

UTOPIAN BODY: ALTERNATIVE EXPERIENCES OF EMBODIMENT IN  
20TH CENTURY UTOPIAN LITERATURE

A Dissertation

by

OLIVIA ANNE BURGESS

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2010

Major Subject: English

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Approved by:

Chair of Committee,	Paul Christensen
Committee Members,	Marian Eide
	M. Jimmie Killingsworth
	Brett Cooke
Head of Department,	M. Jimmie Killingsworth

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## ABSTRACT

Utopian Body: Alternative Experiences of Embodiment in 20<sup>th</sup> Century

Utopian Literature. (May 2010)

Olivia Anne Burgess, B.A., Texas State University-San Marcos;

M.A., Texas A&M University

Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. Paul Christensen

Utopian literature has typically viewed the body as a pitfall on the path to social perfectibility, and utopian planners envision societies where the troublesome body is distanced as much as possible from utopia's guiding force—Reason. However, after two world wars, the failure of communism, and a century of corrupt “utopian” projects like Hitler's social engineering, dystopian societies justified on the grounds of “rational planning” fail to convince us, and the body has risen as the new locus for identity and agency, a point of stability in a dangerous and unstable environment. In this dissertation, I argue that utopian literature in the late twentieth century has identified the body as key to imagining new alternatives and re-connecting with an increasingly jeopardized sense of immediate, embodied experience. Protagonists in utopian literature looking to escape dehumanizing and bureaucratic worlds find their loophole in the sensual rush of adrenaline and instinct and the jarring rejuvenation of nerve and muscle, experiences which are much more immediately real and trustworthy than the tenuous dictates of institutions that tumble easily into absurdity and terror. Survival necessitates a raw and

transformed identity that transgresses the tightly regimented boundaries of civilization and embraces the tumultuous chaos of the fringes and countercultures. Here, utopia thrives.

I ground this study in theoretical and sociological texts which recognize the centrality of the body in society and the dynamic potentiality of utopian thinking, and then examine how these developments unfold in utopian literature since the mid-twentieth century. The body as utopia surfaces in a variety of ways: as the longing for movement in Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano*; as the creation of alternative spaces defined by embodiment in Angela Carter's *Heroes and Villains* and Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club*; as the exuberant immersion in the modified body in Chuck Palahniuk's *Rant*; and as the search for perfection in a detached and corporate world in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*. I conclude with an assessment of utopia in the twenty-first century, referring to Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* as a barometer of the grim state of utopian possibility as we head into the next century.

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## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION: REMAKING THE WESTERN BODY

*“The world which is in the making fills me with dread....  
It is a world suited for monomaniacs obsessed with the idea  
of progress—but a progress which stinks.”*

—Henry Miller, *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*, 24.

The late twentieth century is not the utopian future reformers imagined in the hundreds of utopian novels and socialist tracts of late nineteenth-century America. In *Looking Backward* (1888), Edward Bellamy predicted that the literature produced in the century leading up to the year 2000, after the realization of utopia, would be of the most morally uplifting and inspirational ever written. In the novel, Dr. Leete informs time traveler Julian West that after humanity realized that utopia brought “the rise of the race to a new plane of existence with an illimitable vista of progress, their minds were affected in all their faculties with a stimulus, of which the outburst of the mediaeval renaissance offers a suggestion but faint indeed” (79). The novels of Bellamy’s future are void of social strife, civil conflict, war and poverty, all of which would be irrelevant to readers living in a state of perfect harmony and peace. Of course, of the many things Bellamy predicted inaccurately about the future, literature is one of them. After the

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This dissertation follows the style of the *Modern Language Association* (MLA).

failure of communism, the Holocaust and the shocking images of atomic destruction in places like Hiroshima, twentieth-century literature reflects the fallout of civilization careening toward madness and suffering from irrevocable psychological damage. West, were he to peruse a modern day library, might actually pick up books like Hubert Selby, Jr.'s *Last Exit to Brooklyn*, Paul Auster's *In the Country of Last Things*, Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, or, if we really don't want him to go unscathed, Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho*.

Utopia more often evokes suspicion and unease rather than Bellamy-like visions of communal prosperity and happiness. On the cover of a recent collection of short films addressing utopian themes, the title, *Utopia*, is cradled in the mushroom cloud of an atomic blast (*Short 7: Utopia*). The introduction to the collection confronts the viewer with the image of an emaciated African child surrounded by flies, followed by montages of advertisements and products that flash on the screen as if to brainwash the viewer into believing that a toaster oven really is every woman's desire. Clearly the lines are blurred between utopia and its nightmarish opposite, dystopia, and we approach the thought of utopia with cynicism and doubt, linking it with destruction, oppression and empty consumerism rather than dazzling worlds of the future. It is almost impossible to read classic utopian novels like Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* and Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* without picking up the scent of totalitarian potential, like the Inspectorate of Bellamy's Boston whose mysteriously omniscient watchful eyes are for us too reminiscent of Orwell's Big Brother. In *What's Left*, Jack Luskow writes that critics now believe "the pursuit of Utopia inevitably descends into totalitarianism, not only



because it is irrational and escapist, but because of its inherent elitism” (5). Standing on the other side of the twentieth century and looking backward to horrors Bellamy might have found unthinkable, we are now an audience aware of the violent and barbaric potential inherent in systems that dehumanize the individual while claiming to champion the good of the whole—the price of happiness at the expense of personal freedoms. Utopia is a word tainted by Stalinism and the Great Purge, Nazism and racial purity, the fall of communism and the threat of nuclear war, as well as the exploitation of capitalist systems. In short, utopia is often synonymous with oppression.

With only a few notable exceptions like B. F. Skinner’s *Walden Two* (1948) or Ernest Callenbach’s *Ecotopia* (1975), utopian texts in the tradition of *Looking Backward* are all but extinct. However, the overwhelming trend in literature of the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century resounds with dystopian overtones and the ominous inevitability of apocalypse. Since the late twentieth century there has been a literary outpouring of novels reacting to the perceived madness of a century paralyzed by a hyper-rational mantra of progress and conquest that has perpetuated horror after horror. They warn that the institutions and systems that once promised boundless utopian possibility balance tenuously on the verge of chaos and devastation. Even the city—once the hub of civilization and the pinnacle of rational planning—is often portrayed as an indefatigable and impenetrable monster mindlessly devouring human inhabitants, both metaphorically and literally. Modern literature suggests that under the gloss of rational order and progress lies a barely subdued animality with a snarling appetite.

Late twentieth-century dystopian literature often predicts the return to a primitive state of survival that depends on the same instinctual drives of the body that society has long suppressed as taboo and counter-productive to social progress. This is how Anna in Paul Auster's *The Country of Last Things* survives day-to-day in an unnamed city where utterly despondent people either attempt to live or try their best to die quickly, and the grossly opportunistic capitalize on the desperation of the living by luring victims into human slaughterhouses where bodies hang from meat hooks like stripped cattle. Anna survives civilization's descent into madness by reconnecting with her body's animalistic nature and learning to read and rely on the body's instincts. This is much like the post-apocalyptic universe of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, where an unnamed man and his son journey through the charred aftermath of some unexplained apocalypse, encountering a new universe with no clear narrative, no rational order and no sense of future. In this world, hunger drives people to cannibalize their own newborn babies and to feed from the limbs of living victims. The immediacy of the body runs throughout Jose Saramago's *Blindness*, a Portuguese novel recently adapted as an American film. After an entire city is stricken with an epidemic of blindness, government, order and civilized society disappear amidst the grueling struggle for food and any remaining scraps of agency and selfhood. The institutions individuals rely on for order and social harmony are the same institutions that follow the mantra "for the good of all" by locking up the first of the contaminated in an abandoned insane asylum and leaving them to fend for themselves in a situation that quickly escalates into a mini-totalitarian dictatorship of murder and rape. As the novel closes with the ominous observation, "The city was still

there,” it is clear that even as the epidemic ends and hope is renewed, the madness of the world is only temporarily quieted (326).

This is not to suggest that utopia and the utopian impulse have disappeared from fiction, and that dystopia is now the only reliable vision; rather, utopia as a vision of the perfect social world has shifted inward to the body. Characters must think with nerves and muscle. They must rely on the triggering influences of adrenaline and instinct, which are portrayed as much more immediately real and trustworthy than the tenuous dictates of systems and institutions that tumble so easily into absurdity and terror. Shirking socially and culturally mediated conceptions of the self for a raw and transformed identity becomes the only way to adapt and survive. The body becomes the new locus for identity and agency, a point of stability in a dangerous and unstable environment. In this breakdown of trust in social superstructures, and the shift toward a reliance on the internal world of the body, utopia still thrives.

Though scholars have expanded the concept of utopia, little has been done to pinpoint utopian trends in contemporary life, particularly in terms of personal space and body. Though her recognition of the shift toward the personal is little more than a passing remark, Ruth Levitas notes “the construction of the individual, and thus the question of another way of being” has become the central issue of utopianism rather than public visions (7). Dorothy Ko’s essay “Bodies in Utopia and Utopian Bodies in Imperial China” in the compilation *Thinking Utopia: Steps into Other Worlds* discusses the centrality of the body to utopian thinking. She argues, “In placing the body and processes at the heart of our thinking we may envision utopia with new eyes” (89). For

Ko, the body is not about reaching wholeness and totality, but about what she calls the “body-in-motion,” which is “always in the process of making and breaking boundaries.” The body is always “becoming.” Like Levitas, she rejects the idea of utopia as an exclusively intellectual pursuit. She argues against the prevalence of “‘cerebral intellectualism,’ the pretension that the intellect constitutes the gateway to utopia: Thinking utopia—we think, therefore utopias are” (89). Utopia is equally an experience of body. She specifically applies her idea to the mind-body holism of Chinese thinking in two classical Chinese utopian texts. In doing so, she makes her thesis clearly applicable to the Chinese culture, but she is pessimistic about its implications for Western culture. She distinguishes Western conceptions of the body from those of the Chinese; in the West, the body is connected to sin and weaknesses, while the East has no comparable doctrines or anxieties about the flesh inhibiting the spirit’s quest for a heavenly afterlife (90). She does not allow for an application of the utopian body/body-as-utopia to Western traditions, since, according to Ko, they are not as amenable to discovering utopia in, with, and through the body. This study argues that the utopian body is very applicable and indeed incredibly visible in Western culture, particularly in America, and that it is important to rethink utopian thinking as we head into the twenty first century.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a historical and sociological backdrop to the utopian literature of the late twentieth century—to show why this literature developed and what cultural trends it reflects. This chapter interrogates the way we have traditionally conceived of both the body and utopia and what historical and sociological

processes have contributed to shattering this concept and refashioning a new one. I will first briefly follow the development of utopia from the foundational work of Plato's *Republic*, to the eruption of utopian literature in late nineteenth-century America, up to the apparent demise of utopian thinking in the first half of the twentieth century, always keeping the transgressive potential of the body in mind to distinguish how utopian planners and writers have accounted for the individual body in communal and public settings. Though Sir Thomas More coined the phrase "utopia" in *Utopia* (1516), Plato's *Republic* presents the outline for an ideal state that would be replicated and mimicked for centuries. Rather than briefly review several foundational utopian texts, I will instead discuss the *Republic* as an exemplary model of traditional utopian thinking that develops the strategy of social stratification and ascetic discipline preached in many utopian texts until the twentieth century. It is particularly useful in highlighting the treatment of the body in a traditional utopian setting.

I will then look at how modern sociology has attempted to explain why the body is resurfacing as a much more visible and potent force in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. A modern sociology of the body, like modern utopian literature, hinges on questions of desire and the search for alternatives; thus, modern sociology is beginning to discuss how people increasingly view the body as a "project" that can be shaped according to one's personal desires rather than social demands, though sometimes it is difficult to separate the two. This shift in modern sociology is complemented by the shift in modern utopianism from the public to the private realm where desire and embodiment are central to hopes for a better world, or, more

specifically, a better sense of self in the world. It is obvious that utopia is not on its deathbed, but it can no longer be conceived of as a social project alone. Northrop Frye was incredibly prescient when, in a 1965 essay, he argued that new utopias “would not be rational cities evolved by a philosopher’s dialectic; they would be *rooted in the body* as well as in the mind, in the unconscious as well as the conscious, in forests and deserts as well as in highways and buildings, in bed as well as in the symposium” (49 italics added). The types of utopian thinking in the last half of the twentieth century indicate that utopia not only needs the body, but that utopia and the body are often one and the same. The flesh, and not a distant island, is the landscape for this new sense of utopia, and the individual, and not the community, defines what this body-utopia will look like. It is the body that provides escape and salvation from the social institutions of terror and madness reflected in literature.

Of course, the body that lusts, that desires, and that acts on individual instincts is typically not a body deemed compatible to the goals of the imaginary world of harmony and perfection that usually defines “Utopia.” In the traditional sense, “Utopia” is an imaginary place where society has achieved a state of perfection or at least near-perfection, and this often takes the shape of social harmony, equality and happiness for all. However, no matter what utopia looks like, it is, in essence, about desire and change. Recent criticism on utopian thinking emphasizes utopia as method for enabling difference and otherness, rather than as an imaginary depiction of realized social harmony and perfection. Tobin Siebers defines utopia as “the desire to desire differently”(3). This advances Ruth Levitas’ argument that “The essence of utopia

seems to be desire—the desire for a different, better way of being” (181). Levitas argues that a broad definition of utopia “must be able to incorporate a wide range of forms, functions and contents” (179). Utopianism provokes a multitude of questions and approaches, and utopia as “desiring differently” provides an all-inclusive definition (180). Frederic Jameson situates the dynamic nature of “Utopian politics” in a “dialectic of Identity and Difference, to the degree at which such a politics aims at imagining, and sometimes even at realizing, a system radically different from this one (xii). If utopia can be defined in terms of desiring difference, then the question becomes what does this difference look like? And how do these desires lead to realizable change?

Lucy Sargisson provides the most relevant definition of utopia in terms of its ability to effect radical change based on the desire for difference. In defining her theory of transgressive utopianism, she points out the very important difference between completeness and being, which are important attributes of traditional utopias, and open-ended process and becoming, which are definitive characteristics of the utopian strain running throughout modern utopian literature. Sargisson first developed her notion of transgressive utopianism in her work *Contemporary Feminist Utopianism* (1996) and then applied it again in her study *Utopian Bodies and the Politics of Transgression* (2000). Sargisson’s use of the term “utopian bodies” differs from mine in that it refers to bodies of people forming intentional communities, while my idea of the “utopian body” refers to an individualized and internalized concept of an alternative way of being. She clearly and directly lays out her new definition of utopia in the introduction to

*Contemporary Feminist Utopianism*. It is worthwhile to reproduce her outline of transgressive utopianism here:

- It is internally subversive, which is to say that it challenges from within the aims and assumptions of the ground whence it comes (political theory, utopian philosophy, academic study, etc).
- It is flexible and resistant to permanence and order and even while it constructs an account (of, e.g., “politics”) it accepts its own imminent dissolution. Nothing lasts forever in a changing environment.
- It is intentionally and deliberately utopian. The book [*Utopian Bodies*] asserts, contra popular assumptions, that a certain utopianism is essential to process and dynamism. (2)

Sargisson rejects the traditional view of utopia as an ideal world or social blueprint. Transgressive utopianism is “the product of an approach to utopian thinking that does not insist upon utopia as blueprint: utopia as the inscription of perfection” (2). For Sargisson, the arrival at a state of perfection is synonymous with death, since change is no longer possible. Utopia for her is “wild, unruly, rule-breaking thought that is politically driven and that expresses a profound discontent with the political present. . . . It is, above all, resistant to closure and it celebrates process over product” (3). The idea of utopia itself should not be viewed as static and unaffected by the “real world” where everyday people dream, desire and seek personal change for themselves within a civilization that often seeks to inhibit and order private spaces like the body. The concept of utopia as social blueprint for reaching perfection focuses on the final outcome



and the ultimate resolution to problems and discontentment; transgressive utopianism, however, gathers energy from the very act of engaging in utopian thought, what Fredric Jameson refers to as a strategy of “disruption,” which allows us to envision change in a world run by seemingly permanent systems and institutions (231). Transgressive utopianism self-regenerates through constant destruction, negation and transformation. It counters and destroys what confines it, and by doing so creates a utopian space, or a “new conceptual space” where difference can occur (Sargisson 3). The desire for difference and change and the creation of a new conceptual space, an alternative or “third space,” is a truly utopian project that focuses not on the end result, or reaching a static state of being, but, rather, on the constant process of *becoming* within a dynamic environment.

My own concept of utopia builds from re-conceptualizations of utopian thinking by recent critics, most notably Jameson and Sargisson. I argue for “utopia” as a method of thinking about the world rather than a final destination or outcome, which, as Sargisson argues, is commensurate with death and the end of change. Utopia as an endpoint or final solution will inevitably lead to disappointment, suspicion and failure; in fact, we *need* utopia to fail. Jameson argues that “at best Utopia can serve the negative purpose of making us more aware of our mental and ideological imprisonment...and that therefore the best Utopias are those that fail the most comprehensively” (xiii). Utopia becomes a much more immediately useful and powerful concept when it helps us to imagine alternatives and possibilities that may otherwise seem unachievable or impossible. As Jameson writes, “one cannot imagine any fundamental change in our

social existence which has not first thrown off Utopian visions like so many sparks from a comet” (xii). The point is less to create a better world or a better body than to desire the possibility for something different than we have, and to use that desire for difference as a strategy for enacting realizable change. What we do not want to lose is the ability to imagine difference, particularly in a world that seems increasingly resistant to change. I pinpoint the body as one of the most prominent expressions of the desire for difference and change, and as a source for renewing the potency of utopian thinking. Of course, the body is part of a larger world, and it is in the relationship of body and world that the potential for throwing off sparks of utopian energy is inestimable.

### **Utopia in the Early Twentieth Century**

What role does the body play in utopia? And how do planners of utopian communities account for the dreams and desires of the individuals as embodied beings? No utopia—whether created in fiction or attempted in the real world—can ignore the human body. Even the best and most harmonious visions of utopia must deal with the unavoidable dilemmas of sickness, hunger and death that threaten the possibility of “perfection.” The rest of this chapter will discuss how the planners of supposedly “utopian” societies have dealt with the body and other troublesome elements on the path to a better world, and how their often oppressive and violent attempts to carve out a realizable utopia have created a backlash against rational social planning and a shift toward finding alternative ways of reclaiming the potency of utopian thinking. My aim is to outline the historical context around which the body has shifted from a troublesome site of public discord to an internalized and transgressive pathway to utopian possibility.

The traditional idea of utopia found in works ranging from Plato's *Republic* to Bellamy's nineteenth-century American bestseller *Looking Backward* came under fierce attack in the twentieth century, as "utopian projects" like communism and Nazism gave new and terrifying dimension to the possibility of achieving a "utopian" state. And America, once the promised land of fresh starts and endless opportunity, became, following WWII, the target of criticism from authors who pointed out the exploitation, poverty and oppression lying under America's seemingly bright future as a new world power with a booming consumer culture. With the hope for utopian social possibilities in shambles by the latter half of the twentieth century, the time was right for a new form of utopianism to emerge, one offering hope and possibility through the more immediately moldable frontiers of the body.

Plato's *Republic*, as "the great archetype" of utopian literature, set up a format that many traditional utopian texts would later imitate and many dystopian texts would later satirize (Walsh 39). The modern tendency is to read the *Republic*'s utopia as cringe-inducing, passionless world, void of pleasure and creativity. Even Plato's student, Aristotle, found Plato's city too unrelenting and inflexible in regard to human nature, as would many future anti-utopians. Frank and Manuel write that "Aristotle balked at the rigid tripartite class division of Plato's *Republic*, at the degree to which specialization had been driven, at the imposition of one function upon a man for the whole of his life, at the exaggerated emphasis on unity at the end of the state" (109).

However, Plato's social organization set up a model that would influence utopian thinkers for centuries and shape what they considered the ultimate aims for humankind.

*The Republic*, with its social divisions and specialized skills, would inspire seminal works like Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*, Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, and H. G. Wells' *A Modern Utopia*. Along with Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*, Plato's model is one of the best examples of a classic utopia, particularly in its focused devotion to reason and its denial of the "disruptive" potential of bodily desires and innovative change. *The Republic* is an exemplary model of the classical utopian state that would be reproduced and reflected upon rigorously in the centuries to follow, leading up to a burst of utopian enthusiasm in nineteenth-century America, where once again the ideal state was not only imagined but actively pursued in real communities. These would all come under attack in the twentieth century, signaling what might appear as the end of utopia. However, this was the start of efforts to outline a new transgressive utopianism to replace an increasingly defunct but very tenacious model of the ideal state.

*The Republic* is meant to portray an ideal version of society grounded on a strict devotion to justice, reason, and collective happiness. It consists of three social divisions—an elite group of philosopher-kings whose enlightened wisdom secures them all political power; the guardians or standing army who practice intense self-discipline and asceticism as they maintain stability and balance in the city; and the workers, who make up the majority of the population and provide the necessary labor, and who remain ignorant of truth and wisdom of the philosophers. Each individual performs his or her specific task within their chosen class, and no group meddles in the other. This balance of duty and responsibility maintains justice, and, as Plato argues, a just man is happier and better off than an unjust man. As Plato outlines in Book IV, this tripartite class

division mirrors the three-part nature of man's soul, which Plato divides into three principles. The philosophers, guided by the rational principle, are linked to the part of man's soul that loves reason and wisdom. The spirited principle is linked to passion and honor, and this gives the guardians their insurmountable will and courage. Finally, the part of the soul which experiences love, hunger, thirst and "the flutter of other desires" and pleasures is called the irrational and concupiscent principle (137). The workers represent this part of the soul, and they are more likely to be swayed by the appetites of the body.

Temperance and simplicity were expected of the entire social body, allowing no room for "animal" pleasures, excessive indulgence or the pursuit of individual desires that were not dedicated to the state. Plato argues that man's needs are relatively few and that luxury and excess were the precursors to wars and degeneration, ideas that dominated utopian thought for centuries. Plato recognized that "a terrible species of wild and lawless appetites resides in every one of us, even when in some cases we have the appearance of being perfectly self-restrained" (294). These are "appetites which bestir themselves in sleep; when, during the slumbers of that other part of the soul, which is rational and tamed and master of the former, the wild animal part, sated with meat or drink, becomes rampant, and pushing sleep away endeavors to set out after gratification of its own proper character" (293). When man avoids his animal passions, such as the philosophers, he is primed to understand truth—to reach that "other part of the soul" where reason and wisdom reside, separated from the baseness of bodily desires and uninhibited indulgence. However, the workers, being weak in mind and ignorant of

truth, are unable to attain this higher plane of existence, and there is no opportunity for them to ever move out of their allotted social position. The guardians are trained at an early age to protect against “innovations” that would dispel the collective happiness and unity of the state. Neither great wealth nor excessive poverty is allowed “because the former produces luxury and idleness and innovation, and the latter meanness and bad workmanship as well as innovation” (115). They guard against innovations in both the physical sports and the arts. Plato’s fear is that introducing novelty and innovation will jeopardize the entire state by distracting men from their duties and thus disturbing the political order (118).

The social order remains static and unchanging, and not surprisingly, the Republic is void of revolution, countercultures and any other threats to the stability of the status quo. Contrary to the desire for difference and change that characterizes transgressive utopianism, Plato’s utopia is entirely static and subdued. A man who can act or assume different identities will be revered but also promptly sent away since “there is no one like him.” Individuality and difference may be briefly admired but never long allowed. Plato prefers poets who will regurgitate and reiterate the laws and codes of the state and thereby promote the virtuous balance and order of utopia. These poets “will imitate for us the style of the virtuous man, and will cast his narratives in the moulds which we prescribed at the outset” (86). This is insurance against artistic deviance and transgression that also reaffirms the righteousness of the state over the unpredictable spontaneity of individuals who toy with the boundaries of embodiment and the self. Fluid, changeable identities threaten Plato’s perfectly weighted social

balance, though it is just these types of identities that would redefine utopian possibility in late twentieth-century utopian literature.

The basic strategy of Plato was the same for many nineteenth-century utopian reform movements: create the utopia first, and man's actions and desires will naturally adjust to complement an improved if not ideal social environment. For utopian thinkers in nineteenth-century America, the hopes of Plato went beyond fiction.<sup>1</sup> However, the bulk of utopian thought during nineteenth-century America was mostly expressed through literature and fantastic stories of time travel, space travel, and the discovery of new worlds here on earth. When Bellamy published his bestseller *Looking Backward* in 1888, he sparked a decade where utopian literature "was perhaps the most widely read type of literature in America" (Shurter qtd. in Roemer 307). According to Lakshmi Mani, this "spurt in utopian writing" responded to "spectacular and dramatic changes" like "the transcontinental railroad, the electric light, the telephone, the dynamo, [and] the rags-to-riches stories of Carnegie and Rockefeller...." Utopianism in the nineteenth century showed the persistence in "a panegyric hope for the American dream" (63). These would include over a hundred lesser known works as well as such popular novels

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<sup>1</sup> Before the outbreak of literary utopias after Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, real experiments in utopian living were underway throughout America and overseas. The perceived contention between civilization and desire continued as a battle against the unruly indulgences of the flesh and the belief that utopia as fiction could quite conceivably become utopia realized. For example, Robert Owen established the New Harmony Society in 1825. Like all other utopian experiments of the time, New Harmony failed due to the clash of individual desires with community expectations, which required the relinquishment of private property and the development of a self-sustaining economy that relied more on human labor than factories and machines. Owen's attempts at socialist living were based on his writings, particularly *A New View of Society*, and his lectures about the formation of man's character. According to Owen, man's will and actions are shaped solely by environment; thus, if you change the environment, you change the man. Not surprisingly, man didn't change.

as Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Author's Court* (1889), Ignatius Donnelly's *Caesar's Column* (1890), and William Dean Howells' *A Traveler from Altruria* (1894).

The outburst of utopian literature in the late nineteenth century spawned several reactions from authors who feared that attempts to realize utopia would lead to terrifying futures of automatism and tyranny, such as H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine* (1895) and *The Sleeper Awakes* (1910) and Jack London's *The Iron Heel* (1908). By the early twentieth century utopia was under even fiercer attack as the dystopian novel overtook the utopian genre with novels like Zamyatin's *We* (1924), Sinclair Lewis' *It Can't Happen Here* (1935), Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* (1940) and George Orwell's *1984* (1948). The dystopian tradition is not unique to the twentieth century, with earlier satires like Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) and darker meditations like Fyodor Dostoevsky's "The Grand Inquisitor" from *The Brother's Karamazov* (1880).<sup>2</sup> However, dystopian novels of the twentieth century had the unique vantage point of witnessing the consequences and aftermath of the implementation of rational "utopian" planning in modern totalitarian states which used efficiency and bureaucracy as part of calculated mass murders. Reason, the guiding force of utopia since Plato, was criticized in novels that created terrifyingly dehumanizing societies of the future as warnings about the dangers of socialist systems.

According to Krishan Kumar, the possibility of utopia in the twentieth century was shaken by "Two world wars, mass unemployment, Fascism, Stalinism, the threat of

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<sup>2</sup> In "The Grand Inquisitor," Christ returns to earth only to be arrested by the Grand Inquisitor who believes man desires happiness more than freedom and personal choice.



nuclear war—all seem to testify to the continuing power of barbarism and unreason” (89). Jameson writes that during the Cold War, “Utopia had become a synonym for Stalinism and had come to designate a program which neglected human frailty and original sin, and betrayed a will to uniformity and the ideal purity of a perfect system that always had to be imposed by force on its imperfect and reluctant subjects (xi). The totalitarian systems of the first half of the twentieth century were pivotal in producing literature’s growing criticism and distrust of utopian social planning. Under regimes like those of Stalin and Hitler, “Utopia” was considered accomplished or at least on the path toward realization in societies that were hardly barbaric or backwards; on the contrary, they were forward-thinking, technologically advanced, and founded on Reason and science. Soviet socialism and National Socialism gave bloody proof that utopia as a social practice quickly and perhaps inevitably leads to totalitarianism. In *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989), Zygmunt Bauman explains that Stalin’s and Hitler’s victims were killed “because they did not fit, for one reason or another, the scheme for a perfect society.” Their deaths, he continues, were touted as justified acts of creation rather than destruction, necessary to the pursuit of “an objectively better world” that was “a harmonious world, conflict-free, docile in the hands of their rulers, orderly, controlled” (92-93). Much like Plato’s use of an uncompromising social system to promote “justice,” the concept of a “better world” became, under Stalin and Hitler, the justification for oppressive tactics, and a way to gloss over years of violence and misery.

The effects these events would have on perceptions of utopia and of “rational” thinking are clearly evident in the dystopian literature of the first half of the twentieth

century through today, as “utopia” is being reassessed by those intent on reclaiming its potency despite the inexorable denunciations of the twentieth century. Since these historical moments have been influential in the shift in utopian literature from social planning to personal pursuits centered on embodiment, I will briefly outline relevant aspects of Stalinist Russia and Hitler’s Nazi Germany. This will in no way be an exhaustive overview of these events, but a discussion focused on the relationship between these regimes and utopian ideology. Though some scholars would contend that events like the Great Terror and the Holocaust were irrational aberrations in an otherwise civilized world, I side with sociologists and historians who contend that not only were these regimes fueled by utopian visions of egalitarian and mono-cultured futures, but they also relied heavily on uniquely modern methods of rational planning and administration that actually *enabled* the use of violence for mass murder and extermination. It is this perverted application of Reason in justifying violent means for utopian ends that has indelibly marred the concept of “the perfect society.”

Hannah Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) offers piercing insight into the unique brand of terror distinguishing totalitarian governments of the twentieth century, particularly Stalinist Russia and Nazi Germany, from earlier tyrannical forms of governments. Arendt defines totalitarian movements as “mass organizations of atomized, isolated individuals” that demand “total, unrestricted, unconditional, and unalterable loyalty of the individual member” (323). Individual ambition or desire is completely replaced with the good of the party. Unlike its predecessors, totalitarian rule is not interested in limited, local interests but a power so absolute that it plans, in some

indeterminate future, to command the globe and lead all nations. It is this drive toward “a purely fictitious reality in some indefinite future” that marks totalitarianism as no ordinary dictatorship (412). No matter the reality of the situation or the demands of the moment, this “ideal” of global power is used as justification for violent and oppressive action. The “unwavering faith in an ideological fictitious world, rather than lust for power” is one of the key traits of this new system of control and part of the government’s “entirely new and unprecedented concept of reality” (415). This distinctly utopian mindset is one of the distinguishing features of the modern dictatorships of Stalin and Hitler.

Stalinism is inseparable from utopian ideology, and, as a consequence, we now link utopianism with the atrocities of the Stalinist period. The Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin was deeply rooted in utopian ideology and the hope for a communist future that would transform Russia and eventually the world. Such hopes were largely influenced by Karl Marx, who argued that capitalism exploited the working class, making a working class revolution necessary to overthrow the bourgeoisie, abolish private property and establish a classless society. In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx criticized utopian thinkers as dreamers and escapists; instead of such fantasies, Marx called for bold revolutionary action that would take charge of history and catapult oppressed proletariats into political power. Such goals were certainly utopian in nature, though distinguished from “social fantasy” in their insistence on violent revolution and realizability. Marx’s theory was at the heart of Lenin’s overthrow of the Russian autocracy during the Russian Revolution of 1917. The goal of the revolution was to

establish communism, and this struggle to actualize Marx's communist ideas lasted until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Though the Soviet Union did provide welfare, education and other amenities one would expect in a socialist society, the period is characterized by its use of violence and terror, instigated most notably by Joseph Stalin, who led the Soviet Union after Lenin's death in 1924 until his own death in 1953. Under Stalinism, the Soviet Union became one of history's most vivid examples of totalitarianism, leading to famine and starvation, countless arrests and deportations, internment in prison camps known as Gulags, mass executions, and, according to Robert Conquest, a minimum of twenty million deaths during Stalin's rule alone (486).

Recent scholarship has debated the rationale and motivation behind the Stalinist era, and not all have agreed that the hope for a better world played into the Stalinist regime. Rather than interpret Soviet socialism as a process beginning with Marx and leading to Stalin and events like the Great Purges and the Great Terror of 1936-1938, such studies mark the period, like the Holocaust, as a single, unrepeatable event driven by madness, irrationality and the acts of a single evil individual. In his article "State Violence as Technique: The Logic of Violence in Soviet Totalitarianism," Peter Holquist writes that contemporary scholarship shares the common belief that the Soviet use of violence was purely repressive and, as such, is "treated as a rupture or deviation from a supposedly more normal Soviet policy" (133). In other words, violent tactics of oppression and control were not necessary or elemental to the plan to establish socialism. Some recent scholarship depicts Stalin as an evil genius given too much power who turned to irrational means for maintaining and increasing this power. J. Arch

Getty argues that Soviet violence took many different forms, from traditional, prophylactic, and even primitive, but it was not uniquely modern or driven by any utopian aims: "...within the leadership there was no attempt to justify violence by reference to theory, total control, scientific infallibility, purification, weeding or perfecting society, or even ideology" (185). Getty likens the regime's tactics to a "psychotic break," the same that might affect a postal employee who opens fire at his workplace (186).

Whatever the approach, such studies argue that the Stalinist period was characterized by completely irrational terror that played no part in a larger rational project to create a socialist future. In this sense Stalinism is *not* attributable to twentieth century developments in reason and progress but can be read as an "aberration." This is definitely one of the easier and more palatable interpretations of the Stalinist period, particularly when faced with the daunting number of deaths and seemingly random and certainly unjust acts of murder and exile. However, Stalinist Russia was not created by one man alone but by the cooperation of an entire system of control and tyranny. *Utopia in Power* by Mikhail Heller and Aleksandr M. Nekrich and *The Soviet Tragedy* by Martin Malia insist that Stalinism was not a deviation from socialism but, rather, a *logical* step in the implementation of socialist ideology. Stalinism was a distinct outcome of the twentieth century rather than a primitive, irrational glitch in an otherwise

sound modern civilization. As such, it contributed to the negative outlook on utopia as social blueprint.<sup>3</sup>

According to David Hoffman, recent studies on Stalin tend to agree that Stalin's "radical interventionism to reshape society, cannot be understood apart from the rise of modern state welfare and state violence" (130). In his editor's note to Holquist's article "State Violence as Technique," Hoffman writes that "Stalinism cannot be understood apart from the modern conception of society as an artifact to be sculpted through state intervention." Hoffman also points out that Stalinism "deployed technologies of social cataloguing and intervention that were new to the modern era. These technologies grew out of Enlightenment thought and European disciplinary culture, which promoted social intervention in the name of rational social reform" (130). The Stalinist regime was not entirely violent; it also supported beneficial state welfare programs. Though this may seem contradictory, Hoffman explains that both welfare programs and state violence were part of the same goal "to refashion society according to an idealized vision of the social order" (130). Violence and welfare were two sides of the same utopian desires for a socialist future. Malia directly links the violent, totalitarian regime of Stalinist Russia with socialism: "...the Soviet experiment turned totalitarian not *despite* its being socialist but *because* it was socialist" (498 Malia's italics). Holquist agrees, arguing that Soviet state violence was not merely preemptive or repressive, but was used "as a tool for fashioning an idealized image of a better, purer society" (134). Under Stalinist logic,

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<sup>3</sup> This outlook was further intensified by Nazi Germany, which I discuss later, and other regimes like Mao's Great Leap Forward, a social project in late 1950s and early 1960s China which ended in large-scale famine and death.

events like the Great Purge and the Great Terror were necessary precursors to forcing utopian visions into permanent realities.

Soviet socialism, as the “great utopian adventure of the modern age” (Malia 1), has perhaps had the most pernicious and derogative effect on the idea of utopianism as social vision. Under Stalin, the Soviet regime became a massive totalitarian network that followed what Arendt has identified as the “totalitarian” elements specific to all ideologies (x). Soviet Stalinism claimed total control of history and the future; it blurred reality and perception for the sake of a “truer” reality in the future; and it held fast to ideas rather than immediate experience. By perverting reality in favor of “truths” that validated the violence and tactics of the regime, Soviet socialism claimed that utopia had been achieved, and by doing so permanently tainted the bright and sunny visions utopia once evoked for many authors and thinkers. Stalin’s programs proved fatal to later attempts at communism.

Hitler’s National Socialism was, along with Soviet Stalinism, one of the most turbulent and horrific “utopian” projects of the twentieth century. Like the Soviet Union, Germany under Hitler considered violence and oppression necessary steps toward achieving a utopian future. Hitler wanted to establish a thousand-year Reich which would champion the superiority of the German race over all others. The Nazis targeted Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals and even those with birth defects. The Nazi hatred of “inferior” races, particularly the Jews, was not couched in vicious, barbaric terms, but in the most sophisticated and unemotional references to science and reason. As Arendt tells us, under the Nazi ideology of racial cleansing and social engineering, even the

concentration camps were sensible and logical. If the captives are considered by science and enlightened thinking to be vermin who will only hinder and undermine a rational project of social planning, it stands to reason that they, like vermin, be exterminated (457). As Bauman explains, racism “comes into its own only in the context of a design of the perfect society and intention to implement that design through planned and consistent effort” (66). According to the Nazi ideology, some races are naturally suited or at least moldable to a utopian future, while others, such as the Jews, were completely unsuited to utopia, and no amount of effort could change this “scientific” fact. Thus, for the Nazis, genocide became “an exercise in the rational management of society” (72).

Some scholars also read the totalitarian regime of Hitler and particularly the Holocaust as an aberration rather than result of modern civilization. Bauman takes to task the idea that the Holocaust was a misstep of civilization and the failure of a modern world to contain man’s evil nature, which too easily dismisses the magnitude of the event (13). He criticizes sociological studies, such as Helen Fein’s *Accounting for Genocide*, that conceive of the Holocaust as “a unique yet fully determined product of a particular concatenation of social and psychological factors, which led to a temporary suspension of the civilizational grip in which human behaviour is normally held” (4). Though we often approach Hitler and Nazi Germany with what Ian Kershaw calls “morbid wonder” at the quickness with which civilization collapsed, Kershaw warns us not to reduce Hitler’s rule the murderous madness of one man or the blind bloodlust of mindless followers, though some sociological studies have done just that—reading the violence of Hitler’s rule as an extremely atrocious phenomenon, and the Holocaust as an



unrepeatable failure of civilization and reason (*Hitler* 228). According to Kernshaw, Hitler provided the name and the authority for actualizing initiatives what were once only visions, such as the acts of SS, who used the name of Hitler to carry out “ever new initiatives in a ceaseless dynamic of discrimination, repression and persecution” (40). Hitler’s name bridged the gap between utopian vision and the achievement of Germany’s goals; he made “the unthinkable seem realizable” (350).

Like the Soviet Union under Stalin, Germany under Hitler was a unique regime which was aided rather than hindered by ideas of modern reason and enlightenment. In *Modernity and Holocaust*, Bauman argues that “It was the rational world of modern civilization that made the Holocaust thinkable” (13). Nazi Germany was not a barbaric, primitive world of random violence and bloodlust, but a highly rational, bureaucratic world that worked so efficiently that normal, everyday people were conditioned to perform heinous crimes, and even victims to co-operate in their own destruction. Nazi rule gained mass support not only from the masses but also from the intellectual elite. And unlike earlier dictatorships, the Nazi dictatorship involved “a highly modern state apparatus...capable of turning visionary, utopian goals into practical, administrative reality” (Kernshaw 353). In a letter quoted by Kernshaw, Hitler himself urges that the “final solution,” which called for the territorial expansion of Germany and the removal of all the Jews, be based on reason rather than emotion (89). As Bauman explains, Hitler was successful, and the Final Solution never veered from “the rational pursuit of efficient, optimal goal-implementation” (17). Bauman also refers to the Holocaust as an “*advance of civilization*” in that it practiced such highly efficient administration and

technology and functioned so rationally that both guard and victim acquiesced to horrifying conditions (9 my italics). Bauman's descriptions of the rational nature of the Holocaust are highly evocative of the traditional concept of utopia as shaping and molding human nature and society into a better world where "evils" and inequalities were erased:

I suggest, further, that the bureaucratic culture which prompts us to view society as an object of administration, as a collection of so many 'problems' to be solved, as 'nature' to be 'controlled', 'mastered' and 'improved' or 'remade', as a legitimate target for 'social engineering', and in general a garden to be designed and kept in the planned shape by force (the gardening posture divides vegetation into 'cultured plants' to be taken care of, and weeds to be exterminated), was the very atmosphere in which the idea of the Holocaust could be conceived, slowly yet consistently developed, and brought to its conclusion.

(18)

We not only live in a world where the Holocaust was possible, but where it could happen again—and the search for utopia is often seen as the foundation for such possibility.

By the mid-twentieth century, the utopian imagination was suffering, and after Stalin and Hitler, utopia as a vision of social possibility was at a frustrating and impotent halt, although civilization had met and exceeded many of the technological and economic hopes of utopian visionaries centuries before. "Utopia" had become another weapon in the hands of humankind, and a very rational justification for acts of evil and exploitation. In his 1967 lecture "The End of Utopia," Herbert Marcuse observed,

“Today we have the capacity to turn the world into hell, and we are well on the way to doing so” (62). Even the utopian sheen of America, once described by Walt Whitman as “the promise and reliance of the future” (264), seemed to be rubbing off according to different critics and thinkers, revealing a “nightmare of joyless materialism and brutal exploitation,” a place Frantz Fanon has called a “monster” (Kumar 84). Allen Ginsberg’s *Howl* rose up from the streets, and in “America” he cries, “Go fuck yourself with your atom bomb” and laments the sick, the mad and the forgotten haunting America’s alleys (39). When ex-patriate Henry Miller returned to America in the 1940s to revisit his homeland, he wrote a travel narrative ominously titled *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*, which described an America that had fallen far from its past glory as a stronghold of dreams and visions. Miller writes, “This world which is in the making fills me with dread. I have seen it germinate; I can read it like a blue-print. It is not a world I want to live in” (24). Miller reviled the land of opportunity as “the land of senseless sweat and struggle” (20). Whether or not we accept him as a spokesman for the American condition, his criticisms, along with the others, suggest that the “utopia” of America was faltering.

Of the American novels published in the 1950s, Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita* (1955) can be read as a watershed novel in the development of a new utopianism. In *The Post-Utopian Imagination*, Booker characterizes the novel as “post-utopian” (61) and its theme of irretrievable loss and lack of hope as “thoroughly anti-utopian” (57). The novel certainly has an element of utopian energy; Humbert’s pursuit of the nymphet Lolita is motivated by the desire to recapture a lost love from his youth, and for him

Lolita is the answer to all his tortured wanderings and feelings of separation and loneliness in a world that reviles his predilections. Booker reads “the crazed nature of Humbert’s desire for Lolita as an oblique suggestion of the craziness of utopian thought in general” (60). Certainly Humbert’s actions cannot be condoned as admirable utopian hopes, especially when Humbert turns a deaf ear to Lolita’s nightly sobs.

However, *Lolita* also suggests that utopian hopes persist—just not in their usual recognizable role as beacons of social optimism. The utopian visions that dominated late nineteenth-century America were clearly fading, but another type of utopian energy was beginning to stir. Poised in the middle of century that had witnessed modern civilization commit countless atrocities in the name of a “better world,” *Lolita* suggests new ways to conceive of utopia and utopian desire. Humbert fantasizes that the magical world of nymphets is an “intangible island of entranced time” surrounded by a vast sea that only a few particularly perceptive individuals are aware of and quest for passionately (16). Once Humbert has claimed Lolita as his own, he feels as though he has reached his “elected paradise” (166). Humbert’s desires are distinctly utopian, rather than simple longings or wishes. He seeks out Lolita as a way to regain a sense of his lost self and fulfill his internalized concept of his own personal “ideal world” on that mist-covered island in his imagination.

This is one of many moments in literature indicative of the shift in utopianism from the focus on collective perfection to the desires and dreams of the individual, whose utopian energies may or may not be amenable to the social status quo. These are the literary moments this study is interested in. Humbert’s quest for a nymphet body is a

complex, internalized desire inseparable from a longing for renewal and change. Couched in utopian terms, his pedophilia could be interpreted as a condemnation of utopia, but it can also be read as an expansion of the traditional boundaries of utopia established centuries before with Plato. In this sense *Lolita* is characteristic of the ambiguity of postmodern utopian novels that contain both utopian and dystopian elements and can no longer be clearly categorized as either, such as Ursula LeGuin's *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia* (1974). Humbert's ultimate failure to recapture the love of his youth and keep a willing nymphet always by his side is not an indication that utopian hope itself is useless; achieving utopia is often far less important than the act of desiring it.

The rest of this study will be devoted to examining this development in the fictional worlds of utopian literature, but first I want to briefly trace the rising interest of the body in sociological and cultural studies, which have recently begun to recognize the connection between the body and the social world. This should not be overlooked, as it further reveals the growing importance of embodiment to the individual. In a world of rapidly escalating uncertainty and rationalized violence, the body is becoming a source for individual empowerment and transformation, whether this involves taking up an exercise program or undergoing radical surgery. Though utopia is most often explicitly explored in the imaginative boundaries of literature, it is a very potent force in the life of the everyday individual who looks at his or her body and "desires differently."

## **Sociology and the Body in the Twentieth Century**

Though little has been written about the “utopian body” in modern literature, the rising interest in the body has not gone unnoticed by sociological studies since the last half of the twentieth century. As David Morris writes in “Postmodern Pain,” “private and secular postmodern utopias reflect a belief that the only valid remaining space of perfection lies, ready-at-hand, in our own individual flesh: a paradise of curves and muscle.” These are utopian spaces “disengaged from any discourse about mind and spirit and reinvented strictly as objects of vision” (152). The body as an “object of vision” has been studied by recent sociologists such as Chris Shilling and Bryan Turner, who ground their work in earlier studies by Herbert Marcuse and Michel Foucault. Like utopian texts, modern sociologies of the body focus on desire as a key element to analyzing the centrality of the body to society. I will briefly discuss some of the prominent ideas on the sociology of the body in modern culture that relate to my discussions on the body as a source of “desiring differently.” I will return to these issues at greater length in discussions of body modification practices in Chapter IV.

In *The Body in Culture, Technology and Society* (2005), Chris Shilling explains the reasons for the rising interest in the body since the 1980s. These include the increasing use of the body in advertisements and other consumer culture images; second wave feminism of the 1970s and 1980s that drew attention to the way women’s bodies were oppressed and controlled; studies on the body within systems of discipline and control, particularly the works of Michel Foucault; technological advances such as cosmetic surgeries and genetic engineering that cast doubt over the stability and

“knowability” of the body; and the use of the body in academia to advance understanding of different disciplinary fields (2-4). This development contrasts with the traditionally “negative views” of the body. Shilling argues that the Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment contributed to the marginalization of the body and the preference for mind as the source for what makes us “truly human” (7). As different fields turn to the body for new understanding, there is little consensus on what the body actually is and how it is to be analyzed, creating what Shilling calls a problem of “analytical elusiveness” (1) or the “absent-present” body which tends to “fade from view in favour of a concern with more traditional analytical concerns” (*The Body and Social Theory* 179). To overcome some of this elusiveness, Shilling proposes a turn to corporeal realism, an idea with considerable relevance to understanding the body as a potential conduit for social change. Shilling’s argument that society cannot be viewed separately from the embodied subjects that inhabit it complements a utopianism that focuses on social change through the body rather than in spite of it. According to corporeal realism, the changes within society are inseparable from embodiment, rather than independent of it. Bodies are at the center of social action and social structures. Shilling writes, “Social action is embodied, and must be recognized as such, while the effects of social structures can be seen as a result of how they condition and shape embodied subjects” (15). The physical make-up of the body as well as its capacity for thought allows human beings to intervene in society and even change the social environment. Rather than being acted upon, the embodied subject is seen as an active social force.

As such, social actions and institutions exist and endure based on their ties with embodiment; thus, every society has some form of sport and games in response to body's desires and abilities (14). A example of this is the Olympics, where the world's nations put aside political differences and unite for a global celebration of embodiment and athleticism. The 2008 Olympics in Beijing was a particularly good recent example of the affinities between body and society. In Beijing, the body was continually celebrated as a utopian source for cultural rejuvenation and reinvention, particularly for the host country, who used the opportunity to showcase their cultural progress and rising prominence in sports. In the closing ceremonies, China's elaborate presentation merged bodies with machines, lights and technology in an awe-inspiring display of the body's centrality to China's emerging cultural and social world status. Many successful athletes, like American Michael Phelps, quickly became national and even international celebrities thanks to their athletic feats. The athletic body and its capabilities are quickly becoming symbols of social growth, identity and possibility far beyond the training field or the pool, a phenomenon I will look at more closely in Chapter II.

In a study from 1993, *The Body and Social Theory*, Shilling fittingly calls the body in modern society "a phenomenon of options and choices" (3). Bryan Turner, another prominent sociologist, agrees that as society shifts more toward consumerism, leisure and technology, the body is no longer regarded as static but as a form to be shaped and molded to individual desires (*The Body and Society* 5). In the West it is typical for bodies to be approached as "projects" that can be shaped and transformed with the determined effort of the individual. Rather than the body as latent or absent



within society, it becomes integral to conceptions of the self within society (187). Body projects may be as simple as diet and fitness or as extreme as cosmetic surgery or bodybuilding. Shilling emphasizes the unprecedented concern with achieving a healthy body as a reaction to the global dangers that threaten our health in a modern world which we have little control over. The body offers “an island of security” in a world of risks and dangers (5). For instance, in the autobiography *Muscle* by Samuel Wilson Fussell, Fussell admires the body of Arnold Schwarzenegger because he sees Arnold’s musculature as a form of protection and insulation from the world: “Here were breastplates, greaves, and pauldrons aplenty, and all made from human flesh....A human fortress—a perfect defense to keep the enemy at bay” (24). Fussell decides to pursue his own bodybuilding “project” so that he, too, will be less intimidated by his life in a big city. It is the body, rather than his social world, which provides release, transformation and utopian potential.

However, alongside more options come possible dangers that complicate our understanding of the body and what it should be, though these options still indicate that it is the body which is central to utopianism rather than the social world. Shilling notes that with the increased visibility of the body has come these two paradoxical developments: “We now have the means to exert an unprecedented degree of control over bodies, yet we are also living in an age which has thrown into radical doubt our knowledge of what bodies are and how we should control them” (3). With science and technology offering what seem like limitless possibilities, what boundaries, if any, should be set in terms of reconstructing the body? Literature has asked this as well in

books like Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*, which tells the story of three friends who grow up in a boarding school for children unknowingly cloned for their later use as organ donors by the world outside, which remains willingly ignorant to the humanness of those who face a slow death as their organs are gradually harvested. I will look more closely at such concerns in Chapter IV when I discuss cloning, genetic engineering and cosmetic surgery—ideas that center on attaining a state of “perfection” that are often shaped by social norms rather than the transgressive desires of an individual.

Bryan Turner also recognizes that an analytical gap exists in the field of sociology when it comes to embodiment, and his purpose in *The Body and Society* (1996) is to “expose this submergence and to articulate a theory in order to bring out the prominence of the body and bodies” (63). Just as metaphysics adhere to the separation between mind and body, traditional sociology has promoted the dichotomy of Self/Society. Sociological studies have dismissed embodiment and personal experience as unimportant to the study of social action and interaction between “social actors,” who are “socially constituted entities” and not necessarily actual people. This has been the “proper object” of sociology (61). Rather than dismiss the body's role in social actions, Turner emphasizes that the body is a cultural and social construct that has *not* remained static while society changes. In particular, he argues that the concept of the body as “the location of anti-social desire” is not a natural physiological condition but a cultural creation used to keep the body disciplined (making Foucault an important scholar in Turner's work); it is the body just as much as the consciousness that is an object of political and social power relationships (63). Turner, who has a specific interest in

dietary regimes, cites the shift from eighteenth-century views of the body as a sacred container of the soul to nineteenth-century industrialization that replaced the “sacred body” with the idea of the body as a machine that should be cared for using efficiency and calculation (65). Since there are clear ties between social institutions and embodiment, Tuner argues that a sociology of the body is necessary, and his work attempts to outline what this sociology should entail.

Turner’s sociology of the body involves “the historical analysis of the spatial organization of bodies and desire in relation to society and reason,” a sociology applicable to an examination of utopian literature that looks to the desiring body as a way to escape an overtly oppressive rationalism (66). Turner’s sociology of the body studies the problems of social order that are rooted in the Western tradition that presupposes an opposition between reason and desire (68). Turner’s work relies heavily on Michel Foucault’s studies of the body as a subject of power relations. For Foucault, sociology is about the regulation of bodies (Turner 75). In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault outlines the carceral nature of modern societies. Different forms of socially authorized discipline “normalize” individuals into objects that are cogs in a hierarchical system of constant surveillance. Modern society itself acts as prison where unseen yet omnipresent forces of power regulate bodies. This carceral society is itself a “classic dystopian model,” and Foucault’s ideas about the interplay between society and the body have made his texts very influential in readings of utopian and dystopian literature as

well as modern sociology (Booker *Dystopian Literature* 28).<sup>4</sup>

A modern sociology of the body owes much to the twentieth-century philosophy of Herbert Marcuse from the Frankfurt School. In Herbert Marcuse's work *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse combined Freud and Marx into a study that argued for the possibility of a non-repressive culture, something Freud believed impossible. According to Marcuse, the progress of civilization had created a surplus of goods, making suppression no longer necessary for social stability and progress. Reason itself is not at fault, only the systems that use reason as justification for suppressing individuality and creativity in the name of order and "truth." Marcuse argued for a balance between productivity and play, or, to use the Freudian terms, between the Reality Principle and the Pleasure Principle. Institutions like capitalism persisted in suppressing desire and pleasure despite having the abundance of means to support it, and civilization was only making people miserable. Unlike Plato, who railed against the society of excess as inherently degenerative, Marcuse saw surplus in civilization as a signal to reduce oppression and pursue pleasures and desires within the boundaries of a society that still valued work and productivity but not at the expense of creativity and desire—the things reason was truly meant to support rather than demonize.

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<sup>4</sup> Though the opposition between civilization/desire has been a standard in Western philosophy since Plato, there have been numerous thinkers who have often worked on the counterculture fringes of society to support greater freedoms for the expressions of desire and the body. For instance, Turner cites the revolutionary and daring discourse on sex by late eighteenth-century thinker Marquis de Sade and nineteenth-century utopian planner Charles Fourier as pivotal in rekindling discussions on desire (69). The orgasmic romps in works like *Philosophy in the Bedroom* were themselves utopian moments where the moral codes and expectations of civilization were cast off for transgressive sexual explorations that can be read as radical and politically-charged expressions of liberation.

The recent studies on sociology by Zygmunt Bauman are also very useful in foregrounding the turn to the body in utopian thinking. Bauman, like Freud and Marcuse, is interested in the balance between individual freedom and the securities offered by society. In works such as *Liquid Modernity* (2000), *The Individualized Society* (2001), and *Liquid Love* (2003), Bauman chronicles the shift in social structures and institutions from a “solid” to a “liquid” state. “Liquid modernity,” which Bauman substitutes for “post-modernity,” refers to the fluid, quickly-changing pace of the late twentieth-century and early twenty-first century world, and the subsequent difficulty in forming lasting and meaningful human bonds. His works describe a world of uncertainty, unsteadiness and anxiety, in which individuals struggle to gain hold of the present while global powers dismantle social networks “for the sake of their continuous and growing fluidity, that principal source of their strength and the warrant of their invincibility” (*Liquid Modernity* 14). This creates a rather difficult situation in which to imagine utopia. Bauman himself refers to liquid modernity as a state of dystopia, “one fit to replace the fears recorded in Orwellian and Huxleyan-style nightmares” (15).

In the chapters that follow I will examine literature from the last half of the twentieth century that explores and redefines the shape and function of utopian desires. These texts reveal a new utopianism of the body and a turn away from social visions to the dreams and desires of the individual as the new source for radical change and transformation. Once synonymous with a “perfect” society that tamed and normalized the destructive urges of the body, utopia is increasingly consummate with the dynamic and transgressive boundaries of the skin, and the desire to transform the world with the

turbulent animal drives of the body rather than the oppressive rationalism of  
“civilization.”

CHAPTER II  
THE BODY AS MEASURE

*“The writer is convinced that there is no way out or around  
or through the impasse. It is the end.”*

—H. G. Wells, *Mind at the End of its Tether*, 45

*“When time, clothes, opinions, and goals become so regulated that people feel they  
cannot be “themselves” or create something new, they bolt and look for fringes and  
margins, holes in the wall, or they just run.”*

—Paul Goodman, *Growing Up Absurd*, 129.

In E. M. Forster’s “The Machine Stops,” first published in 1909, the militarization and regimentation of human life has evolved to such a degree that even basic human movement has been almost completely substituted by the godlike efficiency of the “Machine.” Forster’s hero, Kuno, struggles to relearn his own body and find alternatives to a life entombed underground inside the Machine. His story expresses the deeply ingrained desire for the experience of embodiment and change, even in the face of an essentially static and disembodied world. Unlike her son, Kuno’s mother Vashti spends her life contentedly propelled around a hexagonal room by a mechanical chair. Along with the rest of society, whom she communicates with through sound tubes and television screens (much like our Internet), Vashti is devoted to listening to inane broadcasts while her body fades into “a swaddled lump of flesh” (41). She suffers from a “horror of direct experience” and a paralyzing fear of leaving her room and living

away from the security of the Machine (46). She listens in terror as Kuno describes his first trip outside the boundaries of the Machine:

You know that we have lost the sense of space. We say “space is annihilated,” but we have annihilated not space, but the sense thereof. We have lost a part of ourselves. I determined to recover it, and I began by walking up and down the platform of the railway outside my room. Up and down, until I was tired, and so did recapture the meaning of “Near” and “Far.” “Near” is a place to which I can get quickly *on my feet*, not a place to which the train or the air-ship will take me quickly. “Far” is a place to which I cannot get quickly on my feet; the vomitory is “far,” though I could be there in thirty-eight seconds by summoning the train. Man is the measure. That was my first lesson. Man’s feet are the measure for distance, his hands are the measure for ownership, his body is the measure for all that is lovable and desirable and strong. (51 Forster’s italics)

Kuno’s awareness that “Man is the measure” is in complete contradiction to civilization’s total reliance on The Machine to meter each life to perfection. As he steps into the fringes of his society, he slowly rediscovers the link between the body and his understanding of his place in the world, as well as his potentialities as an embodied being within that world. This is the essence of the utopian body.

Transformations happen when an individual explores the space beyond the mechanical limits of whatever “Machine” society has set to establish unyielding order and regimentation of the body. Kuno’s willingness to desire differently amidst a very homogenized dystopian world underscores a utopianism that relies on individualized



longings for embodiment and change rather than any one wholesale social contract. Forster's story is an early nod to the transgressive utopianism that would continue to develop throughout the century, particularly in post-war America. In this chapter I focus specifically on the literature and cultural climate of 1950s America; this is an important period in the development of utopian literature, and marked a definite turn away from utopia as social blueprint to utopia as transgressive embodiment. This new utopianism gained momentum and strength from movement and bodily potential rather than stasis and social harmony.

This chapter will look at a variety of critical works on the postwar period that offer context to the rising interest in embodiment, as well as the discontent and frustrations evident in utopian literature from the period, such as Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano*. Though there were certainly many optimistic and hopeful moments for the growing nation of America, the dystopian literature of the period highlights trends—particularly in regard to consumerism and corporate interests—that would become more prominent in literature as the century progressed. Many scholars have marked the postwar period as a point of extinction, or at least near extinction, for utopian literature and the utopian imagination. There was no longer an audience for hopeful predictions of social peace and harmony like those expressed in Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, and dystopian literature replaced utopian literature as a more fitting reflection of the times. However, though the utopian imagination that inspired utopian socialists was disparaged as frivolous dreaming, utopianism itself was not ending, but changing, and this shift can actually be traced in dystopian literature. Utopian and dystopian literature

are not opposing genres, and one feeds off the other. As Krishan Kumar explains, “As utopia loses its vitality, so too does anti-utopia” (422). The rise in dystopian literature was not an indication that utopia was over; it was proof that utopia was very much alive. Dystopian novels represent a hunger for change and a desire to think even more fiercely about where we are headed and how we can redirect ourselves before dystopian fiction becomes reality. In this sense, the dystopian novel is a very utopian enterprise, filled with powerful utopian moments, like the stunning laughter of D503 when he meets the bald and rather unassuming dictator in *We*, a laughter which undermines the dictator’s ability to evoke fear and obedience. Authors of dystopian literature show us how a misguided sense of utopia can develop and how it might be re-channeled and hope renewed, providing salvation from the potential future fermenting in our present. And over and over again, the body provides the needed escape.

In one sense the postwar period was very alive with utopian hopes, national pride and optimism. America emerged triumphant from World War II, firmly established as a powerful and promising nation. America looked forward to a prosperous and economically bright future. By focusing on industry and economic progress, America hoped to insulate herself from outside terrors and provide a safe haven for democracy. In *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times*, Krishan Kumar notes that industry became the new utopian project of postwar America, and such aspirations were “incorporated in the drive towards world-wide industrialization.” Western society and democracy, rather than socialism, became the model for the world to follow. Kumar writes that the

“planned and managed social democratic state...seemed to promise an end to the disruptive and wasteful social conflicts of earlier times” (388).

Some critics from the period were cautious about what these strides in progress might lead to. Daniel Bell summarizes American society in the 1950s in his introduction to *The End of Ideology* as a decade marked by changes that reflected this new interest in stabilizing industry and the economy, particularly “in the growth of the white-collar class and the spread of suburbia; by the ‘forced’ expansion of the economy...; by the creation of a permanent military establishment and a bedrock defense economy; and by the heightening tensions of the Cold War” (13). In particular, Bell calls to mind the image of the American factory as one of the indelible archetypes of the period, a place where “a mechanically imposed sense of time and pace” organized workers into efficient automatons locked in the belly of a large and dehumanizing machine. Fittingly, Bell calls 1950s America “the machine civilization” (230).

Utopian projects in the 1950s focused on social progress rather than the private life and psychological well-being of the individual; by enhancing society, the individual’s life would naturally be enhanced as well. In his examination of 1950s corporate life, *The Organization Man*, William Whyte describes this sentiment in terms of a utopian impetus to elevate society to new heights: “Men might not be perfectible after all, but there was another dream and now at last it seemed practical: the perfectibility of *society*” (22 Whyte’s italics). If nineteenth-century reformers had failed to “fix” the individual’s corruptible nature, perhaps the twentieth century could streamline and improve society to a point that both society’s demands and the individual’s needs would be one and the

same. Whyte refers to this “social ethic” (6) or quest for “utopian equilibrium,” as the ideal balance between society’s and the individual’s needs (13). This “equilibrium” undermined utopia as a way to desire differently. For instance, by implementing strategies that would secure American leadership in industry and militarization the economy would flourish and the American family would enjoy a cozy and prosperous life. However, Whyte argues that a perfect balance is not possible, and often society must “interpret” the individual’s needs so that harmony remains intact, albeit at the expense of the individual’s true desires. This “interpretation” led to a world of machine-like efficiency and a landscape not of open ranges and unlimited space, but of shopping malls, neon supermarkets, suburbs and Levittowns<sup>5</sup>, and a newcomer called McDonald’s.<sup>6</sup> The fault is not in organizations themselves, but in the worship of organizations and the “soft-minded denial” that the interests of the individual clash with those of society (13).

Several writers and scholars offer insight into some of the negative sentiments stirring in America and expressed in dystopian literature. Such works suggest that the potency of the utopian imagination was in steep decline. Kumar points out that even the optimism of H. G. Wells, author of *A Modern Utopia*, gave out in 1945. In *Mind at the End of its Tether*, Wells wrote, “Our universe is not merely bankrupt; there remains no dividend at all; it has not simply liquidated; it is going clean out of existence, leaving not

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<sup>5</sup> In Jane Jacobs’ study *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), Jacobs attacks city planning in America as fostering low-income projects that promote delinquency and middle-income projects that “are truly marvels of dullness and regimentation” (4).

<sup>6</sup> For an account of the “McDonaldization of America” see Eric Schlosser’s *Fast Food Nation*. Schlosser writes that a hamburger and fries became the “quintessential American meal” in the 1950s, and coincided “with Eisenhower-era glorifications of technology” (6).

a wrack behind” (15). America, once the world’s greatest utopian experiment, was gaining a reputation for being anti-utopian. As Kumar explains, albeit a bit dramatically, “The ‘ugly American,’ brutally bent on making the world ‘safe for democracy,’ seemed capable in this pursuit of simultaneously dissolving the world in ruins” (381). This was a turning point in the idea of America as a stronghold of liberty, freedom and justice, and the image of the ‘ugly American’ protecting democracy would continue to haunt the nation long into the future.

M. Keith Booker’s *The Post Utopian Imagination: American Culture in the Long 1950s* is helpful in understanding the “anti-utopia” sentiment in American during the long 1950s (1946-1964). Like Kumar, Booker describes American culture in the 1950s as “fundamentally anti-utopian.” Though America enjoyed “an ever-expanding domestic prosperity” (1) after World War II, it also created a capitalist system that could only prosper if it created longings that could never be met<sup>7</sup> (22). America’s attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki cast bleak doubt on America’s image as the “New World” of fresh starts and renewed hope (12). Many Americans were in a state of anxiety about the future and about their own nation. The American government feared socialism along with any other social alternatives, and this fear of difference became part of the social climate. As Booker explains, “the repressive climate of the Cold War was such that any proposed alternative to the present tended to be equated with communism, while communism tended to be equated with satanic evil” (2). Paranoid over atom bombs and “commies,” white middle class Americans sought to create islands of security in

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<sup>7</sup> I will return to this point in more detail in Chapter IV.

suburban homes, set apart from growing social unrest in public spaces.<sup>8</sup> According to Booker and critics such as Daniel Bell, the “unbound dream” of utopianism in America was “exhausted” by the 1950s (Bell 275).

While the new political powerhouse of America was eager to organize, categorize and discipline, the individual was left feeling fragmented and disengaged. Bell categorizes America in the 1950s as a mass society, defined in terms of dependency and controlled spaces: “The revolutions in transport and communication have brought men into closer contact with each other and bound them in new ways; the division of labor has made them more interdependent; tremors in one part of society affect all others.” Bell feared that despite the literal proximity of bodies, individuals would become more estranged from each other than ever (21). Even the workplace offered few opportunities for mobility, and what became known as the “grind” of the workplace came from this sense of a “fixed place” (Bell 257). People were also under pressure to measure up to different social roles, causing a fractured sense of wholeness and skyrocketing anxieties. As Bell states, “To become part of the mass is to be divorced—or ‘alienated’—from oneself” (23). This sense of alienation resonates in literature from the time, such as Sloan Wilson’s *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*. In the novel, Tom is an everyman attempting to move up in the world of business and provide his suburban family with a comfortable life. In his ambition to conform to the standards of the day, Tom must juggle the demands of the “opaque-glass-brick-partitioned world” where he works, the exciting memories of the military, and the much more dull and frantic battles

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<sup>8</sup> Such feelings were captured in 1950s films such as *The Wild One* with Marlon Brando and *Rebel Without a Cause* with James Dean.

of middle class life, such as “the entirely separate world” in suburbia with his wife and children. He finds it best to deal with these “completely unrelated worlds” by thinking of them as “divorced” from each other (22).

The sense of compartmentalization allowed the demands of society to dominate most of people’s lives and interests, frustrating and immobilizing the individual, who had to numbly accept his or her situation since there seemed to be no other choice. This is why Goodman, in *Gestalt Therapy*, characterizes society as an “atmosphere full of splits” where “body and mind, organism and environment, self and reality” are seen as opposing entities (viii). The growth of Gestalt Therapy during the 1940s and 1950s was one reaction to a world of increasing fragmentation, particularly between the internal world of the self and the external world beyond. This is the split Kuno attempted to resolve by testing the potentialities of his body in the outside world rather than the scripted fate given to him by the Machine. Similarly, rather than play a passive role under the therapist’s scrutiny, the patient undergoing Gestalt therapy is actively involved in his or her therapeutic session. The patient concentrates on what he or she “is actually feeling, thinking, doing, saying; he attempts to contact it more closely in image, body-feeling, motor response, verbal description, etc” (287). The patient’s body is fully engaged in the moment, feeling, sensing and experiencing the world. Goodman writes, “Experience occurs at the boundary between the organism and its environment, primarily the skin surface and the other organs of sensory and motor response (228).” Goodman believed Gestalt Therapy would counteract fragmentation caused systems which separated the individual’s sense of embodied experience from the demands of the

social environment by reintroducing “body-feeling” into the individual’s sense of well-being.

However, it is difficult to regain a sense of wholeness and connection between the body and world when movement feels regulated and space is compartmentalized for the productive efficiency of society rather than the well-being of the worker. In another examination of the period, *Growing Up Absurd*, Goodman explicitly argues that society simply claims too much of our space, stunting the individual’s ability to grow and change:

It is hard for a social animal to grow where there is not an open margin to grow in: some open space, some open economy, some open mores, some activity free from regulation and cartes d’identite....A society cannot have decided all possibilities beforehand and have structured them. If society becomes too tightly integrated and pre-empts all available space, materials, and methods, then it is failing to provide for just the margin of formlessness, real risk, novelty, spontaneity, that makes growth possible. (129)

This leads to the second epigraph which opened this chapter: when people feel they are so constrained they cannot be themselves or create anything new, “they bolt and look for fringes and margins, loopholes, holes in the wall, or they just run” (129). A society that closes off space and possibility is inherently flawed, since individuals, particularly the young and the creative, as Goodman points out, will inevitably look for “worm holes” and fringe worlds to quench the desire for change. Though utopia as a social “blueprint”



was itself meant to establish a tightly organized and predictable environment for conditioning human nature, “utopia” was now moving in quite another direction.

It is no coincidence that as society moved toward more regimentation and tighter spaces, the more utopia as a way of “desiring differently” involved the longing for bodily movement and unrestricted space. Theories of space, movement and perception help elucidate the link between utopianism and the body, particularly during the mid to late twentieth century when philosophers themselves were beginning to question the traditional separation between body and world and body and the mind. Phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty’s work has been highly influential in reclaiming the power of embodiment and re-centering the body in not only philosophy but many related fields, and for this reason my discussion of movement and the body will draw largely from his ideas. Merleau-Ponty opposed previous views of the body as a passive container for the Mind or spirit, where the body is nothing more than a machine made of disembodied parts. Merleau-Ponty argued for the body as a dynamic vehicle for experiencing and shaping the world. For Merleau-Ponty, the body is our direct link to “being-in-the-world.” In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty writes, “The body is the vehicle of being in the world, and having a body is, for a living creature, to be involved in a definite environment, to identify oneself with certain projects and be continually committed to them” (94). Since the body is the vehicle through which we are conscious of the world, it cannot be separated out from the world, and our perceptions and experiences are necessarily embodied. The mind and body are not split, and the body is not merely disinterested flesh unaffected by an ever-changing world; on

the contrary, as Merleau-Ponty argues, “we are in the world through our body, and...we perceive the world within our body...” (qtd in Williams and Bendelow 52). There is no existence or experience outside of the body—only being-in-the-world through the body as embodied subjects.

First let me define more clearly the concept of “space.” Generally space is conceived as room or openness, as opposed to crowding (Tuan 51). In my discussion of utopia, however, space indicates a more abstract and less tangible idea. In *Space and Place*, Yi-Fu Tuan writes that the concept of space is linked to transcendence and freedom, which we experience through movement. He explains that “In the act of moving, space and its attributes are directly experienced. An immobile person will have difficulty mastering even primitive ideas of abstract space, for such ideas develop out of movement—out of the direct experiencing of space through movement” (52). For instance, in Forster’s story, Kuno feels that his society has lost its sense of space, and by doing so people have sacrificed an awareness of themselves and their bodies. Kuno begins to reconnect with this lost sense of space by his direct, physical engagement with the world beyond the structured enclosure of his cell. The room Vashti dreads to leave is much more than a way of disabling the body and restricting movement; it is a tool for inhibiting the desire for freedom and transcendence that develop out of movement. The story suggests the irresistible draw of the body despite the victory of technology and organization over chaos and the rise of a deceptively utopian state—the end of want, the end of difference, the end of suffering. But for Kuno this “utopia” is essentially

consummate with death, while the change, transformation and embodiment are pathways to a new awakening.

Space, in terms of utopianism in the body, refers to this potential for change and transformation. Space does not just refer to areas like a wide open field or an uncluttered room. It is also the idea of possibility, transformation and desire—what the wide open field allows us to do, and what we imagine putting in the uncluttered room. Tuan writes that “Place is security, space is freedom: we are attached to the one and long for the other” (3). In Forester’s story, Kuno is attached or—more accurately—trapped by place. What he longs for is to reconnect with the unlimited potentiality of space and all its unknowns. Space is also different from place in terms of movement. While space suggests unlimited possibilities for movement, place is a fixed point, or “pause,” where each pause “makes it possible for location to be transformed into place” (6). The hexagonal cell in “The Machine Stops” worked as a pause button on all the bodies in societies, making individuals terrified of expanding their sense of space and coming in contact with direct experience.

As a condition for movement, space represents transformation and change, and is a key part of transgression since we cannot transgress boundaries unless we know them, explore them, and attempt to move beyond them. If we apply Tuan’s definition to utopianism, “place” is indicative of the traditional concept of utopia as the achievement of a harmonious world of equality, security and justice—a world that has ceased to move or desires to move. The cap on social movement creates a static rather than dynamic society; in other words, society is *planned* so that the irrational itches of the body do not

interfere with the social balance. Too much space would encourage unpredictability. Plato's *Republic* is a good example of a utopia based on a static and closed society; people born into their social positions remain there the rest of their lives. In *The Republic*, harmony and justice are contingent on everyone staying firmly rooted to their chosen place without disturbing anyone else, making movement between groups and social positions non-existent. However, transgressive utopianism, which redefines utopia in terms of dynamic change and open-ended possibility, is aligned with the attributes of space and the desire to move beyond the known. The longing for change goes hand-in-hand with a longing for movement. Transgressive utopianism is a utopianism of *movement*, and the utopian body experiences embodiment and becoming as a body-in-motion. The freedom of bodily movement is fundamental to our experience of the body not as a mere object or container, but as an integral part of our lived experience in the world. Movement becomes a gateway to experiencing the world. This explains the powerful draw of professional athletes, who achieve celebrity status in society based on movement and physical performance. They are the superheroes of popular culture, their feats played and replayed endlessly for an audience that will buy the shoes, wear the jerseys and attempt to mimic the moves of athletic stars, hoping to vicariously experience the possibilities privileged by movement.

Like Tuan, Merleau-Ponty defines space in terms of change and openness: "Space is not the setting (real or logical) in which things are arranged, but the means whereby the position of things becomes possible" (284). According to George Marshall, Merleau-Ponty believes that the lived body is the condition for space, rather than

spatiality creating and shaping the body; Marshall writes, “Merleau-Ponty concludes that space does not ‘pre-exist’ the body but rather space is the result of the body” (109). In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty explains that, “By considering the body in movement, we can see better how it inhabits space (and, moreover, time) because movement is not limited to submitting passively to space and time, it actively assumes them, it takes them up in their basic significance which is obscured in the commonplaces of established situations” (117). As the body moves, it creates and expands the sense of space, just as Kuno became more aware of a world of possibilities beyond the society of The Machine with each new step he learned to take.

Since *Phenomenology of Perception*, scholarship has continued to re-insert the body into theories on how we perceive the world. David Morris’ 2004 study *The Sense of Space* combines Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy with recent developments in the philosophy of the body, and his work is useful in explaining how movement and space are related to our sense of bodily potentiality. Morris likens the Cartesian body to “a web that catches sensation,” and the Cartesian mind like a spider sitting on the web inferring that the vibrations it feels are flies (10). In this image the body is a passive conduit and the mind the active interpreter and shaper of the world and perception. However, like Merleau-Ponty, Morris contends that our sense of space emerges in the crossing of the body with the world, and that the two are in constant living tension with each other rather than independent entities. He writes:

Our bodies cross with the world, cross the earth, cross with our development and with our social world. Our sense of space refers to and makes sense of this

crossing, it is not the reconstruction of an already constituted spatial order or container in which we have been dropped. Against our conceptual tendency to root experience in a subjectivity or consciousness closed on itself, or in a closed and solidified body, our sense of space testifies to the fact that experience is a movement open to the world. (175)

The body is not predetermined or closed, but, rather, open to possibility and change; as the body experiences the world and others, our sense of space expands as well as our understanding of the body and its potentialities within the world. For Kuno to rediscover space, all he had to do was move his body toward new perceptions and experiences; as the body moves, space grows.

In phenomenological terms, the development of the moving body is a very dynamic process allowing for ever-expanding growth and perception within the world. Without movement we would have no way of knowing and perceiving the world, and thus no way of experiencing space and its transcendent qualities. As Morris writes, “We are well past any sort of ready-made world; everything is in movement” (51). As movement allows the body and world to interact, or “cross,” we develop what Merleau-Ponty referred to as a “body schema.” The development of the body schema is highly utopian in nature; unlike science, which typically reduces the body to a closed, mechanical system responding to fixed and universal laws, body schema are a *process* (73). They are not pre-programmed or set by any immutable design, and thus they are constantly alterable and open to shifts in perception and interpretation. The body is open

to the world and vice versa, and as movement “repeatedly translates through the body, the body translates the world” (101).

The development of the body schema consists of “the twofold movement of a body that grows by moving in the world and moves by growing in the world” (74). This process of growth develops when the moving body encounters what Morris refers to as “constraints” and “folds.” As movement causes the body and world to cross, the body runs into certain limitations or constraints, and so new movements develop or “fold” into each other. Morris likens this to a kicking baby; once the baby’s kicks encounter resistance, such as a floor, the constraint causes the baby’s kicking to fold into the new movement of walking. As long as the body continues to move in the world, the body schema constantly changes and adjusts as the body achieves a greater and greater sense of its own possibilities. This is how, as mentioned before, the body shapes space rather than space shaping the body. The abstract concept of space as freedom and possibility can only exist once movement allows the body to cross with the world. Through this process our perceptions expand and our body becomes capable of more and more things, as the baby who begins by kicking eventually learns to walk, then run, then jump, with each movement folding endlessly into the next. This is the foundation for a body that is dynamic, attuned to embodiment and free to engage the desires of the utopian imagination and explore the openness of space.

Though focused specifically on the corporate climate and the sense of fragmentation in American culture, studies like *The End of Ideology*, *Gestalt Therapy*, *Growing Up Absurd*, *The Organization Man* are also invested in the need for space if

society is to retain any vestige of dynamism and individual growth. They suggest that postwar America reacted to a threatening world by attempting to control the social environment and the people within, and this created a type of bodily paralysis. The sense of space as fixed and mechanically imposed by an increasingly profit-driven and militaristic society disrupted the crossing of body and world, creating instead a disjunction between the individual and his or her sense of possibility, which explains Goodman's development of Gestalt Therapy as a possible remedy. Such texts, responding directly to the conditions of postwar America, either suggest or blatantly assert the need for re-directing society's course. Whyte warns of the need for resistance against organizing society based on a misguided utopian social ethic that "interprets" what is best for the individual. The fault, he cautions, is not in organization itself, but "in our worship of it" and in the "soft-minded denial that there is a conflict between the individual and society" (13). As one of his charges against the social ethic, he argues that organization is static and has no dynamic. Dynamism comes from the individual, who is responsible for questioning how society interprets his or her interests (397).

### *Player Piano*

In dystopian literature, the pathway to escape and change is the body—one that can freely move in space and experience the transcendent and transformative qualities of body crossing world. For example, in Kurt Vonnegut's "Harrison Bergeron," (1961) a future America has finally reached a perfect state of equality and conformity, since any natural talents or inclinations are promptly and quite literally handicapped. The Handicapper General makes sure no one is smarter, prettier or stronger than anyone else.



Ballerinas dance with bags of birdshot tied to their bodies to counteract any graceful movements, and the title character wears three hundred pounds of scrap metal to overcome his exceptional natural strength and agility. In the story, Bergeron appears on TV, unmasking a gorgeous dancer, declares himself in command, and tosses away his metal handicaps. Along with his mate, he leaps high into the air, whirling and swirling in an explosion of incredible movement. Their bodies literally transcend both the restrictions of society and of gravity, suggesting amazing bodily potential apart from the confines of society. Though the couple is promptly shot, the case is clear: the freedom of movement throws the traditional idea of “utopia” off-balance, as well as the “social ethic” society thinks it has established. Harrison Bergeron insisted in an uninhibited interaction with the world that can only be pursued once the body is literally freed from society’s bounds and able to both move and quite literally transcend into new bodily potentialities. Vonnegut’s story directs us to a means of escape, however fleeting; the body, once freed from social restraints, is unlimited in its capacity for transformation.

As Goodman explains in *Growing Up Absurd*, such escape often necessitates a dash toward the fringes of society, apart from a regulated life that allows for little to no movement and growth. The margins and fringes of society are synonymous with space and openness, and consequently with the potential for bodily transformation and the development of the body schema. In Vonnegut’s first novel, *Player Piano* (1952), he also directs us to the body as a means for renewed experience and dynamic change, and it was among the fringes and socially displaced where he found the space needed to discover what Kuno did when he stepped beyond the boundaries of the Machine—that

“Man is the measure.” Susan Reid argues that though the rebellion against society which Proteus eventually helps lead is unsuccessful, Vonnegut’s novel shows us that “being on the edge or fringe is a sign of hope” (50). As Proteus’ friend Finnerty tells him, “Out on the edge you see all kinds of things you can’t see from the center....Big, undreamed-of things—the people on the edge see them first” (73). Rather than being shut off from the world by the blinders of society, the fringe is symbolically spacious, with room to move about, see things and, most importantly, to dream big. For Proteus, moving away from the social center to his own alternative space leads to feelings of immediately experiencing his environment and being-in-the-world. Goodman would consider him a successful graduate of Gestalt Therapy, and it is this individual transformation which gives potency to a new kind of utopianism.

The novel begins with Proteus squarely in the “center” of elite high society. He is “the most important, brilliant person” in the town of Ilium, New York in a future post-war America where machines have replaced almost all human labor and a central computer makes all the decisions (1). As Donald Morse explains, “In *Player Piano*, the world, having passed through the First Revolution where machines took over man’s manual labor, and the Second Revolution where machines took over all human routine work, is now about to undergo a Third Revolution where machines will do all the thinking” (304). The America of Vonnegut’s novel is a thinly veiled representation of an industrialized America emerging victorious after World War II. As such, it is a rigidly planned out society focused on production, consumption and profits (Morse 304). Space, time and human potential are all decided by computer so that efficiency and

production are maximized, with no regard for how this affects individual well-being or personal fulfillment; in line with the utopian social ethic, society has decided that if the individual is free to enjoy the many products offered by machine production, then general happiness will prevail.

However, in reality, people are discontent, displaced, frustrated and restless with feelings of uselessness. The dependence on machines has led to a certain amount of bodily amnesia—people do not remember the dynamic nature of the body and its capabilities, since the human body, particularly the skilled and moving human body, is nearly inessential. People acquiesce to computerized decisions and the rule of machines with some grumbling, but no revolutionary fervor. People too young to remember life before the machines “couldn’t remember when things had been different, could hardly make sense of what had been, though they didn’t necessarily like what was.” The older generation, who had been “the rioters, the smashers of machines” before society changed, are no longer violent but filled with churning resentment (25). Neither group knows what to do or what other options exist. And while engineers, managers and scientists enjoy their products from positions of power, most of society struggled with despondency, unemployment and depression. In Ilium, these people live in an area of town called Homestead; ironically, this is where almost all of the population lives.

As one of the elite, Proteus manages the Ilium Works, though he is up for a promotion as the head of the corporation in Washington, D.C. However, despite his comfortable life with his wife Anita, he feels out of touch with his body and the sensation of immediate experience. Movement and its transcendent power have been

mostly usurped by machines that never err, never tire, and never change. Proteus, peeking in on a room at the Ilium Works, cannot help but admire the athletic movement of the machines. In the room are “gymnasiums of machines, where countless squads practiced precision calisthenics—bobbing, spinning, leaping, thrusting, waving” (8). Movements once synonymous with human mobility and potential now belong to machines, creating a schism between the body and the world. Proteus longs to *feel* his body, even fantasizing about being in the war and being shot in the leg, thinking that maybe then he might appreciate a “golden age” where physical labor is mostly obsolete. Instead, he only feels “annoyed, bored, or queasy” (6). In this America, the machines represent dynamic physicality, while humans are left feeling disengaged, restless and even ill from the static nature of society.

However, the novel suggests new hope if we only hold onto something akin to Goodman’s “body-feeling” or Merleau-Ponty’s “being-in-the-world.” Proteus does not see any hope for release in the social world he inhabits as one of the elite of society. He believes that the fragmented nature of his society, though botched, was “a logical, intelligently arrived-at botch” and an inevitable development in history. In the face of this seemingly inevitable social destiny, Proteus turns his attention to the world of the fringes, where he hopes to discover not only direct experience, but also freedom from “being the instrument of any set of beliefs or any whim of history” (99). As an “instrument,” Proteus feels little to no control over his own body, and he decides that reconnecting with his own sense of embodiment will redeem him from a life of humdrum routine and passive obedience. He longs for an embodiment that mirrors his

namesake, the mythic sea god Proteus, known for his “wisdom and knowledge of future events” and his power of “changing his shape at will” (Bulfinch 171). Vonnegut’s Proteus realizes that if he can reclaim his sense of place in the world he will be able to actively shape his own future, choosing growth and change rather than feeling anchorless and adrift.

Though he is not controlled by metal handicaps or a cardioplate, Vonnegut concludes, like Kuno and Harrison Bergeron, that the human body is the measure for possibility and change, though his realization is subtle, slowly unfolding into illumination as he ventures further and further from the social center. His “escape” begins simply enough, with daydreams and fantasies. He begins reading adventure novels where “the hero lived vigorously and out-of-doors, dealing directly with nature, dependent upon basic cunning and physical strength for survival...” (118). He admires the “primitive ideal” of characters with “keg-sized biceps” that survive by body and wit (126). He uses this as a model for lived embodiment; in these stories, the body is the conduit for experience and being in the world, an involvement that is physical and immediate rather than passive and disembodied. He looks at his hands and sees the “mark” of society in skin that is smooth and unblemished, much like a blank and unused canvas. His heroes’ hands were calloused by their many skills, while his long, soft hands could do little “save grip a pen, pencil, toothbrush, hair brush, razor, knife, fork, spoon, cup, glass, faucet, doorknob, switch, handkerchief, towel, zipper, button, snap, bar of soap, book, comb, wife, or steering wheel” (126). Unlike an epic retelling of intrepid victories and adventures, Proteus’ list of activities is extraordinarily ordinary

and mundane, a tongue in cheek summary of his very un-epic life. Eager to realize his fantasies, Proteus buys an old farm unequipped with machinery, hoping to connect with nature and enchant his wife. Here “was a place he could work with his hands” (132).

Though Proteus never retreats into the wilderness to hunt and never moves onto the farm to toil over the soil, these desires are stepping stones to revolutionary change, as opposed to being a passive instrument of history. Just as each movement of the body folds into a different movement, so Proteus’ rebellious spirit evolves from daydreams to action. At first unwillingly and then with gusto, Proteus joins the Ghost Shirt Society. The “Ghost Shirts” are underground rebels who oppose the dehumanization of the work force and America’s plans for “phasing out” superfluous workers. Named after the Native American belief in a magical “ghost shirt” capable of deflecting the bullets of white men, the Ghost Shirt Society is intent on protecting the “old ways” of human labor. Proteus is chosen to be their Messiah and spark a revolution “big enough to take the world away from the machines” (252). Despite an initially successful takeover of Ilium, Proteus soon finds himself watching helplessly as the rebels fervently try to resurrect an Orange-O soda machine they had just destroyed. When the soda machine is fixed, they cheer in jubilation, their original plans forgotten in the delight of regaining the technological security they set out to shatter. They immediately begin repairing other shattered machines.

Though the rebellion fails, Proteus gains a new awareness of the consequences of defining self-worth in terms of economics and production. Rather than accept a pre-package social destiny, Proteus pursues the unknown territory of his own body’s

potential, and by doing so Proteus reclaims his body and his sense of belonging in the world. As Brian Pronger writes in *Body Fascism*, “Listening to our technological essence in order to disobey its profoundly limiting framework is perhaps key to challenging what we are becoming” (65). This is one of the hopes driving utopia away from a social contract to an individualized pursuit expressed through the body—to escape the social engine hurtling toward a future that is out of the individual’s control. This is why Proteus fantasizes about a muscular body, calloused hands, and survival by instinct far from the metallic dance of any machine. The immediate, physical experience of his body in the world would create a sort of rabbit hole in the social framework, a way to bypass the limitations placed on embodiment and movement, allowing him to transgress the boundaries of place and explore the open and unbound potential of space.

Morse, noting that the warnings of *Player Piano* are more applicable and ominous to twenty-first-century readers than those of earlier dystopias like *1984*, writes that even at the dawn of the twenty-first century, the American public and its leaders “still fall prey to imagining that society or its organisation can be perfected” (314). The corporation still dominates the American landscape, and the individual still struggles for identity, space and an embodied connection with the world. It is no surprise that images of athletes and bodies equipped with potential not unlike Harrison Bergeron fascinate the general American public, some of whom literally shape their place in the world by re-shaping their bodies. As John Hoberman explains in “The Sportive-Dynamic Body as a Symbol of Productivity,” the skilled, physically fit body of the twentieth century is popular for the very reason that the actual usefulness of the “laboring” body is in

decline. Hoberman asserts that “the fundamental humanistic problem over the next century or two will be the differentiation of human beings from the materials and machines that are designed to serve them” (199). When we watch physical feats we are able to indulge in our own fantasies of the body, and we are reminded of possibilities of embodiment that are slowly disappearing as technologies increasingly replace the necessity of bodily movement.

Sometimes these fantasies of transformation develop into literal transformations of embodiment. For instance, much like Proteus’ longing for “keg-sized biceps,” bodybuilders use body sculpting as a means of radically enhancing and transforming their sense of being-in-the-world. Not surprisingly, bodybuilding gained popularity during the counterculture movements of the 1960s and 1970s, as people rejected the suppressive atmosphere of the 1950s and began to celebrate social upheaval, revolution, and liberated embodiment. In Arnold Schwarzenegger’s memorable analogy from *Pumping Iron*, lifting is an orgasmic experience, and as a bodybuilder he’s “cumming all the time.” As the body is literally destroyed and rebuilt, the bodybuilder gains a renewed awareness of the self within the world, along with a sense of agency and potentiality. In the training manual *Mind Pump* from 1988, author Tom Kubistant writes about the transcendent qualities of bodybuilding, which gives the lifter a sense of well-being and new perspective that translate to the rest of his or her life. He writes, “From their conscientious training, many bodybuilders eventually realize that if they can control and develop their rhomboids, for example, they can also extend this sense of control and development into the rest of their lives” (3-4). According to Kubistant,



lifters “immerse themselves in their own world of fitness, feeling, controlling, and extending individual muscle groups beyond what they thought was possible” (3). With each new change comes the sense of new and greater possibility, as well as a sense of control and agency.

Bodybuilding, then, changes the body as well as the individual’s place within his or her society. In his autobiography *Muscle*, Samuel Wilson Fussell writes “I pushed the iron, and my body grew. The harder I worked, the better I felt. My routine brought order amid chaos” (43). Before becoming a bodybuilder, Fussell was another unknown face in a corporate crowd, disconnected and anxious. However, as Fussell indulged in each pump, he found escape through changing his body, which became “the sole source of illumination in a dark world” (80). Fussell’s transformed body also helped him find a sense of community and belonging as part of a subculture not tied to the fears, uncertainties and routines of everyday life. In fact, Fussell first joined a gym because he was intimidated by the city, by aggressive people on the street, and by life in general. He describes the experience of seeing other lifters and knowing, by the look of the body, that they were connected: “All it took between us was a quick look, then a nod and a smile. We were not alone. Race, religion, nationality, they were inconsequential. First and foremost, we were bodybuilders—and we breathed easier because of it” (83). Being a bodybuilder gave Fussell a sense of agency, safety and community that he could not find in “normal” society, which was far more threatening and alienating to Fussell than the grit of the gym.

The next chapter expands on the desire for escape and resistance in two novels from the late twentieth century. In these texts, embodiment becomes the means for creating alternative social spaces, and though the novels are part of the “dystopian” genre, they are ultimately interested in reigniting the utopian imagination in new directions. These novels examine more deeply the fragmentation caused by hyper-rational and systematic dystopian worlds, and what it takes to piece together the different parts of the individual to create unity between body, mind and world. But like Kuno and like Proteus, they must take the first step, and move beyond the boundaries of the known into the uncertainty of a new and turbulent fringe world linked inextricably with full-force embodiment. When the world is at the end of its tether and there is no way out, it is time to become a body unleashed.

CHAPTER III  
NECESSARY WOUNDS

*“The end of something has a satisfaction.  
When structures go, light  
comes through  
To begin again.”*

—Charles Olson, “La Torre,” 189.

In the late twentieth century utopian desires are much more interested in the possibility of difference and change than the actual look, shape and feel of a realized social blueprint. Fredric Jameson refers to this development in utopian thought as “disruption,” a strategy by which we can imagine alternatives to the ostensible permanence of social systems that have become deeply entrenched in our lives. Jameson writes:

...it is the very principle of the radical break as such, its possibility, which is reinforced by the Utopian form, which insists that its radical difference is possible and that a break is necessary. The Utopian form itself is the answer to the universal ideological conviction that no alternative is possible, that there is no alternative to the system. But it asserts this by forcing us to think the break itself, and not by offering a more traditional picture of what things would be like after the break. (222-232)

As a way to “think the break,” utopianism is a politically charged tool for initiating social change and challenging systems that otherwise seem immutable. It directs us to

concentrate on the break itself rather than an ideal future or final outcome, thus serving as “a mediation on the impossible” (232). In *Player Piano*, Proteus’ rise to revolutionary leadership begins with daydreams that fold into questions that fold into acts of resistance that momentarily disrupt the status quo. The revolution may have reached a disappointing halt, but the crack in the system is permanent, and the consequences for the future are not yet fully realized as Proteus walks away a much different person than he was when the novel began.

In “From Revolutionary to Catastrophic Utopia,” Slavoj Žižek argues against the idea that revolution is only successful if it leads to the realization of utopia.<sup>9</sup> He writes, “Revolution is not experienced as a present hardship we have to endure for the happiness and freedom of the future generations, but as the present hardship over which this future happiness and freedom already cast their shadow—in it, we are already free while fighting for freedom, we are already happy while fighting for happiness, no matter how difficult the circumstances” (247). Žižek sees utopia in the very act of revolution, just as Jameson sees utopia in the very act of thinking of alternatives. In a sense, the best state to be in is one of constant inquiry, which is exactly what Yevgeny Zamyatin suggested in his 1923 essay “On Literature, Revolution, Entropy, and Other Matters”: “The alive-alive are constantly in error, in search, in questions, in torment.” Utopian energy is rejuvenated and renewed not by realizing utopian goals, but by constantly reassessing and questioning those goals, even if they are achieved. Žižek believes that the problem with some revolutionary attempts is that they do not question their own presuppositions

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<sup>9</sup> Žižek mentions Merleau-Ponty’s view that revolutionary acts are justified as long as the future outcome is freedom, and that the value of revolution is contingent on the final result (247).

(253). What happens the “morning after” revolution? According to Zizek, “lethargy sets in” unless utopia is once again re-invented and questions still posed (254). Zizek directs us to Frederic Jameson’s *Seeds of Time*, where Jameson describes the revolutionary process as “itself the precondition for the reconstruction of something else.” As this reconstruction takes place, people do not construct utopia, but attempt “to find a way to begin imagining Utopia to begin with.” Jameson calls this process “a kind of desiring to desire, a learning to desire, the invention of the desire called Utopia in the first place...” (90). In this sense, revolution doesn’t end, but provides a constant source of renewal for utopian energy and thought; such revolutionary energy is very different from the carnivalesque, which is both temporary and socially sanctioned for the purpose of stabilizing power rather than disturbing it.

How does one generate a space that constantly imagines and re-imagines utopia? If we transgress and resist until we win, what happens next? For Zizek, “this brings us to the key question: how are we to construct a social space in which revolution can stay, can stabilise itself?” He sees possibility in self-organized collectives formed in areas beyond the law, such as the Brazilian community of Canudo from the late 1800s, home to “prostitutes, freaks, beggars, bandits and the most wretched of the poor” until it was destroyed by the Brazilian government (254). But what options do we have now? As I discussed in Chapter II, space and movement are increasingly limited options, and the body must move and grow in increasingly tight spaces. The problem is compounded by the increasing inaccessibility and de-centralization of power. In *The Individualized Society*, Zygmunt Bauman calls our present stage in history “post-Panoptical,” since the

people in charge no longer need to be constantly watching us from the symbolic control tower. Now what matters “is that the people operating the levers of power on which the fate of the less volatile partners in the relationship depends can at any moment escape beyond reach—into sheer inaccessibility” (11). If we wish to resist, whose office do we storm and whose desk do we overthrow? According to Bauman there is no where to go, and we are left feeling helpless and without any sense of control or agency.

We find another option in dystopian literature. This answer inevitably points to the body as a space for renewing utopian desire as well as staging revolutionary moments where difference and change can be created and re-created to a seemingly endless degree. In the two novels I discuss in this chapter, Angela Carter’s *Heroes and Villains* and Chuck Palahniuk’s *Fight Club*, bodies are degraded, wounded, scarred and pierced as visible markers of revolutionary energy and the protean boundary of embodied desire. This is where a new world can be carved and cut in the flesh over and over, creating an endless renewal of utopian possibility. The protagonists in these novels initiate social resistance and change with experiences of embodiment rooted in degradation, sexuality, pain and wounding. As Andrew Slade argues in regard to *Fight Club*, mutilation is a form of “redemption and survival.” Slade does not see the mutilated body as weakened or without future, but “a way to create new possibilities for value, identity, in short, an authentic existence in a world which appears to have erased those possibilities” (64). The mutilated body represents revolution and resistance, as well as the utopian desire to desire differently. This is a grotesque body that has broken from the temporality and social approval of the carnivalesque. As M. Bakhtin writes in

*Rabelais and His World*, degradation is transcendence, destruction is creation, and the lower body is privileged over the Mind. This type of topsy-turvy subversion of expectations is essential to the carnivalesque, where the “world is destroyed so that it may be regenerated and renewed” (48). Though M. Keith Booker urges us not to forget “that the carnival itself is in fact a sanctioned form of “subversion”...a sort of opiate of the masses” (*Techniques of Subversion* 6), the body during carnival shows us what a utopian body might look like, and I will refer to it throughout this chapter to explore the utopian function of the grotesque body.

I chose to combine *Heroes and Villains* and *Fight Club* not only because both are very interested in resistance and utopian spaces, but also because both protagonists in the novels quite literally project the fragmentation of the self in worlds that prioritize reason and the mind over embodiment. Marianne and the Narrator flee to the respective fringe worlds of their societies to embrace embodiment and escape corrupted systems of hyper-rational control, and their attempt to integrate the body back into a new social order is part of a larger debate in the twentieth century over “civilization and its discontents,” and how much suppression is necessary—or too excessive—when it comes to the body. This is the hope of salvaging “he who cannot revolt/because he has strangled himself with his own body” (Eshleman 16). In these lines, Eshleman is referring specifically to Wilhelm Reich, who championed sexual revolution and liberation. Unlike Freud, Reich did not believe that abstinence and the denial of sexual pleasure were necessary precursors for social happiness and harmony. In *The Function of the Orgasm*, Reich proposed that the psyche consisted of three layers. On top is a deceptive layer of self-

control—the face of a civilized individual. Under this façade is a layer of unconscious desires and perversions not acceptable in society. Finally, buried deep in the psyche is the capacity for sexuality, spontaneity, love and joy; this utopian layer “is the only real hope man has of one day mastering social misery” (234). Marianne and the Narrator attempt to move through these layers as they seek utopia—first escaping rational society, then creating doubles that express their unconscious desires, and, finally, attempting to integrate these desires into an entirely new social alternative.

Herbert Marcuse, whom Jameson calls “the most influential Utopian of the 1960s” (*Archaeologies* xv), wrote extensively about the possibility for a new social order integrating the need for work with the desire for bodily pleasure. According to Richard King, the relationship between reason, happiness and freedom was core to Marcuse’s thought, and each was informed by the other. Reason without happiness or freedom became “a means of subordinating the individual to economic and social processes” (122). In *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse writes that Reason has often been categorized as a system of oppression and restraint meant to vanquish “the lower faculties” and suppress “sensuousness, pleasure and impulse” (159). We see this in dystopian worlds that embrace the principles of Reason without regard to individual freedoms or liberties. From the viewpoint of the world that embraces a misguided sense of Reason, the chaos of the “lower” body is as dangerous as any revolt.

In *Eros and Civilization* Marcuse specifically targets the work of Sigmund Freud in developing his idea of a non-repressive social order. King suggests this unpredictable turn to Freud in Marcuse’s work was part of the search for “new radical theory in



postwar western society” during a time when revolution or radical change seemed an unlikely possibility (129). Marcuse argues against Freud’s belief that the reality principle supersedes the pleasure principle, thereby making a non-repressive society impossible. The usurpation of the Pleasure Principle, or Eros, for the Reality Principle is, according to Marcuse, “the great traumatic event in the development of man” in that it justifies the destruction of freedom and the use of repression (15). Marcuse argues for the possibility of a non-repressive civilization where the pleasure principle, or the immediate experience of pleasure, coexists with the productivity and social progress demanded by the reality principle. According to Marcuse, the reality principle has been corrupted into a “performance principle,” which results in economic stratification and competition that is in turn dictated by the scarcity of human needs. Under the domination of the performance principle, “social reality...demanded repression beyond that necessary for “civilized” existence in the true sense” (King 130).

For a non-repressive civilization to work, Reason must return to its original classical purpose of engendering social progress but not at the expense of human creativity and spontaneity; freedom, happiness and Reason must work together. If human needs could be met and the performance principle abolished, a new social order could emerge and, in opposition to Freud, sexuality would no longer be exclusively tied to the genitals. The abject lower body would be thoroughly infused and accepted within society as a whole. King writes, the “entire body, along with all aspects of human and social existence, would become eroticized” (130). This would be the result of an uncorrupted reality principle working with Eros. Marcuse’s idea of a non-repressive

society embraces embodiment and a whole self, with the natural desire for civilization and order fused with the natural desire for sensuality and nature. As King explains, “Sensuality would no longer work in opposition to reason; reason itself would become sensuous. The distinct boundaries between man and nature, subject and object, approved and ‘perverse’ sexuality would be abolished” (133).

Though Marcuse’s ideas have their flaws,<sup>10</sup> his ideas in *Eros and Civilization* highlight the tension between corrupt systems of rational order and the desire for sensual embodiment, particularly in dystopian worlds where the separation between body and society creates schisms in the psyche. In *Heroes and Villains* and *Fight Club*, this split unfolds as a fragmented self intent on creating a utopian space open to the dynamic possibilities of transgressive embodiment. Alter egos reveal the inconsistencies and hypocrisies underlying the split in civilization between the desires of the body and the demands of civilization. For instance, like Andy Kaufman who created the bawdy and vulgar alter ego Tony Clifton, comedian Sacha Baron Cohen’s disruptive double Ali G gave him the premise to interview numerous respected members of society while mocking and insulting political “correctness” at the same time. Posing as an uneducated slang-talking ex-gang member turned famous rapper, Ali G claimed to host a show about educating children; the bait worked, and he held real interviews with figures like politician John McCain and esteemed linguist Noam Chomsky (unaware of the true

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<sup>10</sup> King offers a balanced view of both Marcuse’s strong points and the weaknesses of his arguments. For instance, in *Eros and Civilization* Marcuse proposes a new social order without describing how this utopia could be realized, though Jameson might cheer him on for his willingness to think of new possibilities. King also points out that Marcuse’s “solution” to the fear of death in society is basically a painless assisted suicide, which has dubious totalitarian overtones. King observes that Marcuse’s solution would deny individuals their right to “pain as well as pleasure” (137).

identity of their host). Ali G confronts the educated and elite with behavior they may usually disregard or dismiss as uncivilized and uncouth. His comedy subtly reveals the darkly humorous nature of the codes and behaviors praised by a society that privileges moral uprightness and intellectual elitism. He embarrasses his victims with his political incorrectness, unabashed vulgarity, and sometimes racist attitude while his victims sit uncomfortable and unsure, and sometimes are tricked into making their own embarrassing unscripted remarks.

Marianne from *Heroes and Villains* and the Narrator from *Fight Club* project their repressed and unfamiliar desires onto counterparts that represent extreme opposition to reason and order; thus, however different the novels are in other ways, they are remarkably similar in their use of alter egos for exploring alternatives. Marianne's double is her male captor Jewel and the Narrator's is his other personality, Tyler Durden. The pairing of Marianne/Jewel and Narrator/Tyler is, in Bakhtin's sense, a grotesque doubling of the body, in which there are "two bodies in one: the one giving birth and dying, the other conceived, generated, and born." From this "pregnant and begetting" body, "a new body always emerges in some other form" (26). The double/new body signifies difference and possibility, and indicates the individual's wish for the death of the civilized body and the birth of the liberated self. Marianne and the Narrator beget their doubles at the height of their longing to escape their social prisons, and these doubles then act as liaisons between what society restricts and what the human body craves, and, most importantly, between the *actual* bodies of Marianne and the Narrator and the potentialities of their *utopian* bodies.

The interaction with a double becomes Marianne's and the Narrator's literal link to alternative embodiment and a way for them to realize the true nature of their desires. This is similar to Zamyatin's *We*, where a world split into an *ad absurdum* rational society and a primitive one just beyond the Glass Wall is mirrored in D-503's struggle to maintain composure while being inwardly assaulted by "the wild, shaggy, panting one." This primitive double expresses D-503's repressed desires, and no matter how loyal he is to One State, he cannot rid himself of basic human nature (63). Similarly, Jewel and Tyler represent all that society wants to keep safely tucked away in the darkest corners of the jungles and alleys. In contrast to these ordered, monotonous worlds, Jewel and Tyler brazenly flaunt aggressiveness and chaos, and treat embodiment as a grotesque amalgamation of tattoos, gaping wounds and uninhibited sexual energy. Marianne and the Narrator are both intensely attracted to and occasionally repulsed by their respective doubles just as they are drawn to the shadowy fringe worlds beyond the borders of dominant culture.

For the remainder of this chapter I follow Marianne and the Narrator as each transgresses the "Green Wall" of her/his respective society and moves from order to chaos, from safety to violence, and from sterile being to sensual becoming. Each inhabits worlds that prioritize order and discipline over desire and embodiment and lead both Marianne and the Narrator to undertake similar quests to create an altogether new social world that no longer treats the body as a tertiary roadblock to enlightened living. They do not want to completely reject the rational mind nor do they seek out pure chaos and pleasure; like Marcuse's vision of a non-repressive civilization, Marianne and the

Narrator want to create an alternative where reality/reason and pleasure/chaos coexist. To do so, each must first break through the boundaries of dominant society: Marianne must escape the guarded walls of a post-apocalyptic city run by an elite ruling class of Professors, while the Narrator must free himself from 8 to 5 drudgery in a modern consumer culture. As Marianne and the Narrator explore the primitive worlds beyond civilization, they begin to visualize what utopia means for them, and how—or if—they can claim their desires as their own in a new social world.

### ***Heroes and Villains***

*Heroes and Villains* is Angela Carter's fourth novel and her first venture into dystopian literature, which would later include *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* (1972) and *The Passion of New Eve* (1977). In *Heroes and Villains* Carter makes the clearest case for a utopia fueled by the potentialities of the individual's internal desires. In the novel, Marianne encounters two very different societies that have developed in post-apocalyptic Britain. She is born into a dystopian community led by a group of aging Professors, who represent quite literally rule by intellect and reason. Tsai Chia-Chin notes that the Professors, "in the name of order, discipline and rationality," have resurrected "a hierarchic world founded on patriarchy and totalitarianism" (70). Under the Professors are the Soldiers, who are gradually gaining power in the community as they enforce law and order with machine guns and unwavering discipline; as Marianne's father warns, "they are developing an autonomous power of their own" (9). Workers provide the necessary labor under the burden of the watchful eyes of Soldiers and the lofty ideals of the Professors. This recalls Plato's hierarchic structure in

*The Republic*, where philosophers upheld the authority of the intellect and reason much like Carter's Professors. The Soldiers, like Plato's guardians, enforce the rule of the Professors while the majority of the people serve as a labor force. Again, like Plato's system, there is no social mobility or dynamic social change. Marianne escapes this overly repressive society to join the seemingly wild and liberated Barbarians, an unruly community of primitives who are themselves repressed by an authoritarian ex-Professor named Donally. The novel follows Marianne's efforts to create a space of her own between these two extremes.

The professors hold tightly to Reason—minus freedom and happiness—as they try to “resurrect the gone world in a gentler shape, and try to keep destruction outside, this time” (8). The Professor community is classically dystopian in the sense that it emphasizes the happiness of the greater good over individual liberties, and the result is a totalitarian state not far removed from Zamyatin's *One State*. By privileging order and intellect over the body, the community is, as Gemma Lopez aptly describes it, a “totalitarian, rational, and sexually repressive community” comparable to the Age of Reason (52). The Professors preach stability and social renewal through the restoration of once glorious modern civilization; in fact, it is their self-proclaimed duty to restore the glories of lost civilization prior to its downfall. Beyond the closely guarded walls of the community live the Barbarians, symbols of chaos, disorder and Eros unbound as they struggle for survival among the uncertainties of the jungle. The Professors believe the instinctual and untamed Barbarian tribes are incompatible with civilization. Marianne's father explains that if the Barbarians end up ruling the earth, “they will finally destroy it,

they won't know what to do with it" (11). However, despite the appearance of order and the praise of discipline, the Professor community is so tightly wound it's only a matter of time before it erupts into a destructive chaos of its own. Both Professors and Workers are known to erupt from the "trance" of community life by committing a homicide and/or suicide. Marianne's father is killed when her nurse has a sudden senile fit and hacks him with an ax before poisoning herself with polish. The Soldiers see such breaks as a lack of discipline.

This is the world Marianne grows up in, surrounded on one side by the ominous authority of the Soldiers, and on the other by the impotent wisdom of men blindly devoted to the past. The tenacious and stubbornly curious Marianne does not fit in from the start and most of her youth is spent observing life from a steel and concrete tower. From Marianne's perspective the Barbarian culture is a potential utopia, since its exotic difference is much more appealing than the staleness of her own community. Like the workers and Professors who spontaneously murder or commit suicide, Marianne imagines that destruction and chaos are ways to escape the ennui of civilized life. Though the Professors consider the Barbarians synonymous with murder, rape and cannibalism, Marianne thinks that "at least a visit from the Barbarians would make some kind of change" (2). She finds it "impossible" to consider a marriage with any of the "terribly boring" men in the community, and tells her father she could only marry "a stranger, someone from the outside" (11). She will soon get her wish.

Caught between two conflicting urges—the desire for civilized life and her own strong fantasies of disorder and difference—Marianne finds the lure of the unknown,

untamed, sensual fringe world of the Barbarians too great a temptation, and when the young Barbarian Jewel is trapped in a garage after a second Barbarian raid, she helps him escape and becomes his willing though strong-willed captor. Her initiation into the chaotic and lawless fringe world is marked by a series of new bodily experiences and mutilations. First she is bitten by an adder during her trek through the jungle, and she reports that “Nothing half so painful had ever happened to her” (28). Jewel responds by sucking out the poison, with “his wet mouth against her skin,” creating an “extraordinary sensation” of pain and sensuality that foreshadows Jewel’s rape of Marianne later on.

Despite Marianne’s hope that life among the Barbarians will bring change and escape from oppression, what she discovers is a primitive dystopia that actually replicates the patriarchal dystopia of the Professors in many ways (Chia-chin 72). The source of oppression among the Barbarians is the scheming and despicable Dr. Donally. As the ultimate opportunist, Donally sees the collapse of civilization as the perfect condition for inventing an entirely new system of traditions and religions to regulate the Barbarians and reinstitute a hegemonic system where he can rule anonymously from behind the scenes. He is, as Lopez observes, “eager to implant a totalitarian system in which he is the apex of the pyramid, much like a supreme patriarchal Head” (66). In effect, he wants to replace the pleasure principle, which caters to the desires of the individual and the body, with a reality principle that denies individual liberty. Mrs. Green, who watches over Jewel, ominously predicts that his leadership would bring nothing but “tortures, mutilations, and displays of magic,” and would be “Hell on earth” (39). This is readily apparent in Donally’s treatment of his son, a scabbed and miserable



child chained like an animal and constantly tormented by Donally's harsh authoritarianism. Here, mutilation bears the mark of domination and oppression, unlike the adder bite, which initiated Marianne into new sensuality that will only grow and intensify as she creates a new utopian space for herself.

Marianne's appearance in the community excites Donally, who instantly begins to weave Marianne into his plans for the birth of his own unique brand of civilization. He intends to make Marianne into an impotent symbol, a "little holy image" in Donally's future system based on superstition and myth. Marianne will be the Eve to Jewel's Adam, and Donally will be the invisible deity pulling the strings. It is Donally who tells Jewel to rape Marianne and then marry her in a ceremony drenched in ritual and symbol. Chia-chin explains that Donally "wants to start a new myth, a new social fiction, in which Jewel is the 'chosen son,' or a fabricated hero, through whom a society of noble savages can be established" (81). Like a true totalitarian, Donally's plans for power are global. He promises to make Jewel so terrifying "the bends of the road would straighten out with fright" and both the Barbarians and the Professors would accept him as King (126). To represent his power and intentions visually, Donally has etched an elaborate tattoo onto Jewel's back, showing a snake winding around a tree in Eden while Eve hands Adam a red apple. It is the very moment of the birth of civilization, as mankind forsook a life of endless gratification and pleasure for a life of labor and productivity.

Marianne's longing for change and difference among the Barbarian community leads her to just another version of the repressive civilization, with Donally standing in for the Professors. However, Marianne has an insurmountable desire to imagine new

possibilities and resist the world set before her, and we can see the outward expression of these internalized possibilities in Jewel. Jewel is not an autonomous character but the embodiment of Marianne's fantasy life. Gamble calls him her own "unconscious creation" (77). Lopez calls Jewel Marianne's "alter ego, almost an imagined version of herself whose dark flesh constitutes a 'magic source of attraction'" (95). And Angela Carter wrote that "Marianne is very much a stranger to her own desire, which is why her desire finds its embodiment in a stranger" (qtd. in Jordan 198). Marianne herself calls Jewel "nothing but the furious invention of my virgin nights" (137). As Marianne's creation, Jewel is unsubstantial on his own, only gaining substance in her presence and at her will. Jewel's appearance in the Professor community coincides with Marianne's desperation to escape an increasingly oppressive life with her uncle, who believes firmly in the discipline of the Soldiers. And when Marianne finally reaches a point where she can claim her desires and a place of power among the Barbarians, Jewel is killed, though we only learn about this secondhand. After Jewel has served his purpose, he quietly fades from the narrative in what Lopez calls a "disappearing act...as if he effectively dissolved" (100).

As Marianne's double, Jewel reflects Marianne's still unfamiliar and unclaimed desires, and it is through him that she experiences sensuality, pain, desire—all the tumultuous and sometimes irrational urges of the body oppressed by the rational and ordered world. In terms of the carnivalesque, Jewel's body "discloses the potentiality of an entirely different world, of another order, another way of life" (Bakhtin 48). The rape scene, like the adder bite it closely resembles, is, ironically, when Marianne's desires

begin to awaken alongside new possibilities. The rape does not leave her degraded, humiliated or victimized. Rather, she is angry and indignant, and, more importantly, more aware of her body's sexual responses and her physical attraction to Jewel.

The rape occurs after Marianne decides to leave the Barbarian community and Jewel stalks her down in the jungle and rapes her in the dirt. As Marianne bleeds, Jewel calls the blood part of a "necessary wound," which can be read in more than the literal sense. If Jewel embodies and reflects Marianne's desires, then the rape is in fact a rape *fantasy* born of Marianne's desires, as many have argued, and it does not leave Marianne without control or agency. It is a "necessary wound" that signals an initiation into new possibilities of embodiment. The rape scene "brings Marianne's body into narrative play," according to Lopez, who notes that the rape makes Marianne aware of the "erotic possibilities" of corporeality (113). With the "help" of Jewel, Marianne reclaims her body and "its potentialities" (116). In this context, the rape subverts the typical idea of victimization and sexual assault, becoming instead a potent carnivalesque moment ripe with utopian potential. It has subverted all that Marianne had learned about sex from the rational Professors, who described intercourse as a "deep spiritual experience" (57). Painful sex in the dirt and leaves of the jungle with a man who both repels and attracts her mocks the transcendent sex valued by the Professors, but the experience proves much more satisfying in the long run. Marianne realizes an intense sexual attraction to Jewel's body alongside an awareness of the expanding boundaries of her own desires. During the consummation of their marriage, Marianne eagerly strips her clothes off to be closer to the "magic source of attraction" emanating from Jewel's brown skin, and finds

that never before had she experienced such “extreme intimations of pleasure or despair” (83). Such extremes of pleasure—as part of her growing awareness of the possibilities of her body—began with the first wound in the jungle, an adder bite followed by the cool wetness of Jewel’s mouth. Her journeys into alternative realities of the body are almost overwhelming mixtures of pain and pleasure, each just as necessary for imagining and experiencing utopian possibility.

As Marianne gradually realizes the potencies of her desires, she finds herself being drawn to the lower realms of the grotesque and the becoming rather than the static order privileged by civilization. Jewel is often described in terms of disfigurement, deformity and monstrosity—traits which attract Marianne more than repel her. His body is exquisitely dark and beautiful, his exotic skin imbued with magic and otherness. Jewel’s face is of such “desolate beauty so far from the norm it was as fearful as a gross deformity” (79). In his body and face she discovers the difference dreamed of in her fantasies, and she finds a source for new and unknown possibilities that perpetually transgress boundaries. She even imagines Jewel’s seed as grotesque creatures that are an incomplete and erotic amalgamation of beast and human:

This third thing, this erotic beast, was eyeless, formless and equipped with one single mouth. It was amphibious and swam in black, brackish waters, subsisting only upon night and silence; she closed her eyes in case she glimpsed it by moonlight and there were no words of endearment in common, anyway, nor any reason to use them. The beast had teeth and claws. (89)

Even the erotic toothed beast in her imagination piques Marianne's lust. At the thought of bearing Jewel a child, Marianne balks at the idea of the "night fish" turning into children that will certainly be "monsters." However, after learning she's pregnant, Marianne fiercely embraces the "monster" that will grow in her womb, a child who will literally fuse Marianne and Jewel into a new being fit for a transgressive utopia.

Jewel's tattoo provides the most striking example of the grotesque and its undeniable allure for Marianne. The tattoo should not be quickly dismissed as simply a mark of Donally's power as well as a creation story that posits man's authority over woman. The tattoo certainly marks Jewel as a pawn in Donally's schemes, but it also exhibits a strong attraction for Marianne that should not be overlooked. Donally refers to tattooing as "the first of the post-apocalyptic arts, its materials are flesh and blood" (125). If Donally gives us anything useful, it's this connection between a destroyed world and the turn to the flesh as a means of expression. Though Donally's masterpiece has a specific and oppressive meaning for the creator, it is still an artistic text open to interpretation. By performing her own "reading" of Jewel's body, and by extension the embodiment of her own desires, Marianne transgresses the roles others have carved out for her (quite literally on Jewel's back). Marianne dismisses the creation narrative Donally has assigned her to relive. Instead, she sees in the tattoo a potential for another world where the skin itself can suggest difference and alternative.

At first Marianne thinks the tattoo is the result of some disease, calling it a "grotesque disfigurement," before learning that the tattoo is actually one of Donally's most prized pieces of art (85). Marianne tells Jewel the tattoo is hideous and unnatural

and then we immediately learn she is lying. In fact, the tattoo “seemed to her a perilous and irresistible landscape, a terra incognita or the back of the moon” (86). The “irresistible landscape” of Jewel’s grotesque body is inexplicably tantalizing, and it challenges Marianne’s previous perceptions of the body. Rather than a symbol or a disfigurement, the tattoo is an unknown world she has yet to explore or even understand, though for Marianne, who has escaped from her home, trekked through the jungle, and maintained a resolute autonomy despite a world fraught with oppression, this is a landscape she cannot help but desire.

Rather than bow to the destiny planned by Donally and resign herself to the role of “Eve at the end of the world” (124), Marianne retains her autonomy. She decides to create a new reality apart from the dystopian worlds of both Professor and Barbarian. In one explosively utopian moment, Marianne imagines what might happen if she and Jewel leave the tribe and begin their own life: “...at best, they might begin a new subspecies of man who would live in absolute privacy in secret caves....This fearless and rational breed would eschew such mysteries as the one now forcing her to walk behind the figure on the shore, dark as the negative of a photograph, and preventing her from returning home alone” (137). Marianne, walking on the beach behind Jewel, imagines an alternative society where there is no cause for a woman to move from place to place without the company of a man. This social expectation, she realizes, is what is *truly* irrational; a rational life would be one among nature rather than artificial institutions where people must constantly fear things other than death. As her concept of utopia matures, she rejects the possibility of social harmony in a repressive civilization,

which has twice proved a mirage. The space she imagines is between the extremes of order and chaos and separate from the oppressive pitfalls of Reason. It is a merging of reality with pleasure; like Marcuse, she too believes in a social world where needs are met but not at the expense of desire and fantasy.

After Jewel is killed by a band of Soldiers in the jungle, Marianne ultimately decides to remain with the Barbarians as their new leader and create what Lopez terms a “third space,” or a “utopian locus,” where she can explore her identity and craft her own version of a utopian world (51). She leaves the Professors but not her own intellectual curiosity, and she joins the Barbarians but does not willingly accept their practices. As Sarah Gamble writes, Marianne, who crosses the line from order to chaos and finds neither completely satisfying, “drags order—her own kind of order—into chaos, and thus transforms it from the inside” (79). Marianne will retain her sense of reason and intellect while also incorporating the animalistic and chaotic energy of the Barbarians; she will be the self-proclaimed “tiger lady” and rule “with a rod of iron” (150). Her proclamation transgresses prescribed roles for both Professor and Barbarian, suggesting a new identity altogether. An important part of this alternative space is the obliteration of binaries and “false unities” preached by both the Professor and Barbarian communities. Marianne embraces a utopian space where she and her child can enjoy a world that rejects the oppressive and limited social dichotomies that both Professor and Barbarian enforced, from man/woman to heroes/villains. For instance, children in the Professor community played the game “Heroes and Villains.” In the game, children mimicking Soldiers were the “heroes” who constantly vanquished the villainous and

inept Barbarians. Marianne's "third space" embraces fluid boundaries and open-ended identities. The very title of "tiger lady" suggests a transgressive destruction of boundaries and stable identities. Aidan Day calls it a model in which reason and desire can coexist, rather than oppose each other (53). She is a lady—suggesting a civilized, rational being—but equally a tiger, creating a new identity suited to a utopia that embraces the desires and passions of the body.

By the end, Marianne the tiger lady has herself become a grotesque figure within and without, having fully merged with the underlying desires of her psyche through her interaction with Jewel, and having embraced the physical nature of these desires, symbolized by the half-barbarian child in her womb. She is becoming—a combination and intermixing of forms that unite the animalistic and the instinctual (the tiger) with the rational and smart (the lady). Lopez writes that her monstrosity is part of her new freedom to explore desire, which "transforms everything—including herself—into something unstable and at risk," and she realizes that "the Other is in her" rather than something she must seek in the outer worlds of the jungle (137). Just as Bakhtin writes that within the possibilities of the grotesque "Man returns unto himself" and sees the existing world as alien in the face of a better, friendlier possibility (48), so does Marianne embrace the potency and openness of her desires in a world of her own design. Marianne is no longer a distant observer of the grotesque body; she now embodies it fiercely.



### ***Fight Club***

Zizek notes that one of the underlying ironies of our “individualistic competitive society” is the concern about surviving extreme physical situations despite the pointed lack of survival situations we face in everyday life. Shows like *Survivor* and *Survivor Man* draw our attention exactly because of our “utter alienation from nature,” as well as the community and solidarity extreme situations seem to encourage. Zizek points out that “the true message” of science fiction stories about global catastrophes “resides in the sudden reassertion of social solidarity and the spirit of collaboration among the survivors” (260). In *Fight Club*, the complete lack of lived embodiment and community in dominant society becomes the motivation to flee to fringes and create a new space where community, nature and the body co-exist. Key to this alternative utopian space is the mutilated and wounded body, which, as I mentioned earlier in this chapter, is a source to forge a new and authentic existence.

Like the inhabitants of One State who eat to the droning beat of a metronome, the unnamed Narrator of Palahniuk’s novel numbly follows an 8 to 5 routine before returning to a nicely furnished apartment that effectively insulates him from both his neighbors and the world, just as Marianne’s white tower keeps her removed and distant from the sensual fringe world outside the community walls. The Narrator has spent his life blindly pursuing the ostensibly “utopian” images revered by society, such as apartments stocked with the latest trendy furniture, and bodies, much like fixtures themselves, that are suitably molded, scrubbed and clothed to compliment a consumer paradise. He longs to break into a new reality where men like himself can reconnect

with long buried primal urges and the immediacy of the physical body. Just as Jewel appears at the height of Marianne's desire for escape, the Narrator's pent up frustrations and need for revolt cause him subconsciously to beget a double named Tyler Durden. Tyler's explosive descent into the life of the lower body brings the Narrator into full-bodied contact with alternative dimensions of himself within the animalistic and uninhibited fringe world known as Fight Club. However, like Donally among the Barbarians, Durden's plans take on apocalyptic undertones that mirror rather than counteract the repressive nature of society; and the Narrator, like Marianne, finds himself caught between the extremes of order and chaos, and he must try to forge his own non-repressive "third space" where reality and pleasure can coexist.

Philip Wegner characterizes *Fight Club* as a "proto-dystopia" because it focuses on "the emergence of a truly dystopian (and perhaps, even utopian) near-future situation..." (174). Palahniuk's America is much like our own, but the author highlights the dystopian potential in an urban landscape that most people might overlook or simply accept as unavoidable signs of modern living. The modern city is a dreary repetition of "filing cabinet" apartments monotonously decorated in the exact same mass-produced fixtures from IKEA catalogues, which people read as fervently as the Bible or pornography. The hum of the TV and the social impetus to stay as trendy as the neighbors has created a world with minimal agency and variety as people fixate on maintaining contentment with each purchase. The Narrator explains that each consumer is trapped in his or her "lovely nest," eventually creating a situation where "the things you used to own...own you." No matter what goes wrong in the world and no matter

how little control one has, “at least you’ve got your sofa issue handled” (34). Society’s greatest achievement is its almost complete containment of rebellion and social change. The critical dimension of fantasy and true utopian thinking—where imagining difference becomes possible—is in a complete state of entropy.

The Narrator, increasingly frustrated and unsatisfied by his “perfected” life, looks for a way out of the one-dimensional repetition of the everyday. After years as a successful consumer, achieving that sublime state of trendy-ness and matching furniture society teaches him to value, he only feels disgusted and empty. He laments, “I was tired and bored with my job and my furniture, and I couldn’t see any way to change things. Only end them. I felt trapped. I was too complete. I was too perfect” (164). At first he finds temporary relief by participating in support groups for cancer survivors and the terminally ill, where the instability and suffering he witnesses dispels the unhappiness he feels with life. He is temporarily more content with life when he surrounds himself with people who are dying tragic and painful deaths. He also gets a rush, as well as attention, pretending to be careening toward the release of death, and the groups allow him brief access to a dimension beyond the false needs and stagnant perfectibility of society. However, the appearance of Marla, another “faker” and his future love interest, disrupts the fantasy world he has created and it quickly loses its cathartic effect. He replaces it with Tyler Durden.

Unlike Jewel, who is a separate person as well as a projection of Marianne’s desires, Tyler is pure fiction, a split personality developed by the Narrator, who does not realize he and Tyler are the same person until well into the novel. The Narrator is

undeniably insane, but his insanity is rather unsurprising considering the repressive nature of society. In *Necessary Evil*, James Baker argues that Palahniuk uses the Narrator's madness to represent the social fragmentation surrounding the protagonist. He is "mad" because of society, not despite it, and it is only through madness that he can see past social falsehoods. Baker smartly applies Foucault's study *Madness and Civilization* to the text, particularly Foucault's idea that madness is a result of an individual's inability to follow social codes and ideologies. Simply put, to oppose society is to be labeled "mad." The madman threatens social stability because, as Baker explains, "he assumes an unbridled, wild, or 'animal' freedom that flouts society's authority to define the content within which freedom is permissible, and in doing so, reveals social norms as constructs—folly and unreason—rather than *a priori*, intrinsic aspects of humanity itself" (138). Such madness, in the words of Foucault, is "a liberty raging in the monstrous forms of animality" (83). The narrator may be "insane" from the viewpoint of society, but it is this madness which gains him access to utopian liberation.

The key to this access is Tyler, who exemplifies the unbridled, wild and animal freedom that exalts in an all-or-nothing descent into life's lower strata. His aggressive, charismatic, and uninhibited personality is a physical explosion of the Narrator's pent up and oppressed desires for a different life, and it is through Tyler that the Narrator finds liberation from the rational systems that had oppressed him. He is the Narrator's own grotesque mind-child, a tangible projection of new possibilities of irrationality and disorder. Through Tyler, the Narrator can, in the words of Bakhtin, "look at the world

with different eyes, not dimmed by ‘normal,’ that is by commonplace ideas and judgments” (59). If the Narrator cannot see a way out of utopia gone mad, Tyler can.

As the Narrator’s grotesque double, Tyler transgresses social boundaries by giddily and literally invading high society with his lower body. In his gigs as a waiter and movie projectionist, Tyler *literally* mixes genitalia into otherwise socially acceptable entertainments. These are ways for Tyler—and, in reality, the Narrator—to revolt against the privileging of the rational Mind over the bodily appetites. He craftily splices erect male penises and gaping vaginas into family film reels so that erections loom “four stories tall over the popcorn audience, slippery red and terrible...” (20). Though the clips are too quick for anyone in the audience to catch at a conscious level, people still register that something is not quite right. These monstrous exposures of the lower body subtly assault the “inner” and atrophied world of the unconscious. As a waiter, Tyler frequently urinates and ejaculates into gourmet soups before serving them to upper class customers, finding satisfaction in mixing the abject fluids of the body with an expensive bisque. And in the most symbolic of his gestures, Tyler and the Narrator make and sell high dollar soap using stolen fat from liposuction patients. In true carnivalesque subversion, the “enlightened” behavior and cleanliness represented by trendy, over-priced specialty soap is actually infused with the rejected and unwanted waste and excess of the body, and particularly parts of the body that represent excess desire, appetite and indulgence. Tyler’s crusade, from movie theatres and restaurants to Fight Club, is to reintegrate the body into society—whether people like it or not.

Through Tyler, the Narrator himself is “thrust into the lower stratum of the body for recasting and a new birth,” a process Bakhtin linked with growth and dynamic transformation (53). The Narrator’s rebirth into a state of becoming and difference starts with fight club, an alternative utopian community where men voluntarily punch and get punched. Fight Club more than satisfies the Narrator’s simple desire to not die “without a few scars...” (39). When Tyler first asks the Narrator to punch him as hard as he can, the Narrator finally agrees because, he realizes, “maybe we have to break something to make something better out of ourselves” (43). With each fight the body is degraded and abused, but the effects are positive and uplifting. This is exactly the type of carnivalesque subversion Bakhtin meant when he wrote that “To degrade is to bury, to sow, and to kill simultaneously, in order to bring forth something more and better....Degradation digs a bodily grave for a new birth; it has not only a destructive, negative aspect, but also a regenerating one” (21).

Fight Club offers men the chance to experience their bodies like no other outlet can, because no other place in society allows them the liberty to fully immerse themselves in animalistic, primal sensation. Within the fringe realm of Fight Club, the grotesque body upstages the classical body revered by a rational world; the clean and complete body bows to one riddled with the grime and blood of a barroom floor, gaping with wounds and the guttural cries of change and rebellion. The literal landscape of the body transforms to reflect this reconnection with primal strength and prowess. As the Narrator explains, six months after Fight Club a weak newbie will look like he’s carved out of wood (43). The Narrator draws a comparison between the body transformed in

Fight Club and the body sculpted in gyms “crowded with guys trying to look like men, as if being a man means looking the way a sculptor or an art director says” (42). Fight Club offers direct and immediate experience, and not merely the simulation of experience. And in turn this experience creates true transformation both mentally and physically: “There’s grunting and noise at fight club like at the gym, but fight club isn’t about looking good. There’s hysterical shouting in tongues like at church, and when you wake up Sunday afternoon you feel saved” (43). The body ravaged by pain, cuts and blood catapults the spirit into a new reality that isn’t necessarily “spiritual”—but it *is* different, and it is difference that kindles renewal. Here, finally, is a multi-dimensional world with the ability to change and transcend the stasis of modern life. As the Narrator reveals, “You aren’t alive anywhere like you’re alive at fight club” (42).

Wounding and mutilation is central to the community of Fight Club. Just as Marianne’s rape rockets her body into a new awareness, so do the “necessary wounds” given and received in Fight Club make the body a palpable, visible force in a world intent on erasing agency and autonomy. Through Tyler, the Narrator achieves a sense of self and visibility which, he quickly learns, other men crave as well. As Kim Hewitt writes in *Mutilating the Body*, self-inflicted pain can “acutely mark one’s physical existence and result in awareness of one’s precise place in the universe” (27). A crack to the jaw jolts one out of the numbness created by modern life and back into immediate experience. As men’s bodies become marked with gaping holes, discolored skin and oozing gashes they are able to recognize each other outside of Fight Club, their wounds serving as tribal tattoos. Their marked bodies are also silent revolts against the society

around them. The main rule—“The first rule about fight club is you don’t talk about fight club”—is almost made to be broken, since the men of Fight Club loudly proclaim their part in violent subversion every time they go to work with broken bones and black eyes. The allure of their marked bodies is irresistible to other men, and the clubs grow despite the first rule.

Eventually the Narrator grows desensitized to the rush of fighting. He wants to move on to bigger things, to see destruction on a worldwide scale, and to see everything beautiful and revered dragged into the dirt to go through the same process of renewal through degradation found in Fight Club. Tyler, as the agent of the Narrator’s desires, comes up with Project Mayhem, which aims at the complete overhaul of civilization. As the Narrator explains, “Like fight club does with clerks and box boys, Project Mayhem will break up civilization so we can make something better out of the world.” The ultimate goal of Project Mayhem is to instigate an apocalypse that will replace social “progress” with a utopia where society can reconnect with its primitive roots and abandon their enslavement to consumerism. He envisions

stalking elk past department store windows and stinking racks of beautiful rotting dresses and tuxedos on hangers; you’ll wear leather clothes that will last you the rest of your life, and you’ll climb the wrist-thick kudzu vines that wrap the Sears Tower....you’ll see tiny figures pounding corn and laying strips of venison to dry in the empty car pool lane of an abandoned superhighway stretching eight-lanes-wide and August-hot for a thousand miles. (116)



However idyllic and almost innocent this vision may seem, Tyler's means of achieving it are tyrannical, murderous and dehumanizing. His tactics are nothing short of terrorism; as one of Tyler's followers explains to the Narrator, "We have to show these men and women freedom by enslaving them, and show them courage by frightening them" (141). No longer content with exchanging punches in mutual celebration, Tyler plans to take any means necessary to force the outside world into a state of annihilation. He orders each member of Project Mayhem to buy a gun, and each week groups of men infiltrate society to promote property damage, fear and even death. Quite simply, it's dystopia all over again.

As Fight Clubs continue to grow across the nation and Project Mayhem spreads like an infection, so does the iron grasp of Tyler's power, and the sense of visibility and agency achieved in Fight Club is threatened by Tyler's increasing authority and dictatorship. Tyler's followers become nothing but nameless drones serving the wishes of a tyrannical leader. Baker points out that Project Mayhem replaces the consumerist ideology of one dystopian state with another. It is, as Baker describes, "an icon of corporate America itself where workers are nothing but faceless cogs in a corporate machine of dehumanization and destruction" (139). They repeat to each other: "You are not a beautiful and unique snowflake" (126). The men who "graduate" from Fight Club to join Project Mayhem are indoctrinated with the belief that they have absolutely no individual self-worth as they dedicate their lives to serving out Tyler's dreams for the total destruction of civilization.

The rule of Project Mayhem is simply to obey. As Tyler explains, “No one guy understands the whole plan, but each guy is trained to do one simple task perfectly” (122). Tyler has created an assembly line of unquestioning drones to orchestrate his apocalypse. The multi-dimensional community of Fight Club has reverted back to a one-dimensional society with no critical transcendence or individuality. And in place of the individual cuts of Fight Club there is the kiss-shaped scar of a lye burn with which Tyler marks each new initiate. This marking no longer indicates community and celebration but serves as a prison id tag indicating membership in a system that does not value the individual.

After the Narrator realizes that he and Tyler are two sides of the same person, he realizes he must integrate his fractured psyche. Like Marianne, who fused both order and chaos as she created a new, third world of her own, the Narrator must also find a way to take control and reintegrate his fractured personality by removing Tyler much the same way that Jewel faded from Carter’s narrative. The alternative personal space Tyler first offered the Narrator has crumbled into a destruction that is not about rebirth but dominance and power. The Narrator’s dilemma closely resembles Marianne’s: he is stuck between two worlds, both of which want to drain him of agency and personal choice while ripping his sense of self out of the body and enslaving it to a supposedly “utopian” cause.

Largely motivated by his love for Marla, the Narrator’s quest to reintegrate his personalities and mediate between two unsatisfying extremes is the most genuine utopian undertaking of the novel. In the moment he realizes the nature of his desire he

struggles to create a utopian alternative, though he is far less successful than Marianne. He attempts to dismantle both Fight Club and Project Mayhem, but Tyler's system is unassailable, and the Narrator's more destructive half has already accounted for the possibility of the Narrator's backlash. Tyler's followers refuse to budge from the institution of Project Mayhem, which now owns their lives as much as the corporate world once did. Tyler himself remains ferociously committed to violence and destruction, warning the Narrator, "...if you fuck with me, if you chain yourself to the bed at night or take big doses of sleeping pills, then we'll be enemies. And I'll get you for it" (159). When Tyler drags the Narrator to the top of a financial building that he claims is set to explode (it never does), he stuffs a gun in the Narrator's mouth, giving the Narrator his first real chance to destroy Tyler; the Narrator shoots himself.

At the novel's close the Narrator has been committed to an insane asylum and has come to a final realization: we are not special, nor are we the crap of the world. Rather, he concludes, "We just are" (198). This is the closest he comes to creating a "third space" where order and chaos can coexist. He rejects the ordered rationalism of modern life as well as Tyler's mantra of utter chaos and destruction for a mediation between the two where he accepts himself as an individual person rather than a mere cog in the social machine. Ultimately, he does not claim quite the same potent agency as Marianne, who manages to assimilate the Barbarian culture into her own personalized utopian space, successfully transforming the Professor's cold life of intellect with the Barbarian's joy of violence and aggression into an entirely new social world. The Narrator's self-discoveries still do not free him from the institutions he himself created.

If he ever returns to the outside world, Tyler's followers are waiting, hoping he will lead them toward apocalypse. And if Project Mayhem is ever successful, we can only hope there's a Marianne on the other side.

Utopia for both Marianne and the Narrator compliments Marcuse's vision of a non-repressive culture that "aims at a new relation between instincts and reason" (*Eros* 197). Marianne and the Narrator experience both the extremes of rationalism and the extremes of chaos, and realize that the best social world is one where productivity and pleasure can coexist harmoniously. Their hope of creating a third space for such a utopian alternative becomes the focus of each novel, though we only have hints at what this space might actually look like in the future. It is enough that Marianne evolves into the tiger lady right before the novel's open-ended close, and it is at least a start that the Narrator rejects both complete perfection and total destruction for self-acceptance somewhere in between. Beyond that, Carter and Palahniuk leave the reader to contemplate an ambiguous and unresolved future, and to wonder for themselves at the feasibility of a non-repressive culture for their own world.

Marianne among the Barbarians and the Narrator among the grunting men of Fight Club are engaging in this revolutionary form of utopia as disruption. They escape flat, sterile one-dimensional worlds and seek out violence and chaos that "would make some kind of change," which is what Marianne longs for among the Professors (Carter 2) and what the Narrator hopes to discover with Tyler Durden. Within their private utopian spaces, there is no ultimate vision, no finality, and no clear goal. Stability and homogeneity, once the staples of utopian living, are at odds with their desires for

difference and fluidity. This is a world fit for the grotesque body, a body that is not “a closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits” (Bakhtin 26). The protagonists in these novels subscribe to Marcuse’s philosophy in *One-Dimensional Man*: “The world of immediate experience—the world in which we find ourselves living—must be comprehended, transformed, even subverted in order to become that which it really is” (123). It is flesh, as Angela Carter writes in *The Passion of New Eve*, that “uncreates the world” ( 148). A heightened awareness of the body unravels the false unities of the rational world and leads to alternate realities where human nature and human desire are no longer seen as threats to utopian possibility. Their methods of disruption, of creating a break in their respective systems, are through the body. Marianne and the Narrator rejoice in violence, scarring, wounding and fierce sexuality—all the tumultuous, painful and pleasurable eye-opening potentialities of their previously unknown and inhibited bodies. They voluntarily escape into chaotic fringe worlds that smear the clean and sanctified rational body with the blood and dirt of a primal and instinctual alternative. The body, like utopia itself, is not something to be limited and defined, but a landscape to be explored, transformed and, when necessary, wounded.

CHAPTER IV  
UTOPIA IN THE FLESH

*“Our most inestimable resource, the unfettered imagination, continues to be grounded in the only truly precious possession we can ever have and know, and which is ours to do with what we will: the human body.”*

—V. Vale & Andrea Juno, *Modern Primitives*, 5.

With an identity forged in flesh and remade in a fringe world of violence and chaos, the individual emerges as an entirely new social being. In escaping an oppressive hierarchy of mind and Reason, the individual embraces a purely physical existence. Like Marianne’s escape from the Professors, this is an escape from a world defined by mind into a selfhood defined by scars, wounds, cuts and sensuality. The body becomes the individual’s surest footing in the tricky landscape of “knowing thyself,” particularly when the self is manipulated, processed and refined by a social world intent on dehusking the soul of its truest, deepest and most unsettling urges. This chapter examines the defensive mechanisms of the individual in worlds of corporate domination, mass produced images and ready-made desires. In particular, I look at the rising prominence of body modification practices in the late twentieth century and their relationship to utopian possibility. The two characters I discuss—Rant from Chuck Palahniuk’s *Rant* and Jimmy from Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*—are confronted with different versions of modified embodiment, from the socially constructed to the deviant and

visceral, and the choice to embrace difference and transgression evokes an alternative world immersed in bodily possibility.

However, media moguls and corporate conglomerates are very apt at redirecting potentially subversive energies and weaving them into society so that they are no longer a threat, and this tension between the directives of consumer society and the search for genuinely transgressive change emerges as the definitive conflict in twenty-first-century utopian literature. For instance, in the 1970s book *Modern Primitives*, which includes interviews and artworks by the Modern Primitive body modification subculture, tattoo artist Don Ed Hardy tells editors V. Vale and Andrea Juno that he's saddened tattooing is getting "too popular." More and more people attend tattoo conventions not based on any personal convictions or the desire for self-expression, but because tattooing is just the thing to do. Hardy prefers art with a social conscience, and he believes in art that "takes people out to a new plane of thinking, and so betters them." Unsure of the part he's played in popularizing tattoos, he wonders "Where do we go from here?" (67). Early in the twenty-first century, Ed Hardy signed over the rights to his designs to a high-end designer, and tattoos once crafted for individuals became mass-produced as part of a multi-million dollar industry. The name "Ed Hardy" is more likely to provoke images of haute couture, discriminating taste and the Hollywood elite than it is the Modern Primitive movement or even the art of tattooing<sup>11</sup>. Today it is possible—if you can afford it—to don Ed Hardy from top to bottom, since the line sells perfume,

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<sup>11</sup> I was unaware of Hardy's affiliation with *Modern Primitives* until I read Vale and Juno's book. Before that I knew the name from the tag of one of my swimsuits.

sunglasses, watches, jewelry, tops, bottoms, socks, purses, and even computer accessories.

This transition from subversive art to haute couture is characteristic of today's consumer society. In consumer culture, potentially rebellious and subversive energies directed against the corporate world are rerouted, packaged and sold to consumers as innocuous products, thereby maintaining a state of obedience and passivity. M. Keith Booker argues in *Techniques of Subversion in Modern Literature* that bourgeois society has an uncanny ability to "absorb and appropriate whatever subversive energies are directed against it" (8), and even the very idea of subversion has become "thoroughly inscribed in mass culture" (9). Corporate giants frequently play up images of rebellion and individuality to sell millions of products to consumers who want to believe in the romantic image of the rebellious outsider, while they themselves are succumbing to the sway of the dominant rhetoric. Corporations saturate society with images that provoke hidden desires and wants in the consumer. Mike Featherstone writes that the "inner logic of consumer culture depends upon the cultivation of an insatiable appetite to consume images" (*The Body* 178). Consumers pursue these images as if they were an expression of direct, genuine experience—and so you have millions of people wearing images of Ed Hardy tattoos without ever getting one. The "inner logic" of purchasing the clothes rather than the tattoo assures the consumer that not only will they be able to change and adapt to the next fashionable image, but also that they will be able to mimic a culture that might otherwise remain largely inaccessible. The thrill is to portray oneself as participating in subversion and resistance without ever doing so.



If twentieth century utopian literature was defined by the fight against totalitarian systems and malevolent systems of power, the utopian literature of the twenty-first century will likely be defined by the struggle of the individual against corporate interests and the commodification of almost all areas of life, including individuals themselves. In *Consuming Life*, Zygmunt Bauman writes that the most prominent feature of a consumer society “is the *transformation of consumers into commodities*,” or, more specifically, the individual’s “dissolution into the sea of commodities” (italics in original 12). The goal of society is to rise above this “faceless and insipid mass of commodities” to become “a notable, noticed and coveted commodity.” In this social environment, the utopian body—one that celebrates transgression and meaningful social change—becomes blurred with the desire for an elusive and unattainable goal, one that interferes with reinforces social systems rather than subverting them. In the consumer society, “turning into a desirable and desired commodity is the stuff of which dreams, and fairy tales, are made” (Bauman 13). Achieving enviable commodity status makes individuals “bona fide members of society” (57). While the protagonists of most utopian stories long to move from centers of rigid social control to the charged and liberated fringe worlds outside rigid systems of control, the individual in consumer society is constantly fighting to move closer and closer to the center. Those who lack the means to participate fully in the consumer society—such as the poor and underprivileged—are “totally useless” (Bauman 126) and best left “out of sight” (127). This creates a schism between rich and poor, the accepted and the marginalized, the “rational” elite and the outcast abject. The social fringes become populated with the mentally ill, minorities, the uneducated, the

poor, and—in a consumer society—the ugly, the old and the freaks, those who do not fit into society’s rhetoric of youthful beauty.

In an effort to rise above the “mass of commodities” and stand out, the consumer must give close attention to the appearance and comeliness of the physical body, which sublimates the desire for meaningful change and political awareness. In *The Body*, Featherstone notes that the “reward for ascetic body work ceases to be spiritual salvation or even improved health, but becomes an enhanced appearance and more marketable self” (170-171). Body maintenance has become the prerequisite for getting the “most out of life” (182). The body that stands out—like the football player sporting both skills and looks, or the thin fashion models envied the world over—accrues higher capital and greater visibility. In a society saturated with images, appearance is everything. The aim is not to enhance the individual’s sense of agency and embodiment in the world, but to increase one’s marketability as a commodity within dominant social hierarchies. As a consequence, the time-consuming practices of body maintenance divert the individual away from social and political awareness. For instance, in *Bodymakers*, Leslie Heywood, an academic as well as a bodybuilder, explains that the obsessive and time consuming nature of bodybuilding “can sometimes function to divert energy away from activist causes and keep change from happening” (186). On the other hand, she also believes female bodybuilding is a form of social activism that allows women to “claim a forbidden space” and “to assert oneself into the public sphere in unprecedented ways,” like when a woman walks into the often male-dominated free-weight area of the gym (186). This can give women a greater sense of personal worth, empowerment and

confidence. Like any utopian project, the body and its potency for genuine transformation and change is in flux, open to interpretation as well as corruption by the very systems utopian desires set out to topple.

The debate over who truly is in control of the body—society or the individual—is particularly important to feminists such as Heywood, who, as a bodybuilder, enjoys a sport that gives her a feeling of empowerment and agency yet remains mostly judged by men (and a patriarchal society) who frown on female bodies that are overly muscular and no longer feminine.<sup>12</sup> Many feminists see body modification practices as tools of subjugation and oppression rather than opportunities for empowerment. Studies like Susan Bordo's *Unbearable Weight* argue that a preoccupation with achieving an “ideal” body through dieting or exercising “function[s] as one of the most powerful normalizing mechanisms of our century, insuring the production of self-monitoring and self-disciplining ‘docile bodies’ sensitive to any departure from social norms and habituated to self-improvement and self-transformation in the service of those norms” (186). According to Bordo, the social impetus for “self-transformation” is a method of social norming, and alternatives to the status quo are feared and avoided rather than pursued. One very visible protest against social norms of beauty and the practices which perpetuate them comes from the French artist Orlan. Orlan's “body art” from the 1980s and 1990s criticized the dominant ideologies and norms which shape the way women perceive their bodies. She claims she is not against plastic surgery but “against the

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<sup>12</sup> Since the introduction of Fitness and Figure competitions in the early 1990s, female bodybuilding has been in decline since the more “feminine” look is more marketable in a consumer culture. Heywood writes, “As a result [of Fitness competitions], many women have switched from bodybuilding to fitness because it is much easier to get endorsements and widespread exposure” (36).

standards of beauty, against the dictates of dominant ideology that impress themselves more and more on feminine and masculine flesh” (Armstrong qtd in Clarke 189). Orlan went under the surgeon’s knife and reconstructed herself using representations of women from famous art by men, including the forehead of Da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa*, the chin of Botticelli’s *Venus* and the nose of Fountainebleau’s *Diana*.<sup>13</sup> She was certainly not trying to improve her appearance; Kathy Davis reports, “Her operations have left her considerably less beautiful than she was before” (174). Her intent was to transgress the intended purpose of cosmetic surgery. Davis explains that instead of beautifying or improving her body, “she turns the tables and uses surgery as a medium for a different project” (174). Under a local anesthetic, Orlan was conscious during each surgery, directing the cutting, suctioning and alteration of her own body. Far from a passive subject, she took complete control over her surgeries and used them to shape just the look she wanted—despite her patchwork of “ideal” inspirations making her more akin to Frankenstein’s monster than any classical beauty.

Critiques like those of Bordo and Orlan represent the main tide of feminist thought in regard to body modification practices they believe are motivated by pressures to conform rather than resist. But these critiques are also academic and theoretical in nature, and do not always reflect the experience of patients who choose surgery as a positive opportunity for self-empowerment and transformation. Women who opt for cosmetic surgery are often motivated by painful social experiences, low self-worth and a perception that their bodies do not match their inner-selves. Davis refers to their choice

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<sup>13</sup> Since a male doctor would not purposefully disfigure her “cute” face, she recruited feminist female surgeons (Davis 174 ).

of cosmetic surgery as “an intervention in identity” (175). Herself a feminist, Davis has interviewed female patients who struggled with doubts and fears about surgery, but ultimately decided the benefits outweighed the risks. These interviews showed Davis the discrepancy between objective feminist critiques and the decisions faced by real everyday women, who, for a variety of reasons and influences, believed surgery would help them live more satisfying lives. Davis recognizes that the experience of cosmetic surgery is a “complex dilemma” for women, and should not be quickly dismissed by feminists as an “absolute evil” (169). She writes, “While I shared the commonly held feminist view that cosmetic surgery represented one of the more pernicious horrors inflicted by the medical system upon women’s bodies, I disliked the concomitant tendency among feminists to treat the recipients as nothing more than misguided or deluded victims” (168). Davis prefers to see women as active participants in changing their bodies, and recognizes that under some circumstances cosmetic surgery can lead to empowerment and the ease of emotional suffering.

As technology makes body modification more accessible and the media and popular culture promote tattoos, piercings and surgical procedures as must-have fashion accessories, questions about body modification and social change grow more pressing. Does body modification provide individuals with a potent form of transgressive utopian expression, or does it propagate the agenda of the social status quo, distracting individuals from genuinely productive social change and leading them instead toward endless consumption? Recent utopian literature explores the possible long-term consequences of living in a consumer society where the pursuit of bodily ideals detracts

from social change and social awareness. For instance, in Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go* is set in an alternative Britain where clones are harvested for organs used to treat people with health problems. Ishiguro's novel presents a future that is both hopeful in the advances of science and cures for cancer and other diseases, and a future that is terrifying in its realistic depiction of people's unquestioning pursuit of the "utopian" body with little regard for the possible consequences. The story evolves at Hailsham, a school where the clones, or "students," are reared and educated by a group of people who want the young clones to have the semblance of a normal, healthy life. Eventually, Hailsham and other schools like it are shut down and the movement fails to effect any change in the perceptions of clones, though the students do receive a much more comfortable upbringing than the majority of clones reared in "deplorable conditions" that are "only getting worse" (261). The situation unmistakably calls to mind feed lots on slaughterhouses where cows are doomed from birth to a life of captivity and death for the consumption of society. There is a very utopian element to Ishiguro's future world. New technologies can cure diseases such as cancer and ease the pain of long-term illnesses. However, this milestone is counteracted by the methods used to achieve it. The clones are required to "donate" until they "complete," or die, usually by their fourth operation and in an often agonizing and slow death. Whatever the euphemisms used to gloss over reality, the clones are essentially dehumanized products to be consumed by society for life extension and body maintenance.

In Ishiguro's novel, the public interest in body modification and the technology making modification possible creates both utopian promise and dystopian solutions—a

very appropriate representation of the complexity of body modification practices. Perhaps it is less useful to consider whether or not body modification practices such as cosmetic surgery or dieting are truly empowering than it is to inquire into society is adapting transgressive rhetoric and then regurgitating it to justify its own perpetuation, and how transgression—and utopia—can be reclaimed. In her study on make-overs and cosmetic surgeries, Deborah Covino urges us be aware of the way our fears and desires are manipulated, and to “inventory without complacency those practices, expectations, desires, and appeals that have become embedded in a public sense of the possible” (1). This is an important task, since by understanding how our desires are shaped we can understand what represents genuine utopian possibility and what desires are programmed into the subconscious by consumer culture. Utopian literature headed into the twenty-first century is very concerned with the precarious state of true utopianism in a society that defines human life in terms of profit and products.

With body modification movements in late twentieth-century Western culture as a reference point, this chapter looks at the literary representations of body modification in consumer cultures where *images* of utopian experience are steadily replacing real ones. The insidious trickery of dominant culture creates a smoke and mirrors effect that leads the individual on endless pursuits of marketed dreams and possibilities at the expense of lived embodiment—and social resistance. Works like Chuck Palahniuk’s *Rant* celebrate wounds, car crashes and disabling infections, suggesting the need for extreme and self-destructive means of circumventing society and shocking individuals out of near-comatose states of compliance. Margaret Atwood’s novel *Oryx and Crake*

suggests that it may take a complete social overhaul in the form of apocalypse to imagine utopia again and to see the transgressive and world-shaping potential in bodies that are free from social mediation and control. These novels, the subjects of the remainder of this chapter, help define what constitutes genuinely transgressive body modification and utopian desires—desires that long for alternatives to social systems which create consumers willing and eager to purchase utopian possibility. If the potency of transgressive embodiment is being redirected and distorted by oppressive systems, it is time to ask where renewed utopian energies will materialize next, and what this means not just for the future of literature but for us as readers, whose desires may also not be our own.

### ***Rant***

“Body modification” is an umbrella term for dozens of practices, from the mundane to the shocking. Mike Featherstone defines body modification as practices which “alter the appearance and form of the body,” (1) a simple definition that refers to practices such as piercing, tattooing, branding, cutting, binding, cosmetic surgery, diet and exercise regimes, anorexia, bodybuilding, prosthetics, life extension technologies, gender transformation and even, in extreme cases, attempting to change species.<sup>14</sup> Many of the practices of body modification subcultures since the late twentieth century have intentionally borrowed from ancient cultures as a way to express dissatisfaction with modern society. However, such practices are distinct from the markings or alterations

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<sup>14</sup> Here I am thinking of “Cat Man,” a Native American who has spent years attempting to transform himself into his totem, the tiger. I will refer to him again later in this chapter. Of course, some practices, such as putting on make-up, shaving or sun tanning, are so ingrained in our daily routines that we would not consider ourselves “body modifiers,” though most people are to some extent.



practiced by indigenous cultures for centuries, which were used to indicate tribal status and hierarchy (Pitts 31). Western body modification movements emphasize individualized experiences rather than the shared beliefs of a tribal society. As Victoria Pitts explains, “the modern Western body is understood not as a collective product of inscription, but as a personal projection of the self” (31). Self-identity and personal expression trump social ties, though body modifiers gain a sense of community and belonging within the body modification community.

The prevalence of the body in literature is directly related to the rising cultural interest in the body as a source for individual transformation and self-expression. Images of the athletic, toned body are particularly prevalent, and often represent the pinnacle of physical ideals for the body. Like Harrison Bergeron’s exceptional body, the athletic body connotes more than just physical ability; it also represents discipline, empowerment and success. It defines today’s icons and superstars, like Arnold Schwarzenegger, whose career in movies and later politics first began in the gym. Schwarzenegger describes his first visit to a gym as a personal revelation: “It was something I suddenly just seemed to reach out and find, as if I’d been crossing a suspended bridge and finally stepped off onto solid ground” (14). Bodybuilding taught him how to know his body and control it, and he transferred that knowledge to other pursuits, shaping a hugely successful career led by “confidence and pride and an unlimited positive attitude” that came from understanding and controlling “each individual muscle” in his body (109). For body modifiers like Schwarzenegger, transforming the body is the starting point for defining one’s own limits and possibilities

rather than as an end in itself. It is also a way to experience a dynamic connection with the body. For Schwarzenegger, “life is continuously being hungry” (112). He lived for the *pursuit* of perfection and new possibilities rather than an end in itself. Bodybuilding allows the builder to constantly shape and reshape the body, a practice that is particularly empowering in a world that relies on static routine, order and stability—a world like America in the 1950s, when bodybuilding was gaining popularity.

Though body modification practices like bodybuilding, dieting and fitness are commonly accepted forms of body modification, some practices remain outside the mainstream and mark individuals as transgressors and non-conformists, unlike Schwarzenegger, who used bodybuilding to catapult him into stardom. For these body modifiers, the body is a way to critique the status quo, create tension and broaden political awareness. Victoria Pitts’ recent study *In the Flesh: The Cultural Politics of Body Modification* links the origins of the current body modification movement to several subculture groups since the 1970s. These groups wanted to treat the body as an expression of rebellion and discontent, to use the body as a symbol of membership to an alternative community, and to mark the body as a way of expressing a unique identity (8). Early body modifiers like punks often felt helpless to affect meaningful change in their environment and to voice their discontents about living in a stifling, conservative world. According to *Punk and Neo-Tribal Body Art* by David Wojcik, the punk movement of the late 1970s used tattoos, piercings and wildly colored and styled hair to shock the public and express the sense of “futurelessness” felt by youth who were disgusted with massculture. They created startling contrasts to the dress code of white

shirts and trimmed hair required by corporate society. According to Wojcik, punk “constituted a form of resistance that provided a sense of identity, self-esteem, and community for alienated youth” (5). Punks used the body was one of their most forceful ways to express resistance to what they believed was as a stagnant conservative culture built on bureaucracy and consumerism.<sup>15</sup>

Wojcik believes the punks inspired body modification subcultures, such as the Modern Primitives movement in the 1980s (35). However, while punks expressed anger and destruction, most of the later movements emphasized the creative possibilities of body modification (36). They used body modification as a source of positive transformation and change, and the body as a “site of symbolic resistance, a source of personal empowerment, and the basis for the creation of a sense of self-identity” (36). As Pitts explains, the different body modification groups which emerged all shared a similar perspective on the body as a “site of exploration as well as a space needing to be reclaimed from culture” (7). The body became a platform for voicing frustrations and discontent with society and marking oneself as a member in a deviant and “alternative community” (8). This very utopian desire to critique existing society and create alternatives showed that the utopian impulse was still very strong, though also clearly very different from earlier utopian projects like those of the nineteenth-century reformers. Now the focal point for creating an alternative to the perceived corruptions and flaws of society was the body, and not one that was magically purified and

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<sup>15</sup> Anthony Burgess’ Alex in *A Clockwork Orange* could be read as a precursor to the punks with his animosity toward authority and resistance to pressures to be docile, hard working and conformist. His aimless violence and wanton destruction represented the same sense of futility and futurelessness that inspired the punks to emphasize death and the inevitability of apocalypse.

beautified by utopian living. This utopian body was scarred, cut, pierced, branded, hung and inked—transgression materialized in flesh.

The publication of *Modern Primitives* by V. Vale and Andrea Juno marked “a pivotal moment in the rise of body modification as a subcultural movement” (Pitts 8). Vale and Juno’s collection of pictures and interviews includes a detailed interview with Fakir Musafar, one of the founders of the movement and a body modifier since the age of twelve. Musafar defines “modern primitive” as “a non-tribal person who responds to primal urges and does something with the body.” Musafar categorizes body modification practices, or “Body Play,” into seven practices: contortion, constriction, deprivation, encumberment, fire, penetration, suspension. Examples of these practices range from the fairly mundane and mainstream, such as yoga as “body play by contortion” and sun tanning as “body play by fire,” to the more shocking and subversive practices of lying on a bed of swords for “body play by penetration” and suspension from fleshhooks for “body play by suspension” (15). One of the purposes of Modern Primitivism is to encourage spontaneity; too much “structuring,” Musafar says, “destroys any possibility of an ecstatic breakthrough in life experiences” (13). For Musafar and many other body modifiers, the answer to social alienation, frustrations, and emptiness is the body, and body modification fulfills a desperate need in the individual to find alternatives (36).

Modern Primitives were frustrated by the consumer society of the twentieth century. Vale and Juno believe that the great change of the twentieth century, which involved “the wholesale de-individualization of man and society,” resulted from “an

inundation of millions of mass-produced images” and the loss of lived experience. First-hand experience and creative expression have been subtly dismissed “in favor of a passive intake of images” such as watching TV (5). Hope is grounded in the body. According to Vale and Juno, the practices of modern primitives imply “the desire for, and the dream of, *a more ideal society*.” The body is the source for this utopian impulse:

Amidst an almost universal feeling of powerlessness to ‘change the world,’ individuals are changing what they *do* have power over: *their own bodies*...By giving visible bodily expression to unknown desires and latent obsessions welling up from within, individuals can provoke change—however inexplicable—in the external world of the social, besides freeing up a creative part of themselves; some part of their essence. (4)

The body as a fearless vehicle for the “visible bodily expression” of “latent obsessions” has become a prominent part of Western culture, and certainly not limited to subcultures like the Modern Primitives. These bodily expressions emerge as wild forays into a purely sensual, embodied existence that is mimicked and embraced in a variety of media and entertainment, showing not only the participant’s willingness to test the limits of the body but also the viewer’s eagerness to vicariously experience altered embodiment. The choices are endless: violent “ultimate fighting” and wrestling matches promoted on television as well as children’s gaming systems; extreme make-over shows that literally carve out Barbie doll versions of the discarded self; reality shows, such as *Survivor* or *The Ultimate Fighter*, which pit people together in intense physical struggles; and extreme shows geared toward youth like *Jackass*, where people perform shocking and

often self-injuring stunts as if the body were a cartoon, able to flatten and pop back up, break and reassemble, explode and remain unscathed. These flirtations with the body's limits provide a mesmerizing alternative to the imposed limits and restrictions of society, and show the universal draw of the body that utopian literature is registering.

The philosophy of the Modern Primitives and the insatiable desire to push the body to new limits also resounds through all of the utopian literature discussed in previous chapters. The criticisms of utopian literature and the Modern Primitives unite them as allies against the overly rational, dehumanizing condition of society, and the body voices these frustrations. Like the protagonists through all of the utopian literature, body modifiers attempt to step outside the boundaries and expectations of mainstream community to regain a sense of individualism the social world lacks. They embrace the aspects of transgressive utopianism I outlined in Chapter I. They value a dynamic, changing body; they use their body and their art to voice resistance and critique current values; they “destroy” the body in an effort to create a new body and a new sense of being-in-the-world; and they are intentionally utopian in their desire and expression for difference and change, both as individuals and members of a broader social world.

Body modification continues to gain visibility into the twenty-first century, and the possibilities for modification continue expanding. In the recent documentary *Modify* Fakir Musafar appears almost tame and conservative in comparison to other people interviewed for the film, from a bodybuilder whose muscles surge under his skin, to people with fully-inked bodies, to the even greater extreme of Native American Dennis

Avner, also known as “Cat Man,” has undergone years of surgery—even having whiskers implanted on his face—to be literally morphed into his native totem the tiger. Avner’s transformations are performed by Steve Haworth, body modification artist and inventor of subdermal and transdermal implants. Haworth and his partners also appear in the documentary *Flesh and Blood*, which shows transdermal procedures, such as a man with spikes inserted into his shaved head, creating a “metal Mohawk” any punk would envy.<sup>16</sup> The film also shows fleshhook suspensions, in which large metal hooks are inserted in the flesh, suspending the body from wires. The practices are painful and sometimes difficult to watch, but for the body modifier the desire to be different supersedes the fear of pain and injury. Both the painful process and the results of these practices are part of the modifier’s initiation into a counterculture they want to embrace as part of their identity. Isa Gordon, one of Haworth’s friends and fellow body artists, explains that most body modifiers, like most people, felt like the outsiders when they were children and never made it to the popular “center.”<sup>17</sup> However, while most people try to fit in, people who modify choose to move farther away from the center. They identify with the social fringes and clearly mark themselves as distinct from society’s “inner circle.”

This almost seems contradictory, though, considering the proliferation of piercing and tattooing and the widespread acceptance of such practices in popular culture. Are American college students really trying to live in the fringes of culture by

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<sup>16</sup> Since Haworth is not medically licensed, such procedures must be performed without anesthesia, though this does not deter people from around the world from seeking his services.

<sup>17</sup> Gordon uses the analogy of a playground, with a very few children in the center and most people looking in from the outskirts.

getting tattooed, or are they mimicking what they see in mass produced images marketed by the media? What makes one practice transgressive and another socially sanctioned? Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* is worth revisiting for its insights into transgression and the modified body. Within the community of Fight Club, men revel in wounding, scars, bruises and cuts, which set them apart from the normal, "civilized," and routine, where their lives are dominated by meaningless jobs and consumer culture. Tyler's vision for Fight Club reflects the same spirit as the Modern Primitives in his desire to return to an earlier time when individuals followed the urges of the body. Fight Club creates just such a space. And like the Modern Primitives, the body modification practiced by the members is hardly accepted by mainstream society. In *Modern Primitives*, Musafar tells Vale and Juno that physical difference "frightens people in our culture more than anything else....They'll let you do almost anything as long as it isn't physical." He cites bodybuilding as a modern-day "accepted" form of body modification that society no longer views as threatening or extreme (14). In *Fight Club*, Bob attends a self-help group for testicular cancer before joining Project Mayhem. Bob was a bodybuilder before testicular cancer, divorce and the effects of steroids wrecked his sense of masculinity. Though Bob once reveled in the power and shape of his physique, it has failed to provide him salvation or hope from illness and loneliness; however, after joining Fight Club, Bob regains his strength, both metaphorically and literally. He has become "quilted with muscle and so hard they shine" (91). The body created in Fight Club is not a representation of an image; it is the genuine experience of altered embodiment. By circumventing the safe and prescribed behavior of consumer society—



the consumption of second-hand experience—the members of Fight Club are not only changing their bodies but remaking their worlds and reclaiming a sense of lived embodiment. Like the tattoos of the Modern Primitives, Bob’s muscles represent social resistance as well as physical difference.

*Fight Club* distinguishes between body modification that has been integrated into the social center and that which exists on the fringes and generates real transgression and—as the re-appearance of Bob’s muscles show—transformed and renewed embodiment. Palahniuk pointedly contrasts the body modification practices of working out with the transformations experienced in Fight Club, suggesting that the latter offers a much deeper and transcendent escape. The “stock body” shaped in the gym lacks the gut-punch immediacy provided by Fight Club, where the individual experiences the transformative potential of very direct experience. For the Narrator, a beautiful, chiseled body is nothing without the experience of pain and struggle to back it up; he doesn’t want to die “without a few scars” (39). It’s the same desire Proteus expresses in *Player Piano* when he looks at his clean white hands and fantasizes about putting them to work on the land, where they would be scratched, calloused and dirtied. Unlike the gym, Fight Club “isn’t about looking good” (43). It’s about a spiritual transformation and salvation through the modified body, and that true subversion is free of social regulation and approval. Meaningful body modification disengages and frees the individual from social norms and ideals, working outside of social power structures in efforts to change them.

Reclaiming transgression in a world that heavily polices the body also requires embracing the abject and finding Bakhtinian transcendence in the low, the scorned and the unwanted—even if this means contracting an infection that makes you drool like a dog. Palahniuk’s other dystopian novel, *Rant*, also pinpoints transgression in fringe cultures where experiments in body play offer resistance to the dominant consumer culture, as well as wickedly entertaining relief from the boredom of everyday life. *Rant* is both a celebration of the transgression possible in embodiment and a warning against the increasing reliance on second-hand experiences that make true transgression and resistance an increasingly difficult feat. The same fears that led the Modern Primitives to practice body modification are driving individuals to violent extremes in *Rant*, where being comatose is the norm. In “The Politics of Boredom,” Lance Rubin draws a connection between Palahniuk’s themes in *Rant* and the Punk movement of the twenty-first century. Both want to break away from the “narrow subjectivities” created by mass media, religion and commodity fetishism and into something more genuine. Rubin writes that Punks and Palahniuk share an interest in “overcoming our reluctance to abandon the comforts of conformity” and deviating “from the master narratives scripted for us by powerful institutions in favor of chaos and spontaneity” (130). *Rant* is a novel about creating one’s own version of the world rather than passively consuming a media-enhanced representation of “life.” The body must take a fairly horrific barrage of abuse to jolt the individual out of complacency, but the reward is a life of sensual awareness, blooming embodiment and renewed possibility.

Rant, the eponymous character, is a body modifier whose interest in the body and body play make him the “Adam” of a new generation that directly counters the hierarchy of health, self-improvement and obedience. Rant survives by embracing the mutated, infected and aberrant body. The novel indicates that utopian energies into the twenty-first century are still most potent at the fringes, though, unlike *Fight Club*, where the fringes offered a space mostly free of social control and regulation, the sites of possible resistance in *Rant* are still closely monitored and often quickly neutralized. In the future American dystopia of *Rant*, society is divided along the lines of the accepted and the abject; to borrow a make-over phrase, society works a lot like before and after photos. According to Covino, “before” photos show body parts that are “estranged” from the ideals society values, such as youth, vitality, proportion and whiteness. “After” photos show these parts after they have been “removed, smoothed, slimmed, adjusted, sculpted” (2). In both pictures, “the focus remains on the area whose deviance is reparable; in such a context, the body is represented less as a dynamic of elements and process constituting a distinctive and physically complex identity, than as a confederation of territories that can each be demarcated for upgrading or renovation” (2-3). This compartmentalized approach to the body allows society’s policing forces to manage deviance and transgression. As Covino explains, we come to see “our deviance from social norms and ideals as local and manageable” and we repress the “full extent and range of bodily imperfection and difference” (3). The society of *Rant*, like many dystopian societies, approaches the subversive nature of society with the same approach to abjection as surgeons to an unwanted blemish.

In the novel, the parts of society that are not “reparable” or that threaten the power of the government with unmanageable deviance are literally hidden in the “big trash bin” of the night (Palahniuk 196). Society is fragmented into Daytimers and Nighttimers, where Daytimers are the “after” photos of society: “civilized” middle class workers that follow the rules. Nighttimers are the “before” photos: the rejects, misfits and the outcasts who restlessly scour the night. The night is “a place to store” all the people who seem beyond fixing and serve no good purpose (196). People who choose Nighttime culture are usually too poor or too unskilled to make it in the day. They must adhere to the “I-See-U” curfew, which is enforced by heavy fines and in some cases death. Businesses that serve Nighttime customers who are in violation of curfew are fined as well. As one character says, it is “segregation by time” (194). Many Nighttimers channel their frustrations and energies into Party Crashing, in which groups in marked cars hunt each other down and crash, causing injuries, property damage and sometimes death. Though the game relieves boredom and gives Nighttime youth a hobby, it is also a way for the government to curtail active rebellion and redirect the energies of potential dissidents. The game is organized by an unseen entity and goes on uninterrupted by the government.

Rant is a Nighttimer and Party Crasher whose experiments in body play as a youth make him the originator of an outbreak of rabies that upsets the social balance when it spreads over the whole city, leaving undeniable evidence that the barriers between social groups have not completely contained the unwanted. The outbreak gives visual expression to the beliefs of body modifiers like Musafar, who believe that living

“an *uncomfortable* life is sometimes far more satisfactory than a placid, bovine existence” (15). The typical pastime in society (for both day and night) is “boosting peaks,” which is very similar to watching TV. When people “boost a peak,” they hack into another person’s sensory experience and briefly escape their own un-stimulating lives. In Rant’s world it is exactly this “comfortable” life provided by society that is so irksome to both the protagonist and the reader. Rant is born with a highly attuned sense of taste and smell along with a penchant for direct experiences. As a youth, Rant preferred “fishing” to boosting. When he goes “fishing,” Rant plunges parts of his body down animal holes and waits until he is bitten, wounded, scarred and poisoned. As Rant explains, “A rattlesnake’s just my vaccination against boredom” (69). In terms of Musafar’s classification system, Rant enjoys body play by penetration or “invasion,” an extreme version of the same category as piercing, tattooing or lying on a bed of nails. The bites and the pain shock him awake to life, much like the pain of body modification practices. As a result of the bites, Rant becomes infected with rabies, which disrupts his ability to boost peaks but also gives him instant erections. Rubin suggests that Rant’s inability to boost peaks because of his rabies infection—an infection that will later spread thanks to Rant’s sexual appetite—may be a purposeful attempt to destroy the technology of boosting peaks “so that people will lead their own lives and construct their own life experiences” (134). Rant’s experiments in alternative embodiment create a break from the boring, overly processed life metered out by his society, sending him instead into an even deeper and more sensual embodied existence. As the infection

spreads and gains popularity, people tacitly join Rant's resistance and experience their own utopian revival.

As his friend Bodie Carlyle explains, "To Rant, pain was one horizon. Poison, the next horizon. Disease was nothing but the horizon after all them" (70). Disease offers another conduit for transformation and escape from a much more "unhealthy" society. According to Eduardo Mendieta, Palahniuk's stories are about "unmaking, uncoupling and disentangling ourselves from the normal self into which we have been socialized."<sup>18</sup> Deviance becomes "the health of the individual in a sick society" (395). Like the Narrator's frequent visits to support groups in *Fight Club*, the idea of being literally sick is far more appealing than being bored and depressed in a sick society. What starts as bites and scars becomes a rabies outbreak that puts all of the city in jeopardy—or, depending on how you look at it, gives people a chance for salvation and escape. The infection intensifies the schism between the civilized Daytimers and the abject Nighttimers, whose numbers were beginning to threaten the political power of the Daytimers. As the infection spreads and some Nighttimers purposefully spit at Daytimers to pass the rabies, the government enforces an even stricter curfew and a quarantine. Eventually the government sanctions on-sight shootings of Nighttimers, infected or not. Nighttimers fear rabies is "the new weapon of mass destruction," used by the social elite to legally control if not annihilate the nighttime population (302). However, the infection also stirs up a counterculture movement in the youth. The desire

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<sup>18</sup> Mendieta's article covers Palahniuk's novels up to 2003, but his characterization remains very pertinent for later works such as *Rant*.

for infection and the celebration of sickness, impairment—as opposed to “reparability”—and possibly death indicates a deep and desperate desire for change.

In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin writes that “Degradation digs a bodily grave for a new birth; it has not only a destructive, negative aspect, but also a regenerating one” (21). The same is true for the obsession with infection; though debilitating and possibly fatal, rabies is glorified as an opportunity for individual renewal. Bakhtin writes that to degrade is to toss something into the lower realms of the reproductive organs and the womb, creating a new birth (21). The Daytimers adopt the same belief in rabies. Hailed as the “Adam” of a new generation, Rant rises to hero status among both Daytimers and Nighttimers alike as the father to this renewal through degradation (296). Daytimers begin sneaking out into the night, hoping to get picked up and infected, while Nighttimers brag about their closeness to Rant (296). High school kids begin putting on rabies-themed parties and dance “The Drooler,” where dancers would mimic end-stage rabies. Kids would “stagger around the dance floor, foaming from Alka-Seltzer on their tongue, crashing into each other, and snarling” (294). As one Daytimer explains, she wants to get infected “to live a real, alive life” (300). She also plans to be impregnated while infected, spawning a baby that she hopes is part man and part animal. She wants to take human evolution “one giant leap backward” (301). In this plummet into degradation, utopia takes one step forward.

Ironically, a deadly epidemic becomes an opportunity for both the “civilized” half of society and the abject and downtrodden to indulge in body play, with *play* being a particularly appropriate descriptor. This is precisely the perspective of body modifiers

like the Modern Primitives, who want to see life in terms of play and pleasure rather than social forces and suppression. Musafar did not want body modification to become an object of study or academic scrutiny; body modification was intended to free the individual from objective discourse and rhetoric and release them into a world of lived embodiment and subjectivity. He practices body modification “BECAUSE IT’S FUN!...It’s more fun than going to college and getting a PhD” (15 Musafar’s emphasis). Palahniuk makes the same point in *Rant*, just as he did by pointing out the difference between working out and actually using the body in *Fight Club*. Direct experience is the key. One chapter in *Rant* parodies academic discourse by using the kind of pretentious and cryptic language associated with academia. Professors and academics analyze Party Crashing, calling it “the latest manifestation of a liminal space which provides a cathartic sublimation...thereby deflecting any pent-up hostility toward the status quo and preserving the existent social structure” (289). In an anticipatory parody of my own argument, this group of academics argues that Party Crashing perpetuates the status quo and preserves civilization as a whole by diverting the frustrations of Nighttimers and keeping them relatively docile. However, at the end of the chapter, Shot Dunyan, a Party Crasher, undermines these academic voices (including mine) by simply saying what most people are thinking when they read the thick academic jargon: “All that Anthropology 401 garbage is beyond boring. Party Crashing is just a fun time. It’s a fun playtime. Please don’t kill it with big words” (294). By dismissing academic attempts to understand his behavior, Shot reclaims a sense of ownership over the game that he does not see as part of a complex social power play.



If Daytimers are fantasizing about babies that are half-man and half-animal, then the “after” photos of the possible future of America are much different than the views shown in the light of day.<sup>19</sup> There are obviously still sites of resistance in the social fringes, though it takes violent and extreme actions to ignite both resistance and transformation, and the transgressors run the risk of either dying of infection or being shot by police. In *Oryx and Crake*, Margaret Atwood shows us a world where society has fallen completely under the control of corporations and the dictum of profit, and little to no room remains for transgression, largely because people are so distracted and obsessed by improving their appearance that they have no time for thinking about real social change. Atwood’s solution—and the source for utopian renewal—is still possible, but, to take Palahniuk’s images even further, change is only possible after apocalypse ends the rhetorical mirage that “utopia” was a few purchases away. Utopia is never that easy.

### ***Oryx and Crake***

Perhaps the best prediction of a future society completely driven by consumption and profit is the 2003 dystopian novel *Oryx and Crake* by Margaret Atwood. This novel, which Dunja Mohr calls a “twofold dystopia,” involves a dystopian 21<sup>st</sup> century America and the “post-apocalyptic primal world” that is left after a global virus kills off most of humanity (17). Sharon Sutherland and Sarah Swan see the novel as a barometer to the American response to a post-9/11 world where fears and paranoia have

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<sup>19</sup> This is very similar to Marianne’s vision of her baby as half-man and half-beast in *Heroes and Villains*, representing the merging of the worlds of reason and chaos into a new possibility. I would say the same is true here; such a baby would bridge the separation between Daytimers and Nighttimers, thereby mixing the “civilized” with the abject.

contributed to heavy surveillance and the rise of corporate interests. In the novel, “individual rights have succumbed to corporate and state domination, dissenters are executed, and the argument that heinous acts may be committed in the names of the greater good is taken to its extreme” (220). The social conditions in the novel seem so insurmountable and unsolvable that they provoke a global act of terrorism and the almost utter extinction of humanity (223). The world has become so taut, so tightly controlled and so constrictive that there is no room left to imagine different social possibilities. Corporate life and consumerism are the be all and end all, and in this nightmarish world the body loses its transgressive and world-shaping potential. In Atwood’s America, the “utopian body” has been packaged and sold to such an extent that it no longer stirs up transgressive energy. Even Crake, the mastermind who hopes to create a new world by destroying the old, re-imagines humanity as primal, well-conditioned bodies that eat, talk and reproduce but lack the creative potential for complex thinking, and this certainly includes utopian thought. For humanity to rebuild, identity must be re-forged and refigured in terms of difference and embodiment, and human bonds restored.

In Atwood’s future America, pornography, snuff sites and gratuitous displays of death and torture belittle human life, while corporations manipulate the public into buying the latest product for improving one’s appearance, prolonging life and improving one’s sex life. Atwood’s America exemplifies Bauman’s description of the consumer society as a world that perpetuates compulsive and addictive consumption by rendering “the non-satisfaction of its members perpetual” (47). Companies like “AnnooYoo” package “perfection” in the form of self-help products like cosmetic creams, steroid

bars, and pills “to make you fatter, thinner, hairier, balder, whiter, browner, blacker, yellower, sexier, and happier” (248). The modifiable body is the hottest item on the market. Sally Chivers notes that the “eerily familiar products featured throughout *Oryx and Crake* each appeal to consumers through the promotion of a belief that though the wallet has limits, the body does not” (390). One corporation even releases diseases into impoverished areas before putting the cure on the market, thereby manipulating supply and demand with little concern for the consequences. Similar to the separation between the engineers and the displaced in *Player Piano*, life is fragmented according to intellectual ability, wealth and just plain luck. The upper-middle classes inhabit the Modules while employees of the corporations and their children live in Compounds funded by the corporations; the rest of the world is fenced off into the “Pleeblands.” Society as a whole is policed by the “CorpSeCorps,” a group that began as a private security firm for the corporations, but then took over general law enforcement after lack of funds destroyed local police (*The Year of the Flood* 25). Like patrolled and gated communities, the Compounds provide the highest level of security and insulation from the outside world, which is perceived as depraved, corrupt and dirty. Of course, as Dana Solomon writes, “the more impenetrable a society becomes, the more oppressive its own walls and gates become; the boundary that once served to repel the unwelcome Other is the same boundary that imprisons the individual living within the safe-zone.” The Compounds take the need “to sever one’s community from the social body” to an extreme, creating a rift in society that continues to echo in Snowman’s post-apocalyptic world when he becomes the primal, degenerate counterpart to the perfect Crakers (152).

The story unfolds through the flashbacks of Jimmy, who renames himself Snowman after the apocalypse. The story follows the relationship between Jimmy and his best friend Crake, who engineered the virus and its deadly release into the population. Taking on the role of the “mad scientist,” Crake plans to annihilate the human race and replace it with a new race of bioengineered, “perfect” humans called the “Crakers.” He sees the world as hopelessly deadlocked and doomed to perpetuate the same mistakes and misery. He is not the only one who sees the problem. Jimmy’s mother grows suspicious of her husband’s corporate employers and their role (and her complicity) in destroying the world and corrupting humanity. She leaves while Jimmy is young to join a resistance group, and Jimmy later learns she has been shot by the CorpsSeCorps, who relentlessly hunt down traitors.<sup>20</sup> The book suggests other attempts to resist that end quickly in silence and death. The corporations are slicker and more watchful than Orwell’s Big Brother. In this context, Crake’s perceptions of humanity’s future seem accurate; how will it ever get any better when the systems that need to change are rigged with endless failsafe measures to ensure survival? Crake’s solution is the BlyssPlus pill, which promises to protect against sexually transmitted disease while enhancing the libido. Consumers rush to purchase the new product, and an excruciatingly painful and deadly virus blankets the country, exempting the Crakers and Jimmy, who Crake inoculated.

Engineered to repopulate and improve the world, the Crakers are attractive, healthy, self-sufficient (they eat their own feces), and free of dangerous emotions such as

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<sup>20</sup> They believe she may have absconded with corporate secrets, but they probably would have killed her either way.

jealousy, hate and even humor. Their brains have been “unwired” of all the “destructive features” responsible for humanity’s downfall, such as racism, hierarchy, territoriality, and wanton sexuality (305). By removing the darker facets of human nature from humanity, Crake has actualized what utopian thinkers have attempted to do for centuries. However, with the bad goes the good as well. Though Snowman is left alive, inoculated by Crake to watch over the Crakers, he is haunted by a constant fear of isolation. The perfection of the Crakers only serves to dehumanize them. The Crakers are “sound of tooth, smooth of skin. No ripples of fat around their waists, no bulges, no dimpled orange-skin cellulite on their thighs. No body hair, no bushiness. They look like retouched fashion photos, or ads for a high-priced workout program.” Ironically, as Chivers points out, Crake’s bioengineered solution to a corrupt society is based on “a socially prescribed aesthetic, that of magazine image-imposed beauty, which goes unquestioned” (395). However, despite the surreally flawless appearance of the Crakers, Snowman feels no attraction to the females. He prefers “the thumbprints of human imperfection” and the “flaws in the design” to the living embodiments of the physical ideals his society obsessively sought (100). Chivers writes that “lived physical difference” is important to *Oryx and Crake* as well as other works by Atwood. Atwood shows that “the desire for physical difference is necessary not only to art but also to human functioning” (395). Snowman’s longing for physical difference and genuine human companionship, flaws and all, is the novel’s real source of utopian energy.

As a lonely and isolated survivor, Snowman lacks both a sense of place and a sense of embodiment. Like the Abominable Snowman who first inspired Jimmy’s new

name, Snowman is “existing and not existing, flickering at the edges of blizzards, apelike man or manlike ape, stealthy, elusive, known only through rumors and through its backward-pointing footprints” (7-8). Later, as he drifts further into depression and loneliness, Snowman compares himself to “the other kind of snowman,” a “white illusion of a man” built for holiday entertainment before being shoved over and left “to melt in the sun, getting thinner and thinner until he liquefies and trickles away altogether” (224). Snowman exists as a body-less body, a being who cannot connect to the world because the world no longer exists. Consequently, his possibilities for growth and transformation have been stunted, keeping him immobilized in liminality and unable to imagine utopia.

In Atwood’s post-apocalyptic America, there is simply no one left to talk to or relate to, and for Snowman this creates a sense of disembodiment. Mohr argues that the glimpses of utopia found in *Oryx and Crake* lie in language and communication, and storytelling is “synonymous with survival” (19). Though language is crucial to Snowman’s ability to cope, it is more accurately an expression of a deeper utopian longing for community and human understanding. Snowman would agree with Kuno’s philosophy that “Man is the measure,” but as the potentially last real man on the planet he has no benchmark. At one point in the novel he successfully confronts a crisis, but he doesn’t know if this has made him a stronger person or not “because there’s nobody to measure himself by” (237). He longs for “an auditor besides himself” to talk to (307). Without community, change seems moot and existence agonizing. When he finally finds a radio and hears a human voice, he becomes elated; as he explains, “There are

more possibilities now” (274). In this novel, utopia is synonymous with community, and with community there is a chance Snowman can feel real again, not just a fleeting illusion. These possibilities become realities by the novel’s end, when Snowman discovers human footprints that lead to three other survivors. Snowman is faced with a life-altering decision. He can sneak away unannounced, he can attack the group and kill them, or he can approach them peacefully and hope for acceptance. Chung-Hao Ku characterizes the end of the novel as “a moment for the reconstruction of ‘humanity’ through mutuality, communication and communion” (130). Though the novel ends before Snowman acts, it is clear that he longs for shared experience and community, and with this longing utopia becomes possible.

If Snowman opts for community-building, he will be taking the first steps toward building a potential world of genuine human bonds and shared experiences, making him what Danette DiMarco calls “a potential site for change” (170). DiMarco also notes that by belonging and not belonging, “Snowman/Jimmy is Atwood’s vehicle for showing that potential social change may be enacted” (172). Even before the spread of Crake’s virus, Jimmy never truly belonged to the elite, scientific community he was raised in. His preference for language and his concern for humanity make him less valuable to profit-driven corporations hoping to engineer the next life-enhancing product. DiMarco thinks he is more suited to the “Sodom and Gomorrah-like visceral nature of the society beyond the walls” (177). Like Marianne in *Heroes and Villains*, Jimmy wavers between the cold, intellectual world of the elite and the chaotic, fleshly jungle of the pleeblands. Neither promise fulfillment; for that, Jimmy must carve out his own space. It is nothing

less than apocalypse that provides Jimmy with this opportunity. When Marianne claimed the identity of the Tiger Lady she created an alternative world for herself free from the oppressive systems of both the Professors and the Barbarians. As Snowman, the survivor of a global catastrophe, Jimmy has the same chance to create a new world without the trenchant systems and restrictive boundaries he faced before, a world unlike both the profit-driven techno-dystopia of America or the primal, art-less life of the Crakers. His existence in a destroyed world reveals that a utopian experience of embodiment is moot outside of the experience of shared belonging. Even Marianne, who briefly fantasized about starting her own family in a cave apart from the Barbarians, eventually opts to stay with them as their leader, the Tiger Lady.

In *Liquid Love*, Zygmunt Bauman writes that human solidarity “is the first casualty of the triumphs of the consumer market” (75). *Oryx and Crake* exemplifies the consequences of a corporate-driven world for it reminds us what a painful and violent cost utopia would be when “utopia” is marketed as a mere commodity. By co-opting the utopian boundaries of the flesh, dominant society essentially puts blinders on individuals, guiding them toward self-indulgent pursuits with no end in sight and no potential for reform or social change. The internalized search for utopia ensures the perpetuation of the status quo. Crake saw no other way to redirect society than to completely destroy it and start over with the Crakers, who were engineered to eradicate human imperfections and establish a harmonious albeit humdrum civilization. The Crakers are a throwback to the boring and suffocating utopian societies proposed in utopian texts like *The Republic*; they certainly aren’t the answer. The key to renewing



utopian possibility lies in Snowman's desire for human companionship—for bodies marked with the flaws and imperfections that indicate individuality and difference. He wants to measure his body against others so that he can regain an embodied identity. Snowman's desire is the quintessential utopian desire: the desire for difference. Snowman's fate, such as our own, rests on regaining social connections and shared humanity. As we move further into the twenty-first century, this is the only way to ensure that even after the end of the world, utopia is still possible.

The images of the transformable body saturating the airwaves, the modified muscle and pierced skin we encounter on the street and the focus on embodiment dominating utopian literature suggest a new type of identity is forming as we head into the twenty-first century. The stability of the rational world and our confidence in the subjectivities shaped by our society may be faltering and giving way to an identity completely scripted in skin. What we may be losing in the exchange, however, is the ability to imagine the social difference transgressive utopianism fosters. In a world completely defined by body, is there any future left to imagine for humanity, or simply more and more extreme pursuits of embodiment? There may not always be another chance after apocalypse; this will be the consideration of my next chapter.

## CHAPTER V

## CONCLUSION: UTOPIA AT THE END OF THE ROAD

*“The disappearance of utopia brings about a static state of affairs in which man himself becomes no more than a thing. We would be faced then with the greatest paradox imaginable, namely, that man, who has achieved the highest degree of rational mastery of existence, left without any ideals, becomes a mere creature of impulses. Thus, after a long tortuous, but hectic development, just at the highest stage of awareness, when history is ceasing to be blind fate, and is becoming more and more man’s own creation, with the relinquishment of utopias, man would lose his will to shape history and therewith his ability to understand it.”*

—Karl Mannheim, *Ideology & Utopia*, 263.

“The Machine Stops,” which I see as a quintessential tale of returning to utopia through renewed embodiment, is also a story about the need to share such experiences. For Kuno, physical movement was not an end in itself or a temporary release, but the beginning of social revolution and a chance to cast an entirely new vision for the possibility of society. He was willing to imagine an end to an endless system, and to make his own choice when all choices were preprogrammed and predetermined. Utopia founded on dynamic change does not retreat from society, but re-imagines and re-shapes it into an alternative space where individuals can move, change and grow in an unhindered relationship with the world. Utopia is only an escape in the sense that it gives us a loophole out of systems which demand order and obedience and curtail the freedom to think differently, let alone *choose* differently. Neutered utopia, like those marketed by the corporations in *Oryx and Crake*, no longer has the transgressive potential to readjust the individual’s interaction with the world. Image and market value

trump all others, particularly in a fast-paced world where image must be continually reshaped and remade to ensure marketability and success. As social alternatives for the future give way to the more immediate and seemingly endless possibilities for changing the body, utopian hopes remain prominent but expressed as strategies for upping one's social status and marketability. For instance, in early 2010, 23-year old reality TV star Heidi Montag underwent ten plastic surgeries in one day as a "necessary part" of her media career. According to NYDailyNews.com, the painful onslaught of surgeries, which drastically changed Montag's appearance, were "part of being a pop star" (Dominguez).

This chapter will consider the state of transgressive utopianism in the early twenty-first century. For many, the state of utopianism is rather grim. Concerns with appearance and the body's value in society unfold against a background of fear and unrest, from threats of terrorism and mass destruction, to poverty and failing economies, to a declining faith in public institutions and national ideals. Cara Cilano writes that the events of September 11, 2001 created a state of fear and an anticipation of future "traumatism" that justified "the violations of democratic principles, civil liberties, and agreed-upon conceptualizations of justice" (14). However, Cilano notes that both 9/11 and the photographs of American military personnel torturing and abusing prisoners in Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison in 2004 were tragic and disillusioning, but also potentially utopian. Cilano refers to David Simpson's book *9/11: The Culture of Commemoration*, where Simpson calls 9/11 a potentially utopian moment that could have pushed people

into “radically refiguring the relations of the homeland to the foreigner” (169).

However, hindsight confirms otherwise (Cilano 14).

In a damaged world dominated by fear, mistrust and uncertainty, individuals dive even further into embodiment and an identity defined by immediate transformations rather than seemingly unrealizable goals for social change. While an absorption into the life of the body may cushion an individual from the brunt of the world, an obsession with body can also disengage an individual from community and social change, and reaffirm the aims of corporate interests rather than challenge them. Courtney A. Robert, Krista J. Munroe-Chandler, and Kimberley L. Gammage report in *The Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research* that the value placed on health, fitness and appearance has intensified a disorder known as “muscle dysmorphia,” which is the obsession with muscularity and leanness and the concurrent fear of appearing “too small.” Some people who suffer from muscle dysmorphia have reportedly spent five to six hours a day lifting weights, and another six hours thinking about how to gain more mass (1656). This is the negative aspect of weight training discussed by Leslie Heywood in *Bodymakers* when she considers that the time dedicated to the gym could detract from social activism (186). This obsession becomes the individual’s main identity, and the “utopian body” quickly becomes a site for an individualized dystopia where the tyrant is the individual’s own mind.

Like Montag’s ten surgeries in one day, this interest in transformable embodiment is becoming a visible obsession in Western culture, though an obsession that is itself often admired, applauded and endorsed in media and popular culture.

MTV's program *Jackass*, which ran from 2000-2002, had an audience of nearly three million people and led to a movie in 2002 (Brayton 57). Sean Brayton describes the show as "preoccupied with male nudity, bodily fluids, and lampooning an unassuming American (and Japanese) public" (57). This is a show where young men electrocute their testicles, eat vomit and walk a tightrope over a pool of alligators with nothing on but a jockstrap. Brayton notes that the popularity of such images is possible in a culture that rewards "depoliticized" youthful rebellion as a form of consumption but not the "articulated political commentaries" of minorities or the displaced (69). MTV and Viacom, which produced the movie, are willing to endorse the show "as long as its grotesque humor generates revenue and fails to disrupt any particular fulcrum of power" (70). Millions watched the disturbing and sickening images on *Jackass*, but no one was meant to see the Abu Ghraib photographs. The hooded, tortured figures in the Abu Ghraib photos evoke shattered ideals and a dubious future, while the degraded bodies in *Jackass* are pure physical fun. The "entertaining" possibility of electrocution, dismemberment and castration take us further away from a world where these threats are entirely too immediate and real.

With identity hinging on the individual's ability to modify and transform the body to the point where selfhood becomes a bodily display, it is imperative to ask where utopia is headed. What does this turn inward to the transformable body as a definition of the self say about the present? More importantly, where is it taking us and what kind of future are we creating? Political and sociological studies point to a world where a future of utopian possibility no longer exists, precisely because hope in the future and in

shared human experience is being abandoned. In *The End of Utopia*, Russell Jacoby argues that we have reached a definitive dead-end in terms of utopian thinking. We are no longer confident that a different world is possible or ever has been (13). As Fredric Jameson writes in *Archaeologies of the Future*, society is crippled by “the universal belief” that not only is existing society irreversible, but that “no other socioeconomic system is conceivable, let alone practically available” (xii). Rather than advancing radical reform and change, even the most extreme and radical thinkers propose modifications rather than transformations, consequently undermining the transgressive function of utopian thinking to imagine difference. Energies are channeled to maintaining the stability of the status quo rather than disrupt it and risk unsettling economic prosperity or power. Jacoby notes that “radicals and leftists envision a modified society with bigger pieces of the pie for more customers” (10). Jacoby, along with sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, sees the same developments from the different vantage points of politics and sociology: the individual’s life, like society at large, is believed to be unchangeable and inevitable. It’s what Bauman aptly calls “the ‘no-choice’ condition” (*Individualized Society* 13).

Using Jacoby’s and Bauman’s synergistic assessments as context to the complex and battered world emerging out of the twentieth century, this chapter examines the current state of utopianism. Utopian literature forecasts dimmer and more unsettling depictions of futures that are resistant to revolution and change. The visions of unknown and intangible terror that haunt utopian literature in the twenty-first century are consequences of declining utopian energies and a loss of faith in alternatives. The terror

is not that a totalitarian monster will stamp out the globe—we have plenty of weapons to ensure that will never happen—but that we no longer have any claim to the present and, consequently, to the future. Malevolent dictators and omnipresent systems of surveillance are far less threatening than apathetic and distracted individuals who become easy prey for corporate pitches and mass marketed hoopla. The future is looking desperate. In *Oryx and Crake*, it took apocalypse to shake apart the system and allow new possibilities to emerge. After a brief discussion of Jacoby and Bauman, I refer to *The Road* as a representative example of the absence of utopian energies the early twenty-first century. In Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* a no-choice world is cast as an apocalyptic wasteland of cannibals and wanderers who have abandoned both utopia and each other. It's a hundredfold more terrifying than the present, and yet it clearly speaks the unspoken terrors of our world. In it, man struggles against man in a primal battle for basic survival that is not too far removed from the fierce consumption-driven society we face today. It's perhaps the closest literature has ever come to creating a world utterly void of utopia; it's a world that can only exist—and seem possible—as we leave the twenty-first century and into an uncertain fate ahead.

In *The End of Utopia*, Jacoby points us to Robert Kaplan's book *The Ends of the Earth*, which tracks environmental calamities, overpopulation, disease, and crime, and concludes that "the banal truth is that economic and social development is generally cruel, painful, violent and uneven—and humanity is developing more dramatically than ever before" (437). Such predictions are accepted with a sense of foreboding but helplessness, as if this were the natural and inevitable order of the world. Jacoby argues

that Daniel Bell was premature when he trumpeted the end of ideology in the 1950s,<sup>21</sup> but half a century later it's time to reassess the potency of utopia in culture and politics.

Jacoby writes:

If not murderous, utopianism seems unfashionable, impractical and pointless. Its sources in imagination and hope have withered. The demise of radicalism affects even the most politically apathetic and unconcerned, who viscerally register a confirmation of what they always intuited: "This society is the only possible one." (180)

Do we have any substantial visions left for the future? Is there any viability left to utopian studies apart from lone scholars plowing the pages of science fiction and contemporary literature for any phrase recalling utopian possibility? According to Jacoby, utopia has been abandoned, and quite definitively, minus groups like the futurists, who Jacoby criticizes for their "thinness of vision."<sup>22</sup> Futurists foresee "grassy subdivisions with homes and computer and work stations set off from a larger terrain of violence and injustice" (161). This is not a vision of change but one of retreat; the "terrain of violence and injustice" remains, just less visible, along with the sizable chunk of the population who could not afford to participate in this improved life. In Jacoby's terms, utopia is not just a vision of a future society, "but a vision pure and simple, an

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<sup>21</sup> Jacoby cites the rise of the dissident utopian spirit in the 1960s as proof, though this burst of utopianism was short lived (158).

<sup>22</sup> Jacoby cites the vision of Alvin and Heidi Toffler, two futurists who wrote *Creating a New Civilization*. Their idea of a "third-wave" civilization involves readily available products and a vast selection from stores like Wal-Mart. In their utopian future, "a Wal-Mart store can offer the buyer nearly 110,000 products in various types, sizes, model and colors to choose among" (qtd in Jacoby 161). They also praise new technologies that will allow marketers to reach buyers "with even greater precision" (qtd in Jacoby 162). This is the enhancement of the system rather than an alternative.



ability, perhaps willingness, to use expansive concepts to see reality and its possibilities” (105). For the most part, such thinking remains fraught with connotations of implausibility and fantasy, contributing to a current political environment characterized by apathy and helplessness.

Jacoby characterizes the current mood toward change and the future as one of practicality and conservatism. The general spirit is not one amenable to “unfashionable” utopianism, but one that embraces “realism and practicality” (Jacoby 158). People believe the future is simply a continuation of the present, though perhaps inevitably worse, and such thinking invariably limits discussions of radical alternatives. Students and youth are more invested in the practical, immediate concerns of a job and career rather than what appears to be fruitless idealism. Jacoby writes, “Success and its insignias become the goal for the best and wisest youth—and who can begrudge them, since they are simply drawing conclusions from what they see?” (180). Yet no one anticipates achieving wide scale prosperity and equality in the future; as Jacoby pointedly writes, “the danger of universal prosperity no longer keeps anyone awake at night” (160). The irony of work is well known yet never challenged: the more we work the more we buy, and the more we buy the more we need to work. Whether or not we believe in utopia, there is simply no time in the day for what appear to be frivolous and impractical daydreams. In this environment it is difficult for transgressive utopianism to survive beyond the privacy of one’s own skin, and even then it is not always a utopianism that longs for outward change or community. The more people retreat to

private islands of utopia, the more they distance themselves from an active engagement with the world, and change on a wide scale appears doubtful. Utopia implodes.

Zygmunt Bauman's studies *The Individualized Society* and *Liquid Love* help explain the disintegration of utopian thinking. When people believe the fate of society is ultimately out of their control, they experience the "overwhelming feeling of 'losing a hold on the present,'" which in turn leads to "a wilting of political will; to disbelief that anything sensible can be done collectively, or that solidary action can make any radical change in the state of human affairs" (Bauman *The Individualized Society* 53). When people believe in "no choice" conditions, "society ceases to be autonomous, that is, self-defining and self-managing; or, rather, people do not believe it to be autonomous, and thus lose the courage and the will to self-define and self-manage" (54). The problem is complicated even further by the multitude of separate agencies and institutions available for action. Power is so divided and organized that no real power exists. Even when a decision is reached, people give up "when it comes to deciding who—what kind of an effective institution—is going to do it" (53). Robert Kaplan calls our age one of "localized *mini*-holocausts" where "decisive action in one sphere will not necessarily help the victims in another" (436 Kaplan's italics). Society is replete with the private interests of individuals fighting their own private battles for survival and convinced that social action is outside of their control. Like a ship at sea, society becomes "pushed rather than guided, plankton-like, drifting rather than navigating" (Bauman *Individualized Society* 54) Individuals are the passive observers on the vessel, taking no

action to steer the course, not because a helm doesn't exist, but because no one believes turning the wheel will produce any results.

Retreating from the world reduces the dynamic options that can only come from movement in the world and interaction with different and even contradictory perceptions. In *Liquid Love*, Bauman notes that devices like cell phones create a “virtual proximity” that “renders human connections simultaneously more frequent and more shallow, more intense and more brief” (62). American society subscribes to a fast food mentality that applies as much to eating as it does to human relationships. Connections are made—and ended—with “the press of a button” (62). With the advent of texting, even the brief formality of a phone conversation is replaced with language that borrows from stock phrases and abbreviated words that make communication even more efficient and impersonal.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, social skills have faded, and people act according to “the models currently in vogue.” The allure of such “heteronomous action” is in the “surrender of responsibility” (75). We mimic the images and language of the media to such an extent that our own desires and words are lost or become so interwoven in pre-programmed behavior that they are indecipherable from a sort of “ready made” identity. When our actions and behaviors are themselves mass marketed, we are free from the time consuming activities of bond-building and human interaction. This produces a distinctly modern invention: “strangers who remain strangers for a long time to come” (105). As relationships fail to gain depth and strangers remain strangers, lines of communication break. Bauman appropriately references Hannah Arendt's “On

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<sup>23</sup> Examples include the now widely recognized phrases “LOL” and “OMG.”

Humanity in Dark Times,” where Arendt writes that as people remove themselves from thinking about the world and politics, they also retreat from their fellow men. With each retreat “an almost demonstrable loss to the world takes place” in the form of lost bonds and human contact. Particularly during difficult times, people avoid the public realm and political action to protect their own lives and interests (Arendt 11). As people retreat from a political engagement with the world and others, they sacrifice the discourse and communication which bridges the distance between individuals and the world and broadens the possibilities for dynamic growth and new perspectives. This is why Snowman felt almost as if he didn’t exist; without others to converse with and share experiences, he could not gain a sense of corporeality or connection with the world. Arendt writes, “We humanize what is going on in the world and in ourselves only by speaking of it, and in the course of speaking of it we learn to be human” (25). In regard to utopian thinking, if individuals are disengaged from the world and discourse, there is no chance to broaden our awareness of the possible.

The faltering hold on the present and the receding engagement with the world creates a multitude of slippery existences and identities that make it difficult to grow and transform. Bauman writes in *Individualized Society* that people are left largely to their own devices, no longer tightly managed and observed by figures like Big Brother, and they are “lamentably inadequate when it comes to ‘getting a hold’ on their present condition, a hold strong enough to encourage thoughts of changing the future” (12). He argues that a Panopticon society, in which surveillance is constant yet undetectable, is no longer needed to maintain power. Today’s most popular technique of power is the

“speed of movement” (12). This differs from the movement necessary for developing a body schema, which requires an ongoing and dynamic process of the body interacting with the world and others. Merleau-Ponty’s body schema are shifting processes of becoming that can change and adapt to a changing environment. As movement “repeatedly translates through the body, the body translates the world” (Merleau-Ponty 101). Bauman’s use of the term “movement” refers to a predetermined social pace that we are caught up in and participate in with little to no sense of control, where growth is stunted rather than augmented. The speed of society is so fast and relationships so superficial that the bonds of human solidarity and community are threadbare at best.

Utopia is also undercut by what Bauman terms “individualization,” a process by which individuals are set adrift in society, responsible for their own fates yet without any sense of control over the conditions and consequences which dictate their existence (6). Individuals, and not social conditions or institutions, are held accountable for their own failures, even though our actions hang “on the shifting and unpredictable moods of mysterious forces” such as the stock market, economy, labor markets, overpopulation, global warming and declining natural resources (53). Again, the speed of society negates lasting and meaningful bonds, and as a result, individuals remain isolated and solitary despite a hundredfold methods to instantly “connect” to a global population. Conversation and bonds are built around managing this solitude, whether its picking up the latest dieting tip or the newest move to pleasure a loved one. The first thing we gain from the company of others “is that the only service that company can render is advice on how to survive one’s own irreparable solitude, and that the life of everyone is full of

risks which need to be confronted and fought alone” (48). As a result, “The ‘public’ is colonized by the ‘private’ and ‘public interest’ is reduced to curiosity about the private lives of public figures...” (49). The private dalliances of political figures become more interesting than political agendas because they relate more immediately to an individual’s survival. It seems a given that political proposals are just jargon and trickery anyway, or at least far less appealing than the public revelry in private scandals.

Bauman’s concept of “individualization” is closely related to neo-liberalism, which is, as Pierre Bourdieu explains, “a programme of the methodical destruction of collectives.” According to Raymond Plant, neo-liberals subscribe to negative liberty, which is a freedom from coercion or interference in achieving one’s goals (255). This supports a free market economy, with each individual pursuing his or her own ends and ideals apart from collective aims or a collective identity. Economic responsibility shifts from the public to private, making each person responsible for his or her economic situation despite, as Bauman pointed out, the unpredictable nature of the economy in general. Plant notes that agency is central to the neo-liberal agenda, but “the neo-liberal neglects the extent to which agency depends on *needs* and *capabilities*” (254 Plant’s italics). Individuals only act after basic needs are met and when certain resources are available; so while agency is necessary for neoliberalism to work, the basic needs and abilities which preclude agency are not accounted for (254). Bourdieu argues that while corporate and political interests profit from the system, the individual is left in a state of uncertainty and isolation. Salaries and careers are individualized based on “individual competences,” unions and cooperatives meant to protect workers are discouraged, and

even the family loses some control over consumption “through the constitution of markets by age groups.” In dismantling collective structures, “a Darwinian world emerges—it is the struggle of all against all at all levels of the hierarchy, which finds support through everyone clinging to their jobs and organisation under conditions of insecurity, suffering, and stress.” This situation is intensified by the constant availability of a “reserve army” to replace the unemployed. In such a world, the model of rationality is “the maximization of individual profit.” Bourdieu concludes by pointing toward salvation in the very forms of collective power neo-liberalism wants to dismantle, and in a social order promoting collective goals rather than an economy based solely on the individualized pursuit of profit.

### ***The Road***

Literature is not making the case for the future any brighter. The grim social assessments by scholars such as Jacoby, Bauman and Bourdieu materialize in works like Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* (2006), which exemplifies Jacoby’s end of utopia and Bauman’s no-choice condition. *The Road* is neo-liberalism *reductio ad absurdum*; it is a brutal “all against all” environment where the entire collective of humanity has been shattered into individuals clinging to shreds of survival and competing fiercely for every available piece of food. The horrors witnessed by the man and boy along their journey give unrelenting visual impact to the repercussions of the last century and the current crises in utopian thinking. The world of *The Road* is a ghost of our world, as if the isolated lives and global terrors of the twentieth century were captured and let loose for us to witness in some monstrous alternative dimension. It is a world without ideals and

without utopia, a place Thomas Carlson calls a “world-less world” void of anticipation for the future (58). A world-less world is one without utopia, where, Karl Mannheim tells us, man is “no more than a thing,” and “a mere creature of impulses” (263). The world in *The Road* is certainly not one of depth, understanding and progress; it is the complete reversal of the movement of history, a stagnant end-stop to time and hope, but one that seems all too possible an outcome considering the path of history in the last century.

In an article on *Blood Meridian*, Steven Shaviro describes the novel in terms that apply to *The Road* as well, and perhaps more fittingly; both are books “not of heights and depths, nor of origins and endings, but of restless, incessant horizontal movements” (147). If *Blood Meridian* is, as Shaviro calls it, an “active counter-memory” to a glorified memory of democracy and progress, then *The Road* is an active counter-*future* undermining our misguided beliefs that nothing will change and challenging our apathy toward the future. The events leading up to the destruction of civilization are unknown, and even more unclear are the future of the few people remaining. The landscape is inexplicably charred, corpses are trapped in various poses of agony and decomposition and cities crumble and die. This is a world where men “would eat your children in front of your eyes” and looters ravage charred cities looking for tins of food “like shoppers in the commissaries of hell” (181). The road is the centerpiece of the novel, and on it travel a few scattered survivors with no hope other than day-to-day existence. As one man puts it, survival follows a simple rule: “I just keep going” (168). Such “incessant horizontal movements” are the only things left to do in a world of no escape, no meaning



and no security. *The Road* itself a new frontier fraught with meaningless cannibalism and savagery; however, unlike the roads leading West, this road promises nothing and goes nowhere. McCarthy's violent depiction of the birth of America and the bloodshed required for "progress" is extended into the future, where all the past and its progress is instantly washed away to reveal existence in its rawest and basest form, a free-for-all landscape of cannibals and solitude.

In *The Road* there is nothing concrete to resist or ideology to overturn; there is no Benefactor to laugh at, no Big Brother to circumvent and no Machine to dismantle. If there is nothing left to transgress and no change possible, where does *The Road* fit in the utopian genre and in a tradition of dystopian literature like *Fight Club* and *Oryx and Crake*, where there are clearly evils to resist and changes to make? Perhaps McCarthy has written the ultimate dystopian future, one that reflects the most drastic and frightening consequences of the past century of war, violence and global fears. According to Alex Hunt and Martin Jacobsen, McCarthy's vision is the inverse of Plato's allegory of the cave. They write that McCarthy's story "is not about getting out to the sun and to illuminating wisdom but about going in deeper, lost in the darkness with a fading light" (157). Carl Grindley suggests the novel takes place post-Rapture, making the story a truly anti-utopian story set in Hell and offering no absolution or escape (13). The man does his best to inspire the boy to "carry the fire" of hope and possibility, yet he always keeps his gun loaded and ready with two bullets meant for merciful death rather than one at the hands of starving cannibals. When the man and boy reach the sea they find the exact same conditions instead of salvation. The father finally

succumbs to an ongoing illness and the boy is miraculously taken in by a family that happens to have a daughter, suggesting love and repopulation. However, Hunt and Jacobsen see the ending as tenuous at best; “ultimately,” they write, “there will be no one left to carry the fire” (157). There is simply emptiness and nothingness.

During their journey the man and boy come across a starving old man who tersely and cryptic replies to the father’s questions, and refuses to offer his real name. The old man explains, “I think in times like these the less said the better. If something had happened and we were survivors and we met on the road then we’d have something to talk about. But we’re not. So we don’t” (172). His comment is perplexing at first since something *has* happened and they both survived it, but both of them recognize the futility of communication in the presence not just of death, but, more disturbing, in the presence of a hollow and endless absence of world. The something that “had happened” would be a form of salvation, and then they would be survivors of the slow death gripping the world. Since no one is able to get a hold of the present, not to mention the past or future, there is simply nothing to draw people together. In a world-less world there is nothing to survive and nothing to experience and share; the world is dead, making it impossible for people to develop, grow and understand difference. McCarthy’s world illustrates utopia as we move into the twenty-first century: like the old man said, there’s nothing left to talk about.

On the other hand, it could be that McCarthy has written a powerful utopian novel at a time when utopia is most in need of revival. The story itself is not without prospects for re-growing the world and civilization. The boy’s recognition of his role in

the future and his unyielding humanity suggest a much more hopeful reading of the novel than offered by critics like Hunt and Jacobsen. After the man tracks down a thief who steals their belongings and leaves him stripped and cold, the boy sobbingly insists they return the man's clothes before he dies. The man tries to defend his actions by expressing his fear about the boy's survival; he explains, "You're not the one who has to worry about everything." The boy, though, has a different perspective: "Yes I am, he said. I am the one" (259). The boy recognizes his responsibility toward the world—whatever that may be—and to humanity, and he does so consistently throughout the novel in his unchecked interest in the needs of others. Karl Mannheim writes, "Once the individual has grasped the method of orienting himself in the world, he is inevitably driven beyond the narrow horizon of his own town and learns to understand himself as part of a national, and later of a world, situation" (107). The boy struggles to orient himself in the world by attempting to know others and empathize with their situation. Even in the grips of hunger, the boy recognizes that the future depends on people's ability to reestablish bonds and share experiences rather than deny all human contact. The boy is trying to understand a world that appears beyond the scope of comprehension by gaining a foothold in some sense of humanity and community. Hunt and Jacobsen might be right, and the boy is destined to die along with the rest of the world, but he may also "carry the fire" into the beginnings of a new world.

The most invigorating jolt to utopia, however, is the story's very pointed *lack* of utopia. It is a literary experiment in what-could-be that reinforces the value of a world with choices and possibility—a world that actively engages in utopian thinking. This is

not the “dangerous” utopian thought that irks us when we read *1984* or *Brave New World*, but a transgressive energy that calls on us to realize the value of resistance and change when no change seems possible. As Carlson explains, by staging “the spectacle of the world’s closing or disappearance,” the novel reinforces the meaning of world and the importance of anticipating the future (55). The novel is an “illumination of a darkness” that reminds us that the every beginning “could not have been, and could yet cease to be” (59). We are not yet as hopeless as the man and boy, and we have a chance to rethink the course of history. As William Sheidley writes in reference to both *Oryx and Crake* and *The Road*, the secular apocalyptic novel teaches us “to treasure and preserve what we have not yet lost but may soon lose,” like the man’s fleeting memory of the life before global catastrophe (96).

McCarthy’s vision is the world unmade, a reversal of progression and creation that reveals the frail and tenuous condition of the world, and, by implication, society and humanity. The years after apocalypse left humanity ragged, soiled and without faith: “The frailty of everything revealed at last” (28). The road, a fitting reminder of the loss of civilization and utopia, goes nowhere and winds through no place. However, by showing us this world the novel reminds of the need for choice, for change and for the interaction between self and world that utopia inspires. Though the man and boy never find what they are looking for at the end of the road—a better climate, sources of food, “good guys” like themselves—their story calls attention to utopia by showing us utopia’s absence. If the devastated future of *The Road* is even remotely part of our destiny, we must embrace the revolutionary and transgressive energy of utopian thinking. Bauman

warns that "...at no other time have the keen search for common humanity, and the practice that follows such an assumption, been as urgent and imperative as they are now" (*Liquid Love* 156). As Carlson points out, destruction is a chance to understand creation (59). McCarthy writes toward the end, "Perhaps in the world's destruction it would be possible at last to see how it was made. Oceans, mountains. The ponderous counterspectacle of things ceasing to be" (274). In a similar way, the end of the world in *The Road* is a chance to think about how this type of future was created, and what we can do to choose differently.

*The Road* is a clarion call for a return to utopian thinking at a time when utopian possibility is soundly denied and the course of history charges forward unchecked. Fredric Jameson argues that the Utopian form "is the answer to the universal ideological conviction that no alternative is possible, that there is no alternative to the system." Rather than show us life after radical reform, utopian thinking can help to "think the break" and therefore come to believe in the potential for change (232). This "meditation on the impossible" is "a rattling of the bars and an intense spiritual concentration and preparation for another stage which has not yet arrived" (232-233). This meditation is in itself a bold step toward transgressive utopianism and heightened awareness. Mannheim encourages us to recognize the limits of our own thoughts and welcome in new ideas and possibilities, since recognizing where we have failed and fall short "represents an enrichment rather than a loss" (105). "Utopia" should not be relegated to the dusty shelves of history as a laughable fantasy; it is the very material we need to take hold of the present and navigate the future. In *The Individualized Society*, Bauman reminds us

that our task in the future “is not closure, but opening; not the selection of human possibilities worth pursuing, but preventing them from being fore-closed, forfeited or simply lost from view” (13). Despite his grim assessment of the present, Jacoby rallies us to action: “Yet in an era of political resignation and fatigue the utopian spirit remains more necessary than ever. It evokes...an idea of human of human solidarity and happiness.” It is the “something” which gives the world illumination and hope; without it, the world “turns cold and grey” (181). *The Road* is just this cold, grey world we want to avoid, and to do so we must desire differently.

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## VITA

Name: Olivia Anne Burgess

Address: Department of English  
Texas A&M University  
4227 TAMU  
College Station, TX 77843

Email Address: livi\_burgess@hotmail.com

Education: B.A., English, Texas State University-San Marcos, 2002  
M.A., English, Texas A&M University, 2005  
Ph.D., English, Texas A&M University, 2010

Professional Experience: Graduate Assistant Teacher (2004-2010)  
*Department of English*  
*Texas A&M University*

Academic Coordinator (2009)  
*Duke University Talent Identification Program*  
*Summer Studies Program*  
*Texas A&M University*

Academic Coordinator (2008)  
*Duke University Talent Identification Program*  
*Summer Studies Program*  
*University of Kansas*

Instructor (2008)  
*Duke University Talent Identification Program*  
*Summer Studies Program*  
*Wake Forest University*

Instructor (2006-2007)  
*Duke University Talent Identification Program*  
*Summer Program*  
*Texas A&M University*

Senior Editorial Assistant (2001-2003)  
*Office of Correspondence Studies*  
*Texas State University-San Marcos*