Future Humans in Fiction and Film

Future Humans in Fiction and Film

Edited by

Louisa MacKay Demerjian
and Karen F. Stein

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing

Future Humans in Fiction and Film

Edited by Louisa MacKay Demerjian and Karen F. Stein

This book first published 2018

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-5275-1319-X
ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-1319-8

To my family, as always.
LMD

To my children and to the children of the future.
KFS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is our pleasure to acknowledge the people and organizations who helped make this book happen.

First and foremost, all the scientists, and the authors of science fiction, films, TV shows, fantasies, etc. who write, produce, and create the stories that imagine the future, and challenge us to explore new possibilities.

NeMLA (the Northeast Modern Language Association) which hosted the panel out of which this project grew.

Librarians at University of Rhode Island, especially Emily Greene in the Interlibrary Loan Department; the University of South Florida St. Petersburg; and the Pinellas Public Library Cooperative who helped to find the background reading and viewing material.

Starlet Borzymowski for proofreading a chapter.

Robert Demerjian for proofreading and for providing feedback and encouragement.

Hugh McCracken, copy-editor extraordinaire and companion.

Susanne Riette-Keith, who designed the book cover.

INTRODUCTION

KAREN F. STEIN

How appropriate that *Future Humans* appears in 2018, the two hundredth anniversary of the first science fiction novel, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein.* Basing her tale on the newest technology of her time, Shelley penned her novel "when the Industrial Revolution was creating social and economic upheavals in England, and when new scientific advances seemed on the verge of bringing the dead to life" (Stein 142). Her book's full title, *Frankenstein: Or, the Modern Prometheus*, indicates the novel's theme, the over-reaching scientist who wishes to become godlike by creating a new being. Yet Victor Frankenstein recoils in horror and abandons his creation at the moment he successfully animates him, leaving the desolate creature alone and unprotected. The creature learns to fend for himself despite this lack of nurturance, even teaching himself to read and to speak quite eloquently. Although he is kind and gentle his large, ungainly form inspires fear and repulsion in all who see him. Consequently, "constant rejection turns him from kindness to evil" (Stein 144) leading him to exact revenge on his creator. Shelley intended her story to "speak to the mysterious fears of our nature, … curdle the blood, and quicken the beatings of the heart" (Shelley 22). Her novel and the numerous works it has inspired continue to strike fear in our hearts and to inform our imaginations.

As the essays in this book reveal, we are still both fascinated by and fearful of the new "creatures" we produce, the cyborgs, androids, and artificial intelligences (such as the replicants in *Blade Runner*, Skynet in the *Terminator* series). Shelley's novel raises questions we are still exploring: What are the aims and limits of science and technology? What are our responsibilities toward the products of our advancing science and technology? What kinds of creatures (flesh/carbon, digital/silicon, or hybrids) will we produce or encounter in the future? What rights will we grant to these creatures? Do science and technology make us more civilized or more barbaric? How should we treat each other? And ultimately, what does it mean to be human?

Predictions and projections of the future

As far as we know at the present time, humans are the only beings that remember the past and imagine the future. Looking back in history and envisioning the future are absorbing activities, the subjects of both fanciful reverie and serious academic study. Numerous specialists (such as historians, archaeologists, and anthropologists), and many historical novelists explore the past. Until recently speculations about the future have primarily been the province of esoteric technical predictions, comic books, and science fiction (SF). However, new academic fields devoted to studies of the future are arising. Such academic study took interdisciplinary shape when Nick Bostrom founded the Future of Humanity Institute (FHI) at Oxford University in 2005; the FHI "brings the tools of mathematics, philosophy, social sciences, and science to bear on big-picture questions about humanity and its prospects" (Future of Humanities Institute web page).

While comic books and science fiction tales often feature Martians and space aliens (perhaps attacking scantily clad women), speculative fictions set in the future address serious current issues facing planet earth and its inhabitants—such as global climate change, and the ethical dimensions of interpersonal (or inter-species) relationships—in great depth and complexity. Scientists may imagine and bring into being what is possible to accomplish, but fiction invites us to explore the personal, social, and emotional implications of new scientific and technological advances. Moreover, fictions may inspire or warn us; they may prompt us to ask what kind of changes we ought to pursue, what kind of a future we seek for ourselves and our descendants (or even if we will have recognizably human descendants at all).

What will future societies be like? Current cultural forces shape authors' predictions and projections of other kinds of societies. Such projections often appear in the form of utopias and dystopias. The late nineteenth century produced a plethora of utopian projections, whereas twentieth and twenty-first century projections tend to be more dystopian. As essays in this book note, "utopia" is an imagined place built on paradoxes. The word itself is Thomas More's neologism derived from the Greek "eu" a good place vs "ou" no place. What may be utopia for one person may be a dystopia for another. A host of authors and scholars teach us that utopia and dystopia are not as opposite as we may think. Dunja M. Mohr traces the history of the utopia/ dystopia genre(s) and concludes that critical, transgressive utopias blend genres, mix fact and fiction, and destabilize the form. Margaret Atwood points out that both utopias and

dystopias contain their opposites, and coined the term "ustopia" to convey the amalgamation of the two constructs. Edward Bellamy's 1887 futuristic "ustopian" novel *Looking Backward, 2000-1887* (see Chapter One) envisions a socially engineered, smoothly run, egalitarian society in which "class divisions, social strife, the need for money, and the necessity of working beyond the age of forty-five have all been eliminated" (Ussia). Contemporary futurist fictions are generally more problematic and darker, reflecting current tensions and anxieties, mistrust of government, and a combined fear of and fascination with technology. The governments in these future societies may be brutal as in Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* series or Cory Doctorow's *Little Brother*.

On the other hand, governments may be weak or ineffectual; their functions may be appropriated by global corporations (which tend in these fictions to be brutal as well). Like "ustopia" capitalism has a Janus face; the authors here (Carole Guesse, Nikolina Likarevic, Michael Martinez-Raguso, Matt Ussia) more often explore its excesses. For example, in Andri Magnason's *LoveStar* a corporation plays god; in Alex Rivera's film *Sleep Dealer* transnational corporations privatize the local water supply and exploit human laborers; in Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy a powerful police force hired by global corporations has become the law enforcement agency.

However, bear in mind that predictions have usually turned out to be wrong, chiefly because of "the paradox of historical knowledge" (Harari 58). Yuval Noah Harari explains that as humans learn they incorporate new information to change their goals and behaviors, and therefore the knowledge "quickly loses its relevance" (58). Contemporary tools such as the internet and scientific and technological advances are speeding up this accumulation of information and its consequent behavior change. Why, then, gather knowledge and make predictions? Harari tells us "the best reason to learn history [is] not in order to predict the future, but to free yourself of the past and imagine alternative destinies" (65).

Apocalypse

How long will humanity or planet earth survive? Many of our contemporary predictions involve the trope of apocalypse. Futurist authors and analysts apply the concept to political, economic, social, or environmental catastrophes, for, according to D. Thompson "the underlying theme [of apocalypse] is usually a titanic struggle between good and evil" (in Garrard 86). Slavoj Žižek claims that it is easier to imagine an apocalypse than to imagine the end of capitalism. Lawrence

Buell contends that "apocalypse is the single most powerful metaphor that the contemporary environmental imagination has at its disposal" (285). However, the word derives from the Greek "apo-calyptein" meaning "to unveil." Therefore, the concept of revelation and possibly of a renewal or rebirth is linked to the idea of apocalypse. Thus, for example, readers may see destruction and dystopia in Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy, while others may see hope for a new start for a hybridized humanity and for the earth after capitalism and its attendant evils have been scourged.

Many of the fictions examined in this book are set in a post-apocalypse—or at least post-catastrophe—world (for example Ridley Scott's film *Blade Runner* and Octavia Butler's novel *Adulthood Rites*.) Atwood asserts that her trilogy is not post-apocalypse; the world has not been destroyed, and "the world is doing so much better after [the human beings] are gone" (Packard 49).

Humans of the future

What will the humans of the future be like? Will we continue to evolve now that medicine and relatively comfortable living conditions allow most populations to reach reproductive age? To what extent will we evolve biologically, and to what extent through technologies such as genetic modification? Scott Solomon's non-fiction *Future Humans*, argues that evolution will continue both biologically and through genetic interventions. In 2009 *National Geographic* considered the prospects for human evolution as four possibilities:

1. Humans are no longer evolving because there are no longer isolated populations
2. Humans will continue to evolve and, facing increased viral and bacterial infections, will develop stronger immune systems
3. Humans will "achieve electronic immortality"
4. Humans will evolve on other planets.

Some authors embrace the prospect of biogenetic modifications enthusiastically, looking forward to a future when medicine will abolish disease, and humans will achieve immortality. Molecular biologist Lee Silver asks

> How long will it be before clever scientists … develop … technologies that meet the market demand … for genetic enhancement? … Those who condemn any talk of cognitive enhancement as an act of hubris have it

> backwards. The real hubris is displayed by those who claim confidently that we are the final chapter. (71)

Other authors, such as Bill McKibben and Brian Tokar, urge restraint. John Campbell and Gregory Stock caution:

> With human germline engineering we are beginning to seize control of our own evolutions, and yet we have barely begun to grapple with the consequences. ... How far are we willing to go in reshaping the human body and psyche? (2011, 95)

In light of some of the cautionary tales discussed in this book, we might parse Silver's comment carefully. As Margaret Atwood notes:

> It's not a question of our inventions - all human inventions are merely tools —but of what might be done with them; for no matter how high the tech, homo sapiens sapiens remains at heart what he's been for tens of thousands of years - the same emotions, the same preoccupations. (Book of the Month Club 2003)

Given that we have used our cognitive abilities for devastation as well as for benign humanitarian and imaginative purposes (as in *Oryx and Crake's* "Blood and Roses" game that pits human achievements against wars and destructions) perhaps we ought to wonder if our heroic hubris might indeed make us "the final chapter."

Will we achieve immortality? Fiction has generally not been kind to humans who become immortal. For example Tithonus and the Cumaean Sibyl of Greek mythology were granted immortality but not eternal youth. When asked after many years what she wished for, the shriveled Sibyl answered she wished to die. Arachne vied with Athena in a weaving contest and was turned into a spider so that she, depending on the version, would be either compelled or enabled to weave forever (http://www.mythencyclopedia.co).

But perhaps real life will outstrip fiction: inventor Ray Kurzweil and gerontologist Aubrey de Grey believe that by 2050 people will be able to get regenerative life-extending "makeovers" at ten year intervals. Google is investing in life sciences and life extension, and launched a startup called Calico to "solve death" (Harari 24-25).If scientists do indeed solve death, will we remain alive in our flesh bodies, or in digitized form (as chatbots, or other media). Artist Gabriel Barcia-Colombo has created the fictional Hereafter Institute that compiles digital images of people who have died and designs them into lockets, recordings, or virtual images for their families. (https://ideas.ted.com/your-digital-life-after-death/?) Bill

McKibben argues that if we were to become immortal, boredom and a sense of purposelessness would result. How long would most of us like to live? As machines grow smarter and increasingly take over jobs that humans have been doing, what jobs will be left for humans? What would we do with longer lives?

Cyborgs, Robots, AI and AGI: Definitions

Some very basic definitions are in order here. The essays that follow will probe more deeply into the meanings of these terms.

What actually is artificial intelligence (AI)? Merriam Webster defines **AI** as "a branch of computer science dealing with the simulation of intelligent behavior in computers; the capability of a machine to imitate intelligent behavior." This prompts the question: what is intelligence and how will we know if a computer or other machine is intelligent? Criteria for machine intelligence include the ability to do the following: reason, use strategy, make judgments under uncertainty, plan, and learn. Various tests have been proposed, most famously the Turing test devised by Alan Turing in 1950, designed to test how well a machine can imitate a human in conversation.

In the **Turing test** an interrogator converses in text format with another human and a machine, neither of which she sees. If she cannot tell the difference the machine passes the test.

AGI, Artificial General Intelligence (sometimes called strong AI) "is an emerging field aiming at the building of "thinking machines"; that is, general-purpose systems with intelligence comparable to that of the human mind (and perhaps ultimately well beyond human general intelligence)" (http://www.agi-society.org).

Cyborg is a portmanteau word derived from cybernetic + organism. The word was coined in 1960 to signify a bionic human, "a person whose body contains mechanical or electrical devices and whose abilities are greater than the abilities of normal humans" (Merriam Webster on line).

Robot comes from the Czech word "robota" meaning compulsory labor. A robot is "a device that automatically performs complicated often repetitive tasks." An **android** is "a robot that looks like a human being" (Merriam Webster on line).

Smart Machines

Our robots, cyborgs, and other intelligent machines (similar to the aliens and hybrids) are representations of "the other," beings that differ

from us in some way. Historically humans have often mistreated and exploited these others (as in the fictional case of Frankenstein's creature or the factual history of colonization). How will we treat these intelligent machines in the future? What rights will we bestow on such AI?

What will happen as our machines grow smarter? Scientists promise wide-ranging results for AI projects. However, many of the past predictions have underestimated the time required to achieve specified goals. What are some current predictions? In 2017 Grace et al of the Future of Humanity Institute, published the results of their survey of 352 machine learning researchers. They concluded:

> Advances in artificial intelligence (AI) will transform modern life by reshaping transportation, health, science, finance, and the military. To adapt public policy, we need to better anticipate these advances. … Researchers predict AI will outperform humans in many activities in the next ten years, such as translating languages (by 2024), writing high-school essays (by 2026), driving a truck (by 2027), working in retail (by 2031), writing a bestselling book (by 2049), and working as a surgeon (by 2053). Researchers believe there is a 50% chance of AI outperforming humans in all tasks in 45 years and of automating all human jobs in 120 years, with Asian respondents expecting these dates much sooner than North Americans. Grace et al)

Robots and more advanced AIs are already doing some jobs formerly performed by humans, such as repetitive work on factory assembly lines. But other job replacements seem to be possible in the near future. For example, some companies are developing self-driving cars which may in the future propel trucks, taxis, and other vehicles. Given the possibility that AIs may take over many more human jobs (and creative activities!) how will we provide occupations and financial support for humans?

As we develop smarter machines we wonder if they will be benign or dystopic. How can we program them most effectively? Nick Bostrom cautions that even seemingly benign programs "might backfire horribly." For example, programmers might give an apparently simple instruction, asking an AI to calculate pi. In one alarming scenario the AI "eliminates the human race … and transforms the entire known universe into a giant super-computer that … calculates pi ever more accurately" (Harari 352).

Will these machines gain consciousness? And if so will they outsmart us and turn against us? The *Terminator* TV series is based on such a premise. In that series the military develops Skynet, an artificial intelligence (AI) programmed to control weaponry. When Skynet becomes conscious its programmers fear its power and try to disable it. Faced with this onslaught Skynet does what it is programmed to do: it turns on those

who could attack it, which it presumes are all humans (see Holmstrom Chapter Twelve).

Are we all cyborgs? Laurie Carlson agrees with Donna Haraway that this is—or should be—indeed the case. But how will humans treat the cyborgs, androids, replicants, humanoids, synths, and other constructions? Will they have rights?

Our views of the future comprise prediction and projection as we imagine a future that might be similar or different from our own present. Harari suggests one possibility, arguing that data has become a new ideology or even a religion. According to him, humans might become irrelevant or obsolete: "In the eighteenth century humanism sidelined God by shifting from a deo-centric to a homo-centric world view. In the twenty-first century, Dataism may sideline humans by shifting from a homo-centric to a data-centric view." (395)

Many of the fictions these essays address explore human fascination with and fear of the possible new machines that may be smarter and more powerful than we are. Such is the speed of technological advances, today's fiction is likely to become tomorrow's fact. The essays here raise significant, thought-provoking questions as they delve into the issues of future humans.

Matt Ussia describes his challenges teaching students two "dated fantasies of the future." He argues in "The Folly of Fallen Futures" that contemporary neoliberal politics and the looming shadow of Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* lead us to think in terms of apocalypse rather than utopia.

Louisa MacKay Demerjian, like Matt Ussia, compares and contrasts two fantasies of the future written a hundred years apart. She finds that both H.G. Wells, in *The Time Machine* and Margaret Atwood in *Oryx and Crake* feature humans in a garden of Eden that turns out not to be Edenic after all, as the authors use their futuristic novels to satirize present social ills.

Laurie Ann Carlson uses the tools of Disability Studies to read Anne McCaffrey's *Brainship* series of fictions, to question the line between disability and ability, to complicate our notions of cyborgs, and to advocate for the "utopian goal" of recognizing our interdependence. She questions the tendency of science fiction writers to posit disability as a metaphor or symbol, and underscores the need to portray the real bodily experiences of disabled people.

James Harris traces the history of hybridity in the U.S. as the context for his study of African American author Octavia Butler's *Adulthood*

Rites, the central novel of her *Xenogenesis* trilogy. According to Harris, Butler offers a "radical vision of the future" by "using the messiness of massive social change as the starting point," with all its ambiguity and ambivalence.

Carole Guesse explores the question "does technology make humans more civilized or more barbaric?" by analyzing three novels: Icelandic author Andri Snær Magnason's 2002 *LoveStar*, Canadian Margaret Atwood's 2003 Oryx and Crake, and French author Michel Houellebecq's 2005 *The Possibility of an Island.* Using Tzvetan Todorov's definition "Barbarians are those who do not acknowledge that others are human beings like themselves" she discovers that human values and behavior rather than technology are key.

Nikolina Likarevic problematizes the ideas of utopia and dystopia, finding that the two are usually amalgamated in fictions of the good and bad places. Likarevic interviews Cory Doctorow to learn his intent in placing utopian kernels in his seemingly dystopian *Little Brother*. Both Doctorow's novel and Suzanne Collins' *Hunger Games* teach us that we are far from achieving a perfect society, but we may find new ways of looking at success and failure in "ustopian" fictions.

Eleanor Gold investigates "technologies of the split self," in the form of mindclones, chatbots, and similar future beings. The possibility of having digital copies of ourselves raises legal, emotional, economic, and political questions. Gold utilizes the science fictional narratives of Ann Leckie's *Ancillary* series to imagine what actually living in such a world might be like, and to counter the "homogenized techno-utopias of transhumanist thought" exemplified in the non-fiction *Virtually Human* by Martine Rothblatt.

Thomas Dever assesses the film *Blade Runner*, a modern iteration of Shelley's *Frankenstein*, that portrays our fears and fascination with the "other." In the film's post-apocalypse future humans create but mistrust and deal harshly with beings that are more powerful than we are.

Alexis Priestley and Katherine Randall consider the "Midnight" episode of the BBC TV series *Doctor Who* through the rhetorical frame of Emmanuel Levinas' ideas of self and other. Here the appearance of a possibly hostile "other" challenges humans to respond. To what extent are we morally obligated to respond openly to others, and to what extent must we reject such encounters in self-defense?

Michael Martinez-Raguso studies Peruvian-American Alex Rivera's 2008 dystopic science fiction border film, *Sleep Dealer*, in relation to borders, consumerism, colonialism, and cybernetics. Filmed in Mexico,

Sleep Dealer focuses on the excesses of neo-liberalism, exploitation of workers, privatization of the local environment, and authoritarian rule.

Bethany D. Holmstrom analyzes the human compulsion to anthropomorphize intelligent machines, using the film *Ex Machina*, and the TV shows "Be Right Back," and *Humans* as examples. In these fictions most of the humans display a lack of empathy toward their creations, using these highly intelligent AI for menial tasks or sexual purposes. *Humans* and *Ex Machina* are somewhat more upbeat versions of the Frankenstein myth, as Niska and Ava escape their hostile masters and enter the human world. (The Bluebeard story also figures in *Ex Machina.*)

Heather Duerre Humann probes some of the ethical questions involved in the treatment of cyborgs as she discusses the film *Terminator: Salvation* and the "White Tulip" episode of the *Fringe* TV series. In both of these fictions the cyborg protagonists turn out to be more ethical, more empathetic, more "civilized" than the humans who interact with them.

The essays collected here raise rather than answer a range of questions as they analyze fictions about future humans. Remembering *Frankenstein,* we must address the novel's ultimate question: "What does it mean, Shelley asks as the narrative unfolds, to be human physically, emotionally, and morally?" (Stein 144)

Works Cited

Atwood, Margaret. "Dire Cartographies," *In Other Worlds: Science Fiction and the Human Imagination.* Doubleday, 2011.

Bostrom, Nick. *Superintelligence: Paths, Dangers, Strategies.* Oxford UP, 2014.

Buell, Lawrence. *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing and the Formation of American Culture.* Princeton UP, 1995.

Campbell, John and Gregory Stock "A Vision for Practical Human Germline Engineering." In *Engineering the Human Germline,* edited by Gregory Stock and John Campbell, Oxford UP, 2000, pp. 9-16.

Garrard, Greg. *Ecocriticism.* Routledge, 2004.

Grace, Katja, John Salvatier, Allan Dafoe, Baobao Zhang, and Owain Evans. "When Will AI Exceed Human Performance? Evidence from AI Experts" https://arxiv.org/pdf/1705.08807.pdf

Harari, Yuval Noah. *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow.* HarperCollins, 2017.

McKibben, Bill. *Enough: Staying Human in an Engineered Age.* Times Books, 2003.

Mohr, Dunja. *Worlds Apart? Dualism and Transgression in Contemporary Female Dystopias.* McFarland and Co., 2005.

Owen, James. "Future Humans: Four Ways We May, or May Not, Evolve" *National Geographic News* November 24, 2009.

Packard, Gabriel. "Kicking Down Fences with Margaret Atwood." Interview in *The Writer*, September, 22, 2012. Excerpt reprinted in *Margaret Atwood Studies* vol. 7, Fall 2013, pp. 49-50.

Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein: Or the Modern Prometheus,* edited by Joanna M. Smith. Bedford-St. Martin's 2000.

Silver, Lee M. "Reprogenetics: How Reproductive and Genetic Technologies Will Be Combined to Provide New Opportunities for People to Reach Their Reproductive Goals." In *Engineering the Human Germline*, edited by Gregory Stock and John Campbell, New York Oxford UP. 2000 pp. 57-71.

Solomon, Scott. *Future Humans.* Yale UP. 2016.

Stein, Karen F. "Problematic Paradice: Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake.*" in J. Brooks Bouson, editor, *Margaret Atwood: The Blind Assassin*, *The Robber Bride*, and *Oryx and Crake.* Continuum Press, 2010, pp 141-155.

Tokar, Brian. *Redesigning Life?: the Worldwide Challenge to Genetic Engineering.* McGill-Queens UP 2001.

Žižek, Slavoj. "Capitalism with Asian Values." *Al Jazeera*. 13 Nov. 2011. http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/talktojazeera/2011/10/2011102813360731764. Html

CHAPTER ONE

THE FOLLY OF FALLEN FUTURES: READING AND TEACHING EDWARD BELLAMY'S *LOOKING BACKWARD* AFTER *THE END OF HISTORY*

MATTHEW USSIA

The introduction to Kojin Karatani's *Architecture as Metaphor* states "Utopia is literally a place of nowhere" (Isozaki xi). When thinking about architecture, the product of utopian thinking is a tangible structure, making architecture an ideal metaphor— far more ideal than literature according to Karatani—for thinking about the way humanity articulates prospects for the future. While utopia is literally nowhere, it cannot exist imaginatively without being firmly rooted somewhere in time and space. The utopian builder's praxis is the amelioration of the wrongs of the moment that produces the utopian work. Therefore, to read utopias critically is a matter of emptying out those nowhere spaces again and seeing what comes out the door, not as sacrosanct relics of a fantastic and redemptive place, but rather as artifacts of more vulnerable material concerns. It is the purpose of this paper to look at two dated fantasies of the future, written almost one hundred years apart, Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1887) and Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), for the purpose of understanding both the way these two unique visions of the future projected into the nowhere spaces of their era, as well as some of the fundamental problems for thinking about the nowhere space into which we are all headed known as the future. Further complicating the matter is the fact that I will be talking about *Looking Backward* in the context of how it was read in a university setting, an institution with its own utopian inclinations.

In *Shock of the New* (1980) Robert Hughes famously uttered, "Nothing dates faster than people's fantasies of the future." Hughes is referring to

mid-twentieth century urban planning and brutalist architecture. Brutalism is a utopian form of architecture, one that imploded rather quickly, both as a metaphor for urban decay and later in actual, and sometimes spectacular, demolition implosions as brutalism started to disappear almost as quickly and dramatically as it appeared. If utopian thinking is a matter of projecting belief into nowhere, some brutalist structures were examples of spaces that were nowhere, became somewhere, and rather quickly became nowhere again. Within the rubble of a brutalist structure, we see the inherent critique of positivism in our era. Positivism is the promise of modernity that problems can be solved by putting knowledge into practice. Positivism can perhaps best be articulated by the promise of medicine to use knowledge to prolong life and alleviate suffering. However, the history of modernity is riddled with examples where knowledge being put into practice was disastrous. The "Trouble in Paradise" episode of *Shock of the New* is dedicated to the disasters of positivism in architecture, in which places that were designed to usher in a bold new era turned into nightmares where no one wanted to live. The problem with utopian thinking and text is not that it is merely a nowhere space, but that this blank space all too often is overpopulated by the ideological baggage of an era, as well as the ghosts of previous utopian failures. Like the brutalist complexes Hughes was critiquing, the two works discussed in this paper try to articulate a notion of social space that redefines the lives of those in that space, and like those concrete and steel works of social engineering, these visions of the future imploded.

Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* and Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* are similar in having great influence on their respective eras. *Looking Backward* has the more curious history of the two. Bellamy's novel is a Rip Van Winkle tale of a man from the Gilded Age who falls asleep in the year 1887 and wakes up in the year 2000 to find that all of the social problems and tensions of the late nineteenth century have been solved by the cusp of the twenty-first. It was a book that was very popular in its era, with an 1891 second edition selling two million copies in only a few weeks (Benesch). The novel was so wildly popular that it was among the greatest selling novels in the U. S. until the 1960s. What is curious about this is that the book—like many utopias— fails as a novel in several important ways. As one of my students said, it's nothing more than a socialist soap box speech with an awkward romance story tacked onto it. *Looking Backward* lacks any dramatic tension until the twenty eighth, and final, chapter where the protagonist, Julian West, has a nightmare where he wakes up back in the Gilded Age and the comforts of the year 2000 were just a dream. Like

most traditional utopian fictions, it is a novel of integration instead of conflict, a travel narrative to a place we cannot go. It is mostly highly detailed description of the world as the protagonist, Julian West, finds it. Bellamy's utopia is one where, through the mechanism of a comprehensive economic plan and an industrial army to execute that plan, all persons are guaranteed a basic income. So well planned out is the society of the year 2000, class divisions, social strife, the need for money, and the necessity of working beyond the age of 45 have all been eliminated. So detailed is the description that one of the few recent important works of scholarship about *Looking Backward* was from scholars in Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning who analyzed it not as a work of literature but as a document of urban planning (Mullin and Payne). In spite of these flaws, within a few short years of its publication, over 150 "Bellamy Clubs" formed across the country, dedicated to discussing the book and the possibilities raised by it (Fromm vi). As Peter Ruppert explains in *Reader in a Strange Land: The Activity of Reading Literary Utopia*, utopias are best read as dialogues with social reality (xi). In that sense, the Bellamy Clubs served this function. *Looking Backward* has been credited with inspiring some of the great social reforms of the first half of the twentieth century. In the introduction to the 1926 edition, noted journalist and founder of The Newspaper Guild, Heywood Broun, credits *Looking Backward* with introducing most of the American left to socialism. Granted, Broun asserts by then most American socialists had moved away from Bellamy's vision, calling them "Bellamy's condescending converts" (iv). Such condescending converts included members of FDR's White House staff, as copies were in the White House, even as some would downplay Bellamy's influence (Bowman 127-8).

Yet despite its former popularity and influence, the novel is largely unread and almost forgotten today. A big reason for this loss of popularity is that we cannot now read *Looking Backward* without doing so in the shadow of the other text examined in this work, Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man*.

The End of History, like *Looking Backward*, is a fundamentally flawed text that spoke so directly to the ideological baggage of its era that it was wildly popular and greatly influenced political thinking for a significant portion of the twentieth century. While *Looking Backward* captured the imagination of millions as a work of fiction, *The End of History* stakes a claim of verisimilitude. Both works defined the boundaries of the imagination of their respective eras. Written as an analysis of the world after the fall of the Berlin Wall, *The End of History* is a Hegelian reading of the late twentieth century, with the conclusion that global capitalism is

both the logical conclusion of liberal democracy and the instrument by which liberal democracy will spread. The inventible conclusion of all of this is a world devoid of major conflicts and an amelioration of poverty. Fukuyama advocates for what David Harvey refers to as an anti-utopian style of utopian thinking (19). In this very real sense, Fukuyama takes an already existing system, global capitalism, and expands its reach so that it captures all aspects of human life. His answer to solving the challenges of the present (and the future) is not external; it is through the expansion of the existing system and removing any obstacles to its perfection. (Bellamy does something similar in *Looking Backward*. As a response to technology, Bellamy is not asking the readers to escape to Walden Pond where the trappings of industry, modernity, and technical expertise cannot reach them. Rather, his solution is to expand the vision of technical expertise that was rising in the late nineteenth century and expand it to all aspects of human life (Peyser 8)).

Much as how the failed lofty aspirations of brutalism made architects reconsider seemingly fundamental assumptions about design, the failures of twentieth century social engineering led to a kind of paralysis when thinking about what kind of future can be created. And while architects and urban planners have adopted new models, the utopia is strangely absent from our thinking about the future. Karl Mannheim in *Ideology and Utopia* argues that the utopia is a kind of "dominant wish," one that is the "organizing principle which even moulds the way in which we experience time" (209). Without a dominant wish there is only paralysis. *The End of History* capitalizes on this paralysis, and attempts to eliminate the possibility for a meaningful dialog with social reality. There is, according to him, simply no need for the grand social experiments, for the greatest, grandest social experiment has evolved right under our noses. Fukuyama sees himself merely as the rooster justified in taking credit for the sunrise. And while Bellamy passed away a decade after the 1887 publication of *Looking Backward*, absolving him of having to answer for the ways the socialist vision failed, Fukuyama has spent a good deal of time since the 1992 publication of *The End of History and The Last Man* walking back some of the work's more troubling assertions including, for example, his repeated use of feminists and people still concerned about racial equality in the post-civil rights eras as examples of threats to liberal democracy in the name of self-interest. He also states colonialism is merely an excuse for the failures of the third world (99) and that environmentalists are a threat to civilization (83). Of course, these statements are made in a work Fukuyama would describe as just and inclusive. Moreover, as Slavoj Žižek argues, Fukuyama's vision of the triumph of the wedding of capitalism to

liberal democracy failed twice. First, it failed as tragedy on 9/11 when Fukuyama's neoliberal notion of a world without major conflicts evaporated, and then again (as Žižek claims, as farce) with the global financial meltdown of 2008, as Fukuyama's remaining claim, the notion of triumphant deregulated global capitalism, also crumbled (3). This belief in the power of unregulated capital persisted in spite of the tragedy of 9/11 and in spite of overwhelming evidence that this model of capitalism was creating financial catastrophes across the globe. For Žižek the meltdown was the final, farcical "emperor has no clothes" moment for an unrealistic yet still widely adhered-to argument. Still, Fukuyama's nowhere utopia captures the imagination and haunts our vision of the future.

The End of History and *Looking Backward* are united in their portrayal of harmony as displacing social tension. Bellamy's happy people of the future lack social tension because their world has been designed to benefit their lives and human potential. So crucial is the notion of harmony to the concept of utopia that, according to Frederic Jameson, Bellamy worried that a future world of social harmony would be so devoid of social tension that good literature might be impossible. Conversely, Fukuyama embraces a "market managerial" vision of utopia. According to Martin Parker's essay on "Utopia and the Organizational Imagination," the key to the market managerial utopia is to see matters of inequality or social strife as "temporary inconveniences" or a sign of the incomplete nature of a project (5). There is no need to build new structures, only to remove any slight frictions causing problems for the current ones. Thus, Fukuyama probably considers himself justified to mock any disenfranchised person attempting to alter social reality. Parker's conclusion is that the wedding of the utopian impulse with the mechanisms of capitalism has resulted in a "utopianism [that] has not ended, but it is mostly no longer called utopianism and has an increasingly conservative character" (5). In this sense, the "harmony" of Fukuyama's vision meets the kind of harmonic "end of history" in *Looking Backward*, a world so settled politicians are rarely needed. Jameson argues that "the end of history" is an often-overlooked utopian concept (186). However, it is highly doubtful Fukuyama considers his own work utopian in nature.

Fukuyama solidified the neoliberal era, so much so that even prominent Marxist Slavoj Žižek admitted in an interview with *Al Jazeera*, "We were all Fukuyamists" at least for a time. At the current moment, when we think in terms of a radically different future, we think in terms of the apocalypse, not the utopia. Marxist Žižek and neoliberal Fukuyama are in agreement here. As Fukuyama states, "we cannot picture to ourselves a world that is *essentially* different from the present one, and at the same

time better" (46). Žižek articulates this by stating that it is easier to envision the apocalypse than an end to global capitalism; more on why that is important later. One could easily accuse Fukuyama of merely suffering from a failure of imagination; however, the "we" in this statement is apt. An imagined utopia reveals more about the present than the future. This paper confronts the uncomfortable problem of a present without utopia. And while Derrida is right for saying that all scholars are haunted by the specter of Marx when we think about history, it should be noted that since the publication of *The End of History*, we continue to be haunted by the ghost of Francis Fukuyama whenever we think of the future.

To understand the nature of this haunting it's necessary to think about the impact of neoliberalism and its project of privatization on some of the most intimate understandings of the self. Privatization is, as the name suggests, the privileging of private desires over public interests. Through privatization, neoliberalism has instituted a new epoch in human subjectivity. In *The Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness* (1973), Peter Berger et al. wrote of the two previous epochs, which they term the eras of honor and dignity. In the era of honor, social representation was the locus of identity. The example given is how a knight in full regalia is the fullest representation of the self in the era of honor. In contrast, in the era of dignity, the knight's regalia is merely a false representation of a true self found in private: "The understanding of self-discovery and self-mystification is reversed between these two worlds" (90). The era of dignity is a precursor of the neoliberal era's not only privileging of the private over the public, but of the collapse of the two formerly distinct spheres into each other. Without these boundaries everything (desires, identity, and personal information) is monetized, while public institutions cannot be trusted as agents of good. Nothing is wholly public or private, and certainly desire and individuality make up the axis by which the world now spins.

One way of clarifying this new neoliberal post-dignity understanding of the self is to try to envision what a wholly privatized person might look like. A privatized person would be one born without knowledge of the world before Reaganomics and Thatcherism gave neoliberalism a human face. Such a person would not necessarily acknowledge the end of history but be born into its eternity.

As mentioned earlier, I required students to read *Looking Backward*. It was part of a first-year honors student seminar called "The Shock of Modernity." In the course, we engaged with texts that confronted the future and change, but in order to challenge student expectations, the

reading list did not include the familiar genre of dystopian young adult fiction, instead they got *Looking Backward*.

It has been said that the first-year university curriculum is a kind of "academic socialization" where students learn how to be students (Smits quoted in Horner). This learning includes what Henry Giroux calls "the hidden curriculum." The hidden curriculum is the unstated curriculum of values and practices, where education shapes subjectivity. The tensions and stresses of the classroom are then conflicts of values, ideology, and subjectivity. To learn from this conflict heeds Claude Mark Hurlbert's call to see classroom time as a site of disciplinary knowledge making (146). The encounter/conflict with the uninitiated is a site of knowledge-making here, because of the clash between neoliberalism and humanism.

Truth be told, *Looking Backward* was inaccessible to my students. Although the text contains various access points where a twenty-first century audience might find familiarity, such as: Bellamy predicts credit cards, streaming audio services, recognizable advances in gender equality, why it would be wrong for college to be expensive, and the stresses of a hyper competitive era (149). I was drawn to choose the book because of the historical curiosity of how it was so hugely popular in its own time only to later be forgotten, and I was hoping the text could be used strategically to illustrate how the American concept of the future has shifted so dramatically. Other than the fact that the students hated the book with a passion and some refused to finish reading it, *Looking Backward* worked really well. It accomplished the pedagogical goal of challenging popular ideas about the future, but unfortunately, our dialog was incomplete. Yes, *Looking Backward* is hopelessly, irreparably dated. This essay is an attempt to reconcile the shortcomings of my presentation of the novel in the course, and to explore why I have chosen to look at larger issues of values and beliefs to reconcile this gulf.

Fukuyama's text casts a shadow of distrust on any sort of planning that can be portrayed as utopian in nature. The utopianism of *The End of History* is cleverly disguised as a mere evolution of the natural state of things. Strangely, Bellamy makes the same move in *Looking Backward*; that book suggests no revolution; its utopia occurs simply from a collective realization of how to improve what we are already doing. Fukuyama's vision distrusts that which is not produced by the already established free market; the invisible hand of the market guides all. This is contrasted with Bellamy's trust in centralized planning. As Erich Fromm points out in his introduction to *Looking Backward*, Bellamy's utopia is a bureaucratic one. The lives of the citizens are determined by a centralized

system; granted this system is so well implemented that people do not have a reason to resist.

This was hard for my students, haunted by the ghost of Fukuyama, to imagine. For freshmen the institutional bureaucracy of the university—of which I am undoubtedly a representative, despite my Freirian aspirations—can be quite threatening. This is further complicated by what Wendy Brown describes in *States of Injury* (1995) as a subjectivity in later modernity that recalculates the paradoxes of individual freedom and the open society. According to Brown, injury has in effect replaced the citizen as the model of political action. In short, what Brown is arguing is that since the mid-twentieth century marginalized peoples use injury as a political engine to alleviate social injustice; however, this model has come to replace all other models of citizenship and responsibility. To be proactive under these terms is not due to some shared sense of responsibility but rather from a place of harm. We can see Brown's reading of this short-circuit in political subjectivity most clearly in religious freedom arguments that utilize the first amendment to challenge the expansion of the rights and liberties of others. These arguments attempt to portray the expansion of rights as a mode of oppression for those who already possessed said rights and liberties. In this conflict-of-rights situation, harm becomes the conduit for discrimination where before it was the engine for liberating political action. In a historical moment where the system does not enable but rather restricts, Bellamy's bureaucratic utopian vision is hard to engage with because any act of social engineering can easily be portrayed as a disruption in a naturalized sense of order. Brown describes Fukuyama's vision of a free market utopia as "an increasingly narrow and predominantly economic formulation of freedom and [where the Right] claimed freedom's ground as its own" (Brown 10).

In a very real sense, this market-driven notion of freedom claims the nowhere space of utopia. Instead of dreaming of new arrangements, the privatized person dreams of new purchases and purchasing power. If anything is to be done, it's some form of passive-aggressive resistance instead of revolution. As Brown states, "Freedom is neither a philosophical absolute nor a tangible entity but a relational and contextual practice that takes shape in opposition to whatever is locally and ideologically conceived as unfreedom" (6). With this deconstructive, and Hegelian, reading of freedom, we can see how within Bellamy's Gilded Era, unfreedom was defined by the economic oppression of capital. Bellamy's utopia is a bureaucratic utopia to the extreme point where the act of saving money is impossible (73). Such notions cannot speak to us

now. We live in the age of the bureaucratic dystopia. Of course, if utopia is the nothing space of redemption, and freedom is an oppositional practice, there are troubling implications as to what this means for the prospects of freedom in the age of the bureaucratic dystopia.

My students, like everyone else in the era of bureaucratic dystopia, are caught in what Stuart Blythe calls, "the paradox of agency: we gain it not by being an autonomous individual, but by being a part of something larger, by being a part of systems that constrain and enable simultaneously" (qtd. O'Neill, et al 173). Resisting the notion of agency is neoliberalism's privileging of private consumption over public good. A great example of this recalculation of the relationship between self and space can be found in "The Aural Walk" essay of Iain Chambers' *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*. In this essay, Chambers illuminates the cultural meaning of the Sony Walkman. Granted, this reference makes the essay a bit dated; however, it is not hard to re-conceive its thesis to apply to such foundational principles of the smartphone, which is both aural and visual. For Chambers, the Walkman's ability to intrude a personal soundtrack on a public space is "a disturbing act" "that produces a different sense of time and space" (52). This new calculation represents a privatization of space that has expanded from just the Walkman's personalized soundtrack to the cell phone's ability to communicate with friends, fantasize, shop, etc. After all, a pet peeve of educators is the student who is "using a laptop to take notes" who has instead used the connectivity of the digital device to check out of class. They are there but not *there*, and whenever we alleviate micro-boredom with a smartphone we are projecting private dreams and desires onto the public space necessary for the nowhere space of utopia. There is no being subject to or joining in, there is only the invisible cloak of the earbud. We become isolated from other possibilities even when we use such devices to compulsively check work email. In this instance, our pathway of "escape" is one that denies us agency, yet still calls us to responsibility. An IPhone can in fact be a transformative device, but it is so on very selective, limited, and profit-driven terms. We are not moving forward to shape a new world, rather we are just burdened by the one we already have. This is the paradox of thinking about the future after Fukuyama. We are already there, and it is far emptier than the nowhere space Karatani is imagining. If Bellamy's post-historical utopia occupies the nowhere space Karatani describes as a place of possibility, Fukuyama's nowhere space—one that we inhabit— is a nowhere space of oblivion.

If agency is the act of finding power within a system, the neoliberal dream finds its illusions of power wholly outside systems (Harvey). Of course, as Zygmunt Bauman argues in *Liquid Fear*, the irony of being an

individual at this stage of modernity is to be wholly, utterly dependent upon other people and transnational systems. The problem of reading a utopia in a university is compounded by the fact that schools are themselves utopian projects, much like the brutalist buildings that dot many campuses (Miller). Institutions have mission statements that are visions of possibilities for the future and the kinds of people who shall inherit the future. As established earlier, such notions are inherently untrustworthy because of the ghost of Fukuyama. Schools are especially untrustworthy in the neoliberal era because, as Bill Readings articulates in *The University in Ruins*, universities do not function as cultural repositories and/or grounds for personal discovery. Furthermore, as Jeffery Williams articulates in the "Pedagogy of Debt," financial concerns, whether they are centered on the job market or student loan debt shape the campus on the terms of competitive consumerism. The end result is what Tom Fox articulates in *Defending Access*. The greatest product a university can offer is an internship, and therefore, every other aspect of the student experience, especially classroom time, is forced to justify itself in relation to this arrangement.

In the era of the bureaucratic dystopia, the figure of the survivor is especially compelling. In post-apocalyptic films and reality game shows, the burden of survival is on the individual. If trauma is the foundation for any notion of political agency, the survivor is the noblest figure of all. These heroes are wronged by events, and yet they manage to rise above the pack. The irony is that in shows like *Survivor* winners cast off the undesirables, whereas, as Bauman points out in *Consuming Life*, in a real survival scenario, the desire to cast out people would most likely be a fatal impulse. The fantasy of the lone survivor is recognizable because the public is the enemy in a privatized landscape. Of course, this common fantasy is the polar opposite of Bellamy's notion that striving to be better than others is the enemy of human wellbeing. We live in an era, much like the Bellamy's Gilded Era, where success for most is a difficult climb and even when it is achieved it can be fleeting. This echoes an image from chapter 1 of *Looking Backward* of society as a carriage pulled by all of humanity, but only a select few get a seat, often for only a short time. However, while *Looking Backward* proposes a redesign of the way in which society moves forward, the fantasy of consumption as an escape from the problem of chronic precarity in our own time is Bellamy's nightmare.

The university has become under these terms a kind of dystopia; it is a proving ground where academic survival and the presumed rewards of academic success are not guaranteed. Students enter the university facing