

Introduction

MICHAEL D. GORDIN, HELEN TILLEY, AND GYAN PRAKASH

Utopia and Dystopia beyond Space and Time

UTOPIAS AND DYSTOPIAS are histories of the present. Even before we begin to explain that sentence, some readers may feel a nagging concern, for the very term “utopia” often sounds a little shopworn. It carries with it the trappings of an elaborate thought experiment, a kind of parlor game for intellectuals who set themselves the task of designing a future society, a perfect society—following the pun on the name in Greek (no place, good place: imaginary yet positive). Projecting a better world into the future renders present-day problems more clearly. Because utopias tend to be the products of scholars and bookworms, it is not surprising that from the time of the concept’s (or at least the term’s) formal birth in the Renaissance, it has attracted quite a bit of academic attention. Much of this history is easily accessible, even second nature, to intellectual historians, and it traces the genealogy of ideal, planned societies as envisaged from Plato to science fiction. The appeal and the resonances are obvious and rather powerful: religious roots in paradise, political roots in socialism, economic roots in communes, and so on. Ever since Thomas More established the literary genre of utopia in his 1516 work of that title, much of historians’ writing on the relevance of utopia has focused on disembodied intellectual traditions, interrogating utopia as term, concept, and genre.¹

Dystopia, utopia’s twentieth-century doppelgänger, also has difficulty escaping its literary fetters. Much like utopia, dystopia has found fruitful ground to blossom in the copious expanses of science fiction, but it has also flourished in political fiction (and especially in anti-Soviet fiction), as demonstrated by the ease with which the term is applied to George Orwell’s *1984*, Evgenii Zamiatin’s *We*, and Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*.² Despite the name, dystopia is not simply the opposite of utopia. A true opposite of utopia would be a society that is either completely unplanned or is planned to be deliberately terrifying and awful. Dystopia, typically invoked, is neither of these things; rather, it is a utopia that has gone wrong, or a utopia that functions only for a particular segment of society. In a sense, despite their relatively recent literary and cinematic invention, dystopias resemble the actual societies historians encounter in their research: planned, but not planned all that well or justly.³ One need not be a cynic to believe that something in the notion of dystopia would be attractive and useful for historians of all stripes.

Every utopia always comes with its implied dystopia — whether the dystopia of the status quo, which the utopia is engineered to address, or a dystopia found in the way this specific utopia corrupts itself in practice. Yet a dystopia does not have to be exactly a utopia inverted. In a universe subjected to increasing entropy, one finds that there are many more ways for planning to go wrong than to go right, more ways to generate dystopia than utopia. And, crucially, dystopia — precisely because it is so much more common — bears the aspect of lived *experience*. People perceive their environments as dystopic, and alas they do so with depressing frequency. Whereas utopia takes us into a future and serves to indict the present, dystopia places us directly in a dark and depressing reality, conjuring up a terrifying future if we do not recognize and treat its symptoms in the here and now.⁴ Thus the dialectic between the two imaginaries, the dream and the nightmare, also beg for inclusion *together*, something that traditional *Begriffsgeschichte* (conceptual history) would not permit almost by definition. The chief way to differentiate the two phenomena is with an eye to results, since the impulse or desire for a better future is usually present in each.

We confront, therefore, something of a puzzle, almost mathematical in nature: the opposite of dystopia seems to be utopia, but the converse does not hold. There is rather a triangle here—a nexus between the perfectly planned and beneficial, the perfectly planned and unjust, and the perfectly unplanned. This volume explores the zone between these three points. It is a call to examine the historical location and conditions of utopia and dystopia not as terms or genres but as scholarly categories that promise great potential in reformulating the ways we conceptualize relationships between the past, present, and future. But what unites these three poles with each other? To our mind, the central concept that links them requires excavating the “conditions of possibility” — even the “conditions of imaginability”—behind localized historical moments, an excavation that demands direct engagement with *radical change*. After all, utopias and dystopias by definition seek to alter the social order on a fundamental, systemic level. They address root causes and offer revolutionary solutions. This is what makes them recognizable. By foregrounding radical change and by considering utopia and dystopia as linked phenomena, we are able to consider just how ideas, desires, constraints, and effects interact simultaneously. Utopia, dystopia, chaos: these are not just ways of imagining the future (or the past) but can also be understood as concrete practices through which historically situated actors seek to reimagine their present and transform it into a plausible future. This is clearly *not* the way most historians who have engaged with the notions of utopia and dystopia have approached the issue, and it is worth taking a moment to explore the difference.

Historical attention to utopia and dystopia has been strikingly one-sided and consists of dominant leitmotifs without a thorough explanation of the conceptual

space opened up by these categories. To cite one clear peculiarity of the literature: there is very little scholarship attempting to treat both notions together as intimately related acts of imagination.⁵ The core interest for many of those who have already written about utopia and dystopia emphasizes the intellectual coherence (or incoherence) of the idea of specially planned space(s) or chronicles the rise and fall of particular experiments in utopia—albeit experiments ranging in scale from Brook Farm in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s New England to Mao’s Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. There is much to be learned in such an approach, and we believe that we now have a quite rich and detailed understanding of the genealogies of utopias (at least for the Western tradition) and profound analyses of the ideologies underlying them.⁶ It would be superfluous to retread this ground, and we do not propose to do so here. The manifest goal of this volume of essays — selected from the two-year seminar at the Shelby Cullom Davis Center for Historical Studies at Princeton University titled “Utopia/Dystopia” — is to revitalize the concepts of utopia and dystopia by treating them not so much as *objects* of study, but as *historically grounded analytic categories* with which to understand how individuals and groups around the world have interpreted their present tense with an eye to the future.

Such an analytic venture might seem peculiar at the present moment, which could justly be characterized as “beyond utopia.”⁷ Indeed, there is a direct connection between the demise of totalizing theories of social change and reality, including Marxism and positivism, and intellectuals’ diminished faith in grand schemes “to improve the human condition.”⁸ Certainly, after the heady discourse of the “New World Order” died down following the collapse of Soviet communism and the end of the cold war, and sober reflection ensued on the dystopic qualities of the twentieth century (midwifed by Hitler, Mao, Pol Pot, Nixon, Stalin, Pinochet, and a cast of millions), the present appeared (and to many still appears) to be a time that called utopia into question.⁹ We are done with such dreaming, so this story goes, and now focus on the present with more modest ambitions, no longer attempting to imagine majestic paradises. Perhaps. Yet large-scale planning of utopian or dystopian futures—whether by the World Trade Organization or Al Qaeda—persists, despite the unfashionableness of utopian thought in Western academia (and probably not only Western). Coming to grips with the impulse historically offers an opportunity to explore how much has changed, and how much has remained the same, in our present that is supposed to exist “beyond utopia.”

This is a tall order, and it requires readers to let go of their conventional understandings of two major categories thinkers have used to analyze utopia to date: *space* and *time*. When one hears the word “utopia,” one usually thinks of a space — typically a city, but not necessarily so — that has been organized and

mapped out geographically. (In Thomas More's case, it was an island — although even in this case, the island was deliberately constructed by eradicating the isthmus that connected King Utopus's realm to the mainland—and this topographical feature does persist in many literary utopias.) Probing the concept a little more deeply, however, one sees that it implies not only spatial layout and distance — often great geographic distance—but also *time*. Utopias tend to be places of the future or, as in some earlier instances of utopias *avant la lettre* — the Land of Cockaigne, Hesiod's Golden Age, and the Garden of Eden — the distant past. Utopias (and dystopias) thus come laden already with conceptual anchors that fix them to specific space-time coordinates. This was, and is, surely one of the features of utopia/dystopia that explains its striking *realism*, its lasting pull on the intellect. But it also unnecessarily constrains the uses to which the historian can put it.

In our effort to reclaim utopia and dystopia as analytic categories of historical inquiry, we place space and time in the background and think instead of these phenomena as markers for *conditions of possibility*, understood in Michel Foucault's sense.¹⁰ We hope to examine utopias (and dystopias) not for what they tell us about an intellectual construct in assorted individuals' heads, but rather for what they reveal about a set of abiding concerns and cultural formations that *generated* both the desire for utopian transcendence and the specific form that utopia/dystopia took. As such, utopias are not to be seen as referring to an imagined place at some future time; instead, we are interested in how the historian can use variants of utopian thinking and action to explore the specificity of a time and a place. Utopian visions are never arbitrary. They always draw on the resources present in the ambient culture and develop them with specific ends in mind that are heavily structured by the present. Heavily, but not totally, for in each instance the specific utopias produce consequences that force a questioning of the original vision and that shape both its development and how individuals experience it. Marxism, for example, emerged as a utopian form of thinking, but it did so initially in England in the context of industrialization; how Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels imagined their future utopia reflected directly and unambiguously on contemporary cultural perceptions of Victorian Manchester.¹¹ What we focus on, therefore, is utopia as a *practice*, as a technique used by historical actors for understanding their particular contemporary circumstances — and thus a valuable lens for the historian.¹²

Today, long after the rise and decline of structuralism and even post-structuralism, it is interesting to find this approach openly stated (and subsequently stubbornly neglected) in the classic of early sociology of knowledge, Karl Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia*. For Mannheim, neither of these title terms refers to something that can be expressed as a mere concatenation of words, a

document that can be read from beginning to end and then filed away. Rather, both ideology and utopia are *impulses* drawn directly from the sociological setting of individuals. Mannheim thus eschewed characterizations of utopia as an articulation of a planned ideal society and instead redefined it as a socially located critical stance. In the process, he emphasized some of the dilemmas involved in articulating and acting upon visions of radical change that this volume interrogates:

The concept of *utopian* thinking reflects the opposite discovery of the political struggle, namely that certain oppressed groups are intellectually so strongly interested in the destruction and transformation of a given condition of society that they unwittingly see only those elements in the situation which tend to negate it. Their thinking is incapable of correctly diagnosing an existing condition of society. They are not at all concerned with what really exists; rather in their thinking they already seek to change the situation that exists. Their thought is never a diagnosis of the situation; it can be used only as a direction for action. In the utopian mentality, the collective unconscious, guided by wishful representation and the will to action, hides certain aspects of reality. It turns its back on everything which would shake its belief or paralyse its desire to change things.¹³

Or, as he put it more pithily: “The innermost structure of the mentality of a group can never be as clearly grasped as when we attempt to understand its conception of time in the light of its hopes, yearnings, and purposes.”¹⁴ By exhuming the aspirations of historically located actors, this volume seeks to meet Mannheim’s challenge to present a series of partial histories of utopia/dystopia that will illuminate the subjective positionings of historical agents. Tell me what you yearn for, and I will tell you who you are.

In this volume we propose that a return to the crucial insights of the early generation of sociologists of knowledge such as Mannheim, coupled with the attention to discourse and practice that exemplifies recent scholarship inflected by post-structuralism, can breathe some new life into and bring new perspectives to historians’ analytic categories.¹⁵ To reiterate: this volume is *not* an effort to recast the historiography of utopia (or dystopia); instead, it is an attempt to import those categories as useful tools to probe different historical situations. We suggest, therefore, that readers think of utopia and dystopia (at least for the space of this volume) as styles of imagination, as approaches to radical change, and not simply as assessments of ambitious plans for social engineering that have positive (utopic) or negative (dystopic) results. Since those results would form an anachronistic imposition on the course of historical development—those doing the hoping and the dreaming could not possibly have clairvoyant knowledge of the

outcome—we have decided to organize these chapters not along the lines of a section on utopia followed by a section on dystopia because this would obscure the very historical analysis we hope to uncover. Instead, we have opted to divide the essays in terms of two other modes of analysis: *anima* and *artifice*. As with utopia and dystopia, these terms are not exactly opposites; nor do they exist strictly in a binary relation. They are categories to begin to tease apart conditions of possibility.

Part 1: Anima

The first theme, anima, has several different inflections, all relating to human existence and its constraints. On the one hand, we are playing deliberately with the concept of natural limits, both actual and conjectural, and on the other we are invoking ideas of spirit and vision, that is, those things that animate different societies (and theories). There is often, as might be expected, an intimate relationship between the two. Our conceptualization, in fact, draws explicitly on the work of critical theorists, historians of science, and scholars in environmental history.¹⁶ Anima conjures up both nature—including the first and second nature of Marxists—and those indeterminate elements that make up life itself, the exploration of which unites scientists, artists, and philosophers.

Utopia and dystopia in practice tend to test the boundaries of reality: the former approaches an ideal but rarely reaches it—stopped by the real world — and the latter makes visible various breaking points and vulnerabilities. Think, for instance, of the utopian project of disease eradication. For at least two centuries, this goal has seemed increasingly within the realm of the possible, yet in objective terms it has been achieved only once, with smallpox.¹⁷ But has it really? In the expected twist from hope to horror, public health officials, critics, and scaremongers now help us appreciate the prospect that the remaining stores of the smallpox virus could become a weapon of bioterrorism.¹⁸ In its dystopian inflection, eradication draws attention to the very frailties not just of the human form but of our moral codes as well. Anima ought to capture this interplay between life, with all its unpredictability, and the social systems we construct upon this ever-changing world.

Fredric Jameson begins his chapter by emphasizing the extent to which certain utopian visions have gone out of fashion, namely a belief in bourgeois progress and a faith in large-scale solutions. Implicitly he also reminds us that human survival is hardly a certainty. Whether the scenario is abrupt annihilation or merely the gradual erosion of ecological and social conditions that sustain life, nowhere in the world does he see viable alternatives that could confront these threats with sufficient force. For his purposes then, utopian projects are useful because they allow us to interrogate our own thinking and help us to understand the frontiers — and cobwebs — of our own imaginations. They are thus a means to historicize the present so that we can begin to conceive of new possibilities for the future. Jameson's two examples—Wal-Mart and the politics of the multitude—attempt to confront what he sees as a central obstacle within present-day utopian thought: “The difficulties in thinking quantity positively.” Wal-Mart, for all its egregious and reprehensible practices, which have parallels elsewhere, possesses a

kind of unparalleled emergent power, precisely because it purchases, prices, and distributes its wares on such a phenomenal scale. To lose sight of this potential is to miss an opportunity to grapple fully with alternative structures of production and consumption. The concept of multitude, in turn, similarly enables Jameson to discuss overpopulation and collectivity (as opposed to individualism) without insisting on casting either in terms of an inevitable loss of self. Rather than offer dismal Malthusian images or stoke anxieties about social degradation, he chooses to consider how mass culture produces new forms of resistance, political participation, and cultural literacy.

We should perhaps not be so surprised to see some of these issues surfacing in Jennifer Wenzel's chapter on competing millennial movements in mid-nineteenth-century South Africa. This was a pivotal moment in colonial conquest, when contests over land were intensifying, a time when Europeans' faith in their civilizing mission approached its zenith. At the heart of Wenzel's analysis is the 1856-57 Xhosa cattle killing, an event prompted by a young Xhosa woman's prophetic vision that their culture could be renewed if only the Xhosa themselves were willing to sacrifice their material security. According to the prophecy, once Xhosa believers had killed their cattle, destroyed their grain, and improved their moral relations, the ancestors would step in to replenish their stocks and drive both Europeans and unbelievers to the coasts. Their utopian ambitions, in other words, were an attempt to address their unstable reality in the face of an external onslaught. Yet these dreams, as Wenzel is quick to point out, existed alongside equally elaborate aspirations among missionaries and administrators, who also sought to make Xhosa worlds anew. Indeed, the tools they marshaled—guns, printing presses, and plows — were in many ways embedded in a symbolic and cultural framework that undermined Xhosa cosmologies at every turn. What the colonizers envisaged was total transformation: faith, land, and the social order would be entirely redefined. The tragic irony of Wenzel's story is that both prophecies went unrealized; the ancestors never appeared, touching off famine and dispersal rather than regeneration, and the officials and missionaries failed to work their magic. Predictions of abundant new economies and mass conversions remained a distant hope.

In this volume, Wenzel invokes a poignant line from Walter Ong to signal the jarring changes that occurred as societies made the transition from oral to textual literacy: "We have to die to continue living." Dipesh Chakrabarty is preoccupied with an analogous dilemma about the ways in which records of the past are resurrected and preserved, especially in the decades preceding a nation's political independence. The only way to give India a living past, according to his key protagonist, Jadunath Sarkar, was to unearth its textual ruins. So far, so good. But Sarkar, as Chakrabarty suggests, was involved in his own death march, taking up

the losing side in a utopian struggle over the fate of universal history—the desire, so to speak, to narrate the past scientifically. In this sense Wenzel and Chakrabarty are in dialogue trying to draw our attention to the unsettling incoherence that lurks within all histories when we substitute narrators, choose different documentary evidence, or even select which points in the plot to emphasize. Both also help us appreciate how ideology matters, and in Chakrabarty’s case he does so by contextualizing the very debates over a public and private sphere on which the historical profession in general and Indian historiography in particular were founded.

If history takes center stage for the actors in Wenzel’s and Chakrabarty’s chapters, Luise White’s chapter on Rhodesia’s Unilateral Declaration of Independence (1965-79) charts its course to the margins. As minority rule, colonialism, and even theories of racial supremacy beat a global retreat of sorts, loyalists to the Rhodesian cause were so preoccupied with their dream of countering these trends, fighting off the chaos they thought would ensue under majority rule—the fear of the masses that Jameson invoked—that they managed to eclipse Rhodesia’s historical specificity in the process. There was nothing terribly new in Rhodesia’s incarnation as a racial state, since it had already achieved that status following the First World War. What was new was its leaders’ willingness to secede from the British Empire in order to defend this arrangement and their vociferous pursuit of political legitimacy in the face of competing trends elsewhere. As whites clung to alleged racial standards and utopian imagery of working telephones — the stand-in for qualities and conditions that helped them to justify minority rule—they tended to construct Rhodesia in their imaginations in ways that transcended both place and time. This was accompanied, paradoxically, by their deracination and denationalization, a point White underscores when she details just how many supporters of the Rhodesian Front were recent immigrants. Such a racial utopia—some might say dystopia—was difficult to sustain at the level of the state.

Where White’s chapter revolves around questions relating to the limits of racial politics, Timothy Mitchell’s chapter focuses on energy politics and, as he puts it, “the limits of carbon democracy.” Mitchell seeks to bridge a range of debates that are often kept separate; these relate to natural resources, social movements, democratic institutions, and the history of ideas. Rather than isolate oil-rich states, especially those in the Middle East, and speak of an “oil curse” to explain their lack of democracy, Mitchell wishes to turn the tables and ask instead whether democracies themselves have been “carbon based.” To focus only on recent patterns and events misses the forest for the trees or, to use Mitchell’s terms, overlooks the nodes of networks that made “buried sunshine” a catalyst for new kinds of political and economic formations in the modern world. By exploring

when and how coal and oil became foundational to geopolitics, Mitchell is also able to shed light on why these energy forms could both sustain *and* inhibit democratic institutions in different times and places. Take coal, for example. Its methods of extraction and distribution, between roughly 1850 and 1920, inadvertently gave miners, and to a lesser extent railway and dockworkers, a considerable degree of power to disrupt its flow at precisely the time coal energy was becoming increasingly essential to emerging industrial economies. Miners' militancy and their successful strikes in this period helped to constitute the phenomenon we now call mass politics. The gradual transition to oil in the mid-twentieth century, by contrast, wrested some of that power away from workers; indeed, as Mitchell argues, this was a central incentive for corporate and state actors to support the shift to oil. Where coal tended to be consumed within the countries in which it was produced—shoring up a domestic power base—oil, because of its liquid form and light weight, was a far more transportable energy source. This enabled existing democracies to uphold and even increase participatory politics domestically while their representatives simultaneously eroded emergent political movements elsewhere, especially in the Middle East. More significant still, according to Mitchell, in the postwar decades of large-scale oil production, these same democracies promoted the myth that hydrocarbon energy was limitless, a utopian vision on which such iconic ideologies as Keynesian economics were built. Only when Middle Eastern states began to threaten these carbon democracies, in the early 1970s, did oil companies invoke the idea of environmental limits, which in turn helped them orchestrate changes in the way these resources were priced globally. Coming to terms with these realities in the present, the literal constraints that the architects of a “hydrocarbon utopia” often concealed, may help us envisage a future in which energy and politics combine to be more truly democratic.

Part 2: Artifice

Our second theme explores more of what is specifically modern and subjective about utopian/dystopian thinking and practice: its *artificial* quality. The chapters in part 1 place greater stress on life-forms and natural objects — populations, cattle, land, archives, races, and carbon-based energy—and those in part 2 emphasize the role of human manipulations and abstractions, the links between Homo faber and Homo cogito.¹⁹ Here we are interested in the ways in which old themes — memories of lost worlds, if you will — are repackaged in the transition to modernity. In the process, many of these reorientations went right to the heart of human subjectivity. The hope of a general reorganization of the world proved to be deeply and intimately connected to a highly specific conjuncture. That conjuncture was framed by a series of conditions of possibility—colonialism, capitalism, socialism, and even technocratic optimism — that in turn prompted the imagination of a future that was not imposed by the sheer thrust forward of time, but was a possibility produced through the architecture of rationality, variously defined. Understanding the artifice of human consciousness helps us to appreciate the ways in which the Self has also been imbricated in utopian politics.²⁰

One way to track the fine distinction between anima and artifice would be to examine two very different approaches to one of the hallmarks of modernity, imagined and real: energy. Where Timothy Mitchell describes the linkages between oil and (lack of) democracy that seemed to build organically and interdependently upon carbon-based coal economies, John Krige's chapter offers a penetrating analysis of one twentieth-century phenomenon that was quintessentially modern, utterly constructed, and truly never before seen in the world: the power released by the fissioning of the atomic nucleus. Nuclear power (and its dark cousin, the nuclear weapon) spawned utopian visions embedded in the technical infrastructure—as, indeed, had to happen, for there were few preexisting patterns to condition this new form of energy (unlike oil). But as Krige explains, not only did the frame of the U.S.-Soviet cold war suffuse these visions with a dystopic tinge, but so too did the anticipation of empire's end. Focusing on the 1955 Geneva conference under the auspices of the American-led Atoms for Peace initiative, Krige provides a detailed study of the utopian aspirations behind the civilian project of atomic power plants and, more concretely, of the “education of desire”: how cultures and individuals were brought to realize the position of the nuclear in their nation-building projects. This is utopia in Mannheim's sense, and in ours: the nuclear was an artifice that enabled people to think through their present by imagining a utopian beyond. This was nowhere truer than in the

rapidly decolonizing nations of the “global South,” to whom the Americans pitched a nuclear future as a ready alternative to the Marxist utopia that beckoned from the then-unified Sino-Soviet bloc. By the end of Krige’s chapter, we come to see the incipient dystopias of nuclear weapons proliferation, atomic reactor meltdowns, and neocolonial dependency rising on the horizon. Technical choices made by various developing nations —“educated” into desiring what the United States wanted them to desire—solidified into a present that fell far short of the aspirations initially voiced.

World War II, the trauma that the peaceful atom was supposed to heal, was preceded by its own epoch of utopian therapists. The central and eastern European cosmopolitans of the interwar years, as Marci Shore persuasively argues, sought a literary, linguistic, and artistic utopia to remedy the disastrous wounds of the Great War. But as the term “interwar” should alert us, an even more horrific, more dystopian clash between fascism and communism would rip asunder the Polish, Czech, Russian, and German intellectuals who truly imagined that utopia was around the corner. Indeed, to some extent it seemed already present in the optimistic creative ferment that followed in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, both within Russian borders and in the penumbras of the dissolved Romanov empire. The avant-garde that Shore describes took the time and place issues of utopia seriously, and they rejected place in favor of time: modernity was the moment, and although that took many forms (liberalism, Marxism, fascism, futurism, and Dadaism), the important point was to live this present fully. Phenomenologists, structuralists, and other universalists populate her *Mitteleuropa*, traveling between the urban nodes of Vienna, Petrograd, Warsaw, Berlin, Paris, and others, knitting together a new utopia that severed the links to a diseased past. Among these intellectuals we also find the seeds for the terror that would follow as Europe disintegrated once again in its most dystopian/utopian of centuries, and the tour of optimism sounds an elegiac minor chord, as the European present proved too difficult to transcend.

David Pinder’s situationists and letterists grabbed the utopian artifice by the other horn and sought quite literally to reimagine place. Much more directly than the cosmopolitans or the nuclear engineers, these avant-garde artists of the post-World War II era constructed their utopias through *explicit* emphasis on the nature of the present. Pinder builds his narrative of their reflections on the transformative (and utopian) possibilities inherent in the here and now by starting where they did: at the street. The tension between the humdrum quotidian aspect of a stroll on the street and the intense futuristic dynamism of architectural modernism of the Le Corbusier variant found expression in the situationist vision of a completely open architecture of the future, one whose design imposed almost nothing to shape the desires of those imagined future inhabitants. Here, the goal

of utopia was to use the present to conjure a future liberated of the context of that very present. The contradictions were deeply felt and hard to ignore. Just as Jane Jacobs and other urban thinkers emphasized the possibilities inherent in the street, the skepticism toward the conservatism of the everyday proved recalcitrant. The utopian street contained its intrinsic dystopia, as reflected in the collapse of the Situationist International, which Pinder chronicles. Yet, for all their intensity, these debates remained largely in the arena of the theoretical and analytical.

Not so in Igal Halfin's exploration of the discourse in the basements of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) in the Soviet Union amid the Stalinist purges of the late 1930s. The central problematic for Halfin is how the Communists brought before NKVD tribunals, knowing that they would be shot for crimes they did not commit, not only did not resist the secret police but even *confessed* to the invented accusations. Halfin's analysis draws from the transcripts of these confessions, which he embeds within the eschatological framework folded into Stalinist discourse and constitutive of it. Here, as in the other chapters in this section, in the artifice of the Communist Party's utopian vision of messianism, the obverse side of wrecking, sabotage, and constant internal suspicion was laid bare. Thus, Halfin steers clear of conventional and simplistic interpretations of the bloodshed as a realized dystopia, which equates the readiness of the confessions with the steady application of torture — external force generated false self-accusation, yet the internal was left untainted and somehow pure. Halfin's accused share the same discourse as their interrogators, and the depth and extravagance of the confessions emerged from something that transcended facile internal-external binaries. The Communist worldview confessed its own sins to itself—the accused truly *believed* themselves to be guilty, in a nontrivial sense. Both interrogator and interrogated were utopians forged in the same furnace. The artifice of utopian thought should not be understood as existing in some blueprint of a Grand Designer; rather, we need to recognize that the artifice forms no less than a natural part of the self-conception of those embedded within its discourse. The kingdom of Utopus lies within us.

Aditya Nigam's essay on the politics of the Dalit movement —once the so-called untouchables — brings us full circle back to the questions Jameson and Wenzel posed in the first section of this volume. Nigam points to the notions of time implied in utopia, noting that utopias are always displaced in time from the present, and explores the features of Dalit politics that he terms "heterotopic": reform projects that emphasize the here and now, the presentness of the desired vision. Given the pervasive discrimination and prejudice against Dalits in present-day India, their leaders have emphasized the use of status quo mechanisms, such as affirmative action and antidiscrimination laws, to gain employment in the public sector when the private sector excludes them. Nigam discusses the

representations of Mayawati, an important Dalit and on-and-off chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, as well as a contemporary short story, to explore the ways in which Dalits have made efforts to construct a counterutopia that aggressively deploys the artifices of the present instead of developing an animated, organic mass movement akin to those explored in the previous section. The political results may be equivocal, but the aspiration is no less real. Nigam's account of Dalit politics, by building itself into current discourse rather than fashioning a counterdiscourse like the Stalinists, demonstrates that even when the actors do not explicitly invoke the dystopic present or a utopian future (or past), scrutiny of the categories can yield valuable insights concerning opportunities for actual transformation.

A Utopian Beyond

He still had faith in his fantastic vision,
but in moments of doubt
he worried that he'd given the world only
a new version of despair.
—Adam Zagajewski, “Old Marx”

Faith, fantasy, despair, and desire pervade these essays; in fact, they are the stock-in-trade of utopian/dystopian practice. Are we to believe that such dreaming has outlived its purpose? Must we accept the “skepticism about the possibilities of change,” the “cynical reason” that Jameson describes? If so many emancipatory promises have been betrayed and liberatory movements come undone, does that mean that none should be attempted or proposed again? Have we really reached a point beyond utopia?

However complicated these questions might appear, especially when situated against the grand sweep of human history, the answers are rather simple: no. Even as the utopias of communism and cosmopolitan peace stand indicted, the neoliberal utopia of the market creeps up on us, now under the ideologically driven notion of a Smithian human nature.²¹ This also produces the dystopic vision of the “planet of slums,” a Dickensian wasteland of urban poverty, exploitation, and violence.²² Everywhere we turn, historical conditions continue to throw up utopias and dystopias as ways to shape, understand, and critique our contemporary world. Perhaps this helps to explain not just why interest in utopian historicity is on the rise, but also why scholars focusing on Asia, Latin America, and Africa have begun to explore its implications.²³ This book, in fact, explicitly raises questions about what it means to analyze conditions of possibility at the transnational and global levels, especially when so many of our concepts derive from Europe. Several of our contributors grapple explicitly with cross-cultural

phenomena — orality and textuality, scientific epistemologies and other ways of knowing, empire and nationhood, and so on. Others bring to the fore circulations that have a global effect: production systems, weapons, energy. As Chakrabarty's chapter reminds us, however, there still remains theoretical work to be done to understand the universal and particular elements of any utopian or dystopian impulse.

To invoke the proverb marshaled by grassroots organizers the world over, "Without a vision, the people perish." Yet as the chapters that follow reveal, visions themselves are inherently dangerous, whatever their underlying motives. They involve risk, they usually rest upon faith, and they often require their progenitors to relinquish control. More to the point, they are imbued with their own fault lines: limits and critique accompany the projection of utopias and dystopias. Zagajewski's Marx, caught in a snapshot at the end of his life, was not wrong to doubt, but nor was he wrong to continue to believe.²⁴ To draw a direct historical lesson from this volume: no matter how chimerical utopias may appear, dystopias are no less vulnerable; they have their breaking points too. The following chapters underline these fractures, drawing attention to the historical conditions that bring utopias/dystopias into view and simultaneously conceal their limits and flaws.

The conceptual framework we have selected to analyze these dynamics — *anima* and *artifice* — intentionally addresses our twenty-first century collective consciousness, if we can speak of such a thing. Nowhere in the world is it now realistic to deny the need to take into account planetary life as we envisage a better future. Whatever shape our utopian dreams may take, they cannot ignore the constraints and opportunities posed by nonhuman nature. These limits are increasingly evident in the genre of environmental histories, which draw our attention to human dependency and vulnerability in the face of nature's agency.²⁵ But nor should we undervalue the all-too-human need for "fantastic visions," especially in a context of equally fantastic threats. A historical analysis of these visions—and of the conditions that produce them — exercises our imaginations and animates our understanding of how and why things change. It has the potential, in other words, to breathe new life into transformative politics.

When we wed *anima* to *artifice*, it becomes possible to develop tools that help us move beyond the limits of utopian/dystopian politics of past ages. Whereas *anima* forces us to take into account those things that sustain life—and even to reject the ethos that humans can live beyond limits—*artifice* requires us to strike a balance between our inner and outer realities. Not only does what we construct outside ourselves matter—as the histories of failed technocratic solutions can attest—but also the way we construct our very selves shapes our future possibilities. Whether we speak of an "education of desire," the politics of the street, emergent

cosmopolitanism, or even false confessions, understanding the historical interplay between self and collective allows us to sharpen not just our hindsight but potentially also our foresight. Yes, we are toolmakers, and, yes, those tools can help us test the boundaries of reality, but unless we account for our inner natures as well, most artifices will crumble. These are among the conditions of possibility that our analysis has brought to light. Many others are also imaginable. Our goal is to open the question, not to nail it down and seal it up.

Notes

1. See, for example, the collected utopias from antiquity to the present gathered in *The Utopia Reader*, ed. Gregory Claeys and Lyman Tower Sargent (New York: New York University Press, 1999). On the literary traditions, see Gary Saul Morson, *Boundaries of Genre: Dostoevsky's Diary of a Writer and the Traditions of Literary Utopia* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981); and Peter Edgerly Firchow, *Modern Utopian Fictions from H. G. Wells to Iris Murdoch* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2007).

2. Fredric Jameson has recently taken this location within science fiction to unearth some new potentials for the concept of utopia (although less so for dystopia), and his perspective colors this essay in particular. See Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (New York: Verso, 2005). To some extent this follows on the attention to the intellectually productive features of science fiction articulated, for example, in Donna J. Haraway's *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), and *Modest Witness@Second Millennium. Female Man Meets OncoMouse: Feminism and Technoscience* (New York: Routledge, 1997). See also Felicity D. Scott, *Architecture or Technoutopia: Politics after Modernism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), and Patrick Parrinder, ed., *Learning from Other Worlds: Estrangement, Cognition, and the Politics of Science Fiction and Utopia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

3. For two recent analyses of dystopia, see Thomas Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000); and Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan, eds., *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

4. Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) is a classic example of the kind of dystopic imagination we describe here. The film places viewers directly in a mechanistic utopia gone mad and alerts us of the danger of apocalypse if we do not pay heed. Indeed, only total destruction, the film suggests, can provide a new beginning.

5. There are, as always, very valuable exceptions to a statement like this one. See, for example, Mark Featherstone, *Tocqueville's Virus: Utopia and Dystopia in Western Social and Political Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Jaap Verheul, ed., *Dreams of Paradise, Visions of Apocalypse: Utopia and Dystopia in American Culture* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2004); and Everett Mendelsohn and Helga Nowotny, eds., *Nineteen Eighty-Four: Science between Utopia and Dystopia* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1984).

6. For some more general treatments, see J. C. Davis, *Utopia and the Ideal Society: A Study of English Utopian Writing, 1516-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia* (New York: Philip Allan, 1990); Marina Leslie, *Renaissance Utopias and the Problem of History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999); Howard P. Segal, *Technology and Utopia* (Washington, DC: Society for the History of Technology, 2006); and Phillip E. Wegner, *Imaginary Communities: Utopia, the Nation, and the Spatial Histories of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

7. Such a mood has even hit literary scholarship: Nicholas Spencer, *After Utopia: The Rise of Critical Space in Twentieth-Century American Fiction* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006).

8. James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukás to Habermas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Vincent Geoghegan, *Utopianism and Marxism* (New York: Methuen, 1987); Richard Drayton, *Nature's Government: Science, Imperial Britain, and the "Improvement" of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); Tania Li, *The Will to Improve: Governmentality, Development, and the Practice of Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007). For an implicit rejoinder to at least some of these trends, see Paul Boghossian, *Fear of Knowledge: Against Relativism and Constructivism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

9. For a recent example, see Jack Lawrence Luzkow, *What's Left? Marxism, Utopianism, and the Revolt against History* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2006).

10. This concept appears in many places in Foucault's writings, but perhaps most powerfully in his analysis of *epistemes* in *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage, 1994).

11. This is, in the end, one of the crucial insights of the chapters on Marx in the

classic exploration of utopian socialism: Edmund Wilson, *To the Finland Station: A Study in the Writing and Acting of History* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1940).

12. The notion of practice we deploy here derives mostly from the science-studies literature. For an introduction, see Stephen Turner, *The Social Theory of Practices: Tradition, Tacit Knowledge and Presuppositions* (London: Polity, 1994).

13. Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*, trans. Louis Wirth and Edward Shils (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1991 [1929]), 40, emphasis in original. This point is further elaborated, in explicit contrast to the totemic intellectual style of analyzing utopias (and invoking Thomas More), on pp. 200-201.

14. *Ibid.*, 209.

15. For an earlier expression, see Ernst Bloch, *The Spirit of Utopia*, trans. Anthony Nassar (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000 [1918]).

16. A few examples in critical theory include Frederick Engels's *Dialectics of Nature*, trans. and ed. Clemens Dutt with a preface by J.B.S. Haldane (New York: International Publishers, 1940 [1898]); Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972); Alfred Schmidt, *The Concept of Nature in Marx*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: N.L.B., 1971); William Leiss, *The Domination of Nature* (New York: Braziller, 1972); and Jay, *Marxism and Totality*. Historians of the life and environmental sciences explore related dimensions of our understanding of anima, as do those environmental and medical historians who consider nature's agency. These references are too numerous to list, but for a few early works see William McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1976); Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy: The Roots of Ecology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); and Alfred Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). More recently, historians of empire and science have taken up these themes as well, including Richard Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens, and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

17. Other diseases have been brought close to zero incidence, such as polio, but several thousand cases per year persist. See Harry Hull and Bruce Aylward, "Progress towards Global Polio Eradication," *Vaccine* 19 (2001): 4378-84.

18. Donald A. Henderson et al., "Smallpox as a Biological Weapon: Medical and Public Health Management," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 281, no.

22 (1999): 2127-37.

19. Although, again, there are several sources for our thinking here, we owe certain debts to intellectual historians concerned with technics and technology; a classic here would be Lewis Mumford's *Technics and Civilization* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1934).

20. This has become an increasingly popular theme; see Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

21. See, for example, among many such recent titles, David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

22. Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (New York: Verso, 2006).

23. Interest in utopian historicity can be seen, for instance, in literary works such as Tom Stoppard's trilogy *The Coast of Utopia* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002) and in academic analyses such as Eric Weitz's *A Century of Genocide: Utopias of Race and Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003) and Jay Winter's *Dreams of Peace and Freedom: Utopian Moments in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006). For regional breadth, we should note three contributions from the Utopia/Dystopia seminar series: Megan Vaughan, "Slavery in the Utopian Family: Mauritius in the Eighteenth Century"; Susanna Hecht, "Tropical Utopias: Practical and Political Imagination in the New World"; and Lauren Benton, "Empires of Exception: Heterotopia and Global Legal Geography." See also Jean-François Lejeune, ed., *Cruelty and Utopia: Cities and Landscapes of Latin America* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 2005); and Maurice Meisner, *Marxism, Maoism, Utopianism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982).

24. Adam Zagajewski, "Old Marx," *New Yorker*, 21 January 2008. This picture is interestingly related to the classic (and heavily contested) picture of Marx—and utopian socialism in general — in Wilson's *To the Finland Station*.

25. See, for example, the conjunction of urban planning and environmental constraints represented by the chapters in *The Nature of Cities*, ed. Andrew G. Isenberg (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2006). The vast (and growing) literature on environmental history speaks to these issues again and again.