

*Spirit* (2008) is set in a universe that appears to link elements from the *Aleutian* trilogy and the *Bold As Love* series, but, more generally, it is a fast-paced space opera reworking the theme of Alexandre Dumas's *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Nonetheless, as with most of Jones's work, *Spirit* explores themes of gender and its relation to societies in transition.

Jones has published two major works of SF criticism, *Deconstructing the Starships: Science Fiction and Reality* (1999) and *Imagination/Space: Essays and Talks on Fiction, Feminism, Technology and Politics* (2009), as well as chapters such as 'True Life Science Fiction: Sexual Politics and the Lab Procedural' in *Tactical Biopolitics: Art, Activism and Technoscience* (2008). A special Gwyneth Jones issue of the journal *FemSpec* in 2004 was devoted to critical analysis of her work.

### Works Cited

- Halam, Ann (1981). *Ally Ally Aster*. London: Allen & Unwin.  
 —(2001). *Dr Franklin's Island*. London: Dolphin.  
 Jones, Gwyneth. (1977). *Water in the Air*. London: Macmillan.  
 —(1984). *Divine Endurance*. London: Allen & Unwin.  
 —(1988). *Kairos*. London: Unwin Hyman.  
 —(1991). *White Queen*. London: Gollancz.  
 —(1994). *North Wind*. London: Gollancz.  
 —(1997). *Phoenix Café*. London: Gollancz.  
 —(1999). *Deconstructing the Starships: Science Fiction and Reality*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.  
 —(2001). *Bold As Love*. London: Gollancz.  
 —(2002). *Castles Made of Sand*. London: Gollancz.  
 —(2003). *Midnight Lamp*. London: Gollancz.  
 —(2004). *Life*. Seattle, WA: Aqueduct Press.  
 —(2005). *Band of Gypsies*. London: Gollancz.  
 —(2006). *Rainbow Bridge*. London: Gollancz.  
 —(2008). *Spirit*. London: Gollancz.  
 —(2008). 'True Life Science Fiction: Sexual Politics and the Lab Procedural'. *Tactical Biopolitics: Art, Activism and Technoscience*. Beatriz da Costa and Kavita Philip (eds). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. 289–306.  
 —(2009). *Imagination/Space: Essays and Talks on Fiction, Feminism, Technology and Politics*. Seattle, WA: Aqueduct Press.  
 Various (2004). *Femspec* 5 (1).

**Ursula Le Guin (1929–)**, the daughter of an anthropologist and a writer, was born in Berkeley, California, and grew up in various contrasting locations, on both the west and east coasts of the United States, as well as in Europe. She received a BA from Radcliffe College in 1951 and an MA in 1952 from Columbia. Her publishing career began in 1958 with a book review and

poetry in small magazines. She published her first SF story in 1962 and her first SF novel, *Rocannon's World*, in 1966. Over the next eight years, she produced both the *Hainish* and *Earthsea* sequence of novels, respectively SF and fantasy, for which she is chiefly famous, as well as other novels and numerous shorter and longer stories.

*Rocannon's World*, together with *Planet of Exile* (1966) and *City of Illusions* (1967), forms a trilogy set in a common universe in which widespread human life originates from the planet Hain. *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), which won both Hugo and Nebula Awards, occupies an earlier point of time in Hainish history and develops themes concerning balance and mutuality present in the preceding trilogy by foregrounding gender and sexuality (see discussions later in this book). The novella, 'The Word for World is Forest' (1972), presented a critical allegory of the American role in the Vietnam War. The fifth Hainish novel, *The Dispossessed* (1974), actually comes first in terms of the internal chronology because it tells of the invention of the 'ansible', an interstellar communication device, which features in the earlier books. However, the novel is most significant for the examination of the nature of Utopia created by its setting on twin worlds, one anarchist and one capitalist. A very different examination of Utopia is provided by her non-Hainish SF novel of the period, *The Lathe of Heaven* (1971), in which the idealistic (and evocatively named) George Orr dreams of changes for the better and wakes up each time to a world infinitely worse. Fredric Jameson critically discusses this novel, as well as the last two Hainish novels, in essays collected in his *Archaeologies of the Future* (2005).

Concurrently with the Hainish novels, Le Guin wrote what was initially the *Earthsea* trilogy: *A Wizard of Earthsea* (1968), *The Tombs of Atuan* (1971) and *The Farthest Shore* (1972). This story of the life of the wizard Ged from apprenticeship to full maturity, when he becomes Archmage, turns on the same underlying principle of the need to maintain balance as the Hainish novels. The trilogy subsequently received criticism for an alleged privileging of male agency and *Tehanu* (1990), Le Guin's explicitly feminist addition to the series, has been seen by some as an act of restitution although arguably it draws on ideas and tendencies implicitly present throughout the original trilogy. The series has subsequently been further extended by *The Other Wind* (2001) and a volume of stories, *Tales from Earthsea* (2001).

As well as the *Earthsea* novels, Le Guin has continued to produce other significant fiction since the 1970s, such as *Always Coming Home* (1985), a collage of extracts and stories which build up a picture of a future matriarchal society, *The Telling* (2000), a return to the Hainish universe, and *Lavinia* (2008), a prose reworking of the last six books of Vergil's *Aeneid*. However, it is fair to say that her status rests largely on what she had written by the mid-1970s and that this forms the subject of most of her critical attention.

criticism focusing on her work; including the special issue of *Science Fiction Studies* devoted to her in November 1975, and books such as Harold Bloom's edited collection *Ursula K. Le Guin: Modern Critical Views* (1985), Elizabeth Cummins's *Understanding Ursula K. Le Guin* (1990), and Mike Cadden's *Ursula K. Le Guin Beyond Genre: Fiction for Children and Adults* (2004). Le Guin's own critical writings and reviews were collected in 1979 in *The Language of the Night: Essays on Science Fiction and Fantasy* (discussed in Chapter 5 of this book) a later collection, *Dancing at the Edge of the World*, appeared in 1989.

### Works Cited

- Bloom, Harold (ed.) (1985). *Ursula K. Le Guin: Modern Critical Views*. New York: Chelsea House.
- Cadden, Mike (2004). *Ursula K. Le Guin Beyond Genre: Fiction for Children and Adults*. New York: Routledge.
- Cummins, Elizabeth (1990). *Understanding Ursula K. Le Guin*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press.
- Jameson, Fredric (2005). *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*. London, Verso.
- Le Guin, Ursula. (1966). *Rocannon's World*. New York: Ace Books.
- (1966). *Planet of Exile*. New York: Ace Books.
- (1967). *City of Illusions*. New York: Ace Books.
- (1968). *A Wizard of Earthsea*. Berkeley, CA: Parnassus Press.
- (1969). *The Left Hand of Darkness*. New York: Ace Books.
- (1971). *Lathe of Heaven*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- (1971). *The Tombs of Atuan*. New York: Atheneum.
- (1972). *The Farthest Shore*. New York: Atheneum.
- (1972). 'The Word for World is Forest'. *Again Dangerous Visions*. Harlan Ellison (ed.). New York: Doubleday. 26–108.
- (1974). *The Dispossessed*. New York: Harper & Row.
- (1979). *The Language of the Night: Essays on Science Fiction and Fantasy*. New York: Putnam.
- (1985). *Always Coming Home*. New York: Harper & Row.
- (1989). *Dancing at the Edge of the World*. New York: Grove Press.
- (1990). *Tehanu*. New York: Atheneum.
- (2000). *The Telling*. San Diego: Harcourt.
- (2001). *The Other Wind*. San Diego: Harcourt.
- (2001). *Tales from Earthsea*. San Diego: Harcourt.
- (2008). *Lavinia*. San Diego: Harcourt.
- Various (1975). *Science Fiction Studies*.

**Doris Lessing (1919–)** was born in Persia (now Iran) to British parents but grew up in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) after her parents moved there to run a farm. She left her convent school at the age of 14 and her home soon after to

become a nursemaid. In 1937, she moved to Salisbury (now Harare) to become a telephone operator and subsequently married and had two children. After her first marriage ended in divorce in 1943, she became involved with the communist politics of the Left Book Club and there met Gottfried Lessing, with whom she got married and had a son, Peter. When that marriage ended in 1949, she moved to Britain with Peter, where she joined the Communist Party Writers' Group. During this period she toured the Soviet Union as part of a group including Naomi Mitchison and subsequently visited Mitchison several times at her Scottish home. Lessing's first novel, *The Grass is Singing* (1950) dealt with racial politics in Rhodesia and had an immediate impact, but the book which made her famous was *The Golden Notebook* (1962). The novel marks an important moment in the post-war rise of feminist consciousness and, although not itself a work of SF, prefigures her later SF stylistically and thematically, especially in terms of its exploration of inner consciousness. The five volume *Children of Violence* series, beginning with *Martha Quest* (1952), includes speculative, fantastic elements in its fifth volume, *The Four-Gated City* (1969).

Between 1970 and 1983, Lessing's work was almost exclusively SF. Similarly to J. G. Ballard, but probably more influenced by R. D. Laing's critique of conventional psychiatry, she chose to focus on 'inner space' in her fiction; exploring the apparent break-up of Britain that was occurring in the 1970s from within the psyche. *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* (1971) employs a collage of fragmented narratives and doctors' reports to tell the story of a man found 'wandering on the Embankment near Waterloo Bridge' in London who is gradually restored to his 'normal' life as a married Professor of Classics. The irony is that through this process of curing him, the doctors destroy the quest that he has been pursuing in his inner space, seeking meaning beyond the hell which is everyday life in the twentieth century. Her next novel but one and, arguably, her finest, *Memoirs of a Survivor* (1977), details the breakdown of society in an unnamed city from the perspective of a female narrator who lives in a tower block that undergoes a transformation that is quite as extreme as anything found in the work of Ballard. This irreversible decline is interwoven with both the narrator's descriptions of a series of transcendental experiences she undergoes in which she passes through the wall of her flat and an account of the development through puberty of a girl, Emily, who (along with her sentient pet dog, Hugo) is entrusted to her mysteriously. The cumulative effect is extremely unsettling as Emily's typically early teenage oscillation between childhood and adulthood, in which, torn between the street life of her peer group and her loyalty to her dog and the narrator, she experiments with smoking, drinking and sex, is contrasted with the increasingly psycho-sexual scenes that take place behind the wall. Lessing

The new feminist utopias tended to evoke female communities in which the birth process is managed by the women themselves, as in Suzy McKee Charnas's *Motherlines* (1978); or they presented conflict situations between the sexes, as in Sheri S. Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country* (1989), in which a male warrior culture is contrasted with a separate women's world elsewhere.

A novel that sets up an extended dialogue between utopia and its opposite is Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (1974), which opens with a Janus-image, the wall. The novel contains many allusions to the world politics of the time, when the Berlin Wall embodied the opposition between East and West, but Le Guin draws a further contrast between the material wealth and social conservatism of the planet Urras and the physical bleakness of the anarchistic utopian planet of Anarres. The novel was originally subtitled *An Ambiguous Utopia*, and Le Guin evokes this double perspective by alternating chapters located in each world. We are thus compelled by the very act of reading to cross and re-cross the 'wall' between the two. Shevek, the idealistic Anarresti protagonist, is skilfully used to encourage this constant comparing, especially when he visits Urras, since his outsider's perspective highlights the consumerism of this planet. He is also used more subtly to expose the covert ideological maintenance of orthodoxy in Anarres when his scientific research falls foul of the power structure which the planet's anarchistic claims deny even exists. The main city here is described as a model of utility, with its rectangular grid where nothing is hidden (supposedly), while on Urras Old Town is decaying and evocative of the similar district in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, but still offers a kind of freedom. In an important essay, 'American SF and the Other' (1975), Le Guin has attacked the social conservatism of science fiction which 'has assumed a permanent hierarchy of superiors and inferiors, with rich, ambitious, aggressive males at the top, then a great gap, and then at the bottom the poor, the uneducated, the faceless masses, and all the women'. Russ would agree. She questions this division

by bringing her extraterrestrial to New York, Le Guin by inducing a cultural relativism of perspective.

Where Le Guin shows utopia to be an ultimate goal unreached in her novel, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) describes a fundamentalist theocracy achieved. Margaret Atwood combines biblical allusion (her world is named Gilead), echoes of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and references to the evangelical Protestantism practised by part of the American Right to evoke another world where women have become reduced to physical facilities to serve the Guardians, the ruling male elite of this far from Platonic utopia. Atwood extrapolates familiar elements of 20th-century society to build up a misogynistic dictatorship, elements like the use of patronymics. The narrator is named Offred (i.e. Of-Fred) to suggest that she doesn't belong to herself. As a 'handmaid' – the term combines servitude with sexual exploitation – she has to service a Guardian regularly, which she manages by dissociating her mind completely from her lower body. Atwood suggests throughout the novel that Offred is someone else's, contained by a whole series of official interiors, a predicament which Offred endures by clinging on to increasingly tenuous memories of how things were 'before'. Unlike Orwell's protagonist, she possesses the narrative voice and therefore a symbolic self-empowerment within limits, since she can determine the shape her story will take. This perception offsets the bleakness of Atwood's vision of manipulation at all levels from brainwashing to sexual control, a theme developed further as bioengineering in her 2003 sequel *Oryx and Crake*.

## Ecotopias and the *Mars* trilogy

In 1975, the novel was published which popularized and probably coined the term 'ecotopia', that is, an ecological utopia. Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia* is constructed as a series of reports by a journalist (William Weston) on a utopian enclave centring on San Francisco which has achieved independence for the USA. Weston records the transformation of living style which has been achieved

yin and yang. Shevek believes that the seeds to Anarres's overcoming its walls are to be found on Urras; on Urras, he comes to believe that the seeds of Urras's future are to be found on Anarres. Similarly, such unification would rectify his own imbalance; on Anarres he was an egoist, repeatedly punished for his individuality; on Urras, he despises the social inequality arising from individualism and praises the social equalities on Anarres. The solution to Anarres's and Urras's problems lie in a union of the two planets, the yin with the yang that will bring balance to them both and, within the broader scope of the Hainish sequence, allow them to join with what will eventually become the League of All Worlds and, eventually, the Ekumen.

Interestingly, Le Guin extrapolates even further on the need for balance; specifically, Shevek's reliance on Terrans introduces a broader sensibility than simply the merging of opposites. Shevek's ansible will enable instantaneous communication among planets separated by light years' distance. The ansible will allow both Anarresti and Urrasti to communicate with other species, all of whom share a common ancestry in the Hain. As a metaphor for globalization, Le Guin seems to suggest that balance cannot simply be achieved via the integration of opposites, but rather, an all-inclusiveness that does not recognize nor legitimate social inequalities arising from difference. Just as all Anarresti, Urrasti, and Terrans are descendants of one universal community—the Hain—so too are all of Earth's citizens one people, one global community in need of balance.

### **ALTERNATE READING: ANARCHISM AND UTOPIA**

The subtitle to *The Dispossessed* is *An Ambiguous Utopia*, clearly indicating Le Guin's intentions that the novel be located within the broader field of Utopianism (that is, social dreaming) and Utopian studies. In the 1970s, Utopian studies and Utopian literature experienced a resurgence of attention with the publication of *The Dispossessed* as well as Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* (1975), Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), Samuel Delany's *Triton* (1976), and Sally Miller Gearhart's *The Wanderground* (1978). According to Lyman Tower Sargent in *The Utopia Reader*, utopia, taken from the Greek "ou" ("no") and "topos" ("place"), can be defined as "a non-existent society described in detail and normally located in time and space" (1). Breaking that definition down, Sargent goes on to note that utopia typically appears in fiction as a eutopia or a dystopia. Eutopia, taken from the Greek "eu" ("good") and "topos"

("place"), is a utopia the reader judges to be "considerably better than the society in which the reader lived" (1). The dystopia is defined by Sargent as a utopia that the reader judges to be "considerably worse than the society in which the reader lived" (2).

The function of utopias—whether as eutopia or dystopia—gives the author a means of providing political commentary about social and/or political systems through a comparison to a fictional environment. In this particular case, Le Guin uses utopian discourse to critique the limitations of Westernized capitalism, embodied by the social stratification, superficialities, and inequalities of Urras, and the political feasibility of anarchism, embodied by Anarres. Popular images of anarchists and anarchy often depict lawlessness, the bedlam of angry countercultural groups lashing out, usually in violent demonstrations, at dominant figures of authority. To speak of a society crumbling into anarchy is to describe its downfall, its streets overrun by disorder and chaos, violent uprisings, and the fearless committing of vandalism, looting, assaults, and even rape and murder. As a political ideology, however, anarchy is quite unlike the chaos and disorder often associated with the term. According to *Britannica Online*, anarchism comes to be about balance, constructing a society without government mediation and systems of control. Typically, anarchists "deny man-made laws, regard property as a means of tyranny, and believe that crime is merely the product of property and authority. But they would argue that their denial of constitutions and governments leads not to 'no justice' but to the real justice inherent in the free development of man's sociality—his natural inclination, when unfettered by laws, to live according to the principles and practice of mutual aid." An anarchist society based on such voluntary associations would create an interwoven network of shared responsibility on social, technological, ecological, educational, and ethical levels, eliminating the need for governmental power and agencies.

The anarchist ideology is embedded in Odoniasm, the system of thought all Anarresti (and to a lesser extent the Odonian subculture on Urras) share. As Le Guin describes Odoniasm, "[t]here was to be no controlling center, no capital, no establishment for the self-perpetuating machinery of bureaucracy and the dominance drive of individuals seeking to become captains, bosses, chiefs of state" (95). This system is in direct contrast to the political system of Urras wherein material acquisition and class conflict are par for the course. In addition, the importance of anarchy on Anarres is reinforced given the planets harsh conditions. Computers become the center of Odo's anarchist planet, coordinating

and administering “the division of labor, and the distribution of goods.” In addition, the Anarresti are “aware that unavoidable centralization was a lasting threat, to be countered by lasting vigilance” (96). This vigilance helps explain the focus on stamping out egoism because egoizing operates as an early indicator that the subject is centralizing—being an individual—rather than thinking of the broader anarchist community.

The anarchist system Le Guin depicts also gives her an opportunity to touch on issues of gender and sexuality. The feminist undercurrent emerges in key discussions Shevek has with Urrasti citizens, notably Kimhoe, the freighter pilot transporting Shevek to Urras. Kimhoe questions whether the rumors about Anarres women are true; specifically, he wonders if the men of Anarres actually treat women as equals in spite of their “natural” weaknesses in strength and intelligence. Shevek cannot understand the social practicality of dividing labor according to a person’s sex: “[I]t seems a very mechanical basis for the division of labor, doesn’t it? A person chooses work according to interest, talent, strength—what has the sex to do with that?” (17); Shevek then concludes by wishing he were as tough as a woman. Kimhoe is shocked and bemoans Anarres’s losses, including feminine delicacy and masculine self-respect. Kimhoe even expresses incredulity that Shevek could possibly believe that women are equal in mathematics and physics or that Anarresti men are willing to lower themselves to women’s level. The equality that is achieved in such a harsh climate as Anarres is juxtaposed against the so-called freedom women have on Urras; specifically, Veä is entirely unconvincing in her attempts to convince Shevek that aside from their love of oil baths, pretty sandals, and belly jewels, women on Urras have significant power because they influence the Urrasti men who have the power.

The anarchy of Anarres, however, is by no means perfect nor perhaps even an ideal anarchist system. After all, as Shevek experiences firsthand, this anarchist system is failing. Sabul’s power over Shevek, the remote job assignments given to punish Tirin, and the pervasive global censorship indicate that everyone may be equal on Anarres, but some are more equal than others. Centralization begets more centralization, and in these instances it is abundantly clear that a centralized cabal exists on Anarres. As Tom Moylan makes clear in *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination*, “the primary social problem is the danger of centralization of power in an elite group and the reduction of the ideals of the revolution into a dogmatic ideology that itself inhibits further emancipatory activity” (100). Clearly Anarres is falling off the anarchist path:

Shevek repeatedly finds his intellectual will imposed upon by others; Bedap talks about repression on Anarres; and, the Syndicate of Initiative repeatedly meets with resistance from the PDC's Press Syndicate.

It is important to note that the subtitle of the novel calls this utopia an *ambiguous* one; in this fashion Anarres is a complicated social space because it appears lodged somewhere between a utopia and a dystopia. In this case it is better to consider the novel as neither utopian nor dystopian but, rather, an example of a new form of utopian discourse that emerged in the 1970s: the critical utopia. In *The Utopia Reader* Lyman Tower Sargent offers the following definition of the critical utopia: "a utopia that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as better than contemporary society but with difficult problems that the described society may or may not be able to solve, and which takes a critical view of the utopian genre." This is distinctly different from the utopia as it highlights society as perpetually in flux rather than static; thus, readers can see the tensions, contradictions, and frictions of utopian societies as they struggle to articulate social dreaming.

Tom Moylan presents an equally effective understanding of the critical utopia in *Demand the Impossible*:

A central concern in the critical utopia is the awareness of the limitations of the utopian tradition, so that these texts reject utopia as a blueprint while preserving it as a dream. Furthermore, the novels dwell on the conflict between the ordinary world and the utopian society opposed to it so that the process of social change is more directly articulated. Finally, the novels focus on the continuing presence of difference and imperfection within the utopian society itself and thus render more recognizable and dynamic alternatives. (10-11)

In every way Anarres and its reliance on anarchist philosophy is an example of the critical utopia. First, *The Dispossessed* rejects an anarchist utopia as a blueprint while preserving it as a dream. This is embodied by the obstacles Shevek faces and the centralized cabal, headed by Sabul, that keeps him professionally stymied. However, in spite of these problems Shevek still advocates for anarchy while on Urras as he recognizes that the two planets can solve one another's problems. It is important to note that Le Guin ends the novel with Shevek's homecoming, his return to the flawed anarchy of Anarres rather than his outright rejection of it. Second, the novel repeatedly stages the conflict between the ordinary

world of Urras and the utopian society opposed to it. Through these oppositions the possibilities and pitfalls, the triumphs and tragedies of utopian practice are explored. Finally, in spite of the unification that the ansible will enable there are differences and imperfections within the utopian society of Anarres—as well as the ordinary society of Urras—that remain to be resolved long after Shevek returns to his home planet. In sum, in spite of anarchy's failings social dreaming is not lost; rather, *The Dispossessed* highlights that social dreaming, when put into practice, is an ongoing endeavor, a process of perpetual movement that, in striving for a better condition in the future, can potentially improve society in the present.

an explicit response to the former's *Looking Backward* (1888).<sup>3</sup> Here the essential differences are twofold: Bellamy's industrial state (modeled on the army) is refuted by the anarchistic "withering away" of the state in Morris, while the account of labor in *Looking Backward* (something like Marx's "realm of necessity" opposed to the "realm of freedom" of non-work and leisure time)<sup>4</sup> is challenged by Morris' notion of a non-alienated labor which has become a form of aesthetic production.

Meanwhile, the "ambiguous Utopia" of Ursula Le Guin's *Dispossessed* (1974) was famously challenged by the "ambiguous heterotopia" of Samuel Delany's *Trouble on Triton* (1976), presumably on the grounds that Le Guin's Marxist view of the modes of production did not, despite its allusions to a revised position on homosexuality in the communist world, sufficiently address the countercultural issues that arose in the "new social movements" of the 1960s and 1970s. But where Morris answered one Utopia with another, Delany's subtitle seems to propose a wholesale refusal of the form itself, in favor of a Foucauldian alternative of Utopian spaces and enclaves within the reigning dystopia of the system: thus, *Triton* includes just such a space in its picture of the "unlicensed sector" in which, as in Rabelais or Sade, anything and everything is permitted (see below); just as the galactic war in which his Utopian planet is embroiled could stand as a comment on the violence implicit in Utopian closure as such. But the novel has nonetheless generally been read as a Utopian answer to another Utopia, rather than as an anti-Utopia of the more

3 The seismic effect of Bellamy's virtual reinvention of Utopia cannot be underestimated: it electrified a variety of cultures in ways comparable only to Chernyshevsky's impact on the more local area of Russia (there were at least six different Chinese translations, for example). Meanwhile, the productive reactions go well beyond Morris' socialist/anarchist reply; *Looking Backward* may also be said to have generated the first genuine totalitarian dystopia – Ignatius Donnelly's *Caesar's Column* (1890), which preceded Jack London's *Iron Heel* by seventeen years. The ferment aroused in feminist Utopias is documented in Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution* (Cambridge, MA, 1981). One may, to be sure, credit the age rather than the Utopian visionaries it produced: for behind the bourgeois progressivism of the period whose monument was the pragmatist movement in philosophy there lay the immense forces of populism itself: see Lawrence Goodwin, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York, 1976).

4 Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume III (London, 1981), pp. 958–959: "The realm of freedom really begins only where labour determined by necessity and external expediency ends; it lies by its very nature beyond the sphere of material production proper. Just as the savage must wrestle with nature to satisfy his needs, to maintain and reproduce his life, so must civilized man, and he must do so in all forms of society and under all possible modes of production. This realm of natural necessity expands with his development, because his needs do too; but the productive forces to satisfy these expand at the same time. Freedom, in this sphere, can consist only in this, that socialized man, the associated producers, govern the human metabolism with nature in a rational way, bringing it under their collective control instead of being dominated by it as a blind power; accomplishing it with the least expenditure of energy and in conditions most worthy and appropriate for their human nature. But this always remains a realm of necessity. The true realm of freedom, the development of human powers as an end in itself, begins beyond it, though it can only flourish with this realm of necessity as its basis. The reduction of the working day is the basic prerequisite."

familiar Cold War type (something Le Guin's novel approaches more closely in its view of the repressive conformism of Anarresti society than anything in Delany) or even the explicitly anti-Utopian denunciations of Chernyshevsky and of Paxton's Utopian Crystal Palace in Dostoyevsky (not normally considered a writer in the Utopian tradition at all, but see Chapter 11).

Whether this increasingly reflexive development of the Utopian form as such portends its imminent mutation or transformation will be considered in a concluding chapter. Its history, at any rate, has certainly been characterized by substantive oppositions of the kind just touched on; and it is time to take a brief inventory of the latter, an exercise which requires at least one preliminary philosophical warning. It would be tempting, and probably even possible, to fold such a list of oppositions into each other, thereby producing a single primordial antithesis of which each is only a local embodiment or specification. The result would be to ontologize solutions to specific historical situations in the form of some timeless metaphysical dualism such as that between materialism and idealism. It is, for example, enough to reflect on the status of the body in the various textual Utopias from Thomas More all the way to Le Guin and Delany to become aware of the feasibility of such a project, and also, I hope, of the way in which it would relentlessly psychologize the various Utopian options as a matter of ascetic or hedonistic temperament. To be sure, all the Utopian options in question must involve existential commitment and visceral participation, even where – especially where – one particular vision is rejected with passion or revulsion. At the same time, on both existential and social levels, there is bound to be a thematic interrelationship between the various options, which involve topics such as work and leisure, laws and behavior, uniformity and individual difference, sexuality and the family – topics which any Utopian proposal would necessarily have to address in one way or another. Yet as we have suggested in an earlier chapter, the grand Utopian idea or wish – the abolition of property, the complementarity of desires, non-alienated labor, the equality of the sexes – is always conceived as a situation-specific resolution of a concrete historical dilemma. The viability of the Utopian fantasy assuredly finds its test and its verification in the way in which it promises to solve all the other concomitant problems as well. But each of these will reshuffle its primary and secondary terms, its dominants and its subordinates, its combined practice of Imagination and Fancy, in structurally original ways. It is best to hold to the specific historical focus, to the central thematic of the new social proposal, which makes its own unique trajectory of the links between the problems to be solved, rather than to reduce the texts to this or that world-view, let alone to assimilate them all to the mentality detected and diagnosed by a far more homogeneous anti-Utopian ideology: we thus now shift from a focus on Utopian form and the structure of wish-fulfillment to an examination of Utopian content.

once distinguished the logic of the work from that of society”).<sup>24</sup> The Utopian return to the old Platonic distinction between true and false happiness, as in Marcuse, is now denounced as humanism by a mass culture flowering into full postmodernity, and unmasked as the elitism of intellectuals attempting to pass themselves off as philosopher-kings. Meanwhile, in the nightmare of social life as one long televised orgy (in Brian Aldiss’ *Helliconia* trilogy [1982–85]) the opposition between puritanism and hedonism returns with a vengeance, suggesting that the Utopia of full employment and even of non-alienated labor as such is motivated by an idealism unwilling to trust a sinful human race with the poisoned gift of free time.

## II

Such, then, are the dilemmas and contradictions of a Utopian meditation on production; but the same themes are to be found, rearranged in a somewhat different trajectory, in any meditation on Utopian consumption, let alone in that inspired by the question of distribution. For the dystopias of mass culture we have just touched on are merely the face of consumption glimpsed, as it were, from the realm of production itself. When we turn to the former more directly, the antithesis with which we are confronted is better formulated as one between abundance and poverty. But here poverty sheds the overtones of repression and Puritanism associated with the various labor debates and takes on something of the luminosity of a more joyous and Franciscan vision, of the light of the desert or the serenity that comes with fasting. But it is important to realize that neither of these poles – abundance and Franciscan poverty alike – exists in our world. Both are Utopian: the vision of abundance developing out of the Marcusean fantasy of high productivity, while the choice of poverty is constituted out of a radical aesthetic simplification of our everyday life in the present, a reduction of desire to the limits of need which has as little to do with moderation as a rather miserable class virtue as it does with real misery and the suffering of real hunger and destitution.

This is precisely what makes up the hidden imbalance or dissymmetry of Le Guin’s wonderful juxtaposition of these two states of being in the twin planets of Urras and Anarres in *The Dispossessed*, whose very ecologies become expressions of their ideological antagonism. To be sure, the writer has attempted to transcend local Cold War stereotypes by making her communists over into anarchists, with overtones of Taoism: yet well before Stalin and his repressive industrialization, Morris had also distanced his own communism from a centralizing state socialism in advance (that particular revolution having failed, he tells us, and given way to the one portrayed in *News from Nowhere*).<sup>25</sup> Indeed, a

24 T.W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Palo Alto, 2002), pp. 95, 104.

25 Morris, *News*, pp. 140ff.

conventional state socialism (also present in *The Dispossessed* in the neighboring country of Thu) can easily be accommodated by convergence theory, which saw capitalism and Stalinist industrialization as two faces of the more general process of modernization. No such resolution can be imagined for the decentralization of Anarres, which is incompatible with the various Urras systems (the latter conveniently enough already representing First, Second and Third Worlds).

Yet a stereotypical anti-socialist (or anarchist) convention is reproduced, as it were for even-handedness, in the emphasis on conformity in Anarres, on a kind of small-town bigotry which is conveniently allied to the accompanying stereotype of bureaucracy and its alleged jealousies and repression of innovation (Shevek's superior tries to take credit for his scientific discoveries, while the populace denounces his travel to Urras as treason in a prototypical mob scene). But the contrasting portrait of Urras (the two planets are assigned alternating chapters, in a bravura form in which Shevek's prehistory develops alongside the story of his decisive journey) does not offer a complementary critique of the political and social drawbacks of capitalism as a mode of production and regulation: rather it emphasizes the phenomenon of consumption as such, thereby both reproducing and critically estranging the classic dissymmetry of Western Cold War rhetoric, in which political objections (freedom) are enlisted against an anti-capitalist economic system. But in *Le Guin* no objections are implied against the Anarresti collectivist mode of production as such. Meanwhile, the political structures of domination and exploitation in Urras are withheld (we do not even know how A-Io is governed) until the climactic strike and repression, in contrast to the lynch mob on Anarres with which the book begins.

So it is that the narrative "rhetoric" of this "ambiguous Utopia" is on both sides of the diptych displaced onto the theme of consumption, which is calculated to estrange or defamiliarize our habitual perceptions and to shock us into some fresh awareness of everything nauseating about our own current wealth and our own rich commodity system (the subliminal images of food and eating are everywhere here, Shevek emblematically vomits at one point, and the word "rich" obviously carries nauseous culinary overtones with it). Commodity reification and consumerism then become vivid exemplifications of what Odo denounced as excess and excrement; but at this point the reproach of Left puritanism takes on plausibility again, while the very concept of reification, in which the religious overtones of the fetishized object are repudiated in the name of need and simple functionality, is seen as having a more suspicious motivation than that of simple materialism as such, which could always be reformulated in terms of the *pays de Cockayne* and of physical pleasure.

Another way of grasping the new objection is to reformulate it in terms of aesthetics, or rather as a repudiation of aesthetics and art, even including the Morris–Ruskin celebration of beauty. For is not art in fact excess *par excellence*, the superfluous above and beyond sheer physical subsistence? Is it not

decoration (also denounced by Odo, along with ornament in the spirit of Adolf Loos) that adds something to human mere animal existence? Nor is Shevek insensible to this sensory and aesthetic splendor, which he finds in the landscape,<sup>26</sup> but above all in the magnificent fabrics, which adorn the rooms but are also suggestive of clothing, bodies and sexuality (even comfort is redolent of sexuality),<sup>27</sup> as are finally the commodities themselves: "The air of the shop was sweet and warm, as if all the perfumes of the spring were crowded into it. Shevek stood there amidst the cases of pretty luxuries, tall, heavy, dreamy, like heavy animals in their pens, the rams and bulls stupefied by the yearning warmth of spring."<sup>28</sup>

Yet it is not the minimalism of Anarresti art (see Chapter 12) which is opposed to the aesthetics of consumption on Urras: an opposition which would reassimilate this opposition to our own art history and the more familiar supercession of an aesthetic of beauty by a modernist aesthetic of the sublime. Poverty on Anarres is not to be identified with that sobriety of white walls and streamlining with which Le Corbusier and Loos rebuked a decadent nineteenth-century bourgeois taste: an aesthetic of the cold shower and of rigorous hygiene, a kind of reeducation of desire for the machine age, in which a new kind of athletic libidinal investment ultimately triumphs over its overstuffed predecessor.

Here we may rather speak of something like a displacement from aesthetic consumption as such to a transformation of everyday life. Ironically, however, the Ruskin prescription for such a transformation, in which the ugliness of the factory world was to be replaced by nature and a return to medieval handcraft, is as it were itself inverted, the new system demanding a libidinal dissociation from the consumption of individual objects or works, and a projection of these impulses onto social and collective relations generally. In Anarres, then, social relations, both private and public, are cathected with all the energies released by the abolition of property.

It is a transformation now surcharged and overlaid by another opposition, one of the most fundamental in all Utopian thought, namely the opposition between city and country, a Utopian antinomy which is now expressed within the realm of space as such, and which also tends to modulate our attention from consumption to production and distribution. For now Abbenay is characterized in terms of transparency, a rather different ideologeme associated with the reification debates, and tending to displace the suspicions of puritanism. Here what is definitional about the commodity is not so much its religious or spiritual "fetishistic" value, as rather its function as a disguise of labor. The fetishized commodity indeed interrupts the transparency of the

26 Ursula Le Guin, *The Dispossessed* (New York, 1974), p. 82.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 211.

process of production and exchange: it inserts a sham materiality into something which is originally (and remains beneath the surface) a social relation, a relationship between people. In that allegedly original (and no doubt Utopian) relationship, the human labor that gives an object its value is visible to the consumer, as is that of the object it is exchanged for. In the process of consumption we have here preeminently to do with labor time and with a reciprocity of work, a primordial division of labor in which it is not the talents of the respective workers which is at stake but simply their mutual complementarity. With the developing inequality of human relations, however, consumption risks being burdened with guilt, as we glimpse the expense of toil and labor time which has gone into the production of what becomes for us a luxury: thus the materiality of the object itself is summoned to veil the human relationship and to give it the appearance of a relation between things. This is the analysis which the development of reification theory in recent times (in France and in Germany alike, with *Tel Quel* as much as with Adorno) has crystallized in a striking motto, namely, that reification can be defined as the effacement of the traces of production on the object.

The description of Abbenay draws on this conception of reification in terms of transparency and opacity:

Abbenay was poisonless: a bare city, bright, the colors light and hard, the air pure. It was quiet. You could see it all, laid out as plain as spilt salt.

Nothing was hidden ... The activity going on in each place was fascinating, and mostly out in full view ... No doors were locked, few shut. There were no disguises and no advertisements. It was all there, all the work, all the life of the city, open to the eye and to the hand.<sup>29</sup>

Transparency becomes here a vehicle for the collective totality, which is able to grasp how the specialized work of each group is necessary for the whole. In principle it is this transparency then, this grasp of the social totality, which serves as the “moral incentive” on Anarres, and which replaces the profit motive (the catch being the pressure of conformity and group intolerance which confronts Shevek in this Utopia’s “ambiguity”). It will also be noted that the hostility to commodity reification and consumerism is reproduced in the hostility to commerce as such: here the “advertisements” become bad aesthetic excess, and when Shevek is asked on Urras, “Is there anything you aren’t?” with some wonderment at the variety of trades he has practiced, he decisively replies “A salesman.”<sup>30</sup>

Unsurprisingly, then, the counterimage of Urras will take the form of the commodity and its aesthetic excess. This image in fact sums up Shevek’s

29 Ibid., pp. 98–99.

30 Ibid., p. 216.

experience of the capital city, A-Io, which unlike Abbenay does turn out to have concealments and the “mystères” traditionally associated with the city as such: hiding places (let us remember that these are denounced in a peculiar and memorable passage of Thomas More: “nullae latebratae”),<sup>31</sup> places of conspiracy (and sexual excess) and of refuge against the state and its power. For Shevek must himself hide out in such a place during the revolutionary insurrection, accompanied by a wounded participant who dies during the concealment. It is an experience which accounts for Shevek’s final characterization of Urras to the Hainish ambassador:

It is a box – Urras is a box, a package, with all the beautiful wrapping of blue sky and meadows and forests and great cities. And you open the box and what is inside it? A black cellar full of dust, and a dead man.<sup>32</sup>

What is, however, paradoxical about all this is the appeal to nature imagery to characterize the aesthetic illusions of Urras, Anarres being itself a barren desert for which none of these evocations of nature are appropriate.

But this is not normally the way in which Le Guin positions herself on the Utopian spectrum: indeed we have already identified her emblematically as the prototype of a Utopian commitment to the countryside and the village, to agriculture and small face-to-face groups, as opposed to the urban celebrations of a Delany: the commitment of a pastoral Morris, as opposed to the industrial Bellamy. Indeed, the opposition probably becomes meaningful only after industrialization in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. One would not, for example, consider Hythloday’s account of Amarautum as the expression of any particularly urban ideology (despite More’s own identification with London, or the setting of *Utopia* in Antwerp); nor would one characterize Fourier’s phalansteries as being particularly expressive of any great commitment to the land and the soil.

But it is clear enough that Delany’s *Triton* takes up the challenge, and celebrates precisely those “latebratae” forbidden by More and lived as nightmarish by Le Guin’s Shevek. This is indeed the sense of the so-called unlicensed sector within the official Utopia of Delany’s novel:

31 See More, *Works*, Volume IV, pp. 146–147: “Now you can see how nowhere is there any license to waste time, nowhere any pretext to evade work – no wine shop, no alehouse, no brothel anywhere, no opportunity for corruption, no lurking hole, no secret meeting place. On the contrary, being under the eyes of all, people are bound either to be performing the usual labor or to be enjoying their leisure in a fashion not without decency.”

32 *The Dispossessed*, p. 347. It is only fair to add that Le Guin uses the same figure in her decidedly anti-Utopian attack on socialism called “The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas” (*The Wind’s Twelve Corners*, New York, 1975); and see the special issue of *Utopian Studies* on this text: Volume 2, Nos 1 and 2 (1991).