The Cross, the Plow and the Skyline

The Cross, the Plow and the Skyline: Contemporary Science Fiction and the Ecological Imagination

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To my teachers, most especially my loving wife,
Elizabeth, and my first professor of politics,
George Pearson

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remembering the needs of the body and the earth, standing by words, respecting the Creation, and living the life and labor of the mind.

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—EJY
Lexington, KY

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Introduction

To live on the cusp of a new century and the doorway of a dawning millennium is to experience a world beset by contradictory feelings of rapid social change and imminent cultural transformation and intractable ideological resistance and formidable social blockage, of seemingly limitless and breathtaking technological possibilities and imposing political obstructions, of powerful global tendencies toward economic concentration and equally potent trends toward national and subnational fragmentation. To inhabit such a transitional world is to participate in a postmodern culture at once buoyed by overdrawn hopes and dreams and deeply suspicious of all totalizing ideologies and meta-systems of thought (Dallmayr, 1989; Harvey, 1989; Jameson, 1991). To subsist in this pyrotechnic carnival funhouse of excitement and horror (Dery, 1999) is to appreciate the humor and savor the irony of the watchword of this uncertain era—Cennard's pithy adage, "Nothing can be done, everything is possible."

Respecting the many springs and motivations of this confusing and contradictory spirit while simultaneously attempting to transcend it, this study seeks to marry political theorizing with certain assumptions and tools of critical theory, hermeneutics, and deconstruction in order to open up the political possibilities inhering in contemporary science fiction as critical political theory. Not so simply put, I wish to explore the potential of science fiction as a popular medium and cultural artifact of our times to: illuminate some of those powerful social forces and tendencies shaping the cultural and political landscape of the dense and never fully transparent present; uncover the utopian and other hopeful potentialities of the uncompleted and ever changing past; and shoulder the role of anticipatory consciousness of an open future or field of ambig-

uous possibilities that in principle always overflows our meager human abilities or seemingly prodigious technological powers to apprehend, control or direct.

That the literary genre of science fiction, so long considered paraliterature and relegated to the margins of mainstream literature, should fulfill these functions is not self-evident. Despite its growing popularity among general and even high-brow readers and the proliferation of academic courses and literary criticism on the genre, staunch resistance to taking science fiction seriously among conservative gatekeepers in the groves of academia and high-cultural taste makers in the literary world has kept this genre on the cultural periphery even as a few of its leading practitioners like Ursula LeGuin, Ray Bradbury, and (mistakenly) Kurt Vonnegut have been granted passage and admittance into the inner circle of serious twentieth century authors.

By remaining on the margins of literary discourse and continuing to appeal to a mass cultural audience, science fiction has perhaps served as a better bellwether of shifting cultural moods and inchoate political sensibilities than other genres operating closer to the mainstream or residing comfortably within the towering walls of high culture. Indeed, even before science fiction emerged as a recognized literary genre, its impress upon serious American writers was felt. As Bruce Franklin's study, **Future Perfect**, has demonstrated, "there was no major nineteenth-century American writer of fiction [from Cooper, Poe, and Melville, to Twain, Bierce, and Bellamy], and few indeed in the second rank, who did not write science fiction or at least one utopian romance" (Franklin, 1978: x). The pull of the future, whether as utopia or dystopia, has thus been a powerful magnet to American writers searching for an aesthetic appropriate to their times.

In this light, we might consider Frederic Jameson's definition of genre as institution and its implications for science fiction, including the relationship between the science fiction novel, the author's meaning and intentions, and the reader's interpretation. Genres, Jameson writes, are "essentially literary institutions, or social contracts between a writer and a specific public, whose function is to specify the proper use of a particular cultural artifact" (1981: 106). In considering the import of this definition for

assessing the cultural and political relevance of science fiction, we might take note of Herbert Gans' observation that science fiction as low-brow culture is more user oriented than high-brow culture, which he characterizes as producer oriented (Gans, 1974). Moreover, Northrup Frye (1966) has pointed out that, given its ghetto status, science fiction has been historically less mediated by the levels or interventions of critics and other taste makers and therefore more closely attuned to the needs and desires of its mass readership. In addition, the relationship between the science fiction writer and his or her readers has been strengthened by institutions like science fiction conferences bringing novelist and reader together and science fiction clubs and particularly "fanzines" allowing devoted readers to give vent to their creativity and literally participate in expanding the fictional horizons opened up by their favorite writers.

Reflecting recently upon the vocation of science fiction and fantasy writing, Orson Scott Card (1990) has pointed to the contradictory pulls and tugs impinging upon his profession. Noting how publishers in the last decade or two have cemented the identity and relations of writers and readers and thereby exerted enormous pressure on authors to remain within tight bounds circumscribing their writing career, Card finds two positive developments to the ghettoizing of speculative fiction. First, its historically marginal status vis-à-vis the literary mainstream has given SF writers great freedom within the speculative fiction enclave, making the "categories of science fiction and fantasy larger, freer, and more inclusive than any other genre of contemporary literature"; and, second, this status has made the craft itself "extraordinarily open to genuine experimentation" (Card, 1990, p. 11). The greater freedom for experimenting with form, substance, and style afforded to science fiction artists makes for a genre that responds quickly and creatively to its audience's appetite for the novel and the (e)strange(d), while at the same time liberating SF writers (if they choose to) from the tyranny of the stereotypic or narrowly formulaic.

These two features of the science fiction vocation create conditions facilitating the nurture of would-be writers who typically cut their teeth on writing stories for the four to six established magazines in the field and then go on to express

their increasingly honed talents on novellas and book-length fiction. Most important for our concern, these circumstances make this medium of artistic expression extremely receptive to participating in the cultural exploration of cutting edge developments in the world and speculating about popular fears and hopes, mass cultural trends and possibilities, and technological daydreams and technocratic nightmares.

Setting Boundaries, Transgressing Boundaries: Science Fiction as a Literary Genre

By the late seventies, science fiction analyst Gary Wolfe was moved to write in the preface to his book, **The Known and the Unknown: The Iconography of Science Fiction**, that "science fiction in general and science-fiction criticism in particular, is no longer of such narrow interest that every new study of the field need take for its scope the totality of what science fiction means, or where it comes from, or how to teach it" (1979: ix). But even in a study like this one where an underlying interpretative framework informs its structure, some preliminary exercise must be made to illuminate the core meaning of this popular genre and establish its boundaries or lines of demarcation.

So, what is science fiction—or, better, what are its defining features? What are its precursors? How do these literary traditions influence its continued development?

According to close students and literary critics of genre, science fiction includes the following key features. First, science fiction is scientifically grounded—that is: the general rule is that a SF writer "cannot contravene a known and accepted principle of science unless [he/she has] a logical explanation based on other known and accepted principles" (Rabkin, 1979: 121). Second, works of science fiction are constructed upon the foundations of scientific rationalism and embrace a scientific epistemology that presumes the world is knowable, real and phenomenal and "is subject to a system of discoverable and codifiable order, in the form of a set of interlocking 'natural laws'"(Malmgren, 1991: 5). This world, moreover, is “radically contingent” and “lacks an overarching teleology or an informing axiology” (ibid.). In other words, that lawful universe fictionally inhabited by science fiction artists is governed

not by an omniscient godhead, but by a "blind watch-maker." Third, the idea of modern science as the controlling cultural myth of our epoch underpins and supports the writing of science fiction. Insofar as "science...is the real myth of our culture," then "science fiction is merely the codification and expression of beliefs in that myth" (Wolfe, 1979: 5). Fourth, as Wolfe points out, through the second-order use of principles of scientific rationalism, science fiction elaborates a powerful dynamic giving impetus to the narrative structure of science fiction. That is, "the transformation of Chaos into Cosmos, of the unknown into the known, is the central action of a great many works of science fiction" (p.4). Fifth, much science fiction is formulaic, but need not be so. Following John Cawelti (1977), I mean by this that its plot structures, symbols, devices, and icons often take on the form of the conventional and predictable, but always with the deeper intent of estranging the familiar (i.e., representing the everyday world as a strange land) and illuminating the "novum" (i.e., the radically new within the old and familiar). Sixth, as SF practitioner Samuel Delany (1971) has argued, science fiction adopts the subjunctive form, *has not happened*, in contrast to realistic or naturalistic fiction's subjunctive mood defined by the phrase *could have happened* and that of science fantasy's subjunctive mood, *could not have happened.*

This study will work from the Darko Suvin's understanding of the definitional center of gravity or core of science fiction as the literature of cognitive estrangement. In his words, science fiction is "a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment [reality]" (Suvin, 1979: 7-8). Three elements of this definition should be underscored. First, science fiction as literary genre is characterized by the thematic dominance of the double-edged experience of estrangement. That is, it permits one to recognize the phenomenon, but simultaneously defamiliarizes it. The experience of estrangement is commonplace in everyday life, whether in the apparently simple and innocent questions of foreign visitors about one's city or country, the open-ended perceptions and the profoundly difficult questions of chil-

dren about aspects of nature, the world, and social relations, the punning possibilities of misspelled words or fractured sayings, or even the simple act of repeating a word many times. In science fiction, as we shall see, this defamiliarization process takes many forms.

This estranging element is counterbalanced in the practice of science fiction by the limiting principle of a cognitive norm or logic. In other words, the force of the cognitive principle requires that the estranging effects of SF remain within the cognitive bounds of the author's epoch and thus be subject to empirical validation by the logic of scientific inquiry. Finally, the underlying intent of science fiction as cognitive estrangement is less to predict or anticipate the future than to shed deeper light on the inner workings or operating assumptions on the contradictory present often veiled by social convention or screened out by ideological filters. (For further elaboration on this point, see Jameson, 1984.)

Yet another critical element to science fiction is implicit in Suvin's phrase, the "imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment." This has to do with the hegemonic role of the novum. Because science fiction diverges significantly from naturalistic or realistic fiction, it almost invariably incorporates into its plot structure some version of a novum (the radically new or novel). As we shall see, novums are polymorphous and include as concrete examples such elements as LeGuin's ansible, Lem's sentient sea, Benford's tachyons, Wilhelm's clones, and Asimov's gadgets. Working in complicity, the cognitive norms underlying science fiction, its defamiliarizing effect, and the hegemony of the novum tend to prompt the involved reader to oscillate between the author's empirical world and the estranged SF world, "feed[ing] back into the reader's own presuppositions and cultural invariants, questioning them and giving him/her a possibility of critical examination" (Suvin, 1983: 308). As a result, science fiction as critical political theory often issues in a powerful critique of existing social institutions, cultural norms, and prevailing structures of power. In the process, it opens up alternative ways of socially constructing the lived world and disclosing utopian possibilities latent in the present and emergent in that different possible future.

As well, prevailing scientific practice and technological possibilities are frequently interrogated or subverted in the process. As Malmgren puts it, "in part because its discourse is rooted in a scientific epistemology, in part because its novums are drawn from or tied to developments in science, the most significant SF necessarily investigates the dominant scientific paradigm of the day." "In a sense," as he goes on to say, "the genre simultaneously affirms and interrogates science, resting as it does on faith in reason and the scientific method while at the same time probing the assumptions, limits, and blind spots of each" (Malmgren, 1991: 30).

SF and Utopian Fiction

This study also explores the landscape of the utopian (and dystopian) imagination at the nexus of political theory and contemporary science fiction. Like many of the names in the work itself, Thomas More's ambiguous book title, **Utopia**, is a literary pun or joke, for it plays on the ambiguity between utopia as *eu topos* (good place) and *ou topos* (no place). On the other hand, Oscar Wilde (1954: 34) finds a privileged place for utopia as *eu topos* when he argues:

> A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not even worth glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realisation of Utopias."

Regarding SF and utopian fiction, the simple governing rule that some SF is utopian fiction, but not all utopian fiction is SF perhaps applies. Darko Suvin, on the other hand, categorizes utopian fiction as the "sociopolitical subgenre of science fiction."

Whatever the relation between science fiction and utopia, manifestations of utopian science fiction examined in this study can be placed into at least three categories, outlined in Tom Moylan's **Demand the Impossible** (1989). The first, classic or traditional utopias, like More's **Utopia** or Campanella's **City of the Sun,** tend to be systematic, escapist, and often located in new and uncharted parts of the world. The modern utopia inaugurated in some ways by H.G. Wells may be characterized as heuristic or instruc-

tional (exposing the reader to the unfulfilled potential of the collective human project), reformist or subversive of modern economic and political arrangements, and oriented toward its realization in the future (often under the auspices of the wonders of modern science and technology). Finally, the critical utopia, making its appearance in SF in works like LeGuin's **The Dispossessed**, Piercy's **Woman on the Edge of Time**, and Delany's **Triton**, rejects utopia as blueprint while preserving it as dream. A distinguishing mark of this category of utopias is that it holds in tension the conflict between the prevailing socially constructed world and the utopian society as open possibility in order to foreground the issue of socio-political change. In addition, it dwells on the continuing dialectics of solidarity and difference, order and chaos, the qualitatively better and imperfections within the ambiguous utopia or heterotopia of the future, but without trying decisively to resolve those tensions. In sum, in critical utopias, the utopian narrative is treated as the repository of "unfulfilled needs and wants of specific classes, groups, and individuals in their unique historical contexts" (Moylan, 1986: 1) and the utopian society is historicized and placed in a multi-temporal framework where past, present, and future intersect and interact with one another in strange and potentially productive ways. In so doing, utopian science fiction contributes to that pedagogical process Ruth Levitas sees in the best of utopian fiction: the education of desire (Levitas, 1990).

Towards a Critical Hermeneutics of Tradition: Science Fiction as Critical Political Theory

Perhaps surprisingly, the central organizing concept or focus of this work on science fiction as critical political theory is tradition—specifically, the apocalyptic, pastoral, and urban traditions rooted in American literature and politics and more generally in Western culture. I say surprisingly because both the postmodern temperament of our times and the dialectical imagination of critical Marxist theory have tended to weigh in against cultural traditions and heritages for their supposedly conservative, even stifling political and social repercussions. As we shall see, my approach is to emphasize the ineluctability of tradition and its interpretive spaciousness and political malleability.

The intent of this work is to interrogate and critically reappropriate these three deeply entrenched, longstanding, and interrelated literary, political, and cultural traditions through the medium of contemporary science fiction. I seek to do this in order to advance the unfolding political agenda of an ecological consciousness and multifaceted social movement being felt around the globe. That is, each heritage is questioned to determine its potential as a political resource in the developing political debate and cultural conversation about the human species, its relationships with nature and the social world, and the possible alternative futures being opened up by the apparently Promethean powers of modern science and technology. Insofar as these traditions can contribute to a more sophisticated rendering of the socio-political vision of the ecological imagination, the heritages of the Cross, the Plow, and the Skyline may be critically rehabilitated through the fusion of horizons provided by the normative core of these traditions, their cultural sedimentation in American letters and political life, the consciousness among those elements and remnants of the past who still pay homage to them, and the cultural surplus embodied in present-day articulations of these traditions and in their futuristic expressions in contemporary science fiction.

The ultimate goal is to fashion from contemporary science fictional representations and interrogations of these traditions, first, a complex and sophisticated critique of forces inside modern science and contemporary social existence apparently hurtling us toward a future characterized by new and qualitatively more terrifying natural and social catastrophes and by forms of political barbarism and economic bondage barely imagined in early twentieth century dystopian novels; and, second, a subtle and convincing imaginary of a postmodern ecological world featured by sustainable ecological and social practices and institutions, a pluralistic conception of better, more perfectible communities sublating pastoral hopes and dreams with city forms and true urbanity, and a new science and a new technology reconciling scientific specialization with eco-technologies.

These ambitions are guided by the method of critical hermeneutics. As a literary and political approach originally designed to restore meaning to damaged or broken texts, hermeneutics studies the interpretation or signifi-

cance of texts (signs, symbols, myths, poems, drama, music, and other cultural works) and text-analogues (literary and political traditions, actions, social movements, institutions, etc.). In so doing, it parts company with other supposedly scientific or "objective" forms of analysis and investigation in at least two ways. The first difference stems from the human sciences' answer to the question: how do we understand meaning? What differentiates science from the humanities, explanation from understanding, is that the latter moves inescapably within the hermeneutic circle—or, simply, "circle of interpretation."

Epistemologically, the humanities and the process of understanding meaning are indebted to Dilthey's belief that "meaningfulness fundamentally grows out of the relation of part to whole that is grounded in the nature of living experience [and] ultimately is the encompassing fundamental category under which life becomes graspable." So, as we read a text, we always approach it "in terms of part-whole relations: [that is] we are trying to establish a reading for the whole text, and for this we appeal to readings of its partial expressions; and yet because we are dealing with meaning, with making sense, where expressions only make sense or not in relation to others, the readings of partial expressions depend on those of others, and ultimately of the whole" (Taylor, 1971: 6).

To appreciate the intent of hermeneutics, we must remember that it began as an exercise of monks who struggled in medieval times to restore partially mutilated religious writings to their original, or at least whole, meaning. This part/whole method of recovering the meaning of broken texts eventually came to serve as a model for literary and cultural scholarship for understanding such products wherever the meaning and significance of texts and text analogues were in dispute. Within the humanities generally and many schools of thought in literary criticism and social and political theorizing today, hermeneutics is accepted as an essential mode of analysis and interpretation. There, literary symbols, cultural myths, and political values are viewed as common or intersubjective meanings existing within a larger matrix of other meanings and symbols—such as a defined fictional genre, common literary tradition, a national or political culture or ideology—partly constituting the rituals, practices, and symbolic actions

within those spheres. Moreover, because these symbols, myths, and traditions operate within a temporal frame, accumulating, and even changing meaning over history, the standpoint of the historian or literary critic or science fiction reader is an inescapable part of the understanding of these cultural artifacts.

SF and Cultural Surplus: From Complex Pastoralism to Political Ecology

Why focus on the apocalyptic, pastoral, and urban traditions? And why imbue these traditions with a utopian impulse? As a political theorist concerned with excavating the meaning structures of American politics and literature as they refract through contemporary science fiction, I would like to suggest that one way to conceptualize political culture (and its informing traditions) is to think of it as providing narratives to its inhabitants about who they are as individuals, citizens, and a nation and what they should want or need or desire. These narratives also tell them who is We and who or what is Other and what is the appropriate relationship between Us and Other(s). While these forms of individual and collective identity (and exclusion) tend to be relatively stable and durable, they are not cultural constants and thus are subject to change, reformulation, and even transformation. Because literary, cultural, and political traditions are institutions of discourse whose meanings and internal relationships are subject to renegotiation and rearticulation within and between generations, they are being continually interpreted and reinterpreted in the light of the pull of new experience and the push of past articulations. Thus, even hegemonic traditions participate in a politics of interpretation, given the spaciousness of the interpretive field of traditions (Kolb, 1990: 81-84; and Yanarella, 1993: 81). The not-so-simple point is that within the political and social realm there is often a politics of tradition where groups and movements contend with each other over whose interpretation offers the authoritative meaning of that tradition.

Within American culture generally and American political culture in particular, apocalyptic, pastoral, and urban symbols and myths have been deeply sedimented in its cultural narratives. These three cultural streams became

inscribed in our dominant cultural narratives, not so much as discrete and autonomous cultural forms with their own separate histories and impulses, but more so as mutually interpenetrating elements rooted for the most part in the biblical roots of our largely Protestant culture as well as in more secular roots stemming from nonreligious and even anti-religious springs like the Enlightenment nourished by overlapping or convergent sources. Literary and cultural critics like Sacvan Bercovitch (1975, 1978), Warner Berthoff (1994), and Emory Elliot (1986) have argued that "religious language and religiously grounded myths about America played a significant role in shaping an ideology of the 'American Way of Life'" and that "a set of beliefs originally expounded in New England Puritan rhetoric formed the superstructure that encloses virtually all American political and social ideas, even those that appear to be in conflict with one another" (Elliot, 1986: 8).

That Puritan rhetoric, as we shall see, was deeply colored by the temporal form, pastoral imagery, and urban telos yoking the worldly genesis and the biblical apocalypse. Indeed, even before it was discovered, the New World was invested with profoundly utopian hopes and dreams springing from a virgin land uncorrupted by Old World history, institutions, and practices. The signal influence of the Bible in shaping native American literature and American political culture stems from this Puritan heritage. As Northrup Frye has argued, "the spectrum of possible utopias has been rendered for us in the Bible, in the choice presented by the arcadian paradise of the Garden or the urban paradise of the New Jerusalem, 'the two myths that polarize social thought...the myth of origin and the myth of telos'" (cited in Malmgren, 1991: 80). Insofar as the Book of Revelation was in part, as some biblical scholars have claimed, a recapitulation of other parts of the Bible, its imagery of the apocalyptic eruption of a millennial kingdom bringing forth a New Heaven and a New Earth is less a polarization than a conjoining of Edenic paradise and New Jerusalem into a framework transformed by the Apocalypse. Even today, these impulses energize groups and movements in religion and politics while taking on many passionate and frequently bizarre forms (Fitzgerald, 1986; Robbins et al., 1997; and Thompson, 1997; and Wojcik, 1997).

The Cross, the Plow, and the Skyline then have served as powerful symbols of literary expression and political mobilization since the New World was invented in the hopes and dreams of European citizens, writers, and explorers well before its actual discovery. Whether in the concerns of Puritan ministers to locate the site of the Apocalypse in the New England colonies or in the effort by the Republic's school of revolutionary writers to pen a national literature, whether in the Jeffersonian vision of a pastoral American democracy spared Old Europe's squalid, teeming cities and polluting industries or in the populist's struggle to fashion a democratic alternative to the emerging corporate state of the twentieth century, whether in the religious and radical experiments in building utopian communities as counters to the sinful or exploiting big cities of the eighteen hundreds or in the garden cities and other urban utopias of the twentieth century—the American cultural and political landscape has proved to be fertile ground for seeding these three traditions and harvesting their literary and political fruits.

As an exercise in the radical political task of critical inheritance of past traditions, the theoretical thrust of this work draws heavily upon Ernst Bloch's philosophy of hope (1986). Beginning with his definition of human beings as creatures who hope, Bloch explores the many expressions of human hope in the classical literature, the professions, the arts, mass advertising and popular entertainment. His intent is to offer a positive hermeneutic of figures of hope and anticipatory consciousness in popular culture and everyday life. Regarding religious believers, farmers, and small business proprietors as continuing repositories of older ideas of land, community, work, and home subverted by the advancing of modern industrializing forces and secularizing trends, Bloch stressed the need of change agents to shoulder the task of active inheritance as a form of hegemonic rearticulation of the cultural surplus of these ideas (Schroyer, 1982). That is, Bloch recognized that these premodern and even antimodern elements of earlier phases of economic development act as noncontemporaneous contradictions in present-day politics often expressed in conservative and even reactionary articulations. But he believed that their continuing articulation of antiquated cultural ideals and values points to their failure to become

fully sedimented in social relations in the past and to their spawning of a cultural surplus of these traditions that can reactivate these old dreams and seed continuing political mobilization on their behalf in the living present and hopeful future. For Bloch, their political potential as part of a forward coalition of forces promoting radical change requires Marxists to "pay the debts of the past in order to receive the present" (Howard, 1977: 66-67) by articulating the futurity contained in every value and ideal expressed by existing remnants of older economic being and political consciousness—a futurity that could only be truly realized in an open, democratic, socialist society yet to be made.

This study then is animated by the belief that the ecological imagination took shape in late twentieth century cultural and political consciousness may be the anticipatory consciousness of the cultural surplus of the apocalyptic, pastoral, and urban traditions. It is further grounded in the idea that science fiction as critical political theory may be one medium for articulating the futurity of the cultural surplus of these traditions. In making this argument, I am not suggesting that SF unambiguously shows the way or lays out the strategy for critically appropriating these traditions and socially constructing our crumbling political and social institutions of postmodernity (emphasis still on modernity). For, as Gramsci rightly characterized the present epoch, the crisis of our age lies precisely in the fact that "the old is dying and the new cannot be born; [and] in this interregnum a whole assortment of morbid symptoms appear[s]" (1971: 276). Science fiction performs its best political service when it participates in a culture of opposition and gives form to an anticipatory consciousness to subject the present to trenchant critique. By so doing, it points the way to a better future if we but liberate our dreams and desires and channel them into hard political struggle.

The Architecture of the Book

In the first part of this work, the structure of this critical analysis oscillates between chapters providing essential historical and theoretical background to the literary appropriation of the apocalyptic, pastoral, and urban traditions and others offering a critical interpretive reading of their SF

representations. Thus, the first chapter introduces the apocalyptic tradition from its genesis in Hebrew apocalyptics to its flowering and reinterpretation in Christianity in the New Testament, especially the Book of Daniel and the Book of Revelation. It then explores the emergence of America as apocalypse in the widespread assimilation of apocalyptic symbols and energies from the Judeo-Christian heritage into religious and secular cultural, political, and literary forms. It further addresses whether this ambiguous heritage of the West should be looked at as a political resource or a political liability in the political praxis of change-oriented movements. Chapter two then shows how the apocalyptic tradition in Western religion and culture became a fundament of meaning and critical imagination in the hands of various contemporary science fiction writers. That is, in this chapter, I consider the extent to which this unstable set of tokens and symbols of imminent worldly destruction and sweeping spiritual redemption opens out onto a fertile futuristic field. There it reveals a startling and penetrating nexus linking some of the most profound insights of the Frankfort school of critical theory's critique of Western reason and the modern authoritarian state with science fiction's speculations on the near-term horrors and more distant terrors informing the worst of the unfolding trends in the living and contradictory present.

In a similar fashion, chapter three offers a historical and theoretically-informed appreciation of the pastoral tradition, beginning with its seeding in certain Greek and Roman poems and bearing fruit in the lush green landscape of a paradisal America already imagined by early European thinkers before it was even discovered and colonized. This historical and political theoretical gloss of Western pastoralism and a garden America is followed in chapter four by an exploration of three distinctive pastoral images projected into imaginary futures by contemporary SF writers. As I show, these three images reanimate and rearticulate the powerful pull of the garden metaphors and utopian idyll underlying much of the popularity of pastoralism within American literature generally and within the early Republic's political battles to redeem the agrarian democratic promise of the first New Nation against the corruption and temptations of an industrializing and city-building Old Europe.