

# **Science Fiction as Protest Art**

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# Exploring ‘Capitalist Hells’

*This is the first entry in a two-part response to Thomas Wilson Jardine’s December 2020 essay, ‘Cyberpunk: An Empty Rebellion?’ In part one, we introduce the late historian Richard Stites’ framework on the speculative critique of ‘capitalist hells,’ and provide a number of examples of science fiction functioning as protest art. In part two, we will focus on Stites’ concepts of ‘communist heavens’ and ‘alternative, anti-modern utopias,’ analyzing Kim Stanley Robinson’s literature and the Deus Ex game universe as case studies.*

‘The concept of progress is to be grounded in the concept of catastrophe. That things ‘just go on’ is the catastrophe. It is not that which is approaching but that which is. [August] Strindberg’s thought: Hell is not something which lies ahead of us—but *this life here.*’ – Walter Benjamin<sup>1</sup>

In a world facing uncertain, bleak, and even terminal futures, capitalist media companies compete to maximize their market share by exploiting humanity’s artistic, political, and erotic fantasies. Simply put, the culture industry cynically sells our symbolic rebellions against oppression and dehumanisation back to us. Still, our individual and collective psychosocial reveries can be interpreted, at least in part, as compensatory means of coping with capital’s nihilistic, destructive impetus. Seen in this light, such emotional coping mechanisms serve the important ends of mental health and survival.

At the same time, writing in *The Commoner* in December 2020, Thomas Wilson Jardine rightly underscores the risk that the increasing incorporation of critical, anti-authoritarian themes into such media as film and video games may ultimately just prey on our alienation and promote ‘interpassivity.’ The danger is that audiences will passively consume the recuperation of ‘revolutionary iconoclasm,’ or ‘the abolition of authority, authority figures,’ and ‘master symbols,’ in ways that merely reproduce what the French Situationist Guy Debord famously termed ‘the society of the spectacle.’<sup>2</sup>

In this essay, I want to question whether the dynamic between art and audience is so straightforward. Do the iconoclastic themes and fantasies which writers, artists, and game developers incorporate into speculative fiction only serve to reproduce class society and social hierarchy in themselves and their consumers?

Reflecting on the genres of cyberpunk and steampunk, I agree with Jardine that there is a strong risk of interpassivity, of psychic substitutionism, and of what an implanted-memory salesman from the film *Total Recall* (1990) terms ‘a vacation from the self,’ otherwise known as ‘LARPing’ (live-action role-playing). Games like *Deus Ex* (1999), *BioShock* (2007), or *Ascent* (2021),

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Benjamin, ‘Central Park,’ *New German Critique*, no. 34 (1985), 50. Emphasis in original.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 183; Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills, *Character and Social Structure: The Psychology of Social Institutions* (Routledge: London, 1954), 276.

which incorporate subversive cyberpunk and steampunk themes, are rather different from the traditional action games, like the *Counter-Strike* (2000), *Battlefield* (2002), or *Call of Duty* (2003) series, which glorify militarism and the War on Terror. To this point, Brie Code, founder of the Tru-Luv development studio, comments that the gaming industry ‘has focused on a narrow subset of human psychology for several years,’ specifically ‘help[ing] people feel a sense of achievement or dominance.’ In this sense, titles with cyberpunk or steampunk themes may attract different ‘markets’ for game corporations: perhaps ones that are comprised of those who are younger, and/or more politically progressive or radical.

Even so, the gaming experience depends upon the alienated labor of developers, together with that of miners and electronics workers, all of which is made invisible, according to Karl Marx’s concept of commodity fetishism. To this point, Jardine critiques *Cyberpunk 2077* (2020), one of the industry’s most highly-anticipated games, which cost over \$300 million to produce. They write, ‘I do not see V (your character) and Johnny Silverhand going to establish a better or new system and uniting the exploited cyborg proletariat in a popular uprising against Arasaka and Militech [corporations]’. As I have not played *Cyberpunk 2077*, I cannot comment on this particular aspect of the plot, much less any other.

Be that as it may, in keeping with the utopian origins and function of speculative fiction, subversive social commentary is relayed, and social revolution even envisioned, in certain games. *Red Faction* (2001), for instance, begins with a miners’ strike on Mars, echoing the revolutionary fantasy of worker unrest and heroic anti-capitalism on the red planet in *Total Recall*. As this dynamic suggests, compared with the relatively new medium of video games, literature and film have had an expansive history of promoting humanist, anti-authoritarian, and ecological themes, thus advancing what Walidah Imarisha calls ‘[v]isionary fiction’: namely, speculative art that seeks to build ‘new, freer worlds,’ starting with the decolonization of the mind.<sup>3</sup> In this multi-part essay, we emphasize the continuities among literature, film, and games as protest art in this sense. We will see how reason and emotion are intimately tied to the struggle for individual and collective liberation. We will explore some of the links between history and the present, and see how the best sci-fi operates through the critical displacement—or defamiliarisation—of infernal capitalist modernity.

## A Brief History of Speculative Fiction and Protest Literature

Speculative, visionary fiction has an enduring history. In 421 C.E., the Chinese writer Tao Qian (365–427) composed ‘Peach Blossom Spring.’ This is a tale about a fisherman who discovers a utopian community located in a high valley at the terminus of a river lined with pink peach trees. The villagers of this exilic Daoist space, a ‘level land’ wherein ‘white-haired elders and tufted children alike were cheerful and contented,’ are either unaware of the Qin and Han imperial dynasties, or do not recognise them, for their ancestors had fled from the centralising Chinese State. Like the Cossack communities founded by peasants, who avoided serfdom by ‘exiting’ from early State formation in Russia during the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries,<sup>4</sup> the Daoist

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<sup>3</sup> Walidah Imarisha, ‘Introduction’ to Octavia’s Brood, eds. Adrienne Marie Brown and Walidah Imarisha (AK Press/Institute for Anarchist Studies, 2015), 4.

<sup>4</sup> Andrej Grubačić and Dennis O’Hearn, *Living at the Edges of Capitalism: Adventures in Exile and Mutual Aid* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), 48–62.

community at the source of the peach blossom stream ‘had first left men’s society to escape the troubled world.’ In 718, the poet Wang Wei (699–759) expanded on this vision, imagining that the inhabitants of this community ‘were peaceful, calm, [and] kind,’ and the valley ‘fertile and full of animals.’

‘We stayed until we saw what it was: a good place.  
To live here would be fulfillment.’

Moved by his experience, the narrator returns home, seeking to resettle with his family in this utopia. However, upon setting out to move there, they ultimately cannot find the community, for it was but a ‘moment in time’—or maybe just a dream, after all.<sup>5</sup>

In a similar vein, the Indian poet Guru Ravidas (c. 1450–1520) envisioned Begumpura, a ‘land without sorrow,’ five centuries ago:

‘The regal realm with the sorrowless name:  
they call it Begumpura, a place with no pain,  
No taxes or cares, none owns property there,  
no wrongdoing, worry, terror, or torture.  
Oh, my brother, I’ve come to take it as my own,  
my distant home where everything is right.  
That imperial kingdom is rich and secure,  
where none are third or second – all are one;  
They do this or that, they walk where they wish,  
they stroll through fabled palaces unchallenged.  
Oh, says Ravidas, a tanner now set free,  
those who walk beside me are my friends.’

This Begumpura, as the Dalit anarchist Pranav Jeevan P comments, is a stateless, classless, *and* casteless commune. It represents the ‘imagination [mobilizing] against caste, class, state, Brahmanical hierarchies and patriarchy,’ and foreseeing a ‘society living in harmony and free from all forms of discrimination.’ Considering the humanistic, emancipatory impulses that inform this dream, together with its continued acute relevance, both in BJP-dominated India and beyond, Pranav invites us to engage and re-engage with such visions, and ‘work towards creating our [own] Begumpura.’

Fast-forward to Summer 1816. The English novelist Mary Shelley (daughter of the proto-anarchist William Godwin and the feminist Mary Wollstonecraft), while visiting Switzerland with her husband (the Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley), produced *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* (1818), in response to Lord Byron’s bid for a competition to see who could write the best horror story. Composed on the shores of Lake Geneva, this Gothic art-work is often considered the first example of modern science fiction. The ghastly novel, bearing the imprints of the thought both of the author’s parents, as of the Swiss-born *philosophe* Jean-Jacques Rousseau, depicts the ‘mad scientist’ Victor Frankenstein, who successfully creates a humanoid assembled from body parts of the deceased in his laboratory. This creature, who is physically strong and loving yet anxious and hideous, is rejected both by Frankenstein and by society at large. Viewed

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<sup>5</sup> Kim Stanley Robinson, *Red Moon* (New York: Orbit, 2018), 344.

as a ‘monster, a blot upon the earth,’ and denied fellowship and sexual satisfaction, the Creature declares ‘ever-lasting war against the species.’<sup>6</sup> The nameless Creature poses the question: ‘Am I thought to be the only criminal, when all human kind sinned against me?’<sup>7</sup>

This allegory functions as a sympathetic portrayal of human development, feminist and Romantic commentary on ableist social relations and the Promethean-masculinist ethos of capitalism, plus an endorsement of sociological approaches to criminology that would incorporate consideration for environmental and psychosocial factors driving crime. Its message runs parallel to Percy Shelley’s own *Prometheus Unbound* (1820), a lyrical drama which presents its author and his characters as Romantic heroes. From Ursula K. Le Guin in *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) to the creators of the eco-documentary *Chasing Ice* (2012), many have rendered homage to *Frankenstein*’s climactic chase in the Arctic.

In the conclusion to his latest novel, *The Ministry for the Future* (2020), sci-fi writer Kim Stanley Robinson suggests that the utopian socialist Charles Fourier was a ‘secret influence’ on the visionary French novelist Jules Verne, author of *Twenty-Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (1870) and *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1872), among other works.<sup>8</sup> In like fashion, the late historian Richard Stites finds that, in the wake of the Russian Revolution which overthrew Tsarism and landlordism, ‘[t]en editions of Fourier’s works appeared between 1917 and 1926 and many books about his ideas. [Fellow utopian socialists] Owen, Cabet, Buchez, Blanc, St. Simon and others enjoyed new translations in the 1920s. *Their influence on the science fiction of the period is apparent, though never acknowledged.*’<sup>9</sup> A similar story could be told in 2021, a century after the Czech artist Karel Čapek wrote *Rossum’s Universal Robots* (1921). This was the first work to envision synthetic ‘robots,’ or slave workers, who would replace human labourers and soldiers, and ultimately rise up and destroy humanity—as the *Terminator* series likewise foresees. Like today’s producers of science fiction, and especially climate fiction, who often convey either pessimistic ‘grimdark’ or optimistic ‘solarpunk’ messages, speculative writers from Russia’s early Soviet period often focused on social and political problems in their production of what amounted to *protest literature*.

The late Howard Zinn defined protest literature as ‘any form of communication that engages social consciousness and may move someone to action.’ It is similar to the genre known as social science fiction, which includes such titles as Plato’s *Republic* (c. 375 B.C.E.) and Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516). There was also the radical intelligentsia who, in their artistic, subtle, and indirect ways, crucially defamiliarised Tsarism in the nineteenth century, and so inspired the Russian Revolution. Following from their example, Soviet speculative writers expressed themes critical of capitalism, militarism, ‘Taylorist exploitation, death weapons, and mad scientists.’<sup>10</sup> Most sci-fi in our own time, whether developed primarily with society or profit in mind, is an adaptation of precisely this ‘revolutionary critique of the old world’ from a century ago, in a reflection of the staying power of hierarchy, brutality, and irrationality.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, in the following two parts of this article, we will trace the continuities of utopias (and dystopias) in time, between past and present. Starting from the Freudian idea that fantasy dis-

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<sup>6</sup> Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* (London: Penguin, 2003), 123, 138, 150.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

<sup>8</sup> Kim Stanley Robinson, *The Ministry for the Future* (New York: Orbit, 2020), 558.

<sup>9</sup> Stites 168 (emphasis added).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

guises an unconscious desire for wish-fulfillment, we will see how speculative exercises in '[t]aking off into a better world' are linked with the goal of overcoming 'capitalist hells,' reaching 'communist heavens,' and so integrating our deepest hopes with reality.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 171–4; Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Routledge, 1981).

# Dystopias of Domination

*This is the second entry in a three-part response to Thomas Wilson Jardine's December 2020 essay, 'Cyberpunk: An Empty Rebellion?' In this section, we will briefly examine around twenty instances of dystopian "capitalist hells" in speculative fiction, whether literature or films. See our final installment for an analysis of alternative and anti-modern utopias, together with the dialectic between dystopia and metaphorical heavens in Ursula K. Le Guin and Kim Stanley Robinson's novels and the Deus Ex game universe.*

The protest art made by Soviet utopian sci-fi writers last century, and many of the producers of speculative and visionary fiction who have followed them since, share a common concern with the infernal nature of capitalism, whether openly or by implication. In this sense, Thomas Wilson Jardine is surely right to warn that media corporations cynically exploit these 'rebellious' themes for profit and self-aggrandisement. At the same time, the unfortunate existence of this dynamic in no way delegitimises the righteous concerns raised by speculative artists throughout history to the present.

As we have argued in part I of this essay, visionary fiction has a rich history. Here, in part II, we will focus mostly on the meaning of negative, dystopian art. In this sense, many Soviet sci-fi writers followed Jack London's lead in *The Iron Heel* (1908), a novel that foresees an authoritarian-capitalist US State calling in the military to suppress an insurgent Chicago Commune—much as the Communard(e)s of Paris had met a brutal fate in 1871, at the hands of forces loyal to Versailles. In *Tomorrow* (1924), Yakov Okunev inverts the dismal conclusion of *The Iron Heel*, envisioning the defeat of global capitalism as 'the Atlantic fleet goes red, the German workers' army attacks Paris, and the Soviet army liberates India [from the British Empire], setting the stage for a world-wide federation of soviets with its capital in London.'<sup>1</sup>

As an integral part of his counter-revolutionary 'war on the dreamers,' Soviet General Secretary Joseph Stalin (r. 1924–1953) notoriously banned utopian science fiction in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), and mandated its replacement with the upbeat and uncritical genre of socialist realism. However, the late historian Richard Stites emphasised that the anti-capitalist and anti-militarist 'scaretopias' produced during the first decade of the 1917 Russian Revolution themselves anticipated the horrors of World War II. These included 'the 1941 skies blackened with German aircraft,' the 'huge herds of machine-powered vehicles and tanks rolling across the flat landscape,' and 'millions of civilians perishing in a war without well defined rear areas.'<sup>2</sup>

Along similar lines, the *Terminator* (1984) series begins with apocalyptic scenes of machines hunting down human survivors of a nuclear war, by employing battle tanks and aircraft that resemble the 'Osprey' used by the US Marines Corps. With his dystopian vision about 'the very real possibility of the destruction of the human race by its own machine-based creations,' Karl

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 181.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.



Čapek, author of *Rossum's Universal Robots* (1921), sampled from the individualist anarchist Henri Ner's 1896 novel, *La Révolte des Machines*,<sup>3</sup> and projected the grim lessons of World War I into the future. In this sense, it should not be surprising that the US, UK, Israel, Australia, and Russia presently oppose any regulation of lethal autonomous weapons systems, otherwise known as 'killer robots.'

Perhaps ironically, in light of the role he has played in legitimising US imperialism in the post-war social imaginary, the superhero Steve Rogers, otherwise known as Captain America, is made into a Super Soldier during the Second World War to assist the Allies against the Nazis. In parallel, the Red Guardian, his Soviet counterpart, fights heroically against the fascists, too. After the war's end, comic writers of *Captain America*, *Batman*, and the *X-Men*—many of them, like Stan Lee, being Jewish in background—used their platforms to raise consciousness about the Holocaust and denounce Nazi crimes. Indeed, the militant mutant leader Magneto from *X-Men*, whom some have compared to Malcolm X (and Professor X, in turn, to Martin Luther King, Jr.), is given an origin story in the 1990s as a Holocaust survivor. Along these lines, Magneto can also be read as an extremist Zionist and follower of the Rabbi Meir Kahane, and his rival Professor X as a Jew who instead preaches assimilation. Similar conflicts surge in *Black Panther* between T'Challa, the scientist-king of the African realm of Wakanda—played by the late Chadwick Boseman in the comic's 2018 film adaptation—and his insurgent Machiavellian rival, Erik Killmonger (played by Michael B. Jordan).

Below, we will briefly examine twenty instances of dystopian 'capitalist hells' in speculative fiction, both in literature and films, or games.

*The Trial* (1925) and *The Castle* (1926): Franz Kafka, a German-speaking Bohemian Jew, typifies the rebel pariah-intellectual analysed by the anti-fascist theorists Hannah Arendt and Enzo Traverso.<sup>4</sup> Influenced by German Romanticism, Jewish messianism, and anarchism, Kafka conveyed his revulsion with industrialism, capitalism, and bureaucracy through his art. Labouring at the Workman's Accident Insurance Institution by day, he would subvert its ossified grip over the imagination by night. In the absurdist novels *The Trial* and *The Castle*, Kafka portrays alien, frustrating 'world[s] without freedom in which redemption asserts itself only negatively.' In the absence of any 'positive message,' Kafka's iconoclasm corresponds to a *theologia negativa* and a negative anarchism.<sup>5</sup>

To this point, in 2009, *The Onion* reported satirically on the 'oppressive atmosphere' at the fictional Franz Kafka International Airport, and in 'Kafka's Last Laugh' (2015), Vagabond foresees the figure known as 'Resister' being subjected to forced labor at a 'Prison Mall' as a means of being rehabilitated into bourgeois society—this, after she had been arrested while occupying the New York Stock Exchange.<sup>6</sup>

In *The Castle*, the author's alter ego K arrives at an unnamed village posing as a surveyor of a certain castle, the administration of which has mysteriously hired him. Then, suddenly,

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<sup>3</sup> Jesse Cohn, *Underground Passages: Anarchist Resistance Culture, 1848–2011* (Oakland: AK Press, 2014), 167.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Löwy, "Jewish Messianism and Revolutionary Utopias in Central Europe: Erich Fromm's Early Writings (1922–30)," *Erich Fromm's Critical Theory: Hope, Humanism, and the Future*, eds. Kieran Durkin and Joan Braune (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 43–4.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Löwy, *Redemption and Utopia: Jewish Libertarian Thought in Central Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 71–94.

<sup>6</sup> Vagabond, "Kafka's Last Laugh," in *Octavia's Brood*, eds. Adrienne Marie Brown and Walidah Imarisha (AK Press/Institute for Anarchist Studies, 2015), 177–86.

it decides it does not need him—but cannot clarify his work status either way. ‘It could mean that the affair is in process, but it could also mean that the official process hasn’t even started at all.’<sup>7</sup> Metaphorically attempting to salvage his dignity in the face of stifling bureaucracies, K questions ‘why I should allow myself to be interrogated, or why I should go along with a joke or some official whim.’<sup>8</sup> In keeping with his vision of a *utopia negativa*, and his weakly optimistic anticipation of a different world, Kafka implies in the final chapter of this unfinished manuscript that the State’s systematic deception ‘would not last forever, as the people have eyes, and after all, their eyes would tell them the truth.’<sup>9</sup>

*We* (1921): Serving as the main inspiration for George Orwell’s anti-Stalinist dystopia *1984* (1948), Yevgeny Zamyatin’s *We* contrasts the mechanised, ultra-centralised, and conformist urban life of the United State (the Soviet Union, a thousand years in the future) with nature, Eros, and fantasy, which are banished to the countryside that lies ‘beyond the green wall.’ This liberated space, in turn, is reminiscent of the ‘Peach Blossom Spring’ of Daoist antiquity, and suggestive of the contemporary anarchic and exilic movements of the Russian Revolution, which had sought a ‘Third Revolution’ against the Bolshevik autocracy. In fact, Zamyatin and the insurgent Kronstadt sailors shared a common revulsion over the Communist Party bureaucrats’ enthusiasm for the propagation of enslaving Fordist and Taylorist forms of management and workplace organisation. Indeed, the nameless citizens of the United State are reduced to mere Numbers in this novel, in keeping with the Soviet and Western fetishization of machines. As a fierce critique of Marxism-Leninism, *We* was first published in the USSR only during the period of *glasnost* (‘openness’) in 1988, and Ursula K. Le Guin considered it the best sci-fi work ever written.<sup>10</sup>

In a similar vein, Alexander Belyaev’s *Battle in the Ether* (1927) and A. R. Palei’s *Gulfstream* (1928) anticipate workers in the USA being ‘made into robots of the Taylor System.’ In Palei’s vision, proletarians are subjected to ‘extreme specialisation of labour, mind-blunting routine, regimented family and homelife, mandatory TV, and a gradual reduction of human speech.’<sup>11</sup> In this light, speculatively, we can say that these titles may have influenced the creative process for Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* (1953). In this work, Bradbury condemns the stifling conformism and anti-intellectualism of post-war American society, drawing an implicit link between the contemporary McCarthyist persecution of artists, labour organisers, and political dissidents—and the Nazi practice of burning books, and people.

*Metropolis* (1927), *Modern Times* (1936), *Playtime* (1967): These films—directed by Fritz Lang, Charlie Chaplin, and Jacques Tati, respectively—satirise the ‘new high-velocity’ worker, the capitalist ‘frenzy for order,’ the dehumanising pace of the assembly line, and the ‘thorough-going Americanisation of life,’ together with the concomitant sacrifices borne by the working classes, in terms of freedom, health, sexual satisfaction, and even survival.<sup>12</sup> According to the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, the capitalist combination of Taylorism and puritanism amounted to ‘the

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<sup>7</sup> Franz Kafka, *El castillo*, trans. Luis Rutiaga (México, D.F.: Grupo Editorial Tomo, 2006), 165 (my translation).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 117 (my translation).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 265 (my translation).

<sup>10</sup> Stites, 52, 147–8, 169, 187–9.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 145–61.

biggest collective effort [ever made] to create, with unprecedented speed and a consciousness of purpose unique in history, a new type of worker and [person]’.<sup>13</sup>

Like Zamyatin, these filmmakers were critical of bourgeois society’s instrumentalisation of the proletariat. *Metropolis* reveals how the majesty of industrialists depends upon structural violence against the working class. Still, the reformist nature of Lang’s conclusion—wherein the male protagonist brings together the foreman with his father, the city’s boss—suggests an affinity with social-democratic, rather than revolutionary anti-capitalist politics. Monsieur Hulot, Tati’s recurring protagonist, is endlessly disoriented and bewildered by the frenetic and impersonal nature of life in modernity. He stands instead for friendliness and social connection, a slower pace of life, the pre-modern moral economy, and the integration of city with countryside.

Moreover, we know that Charles Dickens’ novels, which depict the dreary impacts of early industrial capitalism on English society, resonated with the young Charlie Chaplin. In *Modern Times*, his cinematic alter ego burns out due to speed-up on a conveyor belt, and ends up jailed numerous times for his radical iconoclasm—including being mistaken for the leader of a workers’ strike. According to Michael Chaplin, the artist’s eldest son, *The Great Dictator* (1940) was ‘the only film at that time that showed what was happening to the Jews in Germany’: that is, dispossession and ghettoization, as preludes to genocide. In his iconic speech at the film’s end, the elder Chaplin, who considered himself an anarchist,<sup>14</sup> outlines his humanist-internationalist vision:

‘I don’t want to rule or conquer anyone. I should like to help everyone, if possible: Jew, Gentile, Black man, white. We all want to help one another. Human beings are like that. We want to live by each other’s happiness, no by each other’s misery [...].

Soldiers, don’t give yourself to brutes! Men who despise you, enslave you, who regiment your lives, tell you what to do, what to think and what to feel! Who drill you, diet you, treat you like cattle, use you as cannon fodder. Don’t give yourselves to these unnatural men—machine men, with machine minds and machine hearts! You are not machines; you are not cattle! You are men! You have the love of humanity in your hearts! You don’t hate! Only the unloved hate [...]. Soldiers don’t fight for slavery! Fight for liberty!

‘In the seventeenth chapter of St. Luke, it is written: ‘the Kingdom of God is within [you]’ [...]. In you! [...] Let us fight to free the world, to do away with national barriers, to do away with greed, with hate and intolerance. Let us fight for a world of reason, a world where science and progress will lead to all [people]’s happiness. Soldiers, in the name of democracy, let us all unite!’

*Dune* (1965): Set in the deep future over twenty millennia from now, the novels comprising Frank Herbert’s *Dune* universe contain themes critical of ecological destruction and political centralism. Feuding aristocratic dynasties and capitalist rackets merely reproduce the imperialist depredation our world knows so well, until the messianic figure Duke Paul Atreides—loosely

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<sup>13</sup> Christopher Chitty, *Sexual Hegemony: Statecraft, Sodomy, and Capital in the Rise of the World System* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), 170.

<sup>14</sup> Charlie Chaplin and Kevin Hayes, *Charlie Chaplin: Interviews* (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2005), 121.

based on the British Orientalist officer, T. E. Lawrence (AKA ‘Lawrence of Arabia’)—leads the autonomous, desert-dwelling, and Arab-coded Fremen in overthrowing the galactic fascism upheld by the Harkonnen and Corrino dynasties.

That being said, the sequel, *Dune Messiah* (1969), merely proves the Fremen ecologist Pardot Kynes right: ‘No more terrible disaster could befall [one’s] people than for them to fall into the hands of a Hero.’ In this vein, the revolution led by Paul merely reproduces previously-existing authoritarianism, raising it to an even higher level: billions lose their lives, and nearly a hundred planets are sterilized, as the ‘fanatic hordes’ plunder the universe in his name.<sup>15</sup> Presumably, this is in part a comment on the course of modern revolutions in the real world, whether American, French, Russian, or Chinese.

Yet, in a disturbing parallel to Georges Sorel, the syndicalist theorist who inspired Fascism by advocating a synthesis of socialism and nationalism, Herbert—an agent of the US Republican Party—betrays worrisome fixations with genetics, racialism, caste, myth, and violence in his six *Dune* novels. For example, Dr. Yueh, who betrays the Hellenic House Atreides to their Harkonnen rivals in the original story, is described as having Asian features, including a Chinese name.<sup>16</sup> Considering the profit to be made by new films revolving around such reactionary themes, in light of the Trumpist intersection of ‘rebellion’ with persistent hypermasculinity, we can expect Legendary Pictures to produce several sequels to the much-anticipated film version of *Dune* (2021) in the near future. After all, this year’s film adaptation covers only the first half of the first volume in the series.

*The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), *The Lathe of Heaven* (1971), *The Word for World is Forest* (1972): In these visionary works, Ursula Le Guin fashions her own “anti-*Dune*” worlds.<sup>17</sup> Reading *The Left Hand of Darkness*, audiences vicariously visit the icy planet Gethen and meet its inhabitants, who are abstinent and genderless for most days of every month, save for their brief cyclical entrance into ‘kemmer,’ when they become transiently male or female and erotically inclined. In *The Lathe of Heaven*, set in Portland, Oregon, Le Guin retells *Frankenstein* to critique the intersection of science with hierarchy and abuse. The Daoist protagonist George Orr discovers that he has a superpower which allows him to change history and the present through his dreams. He is an ‘effective dreamer,’ who, fearing his dreams, avoids them. Seeking out the psychiatrist William Haber, Orr finds that his emergent psychokinetic abilities will be exploited for Haber’s own purposes by means of an ‘Augmentor.’ Haber’s sadistic and technocratic visions, inserted into Orr’s consciousness while in the Augmentor, result in evermore bleak outcomes—until turtle-aliens invade the moon, and then Earth, ultimately for peaceful purposes.

*The Word for World is Forest*, which unfolds on the fictional forested planet of Athshe, functions to denounce colonialism, genocide, and ecocide in an allegory for the Vietnam War. Le Guin portrays humans from Earth as enslaving the indigenous humanoid Athsheans and logging the planet’s woods for profit. Echoing the real-life repulsion of the French and American imperialists from Vietnam through guerrilla warfare, such super-exploitation leads the Athsheans to rise up and expel the humans from the planet altogether.

*THX 1138* (1971), *Star Wars* (1977): George Lucas’s first film, *THX 1138*, examines the title-character’s rebellion against—and ultimate escape from—a politically repressive and sex-negative

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<sup>15</sup> Frank Herbert, *Dune* (New York: ACE Books, 1965), 269, 309.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>17</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (Verso: London, 2005), 268.

future-society. The plot alludes to Plato's allegorical 'ascent of the soul' from the darkness of the underground cave to the sunlight. In this hell envisioned by Lucas, humans serve as little more than automatons who labor to construct robot-police, and so reproduce their own oppression. As in Palei, Zamyatin, and Bradbury's dystopias, the social control of workers in *THX 1138* is attained through television, religion, the pharmaceutical suppression of Eros and emotion, and police brutality. In this way, the film shows human love, exile, and bricolage ('making do with what is on hand') to be important anti-authoritarian strategies for rebellion and survival.

In the film, 'Thex' falls in love with 'Luh' after she switches out his sex-inhibition drugs. Then, after Luh is summarily executed for her erotic disobedience, Thex appropriates a police-car to escape from this dim world. The robot-police retreat, just as Thex reaches the surface by ladder, simply because the operation to neutralize him had by that point surpassed its allocated budget.

The *Star Wars* saga, which has produced billions of dollars for its producers, directors, and investors over the past near half-century, extends the political anti-authoritarianism of *THX 1138* into a space opera, set—as we know—in a distant galaxy, 'a long time ago.' The classic struggle between the Rebel Alliance and the Galactic Empire at the heart of the original trilogy (1977–1983) served as allegories for the Vietnam and Cold Wars, and the mysteriously productive concept of the light side of 'The Force' can be likened to the paradoxical advantage that guerrillas fighting for a cause often have over their technologically and numerically superior opponents. (It is also reminiscent of the Fremen's incredible power arrayed against Houses Harkonnen and Corrino in *Dune*, and perhaps ironically, of the Taliban's recent *blitzkrieg* to seize power in Afghanistan.) The Death Star recalls the atomic and thermonuclear weapons developed and used by the US, and the dark side of the Force brings to mind the violence of the Nazis, the British Empire, and US settler-colonialism. Therefore, *Star Wars* can be viewed as Lucas' symbolic rebellion against the father figure represented by Uncle Sam. At the same time, for Mumia Abu-Jamal, the double-sided meaning of *Star Wars* for the US-American imaginary is this: 'we *were* rebels; we *are* Empire.'<sup>18</sup>

*Terminator* (1984-present): The six films that comprise the grimdark *Terminator* series explore the concern that the Russian astrophysicist Iosif Shklovsky and the Polish sci-fi writer Stanisław Lem had expressed in the 1960s about humanity's future prospects: specifically, that, besides the risk of self-destruction through weapons of mass destruction, artificial intelligence (AI) must be considered a threat to our survival. The first two *Terminator* films (1984, 1991), co-written and directed by James Cameron, peer into this future dystopian world, based on the established power of technocratic bureaucracy, capitalism, and militarism in our own. The result is a post-apocalyptic Los Angeles, marred by nuclear war, and 'controlled by a vast Terminator army, seeking daily to destroy the remnants of humanity. The ground is littered with human skulls and corpses. [Humanity] is completely subjugated, and those who haven't been killed are forced to work for the machines to clean up the bodies.'

As cybernetic organisms, or cyborgs, the Terminators sent back through time by the military AI known as Skynet ruthlessly target the leaders of the future Resistance—Sarah and/or John Connor, Dani Ramos, and their friends. They will stop at nothing to complete their missions: they will drag anyone 'beneath the wheels of the Juggernaut of capital.' Ironically, though, in the original *Terminator*, we learn that the machine overlords send their cyborg assassin back in

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<sup>18</sup> Mumia Abu-Jamal, "Star Wars and the American Imagination," in Octavia's Brood, eds. Adrienne Marie Brown and Walidah Imarisha (AK Press/Institute for Anarchist Studies, 2015), 257.

time in a bid to change the past, given that the Resistance ultimately overwhelms them on the battlefield—in an illustration of quintessential human resilience.

As profitable social-protest films, the *Terminator* series helpfully illuminates the ultra-violence lurking just beneath everyday life under capitalism. Along these lines, we see that violence against women and political reaction go hand in hand; that the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) is simultaneously the Terminator's self *and* Other; that the T-800 and T-1000 sent by Skynet in the first two films clearly resemble neo-Nazi terrorists; and that the 'right to bear arms,' enshrined by the Second Amendment to the US Constitution, facilitates mass-murder. Likewise, the machinery used in construction to destroy buildings resembles the tanks and artillery used in shooting wars—much as the concept of a 'Walking Cargo Vehicle' inspired George Lucas's design of the Imperial AT-AT's in *Star Wars*. Living out disaster communism, Sarah Connor crushes the first Terminator inside a hydraulic press.

In her *Cyborg Manifesto* (1985), the feminist ecologist Donna Haraway asserts that we are all, by this time, 'fabricated hybrids of machine and organism—in short, cyborgs.' Although cyborgs such as the Terminators are born of militarism, 'patriarchal capitalism,' and 'state socialism,' they too can join the anti-fascist rebellion, and aid in its victory.<sup>19</sup>

*Jurassic Park* (1993 film): Based on Michael Crichton's 1990 novel of the same name, Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* amounts to a 'scaretopia' warning us of the risks of genetic engineering in particular, as well as of capitalism and instrumental rationality more broadly. This latter concept of instrumental reason refers to the compulsion to "get things done." Under capitalism, this is accomplished by workers complying with orders handed down by the bosses, rather than through the free use of the mind. In this case, for workers to have autonomy would allow them to 'stop to think if they should' in fact proceed with the plan to resurrect dinosaurs 65 million years after their extinction.

Considering how the dinosaurs rebel against their confinement and smash the infrastructure engaging them for the purposes of commodification and human entertainment, *Jurassic Park* can be viewed as a variation on *Frankenstein* that implicitly affirms the cause of animal liberation and the subversive meaning of chaos theory and fractals—Crichton's disastrous late turn to climate-denialism notwithstanding. In this light, it appears that the investors currently backing the Colossal biotech firm's bid to resurrect woolly mammoths in the Arctic to help preserve the melting permafrost missed the lessons of Crichton's novel, and of Spielberg's film adaptation of it.

*The Parable of the Sower* (1993): The first installment in the two-part *Earthseed* series, Octavia E. Butler's *The Parable of the Sower* integrates this Black feminist author's adverse childhood experiences with racism, poverty, and depression into a social novel which champions struggle to transform the world. Butler's youthful alter ego, Lauren Olamina, is an empath who begins the story living with her family in a gated 'company town' in Southern California that effectively provides slave labor for corporations. Marauding murderers and rapists linger just outside the compound's walls. One day, robbers break into their community, killing Lauren's family, destroying her home, and turning her out. Suddenly made homeless, Olamina sets out for northern California by foot, finding companions, comrades, and a lover along the way. Following from her Buddhist discovery that the 'only lasting truth is change,' Olamina founds the humanistic

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<sup>19</sup> Donna Haraway, *Manifestly Haraway* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 7, 9–10.

Earthseed religion, which emphasizes proactive social reconstruction, community, and proselytization, proposing a destiny for its adherents among the stars.<sup>20</sup>

## Conclusion

Visionary science fiction flourished in early Soviet Russia until Stalin banned it, according to this autocrat's goal of figuratively performing a 'fantasectomy' upon the radical imagination<sup>21</sup>. Such repressiveness facilitated social control and sounded the death-knell of the Russian Revolution, as we see portrayed in *We*, in much the same way that Puritanism, Taylorism, and Fordism have reproduced capitalist oppression in US society—as the dystopias *Metropolis*, *Battle in the Ether*, *Gulfstream*, *Modern Times*, *Fahrenheit 451*, and *THX 1138* show. In this vein, the German anarcho-syndicalist Rudolf Rocker was right to observe that Stalinism and Fascism formed, 'part of a transnational process reinforcing hierarchies in which the worker was inevitably reduced to an anonymous piece of machinery in mass society.' As such, the totalitarian regimes of the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany represented not alternatives to capitalism, but, rather, intensifications of its governing maxims: namely, to manipulate, instrumentalise, and dominate the working classes and nature.

Following the resolution of the Commune(e)s of Paris, and anticipating the 1921 battle of Blair Mountain in West Virginia, Jack London's *The Iron Heel* envisioned the State adopting an authoritarian, militaristic strategy to ensure that the workers in revolt would not succeed in overthrowing capitalism. Along similar lines, Henry Ford and Hitler mutually admired each other, whereas Ford and Stalin made a deal in 1929. In turn, a decade later, Stalin would effectively ally with Hitler to conquer Poland, the home of Europe's largest Jewish community, and launch World War II.

That being said, it is remarkable to consider how utopian and dystopian anti-capitalist themes from early Soviet art have resonated in the literature, films, and games created over the past century—even, and especially, by Western artists, to this day. The *Terminator* and *Matrix* franchises are testaments to this dynamic, and the same could be said about the *Star Trek* and *Deus Ex* universes, as well as the utopian literature of Ursula Le Guin and Kim Stanley Robinson. In the concluding part to this series, we will explore these works—alongside *News from Nowhere*, *Octavia's Brood*, 'Imagining the Future in the Middle East and North Africa,' and others—as ingenious attempts to reach communist h(e)avens.

For now, we are left to marvel at *The Lathe of Heaven* and *Jurassic Park* as variations on Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Implicitly, all three works function to critique the instrumental or technical reason underpinning bourgeois society. In parallel, *Star Wars* borrows heavily from *Dune* in its critique of imperial domination, although George Lucas integrates his opposition to the Vietnam War into the original trilogy, thus presenting a more humanistic, and optimistic, resolution to his films than does the left-right syncretist Frank Herbert in his books. For his part, Franz Kafka was right to portray life under bureaucracy (whether capitalist or 'socialist') as a nightmare. Finally, Octavia Butler's *Earthseed* series vividly portrays the intersections of racism,

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<sup>20</sup> Tananarive Due, "The Only Lasting Truth," in *Octavia's Brood*, eds. Adrienne Marie Brown and Walidah Imarisha (AK Press/Institute for Anarchist Studies, 2015), 259–77.

<sup>21</sup> Stites 236.

patriarchy, and the exploitation of labor in late-capitalist society, while tracing the dialectical struggle between oppression and liberation—the movement from dystopia to utopia.



## On The Shores of Communist H(e)avens

*In this concluding part of our analysis of speculative fiction as protest art, we will wrap up the discussion of ‘capitalist hells’ from parts I and II; consider a few cases of art-works combining utopian and dystopian elements, including Elysium, Octavia’s Brood, and Palestine +100; and then pivot to contemplating the ‘communist heavens’ and ‘alternative’ and/or ‘anti-modern utopias’ envisioned by William Morris, Ursula K. Le Guin, Gene Roddenberry, and Kim Stanley Robinson, among others.*

*Correction to part II: Pardot Kynes, from Frank Herbert’s Dune (1965), is an imperial, not Fremen, ecologist; in the novel, he is father to Liet-Kynes, and grand-father to Chani. Liet is played by Max von Sydow in David Lynch’s 1984 film adaptation, Karel Dobry in the 2000 Sci-Fi edition, and Sharon Duncan-Brewster in Denis Villeneuve’s 2021 version.*

So far, in this three-part series on visionary fiction, we have considered some of the critical functions that protest art may serve, in terms of the links between the imagination and political resistance. Against the ruling ‘master symbols’ that impart unreason and brutality, ‘counter-symbols may arise,’ as reflections of ‘an ideal community of the imagination.’<sup>1</sup> In the anarchist tradition, such counter-symbols include red and black color schemes and flags, the circle A, the idea of ‘One Big Union,’ and songs such as ‘The Internationale,’ ‘Solidarity Forever,’ and ‘A Las Barricadas.’ Anti-authoritarians have also long used photography, poetry, theater, novels, journals, essays, periodicals, comics, zines, and films to convey our hopes for better futures. Indeed, writer Jesse Cohn observes that we anarchists ‘practice culture as a means of mental and moral survival in a world from which [we] are fundamentally alienated.’<sup>2</sup>

In their much-anticipated new study, *The Dawn of Everything* (2021), the archaeologist David Wengrow and the late anthropologist David Graeber affirm the ethnologist Claude Lévi-Strauss’s idea that ‘mythological thought [...] is better conceived as a kind of ‘neolithic science’ inseparable from our humanity, from the very beginning. For this reason, Wengrow and Graeber celebrate the cultural phenomena of carnival and inversion, which feature in speculative fiction and protest art: ‘In carnival, women might rule over men and children [might] be put in charge of government. Servants could demand work from their masters, ancestors could return from the dead, ‘carnival kings’ could be crowned and then dethroned, giant monuments like wicker dragons built and set on fire [...]’ They find such festivals significant, because they remind participants and observers alike that ‘other arrangements are feasible,’ compared to what is dominant at any given time.

Even so, while celebrating how artistic counter-symbols sustain the mental and physical possibilities of ‘striv[ing] to realize [anarchist] communit[ies] in actuality’ by ‘evok[ing] a sense of

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<sup>1</sup> Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills, *Character and Social Structure: The Psychology of Social Institutions* (Routledge: London, 1954), 288.

<sup>2</sup> Jesse Cohn, *Underground Passages: Anarchist Resistance Culture, 1848–2011* (Oakland: AK Press, 2014), 15 (emphasis in original). Some examples of anarchist protest art might include Колокол (‘The Bell,’ 1857–1867), War and Peace (1869), L’Homme et la Terre (‘Humanity and the Earth,’ 1905–1908), Regeneración (‘Regeneration,’ 1900–1918), ‘Written in Red’ (1911), Living My Life (1931–1934), Animal Farm (1945), The Rebel (1951), Viva Zapata! (1952), Salt of the Earth (1954), Can Dialectics Break Bricks? (1973), Libertarias (1996), La Commune (2000), Maggots and Men (2009), World War III Illustrated (1979–2014), and Processed World (1981–2005).

possible worlds worth fighting for,<sup>3</sup> we must recognize that verbal and visual images critical of capital and authority have been thoroughly commodified in popular media. As voiced by Thomas Wilson Jardine, the concern is that this phenomenon of recuperation will merely function as a safety valve which ultimately ends up serving the end of social control, besides generating investors in the entertainment industry a great deal of profit.

Along these lines, at the end of *The Matrix Revolutions* (2003), the conclusion to the original cyberpunk trilogy *The Matrix* (1999–2003), the protagonist Neo responds to his nemesis Smith’s query as to why he persists in his seemingly hopeless struggle by saying, ‘Because I choose to.’ While this is not the same as disclosing that he is driven by some radical duty or cause, Neo’s reply nonetheless echoes the U.S. anarchist poet Hayden Carruth’s observation that:

‘the real revolutionary is the one who can see  
all dark ahead and behind, [their] fate  
a need without a hope: *the will to resist*.<sup>4</sup>

Be that as it may, the trilogy’s anti-systemic messianism champions the epic hero of Western iconography, emblematically centers masculinity and whiteness, and emphasizes individual over collective action. After all, Trinity and Morpheus are mere supporting characters for Neo in the original films, and it remains to be seen whether the much-anticipated *The Matrix Resurrection* (2021) will improve on this dynamic. Like *Dune*, these movies remind us that subversiveness cuts both ways—sometimes, simultaneously—to portend both recuperation into male authority and racial capitalism, as well as the creation of liberatory counter-publics.

With this dynamic in mind, we will defend anti-authoritarian subversiveness and visionary existentialism in this concluding part of our series on speculative fiction as protest art, wherein we consider “capitalist hells,” “communist heavens,” and “alternative” and/or “anti-modern utopias.”

## **Visionary Fiction, from the Turn of the Twenty-First Century to Present**

*Deus Ex* (1999–2016): Although the various role-playing games in the cyberpunk *Deus Ex* universe are relatively open-ended, they jointly communicate Kafka-esque, Orwellian, and ‘negative-anarchist’ visions of totally administered worlds.<sup>5</sup> In the original *Deus Ex* (1999) and in its more recent iterations, *Human Revolution* (2011) and *Mankind Divided* (2016), the main characters, who are vaguely queer-coded cyborg super-soldiers, undergo thematic journeys of self-discovery and exile, as they encounter political corruption, inequality, ultra-violence, homelessness, medical abuse, and discrimination as ‘Augs.’ Players begin *Deus Ex* on the side of the police and the State, but—echoing *Blade Runner* (1982) and *Blade Runner 2049* (2017)—these ‘red detective[s]’ slowly realize the folly of power by bearing witness to the conspiratorial brutality of the authorities and the lies of the mass-media. Players end up defecting to anti-systemic resistance

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<sup>3</sup> Gerth and Mills 288; Cohn 269.

<sup>4</sup> Hayden Carruth, *Brothers: I Loved You All: Poems, 1969–1977* (New York: Sheep Meadow Press, 1978), 93–4 (emphasis in original).

<sup>5</sup> Michael Löwy, *Redemption and Utopia: Jewish Libertarian Thought in Central Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 71–94.

movements.<sup>6</sup> (The alternative options, admittedly, are to serve the ‘Illuminati’ [an anti-Semitic trope], or oneself.)

At their best, the augmented playable characters in *Deus Ex* are ‘Anarchist Action M[e] n’ who recall Alex Murphy at the end of *RoboCop* (1987), Douglas Quaid in *Total Recall* (1990), the T-800 from *Terminator 2* (1991), and Neo from *The Matrix*. Furthermore, they are reminiscent of Miguel Cervantes’ classic knight-errant Don Quixote, ‘a figure sincerely beloved by anarchists’ for his idealism and commitment to direct action.<sup>7</sup> Although only in *Deus Ex: Invisible War* (2003) can gamers choose to play as a female heroine, thus reflecting and perpetuating the toxic masculinity for which the industry is notorious, the *Deus Ex* series not only creatively satirizes many of the social, political, and economic ills of our time, but also allows players the virtual choice to perpetuate or contest these.

Sid Meier’s *Alpha Centauri* (1999): This innovative computer strategy game, which builds on the well-known *Civilization* series, imagines human groups settling on ‘Chiron’ in the Alpha Centauri star system, located 4 light-years from Earth. Having reached Alpha Centauri in the twenty-second century, the interstellar travelers break up into numerous political factions upon planet fall. Gamers can choose to play as the Green ‘Gaia’s Stepdaughters,’ the fundamentalist ‘Lord’s Believers,’ the capitalist ‘Morgan Industries,’ or the despotic-collectivist ‘Human Hive,’ among others. The expansion pack *Alien Crossfire* (1999) adds the syndicalist ‘Free Drones,’ cyborgs, ‘Data Angels,’ and two indigenous alien factions. With a highly customizable interface that permits mod-ability, includes an expansive technology tree, and integrates astute speculation on the future course of humankind, *Alpha Centauri* makes for a unique experiment in the digital construction of new societies that goes beyond the typical one-dimensional game. Indeed, as we shall see below, an unacknowledged source for the makers of *Alpha Centauri* may have been Kim Stanley Robinson’s original *Mars* (1992–1996) trilogy.

In parallel to the game, back on Earth, anarchists are divided among ourselves, and we confront numerous enemy forces, from the State to capitalists, fascists, and Stalinists. Hopefully, we can unite and find allies to propel global anti-authoritarian and ecological revolution, before world leaders lead humanity to our doom through war, future pandemics, totalitarian takeovers, and/or ecological catastrophe.

*Elysium* (2013), *Sleep Dealer* (2008): *Elysium*, written and directed by District 9’s director Neil Blomkamp, is a slice of life from the apocalyptic landscape of Los Angeles in 2154, juxtaposed with the orbiting space-station Elysium, which is home to the affluent capitalist overlords of the future. While on Elysium there are many green, open spaces, with mansions adorned by pools and maintained by servant-bots—akin, perhaps, to the humanoid ‘Tesla Bots’ recently announced by Elon Musk—Earth-dwellers confront veritably infernal conditions. In fact, the “Earth” scenes were filmed in the *Bordo Poniente* landfill in Mexico City (one of the largest in the world, before its closure), while the Elysium scenes were shot in Vancouver, British Columbia.

The film’s protagonist, Max (played by Matt Damon), is seriously injured by a workplace accident in LA, due to negligence and pressure from his supervisor. With mere days to live, Max tries desperately to find a way aboard the remote and highly fortified *space station*, where highly advanced therapeutic machines hold out the promise of freeing the body from all ailments and

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<sup>6</sup> Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 172–3.

<sup>7</sup> Cohn 63, 287.

disease. With the help of his mostly Latin@ comrades, Max overwhelms Elysium's defenses and sacrifices himself to ensure that all Earth residents become Elysian citizens, and so are allowed free, life-saving medical treatment.

In its internationalism, its cosmopolitan focus on migration, and its concern with militarism and labor exploitation, *Elysium* shares many themes with its fellow dystopian social science-fiction film *Sleep Dealer*, which envisions Mexican proletarians renting themselves out digitally to work as labor-bots in factories on the other side of the U.S.-Mexico border—which is closed, and patrolled by killer drones—all while remaining in their home country. This is something that U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris has urged. Both films therefore critique borders, inequality, and labor in a manner consistent with anarchist principles, calling to mind the ongoing importance of class struggle, humanism, cross-border organizing, and migrant solidarity.

*Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements* (2015): This striking volume of visionary fiction, written mostly by people of color, renders homage to Octavia Butler's profound contributions to the development of anarcho-feminist and anti-racist themes in sci-fi and protest literature. In 'Revolution Shuffle,' Bao Phi imagines Asian- and Arab-Americans, 'Pacific Islanders, Native Americans, Chicanos, and Black people' thrown into concentration camps by the authorities *en masse*, as guerrillas look on, contemplating launching a war 'that might just turn into something like a revolution.'<sup>8</sup> In her contribution, co-editor Walidah Imarisha imagines an itinerant, avenging Black Angel who rescues Palestinians and Mexicans from marauding neo-Nazis and ICE agents, respectively, using overwhelming force. Having been expelled from heaven for questioning God's complicity with wickedness, A. seeks to be one of the righteous ones 'who fight against [oppression], who push the forces of destruction back.'<sup>9</sup>

In a similar vein, disability activist Mia Mingus envisions a commune of people with disabilities ('UnPerfects,' or 'U.P.s') finding solace in autonomous life on a distant planet, far from Earth, where a new wave of annihilatory attacks on 'U.P.s' recalls the horrors of Nazi Germany.<sup>10</sup> In an excerpt from *Aftermath* (1997), LeVar Burton, of *Roots* and *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, foresees the Black Dr. Rene Reynolds inventing a 'Neuro-Enhancer' that could cure all disease, but then being enslaved by traffickers who target dark-skinned people. Grimly, these slavers turn around and sell the skins of their victims of color to whites for the purposes of grafting, or 'skin fusion,' to protect the latter against cancer, in light of the catastrophic depletion of the ozone layer.<sup>11</sup> Notably, as well, *Octavia's Brood* includes an excerpt from Terry Bisson's *Fire on the Mountain* (1988), an alternate utopian history of the U.S., wherein slaves and abolitionists successfully liberate the South from Confederate rule, leading to the founding of the independent Black socialist State of Nova Africa. *Octavia's Brood* therefore represents a timely and intersectional intervention that can animate a politics of resistance and decolonization against white supremacy, fascism, and ableism, in keeping with Black Lives Matter, Antifa, and disability-justice movements.

*Palestine + 100* (2019): In this collection of speculative stories about Palestine's future a century after the *Nakba*—the ethnic cleansing of up to three-quarters of a million Palestinians, on which Israel was founded in 1948—Palestinian writers defamiliarize and question their everyday lives, which under Occupation amount to 'a kind of a dystopia,' according to editor Basma Ghalayini.

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<sup>8</sup> Bao Phi, 'Revolution Shuffle,' in *Octavia's Brood*, eds. Adrienne Marie Brown and Walidah Imarisha (AK Press/Institute for Anarchist Studies, 2015), 11, 14.

<sup>9</sup> Walidah Imarisha, 'Black Angel,' in *Octavia's Brood*, 50 (emphasis in original).

<sup>10</sup> Mia Mingus, 'Hollow,' in *Octavia's Brood*, 109–21.

<sup>11</sup> LeVar Burton, 'Aftermath,' in *Octavia's Brood*, 215–23.

Contributors Saleem Haddad and Selma Dabbagh report that they found the writing process to have been therapeutic, and unexpectedly liberating. Along these lines, *Palestine + 100* has the power to ‘ope[n] up a whole [new] world’ for writers and audiences alike, proclaims Dabbagh. In her review of the volume, Ramona Wadi observes that the volume’s fiction ‘offers an alternative to imagine and communicate these fantastical forays into a not-so distant future, while never forgetting about the historical trauma impacting generations since the Nakba.’ Indeed, in June 2021, following another shooting war between Israel and Hamas that took the lives of at least 248 Palestinians and 12 Israelis, Palestinians attested to the centrality of the radical social imaginary in their ongoing struggle for justice by dreaming online of life as if the Occupation had ended, using the hashtag #TweetLikeItsFree.

## Heavenly Communism

Alongside the “capitalist hells” from history and present that pervade sci-fi, visionary fiction also features previews of “communist heavens” at the terrestrial, interplanetary, and galactic levels. Inspired by the Russian Marxist Alexander Bogdanov’s *Red Star* (1908), a two-volume novel set three hundred years in the future in a ‘Martian-Marxian society’ observing full communism, Russian science-fiction writers from the early Soviet period lyrically explored modernization, ‘the outer reaches of technical innovation,’ and the use of science to dominate nature, while proclaiming ‘the ultimate triumph of the shining *pravda* [truth] of social justice over the dark *krivda* [wickedness] of greed and power hunger.’ In this sense, in contrast to the pessimism of the Fabian socialist H. G. Wells, author of *The War of the Worlds* (1897), Soviet speculative writers marshaled revolutionary ideology and critical sociology to optimistically envision utopian futures—in turn, presumably moving Ursula K. Le Guin, Gene Roddenberry, and Kim Stanley Robinson to do much the same, as we shall see.<sup>12</sup>

Along these lines, in April and May 2021, artists from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region publicly mused about the future through the prism of sci-fi. For this series, the Egyptian novelist Ahmad El Fakharany exclaims that ‘Heaven is the world’s motor, the mirage it needs. We will never lose its effects. We will never stop pursuing it.’ Likewise, the Egyptian poet Khadija Al-Saadi identifies fiction as a ‘certain reality that contributes to change and transformation—what I think about, I work on. Ideas are free and roam different worlds.’ She adds that ‘[s]cience fiction is accessible to anyone who thinks about it in depth, calmly and methodically. After thinking, the images come, and then answers.’

To this point, the British eco-socialist poet and designer William Morris (1834–1896) wrote *News From Nowhere* (1891) as an ‘Epoch of Rest’ and a ‘Utopian Romance.’ Although this novella depicts communist h(e)avens, it may more accurately be classified as an anti-modern utopia integrating Romantic, pastoral, and even proto-solarpunk themes.<sup>13</sup> Recalling Tao Qian’s ‘Peach Blossom Spring’ (421 C.E.), Morris’ alter ego, William Guest, awakens the morning after a discussion at the Socialist League about the ‘Morrow of the Revolution,’ only to find himself in a paradoxically future-medieval London, set in 2102, from which the factories and associated pollution have disappeared. Remarkably, he discovers that poverty and class have been eliminated, that workers are healthy in body and mind, and that the people’s social character is warm, joy-

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<sup>12</sup> Stites 32–3, 172.

<sup>13</sup> Stites 174.

ous, and humanistic, such that they resemble a ‘bed of tulips in the sun.’ In place of a ‘country of huge and foul workshops,’ railways, and robber barons, England and its fields have become ‘a garden, where nothing is wasted and nothing is spoilt,’ and ‘made for the pleasure as well as the livelihood of all.’ In this liberated world, capitalism, industrialism, and Puritanism have been overthrown, and ‘mastery has changed into fellowship.’<sup>14</sup>

During a boat ride down the Thames River, Guest and his fellow dreamer Ellen encounter ‘a mill [...] as beautiful in its way as a Gothic cathedral,’ and amidst the sounds of blackbirds, doves, rooks, and swifts, they visit an old house built by peasants from Guest’s timeline, and there jointly contemplate what the psychoanalyst Nancy Chodorow might term the ‘living’ or ‘unconscious past.’<sup>15</sup> Ellen presents socialist-feminist reflections on how she would have been ‘wrecked and wasted [...] either by penury or by luxury,’ had she had the misfortune of being born in the nineteenth rather than twenty-second century.<sup>16</sup> Yet, soon after joining his friends for a communal feast at a medieval church, Guest awakens, hoping passionately that his reveries could become a political vision for the future.

The importance of Morris’ Romantic-revolutionary outlook should not be underestimated. All of it remains relevant today. In Cohn’s words, the message of *News from Nowhere* speaks to a ‘key component of anarchist dreaming’: that is, ‘the process of reconciliation and reintegration that would constitute a society of equals without producing another Terror.’<sup>17</sup> In *Spaces of Hope* (2000), David Harvey employs the motif of falling asleep amidst a bout of political despair to envision a radically different, non-repressive future society. The film *Total Recall* (1990)—starring Arnold Schwarzenegger as a disaffected worker who either goes to Mars to lead a successful planetary insurrection against the capitalist overlords, or merely fantasizes about doing so—relies on a very similar premise. Riffing off Morris’ communalist anti-industrialism, Paul Glover’s ecotopian *Los Angeles: A History of the Future* (1984) envisions the peoples of Santa Monica and Boyle Heights reaching self-sufficiency and replacing car-centric urban planning designs with orchards that are communicated by bikeways and solar-powered rail.<sup>18</sup> Hopefully, with greater movement toward unionization of the U.S. working class during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the ‘Great Resignation’ of laborers quitting ‘bullshit jobs’ *en masse*, the power of State and capital can be further destabilized, so that workers and communities come to replace the State and capital as decision-makers in the future. Green and community syndicalism hold more promise for reaching a sustainable, egalitarian future, when compared to the gross negligence that has been exhibited by world leaders for decades, in the face of the collective death sentence posed by global warming.

In a similar vein to *News from Nowhere*, Alexander V. Chayanov’s 1920 fictional work, *My Brother Alexei’s Journey into the Land of Peasant Utopia*, begins with a proletarian leaving his job one night in 1921, ‘disgusted at the mechanical extremism of the socialist regime in which he lives.’ He falls asleep, awakening over sixty years later in a future Russia wherein the Bolsheviks have been overthrown by the Socialist Revolutionaries, and large cities and the centralized State destroyed. Self-evidently, such a vision deviates radically from Marxist prescriptions for the future. That having been said, for envisioning an agrarian society that would be self-governed

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<sup>14</sup> William Morris, *News from Nowhere and Other Writings* (London: Penguin, 2004), 43–8, 105, 211–6, 226, 228.

<sup>15</sup> Nancy Chodorow, *The Power of Feelings* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999).

<sup>16</sup> Morris 215, 223.

<sup>17</sup> Cohn 209.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 322–4.

by cooperatives, but not necessarily opposed to private ownership or traditional peasant culture, Chayanov perished in Stalin's Gulag in the early 1930's.<sup>19</sup>

## Le Guin's Ambiguously Utopian Futures

The visionary anarcho-feminist Ursula K. Le Guin's award-winning novels *The Dispossessed* (1974) and *Always Coming Home* (1985) combine elements of heavenly communism with anti-modern and alternative utopianism to contemplate possible anti-authoritarian futures for humanity. Following in the steps of her parents, the ethnologists A. L. and Theodora Kroeber, Le Guin (1929–2018) uses anthropological approaches to narrate these “ambiguous utopias.”

*The Dispossessed* describes a future anarcho-communist society in the Tau Ceti solar system being constructed on the desolate moon Anarres, whose courageous inhabitants have broken away from the bourgeois-patriarchal society based on the more ecologically bountiful home planet of Urras. Led by the prophetess Odo, the Anarresti resist socio-political authoritarianism by engaging in cooperation, encouraging free love and sexuality (including LGBTQ dimensions), and creating a new language that lacks possessives, thus consciously building what Le Guin terms ‘the most idealistic, and [...] the most interesting, of all political theories.’ The Anarresti physicist Shevek, the work's protagonist, visits Urras, only to encounter class divisions, sexual repression, and militaristic State violence. By contrast, Shevek's experience in the capitalist hell of Urras does not mean that life on Anarres is perfect, for Le Guin warns of the risks of group conformity and stagnation, even among mindful anti-authoritarians who have consciously overcome many of the problems faced by the Urrasti.

The novel's title is likely a play on Fëdor Dostoevsky's *The Possessed* (1871–1872),<sup>20</sup> and its plot presents a critique of the opportunistic and deranged social character which Dostoevsky imputes to anarchists in his reactionary satire. In this sense, when the Marxist literary commentator Fredric Jameson criticizes the links Le Guin traces among ‘institutionalized warfare, centralization and psychic aggression’ as ‘preoccupations of a characteristically liberal type,’ he merely tells on himself, while echoing Dostoevsky and Marx's authoritarian caricatures of anarchism—not to mention those propagated by neo-Stalinists in the twenty-first century.<sup>21</sup>

Beyond the political novel of *The Dispossessed*, *Always Coming Home* synthesizes speculative ethnology with poetry, parables, music, spiritual journeys, and emblematic memoirs to construct the world of the so-called Kesh, an egalitarian people who institute a society based on anarcho-feminism, free love, communal horticulture, and the gift economy in ‘the Valley’ of California in the deep future. In ecological terms, this future-world is marked by capital's infernal devastation of the global climate. Implicitly speaking to the threat of sea-level rise posed by the melting of the world's glaciers and poles, a certain Grey Bull recalls a journey by boat to what must previously have been the San Francisco Bay Area, whose houses, buildings, streets, and roads now lie at ‘the bottom of the sea.’<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Stites 185–6.

<sup>20</sup> Cohn 228.

<sup>21</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (Verso: London, 2005), 276; Rohini Hensman, *Indefensible: Democracy, Counterrevolution, and the Rhetoric of Anti-Imperialism* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2018).

<sup>22</sup> Ursula K. Le Guin, *Always Coming Home* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 138.

‘Under the mud in the dark of the sea there  
books are, bones are [...] .  
There are too many souls there.’<sup>23</sup>

Speculatively, there may be a connection between this estranging journey into the effects of global warming, and the premise of Kim Stanley Robinson’s *New York 2140* (2017), which is set in a future wherein the polar ice caps have melted, and New York—like other low-lying cities—has been irreversibly inundated. In spite of the ecological constraints imposed not only by climate catastrophe, but also by past chemical pollution of the environment, Le Guin’s sympathetic portrayal of Kesh society in *Always Coming Home* arguably constitutes an (an)archaeology of the future: a vision, in other words, of ‘what [we] can become.’<sup>24</sup> The Kesh and their mysteriously advanced allies, ‘the Exchange,’ use soft technologies, including cybernetics and solar energy, to decentralize industry and society—thus integrating the past visions of Peter Kropotkin, Marshall Sahlins, Morris, and Lev Tolstoy.<sup>25</sup> The climate is fortunately stable enough to support horticulture. Through the practice of ‘*heyiya*,’ or the recognition of the links between the sacredness and interconnection of life, they institute Hermann Cohen’s vision of a ‘religion of reason.’

As a foil to the Kesh, Le Guin introduces the Condor People, a nomadic group of marauding male-supremacists and propertarians, who practice militarism, ultra-misogyny, and cruelty toward animals. Accordingly, in this work, ‘[t] he patriarchal [...] is identified with the imperialistic.’<sup>26</sup> Through their casteism, sexism, and ultra-violence, the Condor soldiers recall the Vikings, the Mongol empire, *conquistadores*, and Euro-American slaveowners of yore, as well as the Hindutva, Taliban, and Christian fundamentalists of today.

In sum, according to John P. Clark, Le Guin condemns ‘the manipulative world of domination we actually find ourselves in,’ while affirming ‘the cooperative world of freedom we are capable of creating.’<sup>27</sup>

## Star Trek: Communism in Space

The various *Star Trek* series (1966–present), the brainchild of Gene Roddenberry (1921–1991), closely follow Morris and Le Guin, in that they mix visions of communist h(e)avens with high-tech utopianism to consider a ‘good future’ for humanity. This arrives through the United Federation of Planets, which is co-founded among Earth and the planets Vulcan, Andor, and Tellar in the year 2161, after victory against the Romulan Star Empire, which had launched a nuclear war on Earth six years prior. The Earth-Romulan war, in turn, comes a century after World War III, which similarly involved the use of atomic weapons.

In this sense, the backstory of *Star Trek* pays tribute to the Russian engineer V. D. Nikolsky’s epic *In A Thousand Years* (1927), which involves a journey via ‘chronomobile’ into the future that anticipates the victory of socialism and humanism over capitalist imperialism, following a desperate period of nuclear war and bourgeois dictatorship.<sup>28</sup> In turn, Roddenberry renders

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 390.

<sup>24</sup> Riane Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future* (New York: HarperCollins, 1987), 5.

<sup>25</sup> Le Guin 379–80.

<sup>26</sup> Jameson 67.

<sup>27</sup> John P. Clark. ‘On Living in the World: Always Coming Home Revisited.’ *Fifth Estate*, forthcoming.

<sup>28</sup> Stites 176–7.



homage to the Argentine Trotskyist Juan Posadas, who adopted Michel Pablo's concept of nuclear catastrophism, whereby the workers of the world would survive the 'destruction of all bourgeois and bureaucratic institutions in nuclear war' to rebuild the world as socialist. Such an optimistic, catastrophic spirit might be germane to our own time, beset as we are by COVID-19 and unchecked global heating.

Broadly speaking, *Star Trek* can be viewed as a rationalist Enlightenment narrative about humanity's self-overcoming of infancy, mastery, and brutality. For instance, in 'Past Tense,' from *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* (1995), we learn that the 'Bell Riots' of San Francisco (2024) paved the way for the coming of the Federation, and *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (TNG, 1987) opens in the twenty-fourth century with the supernatural entity Q putting humanity on trial for the 'multiple and grievous savageries of the species.' Proving Q wrong, the crew of the *U.S.S. Enterprise* liberates an alien lifeform that had been imprisoned and exploited by the humanoid Bandi species at the Farpoint station. Such utopian visual images arguably connect to today's Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, trade-unionist, climate-justice, and Total Liberation movements, not to mention the Syrian or Rojava Revolutions.

In *The Original Series* (TOS, 1966–1969) and TNG, the Federation and its military-exploratory wing, Starfleet, are shown as constantly at odds with the Romulans—who follow the classical despotism of the Romans, instituting an authoritarian State, reified law, and private property<sup>29</sup>—and the Klingons, who are reminiscent of the Mongol, Qin(g), and Japanese Empires. Klingon 'Birds of Prey' could be likened to Bashar al-Assad, Vladimir Putin, and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's war planes, due to the cruel purposes they commonly serve, while the Romulans hold a mirror up to the sordid history of Western 'civilization.' For their part, the menacing, authoritarian-collectivist Borg may be meant to satirize Stalinist or Maoist state-capitalism, corporate capitalism, and/or the dangers of technology. In this sense, Roddenberry affirms Enlightenment and socialist humanism through the idea of the Federation struggling against the fascistic Borg, while conveying a future vision of the Third-Campist motto—devised by U.S. Trotskyists amidst the depths of the Cold War, and likely adapted from Shakespeare—of 'A plague on both their houses': namely, the U.S. and the U.S.S.R., or the Romulans and Klingons. In this vein, a similar critical analysis of present-day rivalries between the U.S.A. and the People's Republic of China would be in order.

Whereas the *Star Trek* universe presents a cooperative, inter-species, post-capitalist future, wherein the peoples of Earth have abolished poverty, scarcity, and profit, it also resembles Le Guin's 'ambiguous utopias,' as hierarchies of gender and race arguably persist in the Federation. The franchise's representation of Klingons as invariably Asian and/or Black also reproduces white supremacy—especially, as in TOS, when these Klingons are played by Euro-American actors. At the same time, Black, Asian, and/or female characters and actors play productive roles in several *Star Trek* series, and so contest racism and sexism, in an implicit nod to the Civil Rights Movement (contemporary to TOS). Nonetheless, due to the machinations of producer Rick Berman, LGBTQ representation and feminist themes were hampered for decades over multiple series.

At its best, *Star Trek* helps defamiliarize and question mainstream politics. The TNG episode 'Force of Nature' (1993) foresees the Federation Science Council imposing fleetwide limitations on warp speeds, due to concern that further high-warp emissions would prove destructive to the

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<sup>29</sup> Martin Malia, *Alexander Herzen and the Birth of Russian Socialism* (New York: Universal Library, 1961), 301–9.

fabric of space. In contrast, in our world, ‘the systems that were meant to validate and respond to’ the initial alert about COVID-19 ‘were too slow,’ and much the same could be said about the official response to the climate crisis, which threatens our future radically. To this point, although the third season of *Star Trek: Discovery* (2020) is set in an alternate future in the early fourth millennium, wherein the Federation has collapsed following a mysterious ‘Burn,’ anti-authoritarians and rebels committed to Starfleet principles still find each other and engage in high-tech communist insurrections. Likewise, the trailer for season 2 of *Picard* (2022) suggests that the crew of *La Sirena* goes back in time to our day to prevent a fascist takeover in an alternate future, without the Federation. Accordingly, the *Star Trek* franchise both encourages *and* profits from horizontalist politics and internationalist struggles.

## The Mars Trilogy and Red Moon

‘[D]o the best you can! Help all good causes!’<sup>30</sup>

The progressive visionary Kim Stanley Robinson’s *Mars* trilogy—*Red Mars* (1993), *Green Mars* (1994), and *Blue Mars* (1996)—renders homage to Bogdanov’s *Red Star* in its portrayal of the near-future colonization of the red planet, and its subsequent terraforming into a green and then blue planet, laden with oceans. Robinson, or KSR, integrates a utopian blending of red and green figurative imagery and eco-political thought to envision a Martian cultural and political revolution against the capitalist despotism based on Earth.<sup>31</sup> Many of the place-names he invents for the red planet pay tribute to the German critical theorist Ernst Bloch’s *Principle of Hope* (1954–1959). In his own words, KSR was forever ‘changed’ by reading Le Guin, whom he described upon her passing in 2018 as ‘a complete person of letters and an important public intellectual.’

Among the scientists who settle Mars in 2026 in KSR’s imagination, certain characters stand for different socio-ecological alternatives. For example, the prophetess Hiroko Ai, a leader of the ‘Green’ movement, which seeks to terraform Mars, stands for ‘viriditas’ and life, while her foil, the geologist Ann Clayborne, initially avows a ‘Red’ position of ‘*Mars First!*’, which is radically opposing to any form of geoengineering. In contrast, Ann’s erstwhile colleague Phyllis Boyle stands for capitalist modernization and the death drive, whereas Arkady Bogdanov, whom she assassinates, symbolizes anarcho-syndicalism. The engineer Nadia Cherneshevsky, his partner—whose last name alludes to the Russian revolutionary Nikolai Chernyshevsky, author of the social utopia *What Is To Be Done?* (1863)—emphasizes the critique of violence and social reconstruction following Terran retaliation against the First Martian Revolution, which takes place at the end of *Red Mars*. Furthermore, the Trinidadian anarchist stowaway known as ‘Coyote’ plays a crucial role in propagating ‘eco-economics,’ utopian socialism, and the gift economy in *Green Mars*. Ultimately, the Martian colonists succeed in transforming the planet into a ‘second Earth’ which has abolished private property, patriarchy, and social violence. As *Blue Mars* closes, on the new-found beaches of the fourth planet from the sun, the transformed elder Ann Clayborne reflects proudly:

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<sup>30</sup> Kim Stanley Robinson, *Red Moon* (New York: Orbit, 2018), 288.

<sup>31</sup> Jameson 409–16.

‘Beat on, heart. And why not admit it. Nowhere on this world were people killing each other, nowhere were they desperate for shelter or food, nowhere were they scared for their kids. There was that to be said.’<sup>32</sup>

In *Red Moon* (2018), KSR contemplates similar themes in a compelling visionary thriller that features inter-imperialist rivalry between the U.S. and China, as well as resistance movements in both countries that contest capitalist authoritarianism for the sake of a better future. The year is 2047, and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has colonized much of the moon, integrating it into the State as a ‘Special Administrative Region’—akin to the internal colonies of Tibet, Xinjiang, Macau, or Hong Kong, among others (not to mention much-coveted Taiwan). Although nationalism explains much of the impetus for China’s lunar presence, KSR describes how the moon also serves as a site to which the most polluting industries could be transferred, as well as an untapped source of mineral extraction, and a launchpad to the rest of space. Through estrangement, KSR presents a dual critique of the ‘G2’ of China and the U.S. as mirror-image ‘[p]artners in crime,’ while he metaphorically ponders ‘what it will take to achieve escape velocity [...] and fly off into a new space.’<sup>33</sup>

*Red Moon*’s main character is the revolutionary Chinese leader Chan Qi, a so-called ‘Party princess’ and daughter of the CCP’s finance minister, who is sympathetic to the New Left and a critic of Confucian sexism—but *not* a Party member. With the help of the U.S. quantum mechanic Fred Fredericks, Qi evades the nefarious bureaucratic forces that would capture or kill her, whether on Earth or the moon, to change the lunar-planetary system, by means of an inside-outside strategy. From her lunar hideout, Qi calls for an uprising in China, resulting in the popular occupation of Beijing. This mobilization for the ‘*China Dream*’ of a ‘*just world*’ in turn inspires a similar movement in Washington, D.C., galvanizing ‘a global people’s revolt,’ starting with a ‘G2 people’s revolt,’ that has ‘no leader.’ As in *The Ministry for the Future* (2020), such popular uprisings lead to significant governmental reforms, but also to the recovery and rehabilitation of State power. This paradox is reflected in the Daoist poet Ta Shu’s declaration—likely echoing KSR’s own contemporary views—that ‘[u]ltimately you need both’ pressure from below and top-down reforms to resist capitalism and combat global warming.<sup>34</sup>

While a grassroots strategy based in green and community syndicalism, feminism, and intersectionality may theoretically provide the best chance for radically mitigating climate destruction, overthrowing class society, emancipating humanity, and saving millions of other terrestrial and marine species from extinction, the ‘receiving sets’ for such revolutionary transformation are arguably missing at present. Moreover, as critical theorists and psychoanalysts emphasize, capitalism and hierarchy tend to reproduce themselves both in mind and reality through children’s socialization and education, proletarians’ working lives, and the imperatives of the culture industry. Along these lines, COP26 has shown the world yet again that the only measures which can be contemplated by capital and the State on the most fundamental questions about climate catastrophe fall radically short of the basic demand—presumably shared by everyone—for a livable planet.

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<sup>32</sup> Kim Stanley Robinson, *Blue Mars* (New York: Del Rey, 2017), 761.

<sup>33</sup> Robinson, *Red Moon*, 148, 181, 227, 232, 234–42.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 142, 157–9, 209, 231, 267 (emphasis in original), 268–9, 276–7, 327, 363–73, 410

## Conclusions

In this series on speculative fiction, we have seen numerous examples of the intimate connections binding radical artists, the social imaginary, visionary art, and revolutionary struggle across time and space. Utopian science fiction flourished in early Soviet Russia until Stalin banned it, according to his goal of figuratively performing a ‘fantasectomy’ of the revolutionary imagination, thus facilitating social control and the counter-revolutionary cause. As the German anarcho-syndicalist Rudolf Rocker argued, Stalinism and Fascism were ‘part of a transnational process reinforcing hierarchies in which the worker was inevitably reduced to an anonymous piece of machinery in mass society.’<sup>35</sup> As such, these totalitarian regimes had more in common with Fordist capitalism than not. It is not for nothing that Henry Ford and Hitler mutually admired each other, or that Ford and Stalin made a deal in 1929.

As opposed to the dystopias of capitalist and Communist hells alike, the competing emancipatory vision of exile, equality, and autonomy is conveyed by the Daoist dream of a ‘Peach Blossom Spring,’ Raúl Cruz’s imaginary Mayan steampunk creatures, and the egalitarian ‘new history of humanity’ uncovered by David Graeber and David Wengrow. The cause of collective liberation resonates in several of the art-works we have examined in these three articles: for example, *We, The Great Dictator*, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, *The Word for World is Forest*, *THX 1138*, *Star Wars*, *Terminator*, *The Parable of the Sower*, *Elysium*, *Octavia’s Brood*, *Palestine + 100*, ‘Imagining the Future in the Middle East and North Africa,’ *News from Nowhere*, *The Dispossessed*, *Always Coming Home*, *Star Trek*, the *Mars* trilogy, and *Red Moon*.

Like Octavia Butler, who believed the ‘highest imperative’ to be ‘action to create change,’ Walidah Imarisha rightly declares that ‘[a]ll organizing is science fiction.’<sup>36</sup> For this reason, while Jardine is right to warn us to be wary of media corporations trying to sell us anti-authoritarianism and anti-capitalism and lull us into interpassivity, perhaps more importantly, we should be mindful of the immense power our imaginations have to break capital’s infernal grip—not only over the mind, but also over reality, from which it is inseparable. In this series, we have seen how visionary protest art permits explorations of social problems and creative solutions to the same in past, present, and future.<sup>37</sup> In this sense, we would do well to heed Pranav Jeevan P’s invitation for us to ‘revisit and re-imagine these visions, understand and imbibe the ideas behind them and work towards creating our [own] Begumpura,’ our Peach Blossom Spring, our global Federation.

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<sup>35</sup> David Bernardini, ‘A different antifascism. An analysis of the Rise of Nazism as seen by anarchists during the Weimar period.’ *History of European Ideas* (2021), 6.

<sup>36</sup> Tananarive Due, ‘The Only Lasting Truth,’ in *Octavia’s Brood*, eds. Adrienne Marie Brown and Walidah Imarisha (AK Press/Institute for Anarchist Studies, 2015), 270; Imarisha 3.

<sup>37</sup> Stites 189, 226.

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