Eckart Voigts, Alessandra Boller (eds.)

Dystopia, Science Fiction, Post-Apocalypse

Classics – New Tendencies – Model Interpretations

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INTRODUCTION: THE DYSTOPIAN IMAGINATION – AN OVERVIEW

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1. World at Risk – Anticipations of Crisis and Catastrophe

Inextricably linked to the various subgenres of science fiction (sf), dystopian and post-apocalyptic narratives are enjoying a remarkable popularity. Whereas precise demarcations between narratives along these terms remain tricky and any attempt to find clear-cut generic boundaries must inevitably end in aporia, all of the genres mentioned are determined by two key features shared by the narratives in this volume: speculation and extrapolation (i.e., conjecture on the basis of prior knowledge), "the imaginative inhabitation of new possibilities" (Roberts 2006: 145). For Lyman Tower Sargent (2010: 9), utopianism is "essential for the improvement of the human condition," but "if used wrongly, […] utopianism is dangerous" – and this is where dystopia becomes inevitable. Brian Stableford argues in his entry on "Dystopias" in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* that the "significance of the firm establishment of a dystopian image of the future in literature should not be underestimated. Literary images of the future are among the most significant expressions of the beliefs and expectations we apply in real life to the organization of our attitudes and actions" (2014: n. pag.).

As the focus here is on "bad places," we exclude the long tradition of utopian writing, in the sense of a "good place" (Gk. *eu-topos*), while dystopias and utopias both share the meaning *ou-topos*, i.e., in Greek, a non-existing place. Whereas the term dystopia (Gk. *dys-*, "bad, hard," together with caco-topia, Gk *kakó-topos*, "wicked place") was first used by John Stuart Mill in 1868, the use of *dys*-topia as an antonym of *eu*-topia is first recorded in the study *Quest for Utopia* by Glenn Negley and J. Max Patrick in 1952. The terminological mayhem, however, continues (evolutionist utopia and anti-eutopia (Tuzinski), cacotopia (Mill, Burgess), *Mätopie* (Huntemann), negative utopia (Sargent, Broich, Rey), inverted and reverse utopia (Walsh), *apotropäische Utopie* (Hönig), black utopia (Saage), nasty utopia, devolutionist utopia, *Gegenutopie* (Seeber), pessimist utopia (Mauthe), anti-technical utopia (Sühnel); cf. Meyer 2001, Seeber 2003, Müller 2010: 32-39, Nümann 2010-). We have opted for the most widespread term 'dys-topia' rather than 'anti-utopia' to indicate that we not only include texts directly addressing the perverted idealism of utopias gone wrong (cf. for Sargent's distinction between dystopia and anti-utopia Baccolini/Moylan 2003: 5; cf. also Seeber 2003: 223f.). Thus, the collection contains narrative depictions of a place or society significantly worse than its contextual present, but not necessarily intended as a satire or parody of a preceding utopian narrative – in the classic way that William Morris' utopian *News from Nowhere* (1890) inverts the state socialism in Edward Bellamy's equally utopian *Looking Backward 2000-1887* (1888). Tom Moylan succinctly locates the attractions of dystopia outside of the literary field:

> Dystopian narrative is largely the product of the terrors of the twentieth century. A hundred years of exploitation, repression, state violence, war, genocide, disease, famine, depression, debt, and the steady weakening of humanity through the buying and selling of everyday life provided more than enough fertile ground for this fictive underside of the utopian imagination. (Moylan 2000, xi)

This volume begins, however, at the end of the nineteenth century, in which even Utopianists such as H. G. Wells realised that the uses to which advanced technology were put "offered hints that science would not have an entirely emancipatory effect on humanity" (ibid.: 6; see chapter 1). Science as a source of human suppression and control, the Darwinist dynamics that implied the threat of regression and the entropic imagination that forecast the ultimate hollowness of rationality and Enlightenment contributed to the development of the dystopian imagination.

In the 20th century, two world wars that brought the nemesis of technology and rationality, large-scale industrialism, collectivism and mass culture, the failure of Marxism in the Soviet Union, the rise of Fascism in Europe – these are historical stepping stones towards the rise of the classic dystopian imagination. Sargent (2010: 9) concludes that in "the 20th century, negative evaluations were strong as a result to impose a specific version of the good life, particularly Communism in the Soviet Union, China, and elsewhere, but also including National Socialism in Germany and the Taliban version of Islamism in Afghanistan." Surprisingly, the evident criticism of capitalism and the anti-technological bias in many dystopian texts is missing from Sargent's rather selective list of problematic 20th-century regimes.

Since then, narratives of a future societal collapse or crisis have responded to a set of urgent challenges that, if anything, have increased at the beginning of the 21st century: climate change; the shortage of resources and other ecological disasters; the unipolar new world order after the end of the Cold War; the global spread of failed states; global overpopulation; demographic crises; inequality and terrorism; as a result: migration and displacement; wild urbanisation; rampant consumerism; the social and economic disasters of global capitalism; religious, ethnic and cultural strife; fundamentalist counter-reactions to modernity; unchecked scientific dynamics in biotechnology, cloning and 'reprogenetics'; nuclear proliferation; the rise of illiberalism; unchecked surveillance and Big Data; viral pandemics; human regression and trans- or posthuman displacement by computers, robots, and so forth.

Dystopian and post-apocalyptic narratives – with their fantasies of degeneration and destruction, their sceptical attitude towards science and technology, their criticism of a sovereign rational self, their toying with nihilism, their visions of dark urbanisation and their sensibility of crisis – may also be linked to scepticism in 'mainstream' modernist texts not covered in this volume, such as *Heart of Darkness* (1902), or *The Waste Land* (1922). There is another clear affinity to postmodernist paradigms as many analyses of the cyberpunk-postmodernist link or the analysis of techniques in a text such as *Cloud Atlas* (2004) suggest (see chs. 13, 21, 22).

Forecasts of doom, both anthropogenic and non-anthropogenic, have been legion and the reasons for the ubiquity of the eco-dystopia (see ch. 17) can be surveyed in the

regular reports on ecological misdemeanours, such as The Club of Rome's *The Limits to Growth* (1972) or the report *Global 2000* (1980), and their various updates. In his book *Collapse* (2004), Jared Diamond listed both classic environmental problems facing humankind today, from deforestation, habitat destruction and water shortage to overpopulation, and new key factors in the impending ecological catastrophe: anthropogenic climate change, the accumulation of toxic substances in the environment, and energy shortages. In Germany, ferocious bioethical debates emerged when Peter Sloterdijk's new eugenics, outlined in the essay "Rules for the Human Zoo," challenged Jürgen Habermas to describe the *The Future of Human Nature*. Elsewhere, as the Human Genome Project was declared complete in 2003, bioengineering ushered in new gene therapies and genetically modified organisms from plants to transgenic animals continued in production (cf. Holland 2012). Critics of capitalist globalisation such as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (*Empire*, 2001) described how capitalism claims global hegemony beyond the institutions of the nation state through transnational corporations. Firmly within the 'biopolitical' thrust of recent theory, Giorgio Agamben (1998) outlined that the disenfranchised refugee, the *homo sacer*, put in deterritorialised prison camps, is the telling new category for the supposedly democratic Western state (see chs. 2, 19, 20). Social media brought both surveillance fears and anthill utopianism of collective intelligence and smart mobs (Howard Rheingold).

In this situation, dystopian narratives offer what Ulrich Beck has called 'reflexive modernisation': "Risk means the anticipation of catastrophe" (Beck 2006: 332). The threats, dangers and risks of modernity keep fuelling the dystopian imagination and find their natural habitat in narratives focused on the "permanent transformation, accumulation and multiplicity of distinct, often spurious risks – ecological, biomedical, social, economic, financial, symbolic and informational – that characterizes the ambivalence and incalculability of world risk society" (Beck 2006: 340; see ch. 22).

Far from merely articulating a "new misanthrophy" (Furedi 2006), anticipations of catastrophe in dystopian, post-apocalyptic sf are reflexive in developing an ethics for technologised modernity (Hans Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility* 1979), in responding to the *Desire Called Utopia* (Fredric Jameson 2005), in pointing out *An Inconvenient Truth* too rarely addressed by politics (Al Gore 2006, see chs. 13, 23).

Thus, the corpus of our texts is discussed in classic journals devoted to utopian and dystopian writings (*Utopian Studies*, *Science-Fiction Studies*, *Femspec*, *Extrapolation*, *Foundation*, *Science Fiction Film and Television*) or in journals devoted to the debate between literature and science (*Configurations*), but also in *Interdisciplinary Studies of Literature and the Environment (ISLE)*, the *Journal of Ecocriticism (JoE)*, *Ecozon@*, or *Green Letters: Studies in Ecocriticism*. The current eco-dystopias are exemplary cases of "toxic discourse," providing "a striking instance of the hermeneutics of empathy and suspicion" (Buell 1998: 640).

2. Dystopia, SF, and (Post-)Apocalypse: Genre and Terminologies

Generic debates are legion. As the focus here is on dystopian narratives rather than dystopian*ism* we have excluded all kinds of non-fictional, non-narrative utopian and dystopian texts as well as poetry and drama, fields well worth exploring. While it is true that some of the critical dystopias and the feminist approaches veer towards the inclusion of utopian worlds (see chs. 9, 10), we excluded clearly utopian texts such as Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia* (1975), keeping in mind that in spite of attempts to reinvigorate the utopian tradition, these utopian narratives, after a brief flowering in the 60s and 70s (cf. Baccolini/Moylan 2003: 2), remain overshadowed by dystopian texts both in quantity and in quality. Indeed, Chris Ferns has recently argued that sf and dystopia have not only converged, but merged (cf. 2011: 56). Following criticism, for instance, by Fredric Jameson, who claims that current sf demonstrates "our incapacity to imagine [a better] future" (2005: 288-289) contemporary culture continues to skirt utopian thinking as "either impossible or undesirable" (Booker 1994b: 17; see also Heinze/Petzold 2007). As Booker (1994b: 15) states, "much of the history of recent utopian thought can be read as a gradual shift from utopian to dystopian emphases," and writers such as Kingsley Amis (*New Maps of Hell*, 1960) have traditionally linked sf and dystopia. Then again, Booker is clearly also correct in pointing out that "one man's utopia" is "another man's dystopia" (ibid.). Booker correctly also highlights the fact that utopian narratives often include dystopian aspects and that dystopian narratives are frequently slightly veiled attacks on a current society. Even if, therefore, utopian alternatives are frequently not included in these texts and dystopias tend to have a protagonist who is part of the 'bad' world (cf. Müller 2010: 56-57), both are not used as criteria for exclusion from this volume.

For texts that deliberately conflate dystopian and utopian ideas, Lyman Tower Sargent has coined the term "critical dystopia" (cf. Baccolini/Moylan 2003: 7), Mohr (2005) calls them "transgressive utopian dystopias," Le Guin suggested "ambiguous utopia" as the subtitle for *The Dispossessed* (1974; see ch. 10) – discussions are further complicated by Michel Foucault's coinage "heterotopia" which is an existing, rather than imaginary 'other' place.

We also hold that dystopian literature is contextual in that it is a literary depiction of a place worse than its contextual present, but need not necessarily be written against utopian models (as, for instance, *Brave New World* clearly is). Thus, we can see a dystopia as a displaced (often futuristic, dis-timed) satire, whereas anti-utopia tends towards parody. Intentionality is another important factor as narratives meant as utopias may be read in a dystopian way. Some aspects of Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516; endorses slavery and eugenics) or B. F. Skinner's *Walden Two* (1948; behaviourist, illiberal anthill) may no longer seem such a good or better place to us.

Suvin describes utopian fiction as "both an independent aunt and a dependent daughter" of sf (2003: 188) and declares that it can only be relative to the author's viewpoint, utopian, based on the "*radically different principle,*" eutopian, "*radically more perfect*" or dystopian, "*radically less perfect*" (ibid.: 188). For Suvin, utopian lit-

erature, similar to science fiction, is a literature of cognitive estrangement. Fitting (2010: 135f.) insisted that utopian and dystopian writing has for some time been inextricable from the leading role of science fiction and criticised Suvin's definition as well as the exclusion of much sf as cognitively deficient. Suvin's definition of dystopian literature clearly transcends the boundaries of sf and includes political fiction, too – but then even this distinction does not hold as much sf is clearly political. Whereas sf might have Enlightenment roots and a main current of technophilia, Fitting (ibid.: 141) noted a tendency to see sf as predominantly sceptical in the 1960s, and concluded that science fiction "is more dystopian than anti-utopian" (ibid.; cf. also Borgmeier et al. 1981: 85) – another reason to opt for the term dystopia rather than anti-utopia.

The term science fiction emerged in the 1930s with Hugo Gernsback's coinage and the pulp fiction context. Thus, it is often incorrectly applied to 'genre sf' or 'hard sf,' when, in fact, its remit is much wider and its roots can be found in the 19th-century techno-criticism, as Brian Aldiss (1973) and Brian Stableford (1985) have pointed out. The definition of sf has generated heated debates focused on the attempt to draw boundaries against other genres (fantasy, horror, Gothic, utopia, eschatological fiction etc.). Suvin's generic requirement, 'cognitive estrangement,' drawn from the Brechtian *Verfremdung*, was countered by John Clute, who – more plausibly – argued that it is precisely the aim of sf to render strange worlds narratively familiar (cf. Stableford et al. 2012). As the term sf is thus misleading – Aldiss quipped that sf is no more fiction for scientists than ghost stories are for ghosts – and far from clear, we might, in order to escape a generic ghetto, want to shed the term sf entirely (cf. Stableford et al. 2012). Following Robert A. Heinlein and Judith Merril, both Ursula Le Guin and Margaret Atwood have proposed to substitute sf with "speculative fiction about things that really could happen" (Atwood 2011: 6).

A discussion of the relationship between dystopian and post-apocalyptic fiction opens up another fascinating genre boundary. Curtis (2010: 7) alludes to the fundamental generic hybridity when she emphasises that "[p]ostapocalyptic fiction exists at a genre crossroads between science fiction, horror and utopia/dystopia." And while she allows for *eu*-topian post-apocalyptic fiction, her postscript makes clear that the *dys*-topian post-apocalypse is the one that is thriving. In a muddled account of utopian/ dystopian and catastrophe narratives, Manjikian (2014: 105-123) seeks to establish fundamental differences between the genres, such as post-apocalyptic "backward induction" or dystopian/utopian "looking backward" (but, bypassing More, thinks that *Erewhon* (1872) is the first utopian novel, Manjikian 2014: 107). We can establish that the motif of disaster or catastrophe is frequent in dystopian narratives and sf scenarios. For a disaster or catastrophe to become apocalyptic, however, it needs to be a disclosure (Gk. *apokalypto*, "to uncover"). Its prevalence in the U.K. from late Victorianism to the first decades of the 20th century and in the U.S. post-9/11 may conjoin "eschatological anxiety" (Kermode) or "pessimism porn" (Lindgren; see Manjikian 2014: 5) and empire elegy. Dietrich (cf. 2012: 64-78) links elegiac post-apocalyptic tendencies (and, one might add, the dystopian imagination) to traumatisation.

Defining features of post-apocalyptic, post-disaster and last-man narratives, as supplied by critics such as James Berger (1999), Teresa Heffernan (2008) or Sibylle Machat (2013) and succinctly phrased by Florian Mussgnug, are "journeys through the wasteland created by the cataclysm; attempts to establish a new community; the re-emergence of violence and conflict; often, but not always, a return to civilization" (2012: 334). If we agree, with Erika Gottlieb, that "[d]ystopian fiction is a post-Christian genre" (2001: 3; see ch. 14), displacing the conflict between salvation and damnation administered by a deity onto quasi-religious conflicts within humanity – then we might define post-apocalyptic fiction by referring to its religious roots (cf. Dietrich 2012: 17; see ch. 23). Contemporary post-apocalyptic fiction may go beyond sadistic millenarian ideologies that merely "celebrate fixed identities or the idea of a stable community held together by faith and shared rituals" (Mussgnug 2012: 334). With classic last-man stories, they can share a "focus on experiences of solitude, the disruption of closed order, crises of identity, and the encounter with a reality that eludes human understanding" (ibid.).

As a result, the field of contemporary dystopian narratives is marked by generic hybridity that precludes clear demarcations between many of the chapters in this volume – which provide model analyses of representative texts for a particular generic strand or emphasis. Some of the texts gathered here are more clearly science fiction than others (*The Matrix*, *Neuromancer*, *Blade Runner*, chs. 7, 13, 21) and we might search the roster of texts for examples of 'hard,' i.e., scientifically sound or science-focused sf; some are dystopian but hardly qualify as sf (*Never Let Me Go*, *Lord of the Flies*, chs. 16, 19); another case, Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* (ch. 11), shares dystopian concerns, creates a post-apocalyptic 'atmosphere,' but is most definitely not sf; yet others cross the border into post-apocalyptic territory (*The Road*, *MaddAddam* trilogy, chs. 17, 23) or transcend generic boundaries into historical fiction (*Cloud Atlas*, ch. 22). Degrees of satire vary (*MaddAddam*: high, *The Road*: low). We might further complicate generic boundaries by discussing the case of *Lord of the Flies* as a dystopian robinsonade or *Never Let Me Go* as coming-of-age horror, *Riddley Walker* (ch. 18) as future medievalism or 'ruined earth' fiction, *Blade Runner* (ch. 7) as noir detective fiction etc.

The approach advocated here is trans-medial, ie., in line with the media mix effortlessly absorbed in contemporary culture, we address literary texts as well as the iconotexts of graphic novels (ch. 12), films (chs. 6, 7, 14, 19, 20, 21, 25) or video games (ch. 24), and structure the volume according to thematic preoccupations. Dystopian films have been regularly discussed in studies of science fiction film (Sobchack 1987, King/ Krzywinska 2000, Redmond 2004, Cornea 2007, Hunter 2009, Hochscherf/Leggott 2011). In Redmond's collection (2004: 48-56), Douglas Kellner and Michael Ryan examine dystopian and technophobic sf film along a political left/right axis. King and Krzywinska (2000: 17) remark that dystopianism on film is "slightly more common" than utopian strains and in the Hochscherf/Leggott collection, Lincoln Geraghty notes a dystopian climax in British films of the 1980s (2011: 208). In fact, Roberts (2005: