes a realistic telling of the life in the 1970s of the protagonist, Connie Ramos, a Chicana in New York City unjustly held in a mental hospital. She is contacted by another character, Luciente, who encourages her to project herself into two radically different futures: a utopian society, Mattapoisett, where the political agendas of the radical movements for emancipation have been achieved; and a much darker future, where the dividing line between person and thing has been erased.

Since its initial publication, Woman on the Edge of Time has been the subject of a large body of scholarly attention. Tom Moylan, in his seminal study, Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination (1986), describes the novel as a prime example of the “critical utopia.” The main characteristic of such works, Moylan maintains, is that they are self-reflexive, focusing on the limitations of the utopian tradition: “The apparently unified, illusionary, and representational text of the more traditional utopia is broken open and presented in a manner which is, first of all,
much more fragmented. . . . The critical utopian text includes much more commentary on the operations of the text itself. . . . More aware of the limits of the traditional utopias and the totalizing tendencies of consumer capitalism and bureaucratic states, the critical utopias keep the utopian impulse alive by challenging it and deconstructing it within its very pages” (1986, 46). Furthermore, Moylan argues that critical utopias more effectively articulate the tension between the utopian societies and the empirical worlds from which they arise, highlighting the persistence of imperfections in the utopian counterpart. Other critics such as Anne Cranny-Frances (1990), Chris Ferns (1999), and Peter Ruppert (1986) dedicate at least one chapter of their books to the novel. Fredric Jameson invokes Woman on the Edge of Time at a number of places in his monumental study, Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions (2005, 13, 137, 187, 211, 233, 289). Younger scholars continue to engage with the novel, as does, for example, Katherine Broad (2012) in her recent dissertation.

He, She and It consists of two parallel story lines: one is set in a dystopian near-future dominated by multinationals and in which the character Shira attempts to reclaim custody of her son. The second narrative is related by Malkah, Shira’s grandmother, and focuses on the story of Joseph, a Golem created in the sixteenth century by Rabbi Judah Loew to protect a Jewish ghetto in Prague from increasing Christian hatred and violence. The novel is the topic of essays by Peter Fitting, Vara Neverow, June Deery, and Helen A. Kuryllo in a 1994 issue of Utopian Studies (“Featured Articles on He, She and It” 1994), which also includes an introductory note by Piercy herself. Moylan, in his later study Scraps of the Untainted Sky, locates He, She and It in the tradition of the “critical dystopia,” as a work that negotiates “the necessary pessimism of the generic dystopia with an open, militant, utopian stance that not only breaks through the hegemonic enclosure of the text’s alternative world but also self-reflexively refuses the anti-utopian temptation that lingers like a dormant virus in every dystopian account” (2000, 195).

Both novels are of particular interest to me as a young scholar and activist living in Brazil because they relate directly to the current global situation. As we live through an ongoing reorganization of oppositional politics, especially after the crises in the previous decades brought on by the rise of the New Right in the Anglo-American context, military dictatorships in the Brazilian and Latin American situations, and neoliberalism across the globe, it is vitally necessary to return to earlier debates about political organization, the uses of
violence, and historical memory. Moreover, imagining alternatives and ways to actualize them, especially in dystopic times, has become once again the order of the day. It is to all of these agendas that Piercy’s work has a great deal to contribute.

I first contacted Piercy through her Facebook account, and after I explained my interest in her work, she agreed to an interview, which took place in October 2012, at a restaurant in the beautiful little town she lives in on Cape Cod, Massachusetts, and at her home among the marshes.3

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Elton Furlanetto (EF): First off, are you currently working on any novel?

Marge Piercy (MP): I have a novel with my agent, but we are having a lot of trouble getting it published.

EF : Why?

MP: I’m seventy-six years old.

EF : But I thought this would give you more respectability.

MP: No. All of the editors are Ivy League in their twenties now; all the old editors are fired. They don’t give a shit what you’ve written or published earlier. They prefer first novels and novels about their own kind of people. So I am having a lot of trouble having it published in New York. I’ll probably go to a small press. But I am working on a volume of short stories.4 I have a contract for PM Press. PM Press is an anarchist press, and they’ve republished some of my early political novels. They’ve done two; now they are going to do the third one.

EF : Like Dance the Eagle to Sleep?

MP: Dance the Eagle to Sleep was republished with a new introduction last December; then in January they brought up Vida. And early next year, I am not sure the proper date, they are bringing out Braided Lives.5 I haven’t written short stories in about twenty-five years. I rewrote some of the early ones, and I’ve written about eight new ones, and I’ll write some more. I had to stop because there is this thing called The Port Huron Statement, which launched the New Left in the United States. I was very active in Students for a Democratic Society, which was a huge anarchist organization, with way over a million members. They were involved in antiwar stuff. Well, so I’ve been asked to speak at a conference. It is the fiftieth year after Port Huron Statement, which launched the whole
thing. And so I’ve been asked to speak where it all started and I went to school, so I am writing a speech for them in the University of Michigan campus.6

EF : The novel you said you are trying to publish, what is it about?

MP: I’d say greed, families, and land. Land use.

EF : Some of your novels like Going Down Fast or Fly Away Home deal with the question of real estate. How did you feel when real estate investment triggered the financial crisis?

MP: It was the question of the banks, rather than real estate. The greed of the bank and the financial institutions, Wall Street, this is what caused it.

EF : What’s your opinion about feminism or feminist utopianisms in the twenty-first century? Once you said feminism was a dirty word. Is it still so?

MP: Yes, the media really always is saying that feminism is dead and so forth. And a lot of women will say, “I’m not a feminist, but I expect equal pay for equal work.” I have heard a woman say, “I’m not voting for Romney because he is, for example, not supporting abortions, he wants to ban abortion, but I am not a feminist.” They don’t like the word. It’s like socialist.

EF : People say that socialists became a legend after the Berlin Wall came down. . . .

MP: They still exist; they’re just not visible in the media.

EF : Is utopia possible after 9/11?

MP: I don’t think 9/11 has anything to do with it, but utopia tends to be possible when people are coming to consciousness. And they have enough energy to think about something better. In the first wave of women’s movement, and the middle years of the second wave of women’s movement, there were lots of feminist utopias produced and also a lot of socialist utopias, working-class utopias, etc. But when people are fighting very hard to stay in the same place, to retain the rights they have already won, and are losing, then there is not enough energy to create utopias. Also with real wages having dropped so much, people work two or three jobs for what you could easily live on with a part-time job in the sixties.

EF : Who do you think are the people nowadays who are making a difference both politically and culturally?
MP: A lot of grassroots. When they kicked the Occupy movements out of their places, they weakened them a lot because they didn’t have a central place. One of the strengths of the Occupy movement was there was a central place where people could go and talk politics, launch demonstrations, launch actions, etc. Without that, it’s much harder.

EF : So these movements had a lack of concreteness?

MP: I mean a real physical place because a lot of things happen in cyberspace, a lot of demonstrations are organized in cyberspace.

EF : Do you think it is effective, this online militancy?

MP: Yes, it is a good way to get people to move.

EF : But don’t you think there are people that are acting only online?

MP: That’s possible.

EF : And culturally speaking?

MP: A lot of the women who came up with me in women’s movement are dead. So that changes things a lot. But I’m online with a lot of them, and we discuss things constantly.

EF : Could you tell me a bit more about your involvement with utopianism?

MP: I set out with Woman on the Edge of Time consciously in the utopian tradition. The utopias that men have created are very rigid, everything very well defined, often a caste system, etc. I am more interested in the type of utopias women have created. Basically women’s utopias have been places where what women do not have can exist—i.e., a sense of community, since many women are isolated while raising their children. A place where women are not punished for their sexuality, a place where raising children is communal or quasi-communal, a place where in old age people are respected and taken care of. A place where a lot of the tasks that are denigrated in this society are respected; for instance, in Herland the teachers are the most respected. We treat day care workers as not well paid, like people who take out the garbage, which is an important thing to do also. All these tasks, which are very important, we don’t reward. We reward people pushing a ball through a hoop, people who take over corporations and destroy them; we reward people who manipulate stocks or manipulate imaginary entities and make a whole lot of money doing it, other people’s money they play with. These are the things we reward most highly, like being famous, sometimes just
for being famous, like [Keeping Up with] The Kardashians. In most women’s utopias, either money has been abolished, or people are respected according to how socially useful their skills are: Are they healers? Arbitrators? Teachers? People who take care of children? People who produce objects of use? People who raise food? People who do the things society really needs?

EF: There is a very important connection with nature and polytheism in Woman on the Edge of Time that you don’t have with He, She and It.

MP: Well, you do inside the city [of Tikva], not in the larger society. In fact, nature has been largely destroyed. Something we are very much engaged in. Isaac Asimov once said, “All science fiction consists of what if, if only, and if this continues. . . .” Woman on the Edge of Time was mostly “if only.” He, She and It is mostly “if this continues.” And it’s continued so much more rapidly than I or anybody imagined at that time I was doing research for it. It’s here. I live in a place that has gone from zone 6 to zone 7, in a place where the ocean has changed, storms are different, where everything is much more extreme. We used to have what we called the mild climate, it didn’t get that cold, it didn’t get that warm. Now if it gets cold, it can get very cold, and if it gets warm . . . this last year was the hottest year on record here.

EF: And it’s funny that there are a handful of scientists that say these changes are normal: Earth is always changing and we have nothing to do with it.

MP: Yes, I know, and they are nuts. You can see what we’ve done. When I first moved here, you’d walk on the beach, and you’d see some egg casings, whelk shells, moon snail shells. You walk on the beach, what do you see? You see the covers of tampons, broken plastic bottles, clumps of oil, this is what you see now. We are killing the ocean. One of the things that this enormous project, this Huron River project, is trying to do is to restore some of that, to try to restore what has been ruined in the last 130 years, to a state where it can sustain life, natural beings, all the things that belong here instead of this polluted thing.

EF: Do you see a new generation also, feeding on what you’ve produced and done?

MP: No, not feeding on it, but they are starting things from scratch. They don’t seem to know many things about many events and strategies and successes and failures in the past. History disappears in the United States, vanishes.
EF: But that is not positive, I suppose.

MP: No, it is horrible. It means you are constantly reinventing the wheel. There have been some interesting things, like the SlutWalks, and that was spontaneous and spread very quickly. That was very interesting to me.

EF: Did you see any problems with that?

MP: No I didn’t. I thought it was fine. You can judge societies’ attitudes toward women with how little clothing a woman can safely appear in public—for example, in the Scandinavian countries women can be seen topless. Nobody bothers them.

EF: What about what the media makes of that? Like that Ukrainian group, FEMEN, which protests naked, and people say they lose their political power because they become spectacle.

MP: I don’t know anything about them, but spectacle is extremely important to making a political statement. Rosa Parks, who started much of the civil rights movements, what she did was orchestrated, that was arranged, it was spectacle. We did political action spectacle, political street theater in New York during the garbage strike. When the city wasn’t negotiating with workers, we organized people from the Lower Side to carry their garbage into Lincoln Center and dump it there. That’s spectacle that spoke to people. There is an element of theater in successful politics, so that people can see what you’re talking about.

EF: You told me before people are forgetting a lot. Could you elaborate on that?

MP: First of all, everybody lives in the media moment, and the media does not give you history. Even the History channel doesn’t any longer give you history at all, just Pawn Stars, Hillbilly Handfishin’, and total nonsense about ancient aliens. It started out giving history, and although it didn’t go much further back than World War II, it used to be at least that history. Basically Americans live in the media moment a lot; what is important is what celebrities are doing at the moment. Well, George Clooney cares about me as much as I care about him. It’s manufactured filled space, it fills your consciousness, instead of thinking about problems, about life in any serious way. If you notice the amount of noise that Americans live with: You walk into a mall, you walk into a train station, into your dentist’s office, even just standing outside McDonald’s,
there is always music, candy music playing; you’re in the dentist’s office, doctor’s office, a supermarket, wherever you go, there is no silence. Silence is terribly important for consciousness. People hardly ever have any time to think anymore. Standing in line, what do you do? You take out your phone, and you play Angry Birds or something. You see your e-mail. You don’t ever just sit somewhere. If you want to do that, you call it meditation. And you have to learn to do that, and it’s hard to learn, because we are not trained to do that.

**EF**: Is that related to the in-knowing process that you describe in *Woman on the Edge of Time*?

**MP**: For me, silence is tremendously important, but I am aware that even my husband, who is fourteen years younger than me, is much less comfortable with silence than I am. I love silence. I didn’t grow up with it. Ours was a tiny asbestos shack where everything was together in a small space. But I love silence; that’s one of the reasons that I love about living here. I can have silence. In the city, silence is a premium; only if you are quite wealthy can you buy any silence. We’ve learned to live with a level of noise and distraction that I think is very unhealthy. Women’s utopias of the second wave of feminism, not the first wave, tend to be ecologically interested and devoted to that, to the preservation of what is wild.

**EF**: How do you evaluate today the impacts of *Woman on the Edge of Time* and *He, She and It*?

**MP**: With *He, She and It*, it’s happening much faster than I or any of the scientists realized when I was doing that research. Global warming isn’t a theory; it’s here, it’s happening, it’s already on. We’re experiencing it.

**EF**: If you were writing *Woman on the Edge of Time* today, how do you think the protagonist, Connie Ramos, would be?

**MP**: She’d be dumped in the streets, really loaded up on drugs.

**EF**: There would be no visitor from the future?

**MP**: Probably not.

**EF**: A question about the cyborg main character in *He, She and It*, which was a curiosity I had. . . . Why did Yod have that tragic ending, sacrificing himself to save the free city of Tikva?
MP: Because he was programmed to kill. It’s the same reason why, if you accept a metaphor, when you train a soldier, you take a young man, an eighteen-, nineteen-year-old man, you send him up and teach him to kill, he becomes bad. He sees enormous atrocities; he is never the same. Adjusting to civilian life is something very few can do very easily. And some never do. So in a sense they were killed. I was hoping that people would see that, an analogy that hardly anyone ever has.

EF: Some people criticize Woman in the Edge of Time and He, She and It as violent novels. What do you think of this criticism?

MP: I think we live in a very violent world. I live in a very violent country. And we do violence all over the world. So I think if writers can’t deal with violence, they are stuck in a very tight world, very tidy world.

EF: But do you think that with time this violence will decrease?

MP: I don’t see it.

EF: If people claim they are pacifists, they are going to have problems fighting against a militarized state, for example?

MP: Yes, I think this is a problem. I think nonviolence works against societies which have at least the pretense of being democracies and republics and having parliamentary procedures. It doesn’t work at all against people who are very willing to kill. And even when the government is just very powerful, I don’t think nonviolence will get you anywhere in places like Syria or Russia, where they don’t like protest. Now in Russia, they may not shoot you, but they have no problem putting you in jail, even for mild protests like the Pussy Riots.

EF: How important was science fiction to your background?

MP: I’ve always liked it because it offers alternatives. It frees the imagination in the same way that magical realism did. You don’t just imagine more of the same.

EF: What about the other side of it like fantasy, like Harry Potter and all that?

MP: I have to tell you I really like the R. R. Martin’s “Fire and Ice” series; I like it a whole lot. So I do like some fantasy. Harry Potter is not really my cup of tea. I read some of it but was not very interested. R. R. Martin is much more interesting. His characters are much more developed,
nobody is good or bad, they all have their own agendas, which may or may not be good for other people. It’s much more psychologically realistic and politically realistic.

EF: Which authors did you read and identify with?

MP: I was not very interested in male science fiction when I started reading science fiction, because all they could imagine was the same thing, but happening in Mars or in the stars. Princesses, emperors, that kind of thing. Ursula Le Guin I found very interesting. Joanna Russ. She was a good friend; she died last year. The communication with her was very good.

EF: I was reading *The Female Man* when I heard that she died. And I was reading *The Illustrated Man* when I heard Ray Bradbury had died.

MP: Ray Bradbury I’ve read and I liked reasonably well; I was not crazy about him as I was with Russ or Le Guin. When you get to seventy-six you start forgetting names. There was a woman who lived in Toronto. I met her, I liked her, and I liked her science fiction; she played with sex roles also: Judith Merril. I just taught her granddaughter. In June I run a Juried Intensive Poetry Workshop. Many people apply, but few are chosen. It’s held in Wellfleet every June, and her granddaughter was in my class. Judith Merril wrote feminist science fiction earlier, and she dealt with sex roles. She is dead now. She was very nice; I liked her. I liked spending some time with her.

EF: Do you feel uncomfortable if people identify some of your work as science fiction?

MP: No. I think it is ridiculous to think it is a less important genre. It’s much more interesting than mainstream fiction about people’s angst: Good science fiction deals with important issues, and often mainstream fiction doesn’t. I mean good science fiction, because there is a lot of crap in any genre. There is a lot of crappy poetry, for instance.

EF: Can you tell me some things that writing your novels taught you?

MP: I write two kinds of novels: one is more contemporary novels about relationships and so forth. The others are the more political novels, either in speculative literature fiction or historical fiction or playing with time, which includes *Dance the Eagle to Sleep; Woman on the Edge of Time; Braided Lives; He, She and It; City of Darkness, City of Light*; and *Sex Wars*. Those are the ones that seem more serious to me.
EF: In what sense are they more serious?
MP: In the sense they grasp or grapple with larger issues.
EF: What is your relationship with your readers? Do you have any feedback from them?
MP: I’m on Facebook, so they communicate with me. Recently, somebody sent me a very nasty message on Facebook. About a hundred people responded.
EF: Was it a criticism?
MP: It said, “I’m sorry I ever read your books. They ruined my life, you should be deeply ashamed.”
EF: So, do you have an idea who is reading you?
MP: Not really, you can never really tell. I give so many poetry readings, and I meet a lot of people. They are the readers of my poetry. The readers of my poetry and the readers of my fiction overlap somewhat but not that much.
EF: What is the relationship of people with poetry?
MP: Anything that has to be read has much less relationship with people than it used to, because people mostly don’t read books anymore. And obviously from what I see on the Internet, there seems to be more people reading my poetry now than reading my fiction, maybe because you read it faster. If you google me, you are going to find hundreds of my poems that people stuck on the Internet.
EF: I am one of them [laughter]. Constantly, when I was researching I would run into a new poem.
MP: But sometimes they get it wrong, and it drives me crazy because there is nothing I can do about it. They misquote them. It drives me crazy.
EF: Because you are always revising your poems.
MP: Some of them were first published in magazine form, and they are finished as published. Others, oftentimes, the first time I read them in public I go home and revise; you hear what doesn’t work much more critically. And then the ones I collect in book form, whether they’ve been previously published or not, a number of those are revised before they are in book form. And some I still change when I read them even in books, things have changed, or it makes more sense not to say one thing and to say another.
EF: Do you think your protagonists today would be more dystopic? Normally they learn something about themselves, about their bodies, how to control their lives somehow. There is a line, for example, with Connie, in which she decides to leave the position of object and become subject of her actions. But Melissa Dickenson, the protagonist in your novel *The Third Child*, didn’t seem to have this.

MP: She didn’t at all. Because that’s not the kind of character I was writing about. I was writing about someone who lies to themselves, who does not have consciousness and is not learning to understand themselves or their position. That’s why people do not like it. But in *Sex Wars*, those characters change a great deal. In my recent as-yet-unpublished novel, there are three character viewpoints, and two of them change their consciousness. One of them is an elderly woman supposedly at the end of her life, and she is trying to protect certain things and trying to figure out how to outwit her daughter, who wants to develop all the land. Both she and her granddaughter change.

EF: How did you feel when [Barack] Obama was elected president?

MP: I work for him. My husband went up for him in Vermont, from door to door. I did phone calls.

EF: So you think it was something important. A kind of change. . . .

MP: Well, it was better than the other, [John] McCain. I wasn’t crazy about Obama, I didn’t fall in love with him the way other people did, but I thought he was a lot better than the other. I’d rather have Hillary [Clinton]. She was tougher; I think she’d have been able to get more through Congress.

EF: Could you give some hints for people who are starting to write?

MP: Read. And learn to read like a writer, which means looking at how things are done, and you learn as much as from the books you don’t like as you do with the ones that you do. Why didn’t that work? Why didn’t I believe that? Why did that feel great to me? How do they use dialogue? How do they move things forward? How do they create pacing? How do they get you to identify with characters, if they want you to? Sometimes authors don’t want you to identify with characters. I don’t want you to identify with Melissa; I want you to observe her.

MP: I really couldn’t identify with her. . . .
EF: You’re not supposed to. I think it’s probably one of my least attractive novels, least successful novels.

EF: But did you expect this kind of reaction?

MP: It’s just I am not sure that I brought it off. It was a different type of novel, but I found that often college students to this day like it enormously; they identify with it.

EF: To conclude, some people complain that even though you are political, your style is pretty much realistic, not very avant-garde. How do you respond to that?

MP: First of all, if you want to reach people, you don’t try to make this as obtuse as possible, you don’t try to keep people out. Second, it is often harder for a poet to write simply than to write a more oblique poem: it is a lot more work, a lot more craft.

Notes

2. For an alternative reading of the novel, see McAlear 2010.
3. I am greatly indebted and thankful to Phillip Wegner, who helped me with the editing of the interview and with his support during my sabbatical at the University of Florida, and to Marge Piercy for all the help with the transcription of the audio of this interview.
4. The Cost of Lunch, Etc.: Short Stories was published in April 2014 by PM Press.
5. Dance the Eagle to Sleep was originally published in 1970; Vida, in 1979; and Braided Lives, in 1982. They were reprinted by PM Press, respectively, in 2012, 2011, and 2013.
6. In June 1962, a group of activists belonging to Students for a Democratic Society met in Port Huron, Michigan, to draft a manifesto for a new era of protest. The Port Huron Statement assembled principles of the Black Freedom struggle, the peace movement, and the anticolonial revolutions. It aimed at a radical vision of social justice and what democracy in action could mean—and it represented an awakening to a New Left movement that would soon impact the world at large. Piercy refers here to a three-day conference, “A New Insurgency: The Port Huron Statement in Its Time and Ours,” which took place on the University of Michigan campus in Ann Arbor from October 31 to November 2, 2012.
7. Piercy refers here to the American manifestation of the protest movements that were part of an international effort to fight against social and economic inequalities. Local groups had different objectives, but the movements in general were seeking for less vertically hierarchical political relations in society and a more distributive economy.
8. The SlutWalks were a protest march initiated in Toronto, Canada, with subsequent rallies happening worldwide. The protesters were mostly women who were fighting for the end of rape culture and the right to dress and behave as they please instead of being forced to submit to patriarchal rules.

Works Cited


Discrimination and Violence in Alfarabi’s Virtuous City: A Response to Alireza Omid Bakhsh

Robert L’Arrivee

ABSTRACT
In a 2013 issue of Utopian Studies, Alireza Omid Bakhsh argues that Alfarabi established the foundation of Iranian and Islamic utopianism. According to Bakhsh, Alfarabi bases utopianism on (1) a conception of justice that resists social discrimination and (2) opposition to violence. While social equality and nonviolence are worthy political aspirations, Alfarabi does not endorse them in the way Bakhsh suggests. In actuality, Alfarabi’s view of justice entails that the virtuous society should be hierarchically organized according to the inherent worth of individuals and the tasks they perform. Alfarabi also allows some leeway for offensive wars to enforce happiness. In addition, he advises the virtuous ruler to use coercion against rebellious individuals he calls “weeds” and to enslave or execute feral human beings who roam the wild. Bakhsh’s misinterpretation masks these crucial issues and, consequently, Alfarabi’s nuanced theoretical reflections on the virtuous city and the political realities it faces.

KEYWORDS: Alfarabi, virtuous city, Arabic philosophy, justice, Islam
Recently, I had the good fortune of reading Alireza Omid Bakhsh’s piece on the foundation of Iranian and Islamic utopianism. Bakhsh makes a strong case that Alfarabi establishes the foundation of such utopianism in the *Virtuous City*, a famous work on political theory that is widely recognized for synthesizing classical Greek philosophy and Islamic principles. Bakhsh suggests that the *Virtuous City* is more than a mere theoretical exercise in constructing utopian models. Rather, he argues that Alfarabi’s “utopian thought as a whole” offers practical proposals to reform Baghdad and other political entities in the hopes of restoring “genuine Islamic life to a universal world state.” In my view, Bakhsh has contributed to our understanding of Alfarabi’s theoretical reflections on utopianism and the practical realities of his time.

That being said, I take issue with Bakhsh’s portrayal of Alfarabi’s virtuous city and instead offer an alternate theoretical description of it. Because Bakhsh’s presentation of the virtuous city is flawed, it cannot be used as the foundation for assessing Alfarabi’s contribution to non-Western utopian theory or the idea of the “utopia” in general. Moreover, the failure to grasp the theoretical nuances of the virtuous city inevitably obscures the unlikelihood of its practical implementation. Specifically, I critique two of Bakhsh’s central claims regarding the character of the virtuous city. His first claim is that Alfarabi’s conception of justice fosters equality between the social classes and mutual recognition that is free from contempt or discrimination. Second, he states that Alfarabi categorically opposes violence—especially when used to spread morality and happiness to imperfect political communities—in favor of reform through philosophic education. But when put into practice, Alfarabi’s theory of the virtuous city requires the rigorous stratification of society and may require certain forms of internal violence and offensive warfare against vicious cities.

I contend that Bakhsh overstates the sections in Alfarabi’s *Virtuous City* that emphasize peace and equality. Moreover, Bakhsh does not analyze enough of Alfarabi’s other writings that explicitly discuss the virtuous city to support his claims about Alfarabi’s political thought as a whole. A satisfactory picture of the utopian state can only emerge when we attend to the details of the *Virtuous City* while also looking at the other texts. Bakhsh’s laudable promotion of justice and philosophic education leads him to downplay some of the unfortunate realities of utopian politics that Alfarabi tackles head-on. By reconsidering discrimination and violence in Alfarabi’s portrayal of the virtuous city, I hope to illuminate key features of justice,
education, and the use of force that virtue-centered utopian theory must take into account. This illumination will call into question Bakhsh’s claim that Alfarabi intends the Virtuous City to be a practical political proposal (however attractive this proposal may be). Both the problem with Bakhsh’s interpretation and the inspiration behind my alternative can be gleaned from the extended title of the Virtuous City: The Principles of the Opinions of the Inhabitants of the Virtuous City. By drawing our attention to the opinions that lead to virtue, Alfarabi invites us to recognize that the virtuous city may not be easily instantiated in the world. In other words, the details of the Virtuous City in conjunction with other texts that consider fundamental political exigencies demonstrate the difficulty in attempting to bring “that pattern laid up in heaven to the earth.”

Hearts, Brains, Bladders, and Intestines: A Consideration of Discrimination in the Virtuous City

Bakhsh begins his analysis of justice with the definition of the virtuous city. A city is defined as virtuous when its people cooperate to attain the plurality of goods that lead to happiness. However, happiness is not the only condition for establishing the virtuous city. Bakhsh rightly observes that “justice is the base of the virtuous state” and that “the disturbance of equality, Farabi believes, will lead to a vicious state.” This means that mutual cooperation between the city’s people and the diverse groups they form is only effective for achieving happiness when they act in harmony with the principles of justice. Bakhsh thus brings to light that the virtuous city not only aims at happiness but also follows the dictates of justice by organizing its people and social groups according to their natural endowments and meritorious actions. Although Bakhsh is clearly aware that justice involves rank and hierarchy, he overstates the degree to which Alfarabi’s view of justice promotes our ideas of equality and social cohesion. In fact, he distinctly distorts Alfarabi’s meaning of the word equality here, for in actuality, Alfarabi is referring to the distribution of discriminated value.

Bakhsh’s first remark on justice is as follows:

Similar to its predecessors, The Virtuous City also discusses social classes. Farabi’s virtuous state has five ministries—education, culture,
administration, economy, and defense; and consequently, the citizens of the virtuous state are classified into five groups, among which philosophers are of the highest rank. . . . There is no discrimination between different classes. The virtuous state, as explained above, is the state administered by the best and most talented ruler, who aims at prosperity and happiness for all. If its constitution fails to provide the people with prosperity, and the rulers do not possess the qualities of virtuous rulers, then the state ceases to be virtuous and becomes a vicious state.8

In Bakhsh’s view the cooperation among the five social classes evinces that discrimination is almost entirely absent from the virtuous state. He claims that one of the hallmarks of Alfarabi’s utopian politics is that citizens enjoy a high degree of equality and social unity that is decidedly not celebrated by previous utopian theorists such as Plato. For Bakhsh, Alfarabi offers a novel conception of justice and the organization of the state superior to that of Plato and the classical Greek philosophic tradition.

In his second remark Bakhsh elaborates on the distinction between Platonic and Alfarabian utopianism by suggesting that Plato’s theory is too abstract and the Virtuous City, unlike Plato’s Republic, is free from discrimination:

He [Alfarabi] avoids abstract theorization in portraying his utopia; instead he illustrates and exemplifies his theories and attempts to scrutinize each subject, from different aspects. The comparison of the virtuous state with a healthy body and different possibilities of the virtuous and faulty states and the discussions of human beings—the citizens and the rulers of the different states—from various points of view make his utopia more concrete and easy to understand, whereas the abstract style of other philosophical utopias makes them complicated. Whereas in a great classic such as Plato’s Republic discrimination is quite discernible, as it was in the Hellenistic states, the Roman Empire, and the Muslim world in Farabi’s day, and fighting guardians and soldiers who were in the lowest social classes were held in contempt, in Farabi’s utopia such people are considered as full citizens of the virtuous state, and there is no discrimination between different social classes.9
Here again Bakhsh emphasizes the absence of discrimination in Alfarabi’s utopia. This passage further illustrates that Bakhsh extends the notion of discrimination beyond the question of citizenship. That is, he claims that Alfarabi (unlike Plato and Aristotle) advocates a genuine sense of equality among the various social classes beyond the mere possession of formal or legal membership. Thus, for Bakhsh, freedom from discrimination entails equal citizenship for all the social classes in the city and the absence of any contempt among them. The implication is that the social classes mutually grant each other equal value within the city. But Alfarabi is far from supporting a view of equality that is free from discrimination. If we take a closer look at Alfarabi’s notion of justice in the *Virtuous City* and the body/city analogy cited by Bakhsh, we will see that Alfarabi is much closer to Plato than Bakhsh would lead us to believe.

In the *Virtuous City*, Alfarabi introduces the concept of justice in his discussion of the emanation of the universe from the First Cause or God. He states that we may call the First Cause just “in as much as all the existents receive their order of rank from it, and each existent receives from the First its allotted share of existence in accordance with its rank.” An existent’s “rank” is the essential factor for determining its place within the order of being. The rank of an existent within the order of the whole is derived from its specific mode of excellence and perfection. The key components of justice are therefore rank, order, and excellence, all of which play crucial roles for Alfarabi, who characteristically “describes a world filled with rank and hierarchy.” In sum, justice refers to the hierarchical ordering of parts according to their inherent worth or excellence. As Wayne Hankey points out, Alfarabi’s emphasis on order is a development of the Platonic notion of justice: “The perfect state of Al-Fârâbî clearly has the Republic of Plato as its model. For Plato, justice is an order of the parts in accord with a structural harmony.” Alfarabi’s Platonic view of rank and order gives him the conceptual space to consider various kinds of things in terms of justice. The multiple levels of the cosmos, different species, individuals, the constituents of hylomorphic structures (matter and form), the powers of the soul, the limbs and organs of a body, and so on can be ordered justly or not. With respect to the virtuous city, the parts mainly involved in ranking and organization are its citizens and their social groups.

Based on this view of justice, the five social classes that Bakhsh identifies ought to be arranged hierarchically. These social classes, however, are
not found in the text of the *Virtuous City* but, rather, appear in Alfarabi’s *Aphorisms*. Alfarabi gives us no indication in the *Virtuous City* of what the specific social classes or groups are. Instead he uses the analogy between the structure of the body and the mutual cooperation of citizens to explicate how we should understand justice (and concomitantly rank, order, and excellence). While Bakhsh mentions this analogy several times in his essay, he overlooks the specific examples—and the implications of these examples—that Alfarabi uses to build his case. He particularly overlooks the two bodily parts that clarify the kind of discrimination prevalent in the virtuous city: the bladder and intestines. Alfarabi states that the bladder and lower intestines are analogous to citizens who perform the least honorable of actions in the service of superior citizens whose tasks are more excellent and noble. A closer look at this analogy reveals the evaluative difference between the various actions that citizens perform in conformity with justice for the sake of individual and communal happiness.

Alfarabi observes that the social groups that compose the virtuous city are arranged according to a determined rank in a way analogous to the hierarchical organization of the parts of a body. The heart, for instance, rules the whole body by directing the various organs and limbs to achieve a common end, such as self-preservation or pleasure. Correspondingly, the sovereign steers the city toward a specified telos (i.e., happiness) with commands issued to subordinates and auxiliaries. These subordinates and auxiliaries then command their own servants and assistants in order to implement the will of the heart/king. The body and city are thus structured in a “top-down” ruler–ruled schema, until we reach the lowest rung of society, where only the ruled exist. In the virtuous city, the lowest citizens merely serve, while the sovereign rules without serving anyone else. The majority of citizens find themselves between these extremes; they obey those above and rule those below. Citizens are typically placed in an intermediate position because most individuals are born to serve, with only some capability for ruling. Alfarabi writes, “Not every art is suitable for rulership, most of the arts, indeed, are rather suited for service within the city, just as most men are by their very nature born to serve.”

This descending structure of ruling and being ruled is what Alfarabi means by civic cooperation in accordance with the principles of justice. The various stratified social groups in the city give and follow orders in turn, leading the city as a whole toward happiness. While each citizen and group has a
part to play in the hierarchical structure of the city, their actions are ranked according to their inherent worth. As Alfarabi states in the quotation above, the multitude of arts and practices in the virtuous city involved in ruling and being ruled are not created equal. Alfarabi’s body/city analogy makes abundantly clear that some jobs are more honorable than others, despite their utility for helping the city achieve happiness. He writes,

In the same way the parts of the city which are close in authority to the ruler of the city perform the most noble voluntary actions, and those below them less noble actions, until eventually the parts are reached which perform the most ignoble actions. The inferiority of such actions is sometimes due to the inferiority of their matter, although they may be extremely useful—like the action of the bladder and the action of the lower intestine in the body; sometimes it is due to their being of little use; at other times it is due to their being very easy to perform.¹⁹

The bladder and the lower intestine are examples of bodily parts that merely serve, as they do not rule any other part of the body, and perform the most ignoble actions. For the city, Alfarabi provides three criteria for discriminating the worth of actions in political life: (1) the “subject matter” or content of the action, (2) an action’s utility, and (3) its ease of execution. The three criteria immediately raise a crucial question: What is the standard by which we measure the value of an action’s content, usefulness, and relative ease?

While it is beyond the scope of this essay to offer a full explication of Alfarabi’s criterion of rank, I will briefly point out what it is and how it functions. The rank of something in the hierarchy of being is based upon its perfection and excellence. A city becomes excellent (or virtuous) when its citizens cooperate to attain the various goods that lead to its telos. If we take happiness as the telos of the virtuous city, an action’s capacity to achieve happiness is the criterion by which we judge its merit. This, of course, raises the difficult question of what happiness is. The difficulty runs even deeper when we take into account that Alfarabi divides happiness into its earthly and ultimate forms, where the latter is enjoyed by virtuous citizens in the afterlife. Ultimate happiness is attained when citizens approach the rank of the Active Intellect.²⁰ On earth, however, most individuals are not capable of even an approximate theoretical vision of happiness. They must rely on
images of happiness and perform actions in conformity with their limited capabilities. If theoretical knowledge defines happiness, and the capacity of actions to achieve happiness is the criterion by which we judge their worth, then we can evaluate actions according to their capacity to make theoretical knowledge possible in the city. In short, we measure the merits of our actions with respect to how they advance the theoretical knowledge of happiness for society as a whole.

Returning to the analogies of the bladder and intestines will clarify how the ultimate telos functions as the standard by which we judge actions with respect to content, utility, and ease. The ruling faculty of the body determines the telos of the body as a whole. Supposing that the telos of a body is to maintain its internal organization over time, the bladder and intestines perform extremely useful actions by evacuating bodily wastes. Without the bladder and intestines, the body would die. The very “subject matter” of removing wastes, however, is inferior to other actions because it does not add any positive good to the body as a whole. That is, the bladder and intestines cannot provide a substantial good to advance the internal organization of the body (telos). In contrast, the heart determines the telos, the brain (according to Alfarabi) regulates the heat of the heart, and the various limbs contribute to procuring nutrients for the body and warding off evil. This means that the brain and heart are more directly involved in advancing the body toward a telos (for the city, happiness) than the limbs, which in turn are more involved than the bladder and lower intestines. Moreover, the actions of the bladder and lower intestines are easy to perform (at least from a human perspective). Ostensibly, they merely release wastes, whereas the heart vigorously pumps blood throughout the whole body, and the limbs undergo constant stress by running, swimming, jumping, fighting, balancing, and climbing. When measured according to the telos of the body, the actions of the bladder and intestines are inferior with respect to (1) content and (3) ease of performance but (2) are extremely useful and necessary for the good of the body.

Alfarabi indicates that we can judge the actions of citizens in an analogous fashion. In the “Alfarabian utopia,” some citizens are like bladders and intestines because they merely serve and perform the most ignoble or vilest actions with respect to their content and ease of execution, despite their evident utility. The lowest strata of society can certainly promote the common good in very important ways, but they do not provide any substantial good related to the essence of happiness itself. A contemporary example Alfarabi
would probably find illustrative is trash collection. I realize that comparing trash collectors to bladders and intestines is insulting. However, we need to think uncomfortable thoughts to get at the heart of Alfarabi’s theory of justice.

Like the bladder and intestines, trash collection involves waste removal. Without trash collectors, the city would become cluttered with refuse and disease, eventually falling into ruin. Notwithstanding the undeniable usefulness of trash collection, the practice of removing waste is one of the least honorable activities in the city because it does not contribute substantially to happiness and is relatively easy to do. The farmer, urban developer, soldier, religious leader, and philosopher engage in more honorable activities because they offer goods more directly related to advancing civic happiness. These occupations are also much more difficult to perform. According to Alfarabi we can—and should—therefore discriminate between civic actions in terms of how honorable they are across the three domains. And it is unlikely that such evaluation would be hidden from the social groups that live in the virtuous city. A soldier knows that her activity is more honorable than the trash collector’s, and the trash collector knows, in turn, that his job is inferior to that of the soldier.

It should be added that the soldier and the trash collector do not merely do “jobs.” They are not arbitrarily assigned positions in the virtuous city. Recall that justice demands that the hierarchy of citizens be organized according to the merits of each individual. Like organs of the body, each citizen has a unique nature suited to a certain duty. In agreement with Plato’s Republic, justice requires a structural harmony between occupation and nature. This means that a trash collector in the virtuous city not only performs the least honorable job; he or she is also in one of the lowest ranks of humanity according to nature. It would be a gross injustice if a person with a superior nature had to perform the actions suited to an inferior nature or vice versa. Every citizen has an important part to play within the city as a whole, and the part he or she ought to play should be based on his or her nature. Alfarabi’s notion of justice therefore demands a harmonic ordering of parts between (1) the natures of citizens and their occupations and (2) their rank in the schema of ruling and being ruled. When the city is perfectly ordered according to justice, citizens should feel no ill will toward each other. In fact, citizens will most likely show each other some form of respect, not as equal rights-bearing citizens or individuals creatively expressing their subjective individuality but
as citizens performing their tasks in conformity with their natures for the sake of the common good. Nevertheless, a kind of “pathos of difference” remains a necessary condition for social cohesion in the virtuous city. Virtuous citizens can know and accept their relative position within the hierarchy of the city and their particular value for promoting the good of the whole, without holding each other in contempt.

Bakhsh’s interpretations of “citizenship,” “contempt,” “equality,” and “discrimination” actually distort Alfarabi’s explanation of justice and the virtuous city. It is difficult to discern if Alfarabi is pointedly disinterested in these issues or if he understands them differently than we currently do. Either way, he desires to understand the relationship between justice and natural excellence, and how they are manifest in political life. As such, his analysis of the virtuous city provides an alternative portrait of justice to that which Bakhsh claims, illuminating our own assumptions that underlie accepted categories of evaluation and the varieties of utopias we envision.

Weeds, Beasts, and Jihād: A Consideration of Violence and the Virtuous City

A natural question at this point in Alfarabi’s argument is, How do we institute justice and the structural preconditions for civic happiness? Put another way, what is the mechanism by which natures and actions are harmonized within the proper hierarchical structure? Bakhsh suggests one such mechanism: philosophic education. He states that Alfarabi’s only solution for reforming vice is “education through philosophy.” Yet Bakhsh is mistaken to propose that Alfarabi argues that the majority of citizens should receive a philosophic education. Alfarabi is abundantly clear that most human beings are unable to understand the teachings of philosophy. What Alfarabi advocates is statewide religious education. While religious education is based on the teachings of philosophy, most citizens by nature or circumstance are incapable of studying philosophy. Instead, they are indoctrinated with religious symbols and images that imperfectly represent truths that only the wise can comprehend.

Moreover, it is not altogether clear that Alfarabi, as Bakhsh argues, rejects “every form of violence.” When strictly interpreted, Bakhsh claims that Alfarabi opposes all violent acts, including those usually deemed necessary and morally justified, such as defensive wars and coercive punishments
for heinous crimes. But I highly doubt that Bakhsh intends to go so far. After all, the *Virtuous City* is clear that the perfect ruler is endowed with the capacity to prosecute war, and even the citizens of ignorant cities are “free from everything unsound in their souls” when they defend their communities from unprovoked aggression. The *Virtuous City* certainly does not oppose all forms of violence. What I take Bakhsh to mean is that Alfarabi opposes violent domestic revolutions and offensive wars for the sake of spreading virtue. In Bakhsh’s view, Alfarabi advocates education as the only legitimate (and practical) instrument to convert vice to virtue in individuals and cities.

Despite Bakhsh’s attractive interpretation (who really wants offensive war?), a glance at some of Alfarabi’s other political writings reveals that his views on violence are complex and beg further analysis. Like other utopian theories, Alfarabi acknowledges that violence is sometimes necessary to preserve the political community from physical aggression and destructive moral forces. To address the role that violence plays in utopian political theory, I briefly consider some of Alfarabi’s statements on the use of force in the domestic and international arenas.

The *Virtuous City* outlines several groups of individuals who seem impervious to the religious education intended to habituate the souls of citizens incapable of philosophic knowledge. In the *Political Regime*, Alfarabi labels such individuals who reside in the virtuous city as “weeds.” The various kinds of weeds in the *Political Regime* overlap with several obstinate individuals in the *Virtuous City*. Ilai Alon has identified six kinds of weeds and eight subgroups in the *Political Regime*, with three parallel groups in the *Virtuous City*. He observes that the essence of a weed is “opposition”; that is, a weed is a metaphor to describe a citizen who expresses some form of opposition to the virtuous city. Weeds oppose the virtuous city for a variety of reasons, all of which resist the virtuous city’s religious education. When left unchecked, the opinions of weeds and the subversive attitudes that go along with them proliferate and may ultimately overcome virtuous citizens. Like the vexing plant weeds that infiltrate a luscious garden, citizen weeds creep through the city and choke the healthy flora to death. Construed in more conceptual terms, these individuals can influence the young with destructive opinions and wretched ways of life. It is not uncommon for fashionable (but dangerous) opinions to enthrall the youth, turning them into skeptics, moral relativists, cynical hedonists, or worse.
Faced with the imminent danger posed by weeds, the ruler of the virtuous city has the duty to uproot the weeds or divert their growth. Specifically, Alfarabi suggests that the ruler “cure” the weeds by exile, punishment, imprisonment, or giving them jobs they would not otherwise perform. Without a doubt the measures are harsh but legitimate given the high standards of the virtuous city. If the city is going to be organized according to justice and directed toward the goods that lead to happiness, the hierarchy of citizens and the goals they seek need to be thoroughly inculcated and protected. The virtuous ruler must strive to protect education against opinions and attitudes that could undermine justice and happiness—even if this means using violence. Allowing the weeds to corrupt other citizens and progressively lead the city into ruin would constitute a great act of injustice. But as a lover of justice, the ruler of the virtuous city must give to each his or her due and fight all forms of oppression. In Alfarabi’s utopian state this means that violence in the forms of exile, punishment, incarceration, and forced labor will occasionally be used—if and only if they are due—to promote the common good.

At the same time, there are intellectually gifted weeds that excel at precisely identifying the errors embedded in religious images. These weeds are not wrong to do so. As I stated above, the religious images that constitute much of the education in the virtuous city are imperfect representations of the truth. Gifted weeds possess some of the qualities necessary to ascend from the images to the intelligibles that form the body of wisdom. That is, some weeds are ripe for philosophic education and, in rare instances, endowed with the nature of potential philosophers. Alfarabi advises to teach these weeds better images of the truth until they are satisfied or brought to the truth itself through education.

The presence of weeds in the virtuous city raises the problem of what to do with individuals whose opinions and characters cannot be shaped by religious education. Some weeds can be educated by philosophers who know the appropriate images to present to them. However, others are impervious to education, and therefore the ruler must use various forms of violence against them to protect the virtuous city and its citizens. In the virtuous city, the philosopher-statesman would presumably maintain the delicate balance between education and force. As a perfect ruler, he possesses the wisdom to discriminate between weeds with the raw capacities for further education and those who can only be dealt with through violence. Taken as a whole, the
weeds consist of an unstable class; their opposition stems from keen insight or stupid obstinacy, where the former is a potential benefit and the latter is a danger to the virtuous city. Philosophers in imperfect cities thus find themselves in a difficult position; they need to educate both kinds of weeds without being labeled as weeds themselves.

Alfarabi identifies another kind of threatening individual who should be dealt with harshly. He characterizes these individuals not with the imagery of irrational “weeds” but as dehumanized “beasts.” Beasts are individuals who reside outside of cities or in hostile environments located on the extremities of the inhabitable parts of the world. They consist of feral groups who lack any self-conscious articulation of the good and are thus reduced to animals, hardly distinguishable from ravenous lions or grazing cattle. Because they form prepolitical, quasi-animal associations capable of disrupting trade, farming, travel, territorial expansion, and other interstate commerce, they pose a danger to cities and nations. Therefore, political communities must find a way to interact with them. Alfarabi’s shocking solution is to enslave the domicile and kill the savage. He even urges the execution or enslavement of “wild” children.33 He has recourse to such extreme acts of violence because these beastly human beings are uneducable. As it is with the weeds, the beasts’ rational capacities have been so distorted by either nature or habit that only slavery or death can render them harmless. There is no question that we should find Alfarabi’s statements horrifying. However, I believe that Alfarabi’s intent is to inspire his readers to think about how the virtuous city would have to treat individuals who are impervious to reason. If a utopian political community is based on reason, it must formulate a coherent response to the presence of irrationality in the world. Because irrationality exists in the world, it may be that irrationality—in this case, violence—can force itself into or upon the virtuous city.

As for international violence, Bakhsh asserts that Alfarabi’s thoughts on utopian politics categorically eschew offensive warfare against vicious cities and nations. On the contrary, Alfarabi allows some leeway in wielding the sword to compel ignorant and wicked political communities to perform actions that lead to happiness. The idea that force is an effective means to compel others to become virtuous certainly seems “more peculiar the more one thinks about it.”34 Nevertheless, Alfarabi explicitly states that a virtuous war may be waged against cities and nations for the sake of happiness. His ostensible description of offensive war as just is not debated in the secondary
scholarship. What is disputed is how we should interpret the relevant passages that call the virtuous city to arms.\(^{35}\) A full treatment of warfare in Alfarabi demands a greater appreciation of his arguments than I can provide within the limitations of this essay. Thus, it is not my intention to directly engage the secondary scholarship or offer my own interpretation here. Instead I focus only on two of Alfarabi’s statements, one found in the *Aphorisms* and the other in the *Attainment of Happiness*. I merely intend to (1) show that Alfarabi explicitly states that the virtuous city may wage an offensive war to force vicious cities to become happy and (2) point out some of the limitations that he places on war for the sake of happiness.

In the *Aphorisms*, Alfarabi states that one of the aims of war is “carrying and forcing a certain group to what is best and most fortunate for them in themselves, as distinct from others, when they have not been cognizant of it on their own and have not submitted to someone who is cognizant of it . . . and calls them to it by speech.”\(^{36}\) According to Charles Butterworth, Alfarabi is reluctant to specify whether this kind of war is just or unjust.\(^{37}\) It only appears in a list of military aims that Alfarabi distinguishes from those clearly stipulated as unjust. The ambiguous status of this kind of war suggests that it may or may not be just, depending on the conditions and reasons for going to war. The *Aphorisms* thus holds out the possibility that a just war may be waged to force other communities to do what is in their best interests.

Furthermore, in the *Attainment of Happiness* Alfarabi is clear that a war waged for the sake of making others happy can indeed be a just war.\(^{38}\) When the prince fails in his attempt to form the characters of people with their consent, he may have recourse to warfare in order to force them to perform the actions that lead to happiness. The prince and his soldiers are righteous warriors when they take up arms to impose happiness. The notion that a just warrior is one who kills in the name of happiness is strange! Joshua Parens is right to wonder how on earth we can *force* people to be happy.\(^{39}\)

Regardless of the precise mechanism that the ruler will wield to enforce virtue once he has conquered a vicious city or nation, the use of force to spur vicious political communities to happiness is no small task. For this reason, the virtuous ruler must make some tough decisions when deciding to wage an offensive war for the sake of happiness. Both the *Aphorisms* and *Attainment of Happiness* indicate that warfare must result in the procurement of things considered good *relative* to the character and rank of the conquered political
community. This suggests that the virtuous ruler cannot simply transplant the religion and institutions from his city or nation to those he has subdued. Every city and nation consists of a matrix of material, social, political, and religious factors that make it unique. There is no one-size-fits-all solution. Due to the idiosyncratic nature of each political community, it is not practical to export laws, ideologies, and religions from one community to another. A ruler’s misguided and hubristic attempt to “bring civilization” to other nations often ends in disaster and thus increases the misery in a world that already knows too much of it. The virtuous ruler can only prosecute an effective and just offensive war against vicious cities if he knows the peculiarities of their dispositions and ways of life: what will truly make them happy, how to implement happiness, the implication war has for the region, and a variety of other considerations. Put simply, the aim of an offensive war—happiness—is both its justification and its limiting factor.

I have shown that Alfarabi’s theory allows for limited forms of violence against the “weeds” in the virtuous city and the “beasts” that roam the uncivilized world. He also permits the judicious use of offensive war to spread happiness to vicious regimes. I hope, however, that the reader sees that Alfarabi does not endorse the capricious or indiscriminate use of violence. On the contrary, Alfarabi sets a high standard for using force against intransigent individuals in the virtuous city, “barbaric” peoples found in the wild, and the vicious regimes that will forever exist in the world. The need for violence arises because various irrational forces pose an existential threat to the virtuous city and the attainment of happiness. In the face of irrationality and imminent danger, the virtuous ruler and his citizens must confront a serious question: When education fails, decadent cultures corrode traditional morality, and vicious communities threaten to unleash pernicious desires, how should the virtuous city respond? By raising this question, Alfarabi forces readers who are attracted to utopian theories to think through the problems involved in cultivating and preserving virtue in their political community and the world at large.

Conclusion

I have discussed Alfarabi’s treatment of the themes of justice, education, and violence in the Virtuous City and related texts. Bakhsh’s analysis of discrimination and violence masks these themes and Alfarabi’s reflections on
their implications for utopian political thought. Only when we understand Alfarabi’s remarks on discrimination and violence in their actual context can we begin to encounter the themes I have identified and probe the issues that they raise for the virtuous city. Much like Plato’s *Republic*, Alfarabi’s writings serve to warn those who aspire to implement perfect justice in political life. A utopian political order based on virtue must wisely establish justice on natural rank, effectively respond to failures in education and the “free spirit,” and prudentially consider the legitimate use of force. The “top-down” management of justice and happiness in the virtuous city and the violence it sometimes requires lessen the possibility that such a city can actually be carried out in practice. The demands of a hierarchical view of justice, the realities of education, and the need to use the sword ought to give philosophers and statesmen pause before enthusiastically embracing the *Virtuous City’s* “blueprint” as an actual political agenda.

I must give my sincere thanks to Bakhsh for offering an original approach to Alfarabi by focusing on the themes of discrimination and peace. There are indeed passages in Alfarabi’s writing that appear to celebrate equality and social harmony in ways compatible with our aspirations for the virtuous city. But we should not overstate the rapport between our political principles and the theoretical and practical issues that Alfarabi boldly confronts. His austere and highly abstract method of writing should inspire us to read deeply and to reflect with him upon the questions and problems that face politics and a life dedicated to virtue. I believe that Alfarabi, like all great authors, aims “not to make people read but to make them think.”

Notes

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2. Ibid., 50.
Alfarabi, *On the Perfect State: Mabādiʾ ārāʾ ahl al-madīna al-fāḍila*, trans. Richard Walzer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 231. Throughout the essay I refer to this work as the *Virtuous City*. Generally, I discuss the virtuous city, although I am aware that there are other kinds of virtuous political communities such as the virtuous nation.

7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., 47.
9. Ibid., 49.
11. Ibid., 95.
15. Bakhsh, “*Virtuous City*,” 44–45, 49.
17. “Now the limbs and organs of the body are different and their natural endowments and faculties are unequal in excellence, there being among them one ruling organ, namely the heart, and organs which are close in rank to that ruling organ, each having been given by nature a faculty by which it performs its proper function in conformity with the natural aim of that ruling organ” (ibid., 231, 233).
18. Ibid., 239.
19. Ibid., 237.
20. Ibid., 263; Al Farabi: *The Political Writings*, 52–53.
22. “But others know them through symbols which reproduce them by imitation, because neither nature nor habit has provided their minds with the gift to understand them as they are” (Alfarabi, *On the Perfect State*, 279).
23. Bakhsh, “*Virtuous City*,” 47.
25. Ibid., 315.
29. Ibid., 87–88.
30. “For this reason it is the duty of the ruler of the virtuous city to look for the Weeds, keep them occupied, and treat each class of them in the particular manner that will cure
them: by expelling them from the city, punishing them, jailing them, or forcing them to perform a certain function even though they may not be fond of it’’ (Alfarabi, *Political Regime*, 55).


34. Paren, *Islamic Philosophy of Virtuous Religions*, 74.


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