



## Utopia in the Age of Globalization

*Also by Robert T. Tally Jr.*

SPATIALITY

GEOCRITICAL EXPLORATIONS: Space, Place, and Mapping in Literary and Cultural Studies (*editor*)

KURT VONNEGUT AND THE AMERICAN NOVEL: A Postmodern Iconography

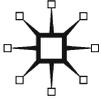
MELVILLE, MAPPING AND GLOBALIZATION: Literary Cartography in the American Baroque Writer

palgrave▶pivot

▶ **Utopia in the Age of  
Globalization: Space,  
Representation, and  
the World System**

Robert T. Tally Jr.

palgrave  
macmillan



UTOPIA IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION

Copyright © Robert T. Tally Jr., 2013.

Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2013 978-0-230-39189-5

All rights reserved.

First published in 2013 by

PALGRAVE MACMILLAN®

in the United States—a division of St. Martin's Press LLC,

175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

this is by Palgrave Macmillan, a division of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

Palgrave® and Macmillan® are registered trademarks in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe and other countries.

ISBN: 978-0-230-39190-1 PDF

ISBN: 978-1-349-35180-0

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available from the Library of Congress.

A catalogue record of the book is available from the British Library.

First edition: 2013

[www.palgrave.com/pivot](http://www.palgrave.com/pivot)

DOI: 10.1057/9780230391901



*for my students and my teachers*

# Contents

Preface	vii
Acknowledgments	xv
Introduction: “A map of the world which does not contain Utopia”	1
1 The End of Utopia at the Present Time	10
2 A Meditation on the Impossible	29
3 Power to the Imagination	48
4 Mapping the Postnational World System	66
Conclusion: <i>Hic Sunt Dracones</i>	94
Bibliography	102
Index	110

## Preface

Utopia seems strangely out of place in the age of globalization. In its various forms, incarnations, attitudes, and caricatures over the years, utopian discourse appeared to belong to worlds of hope, of possibility, of undiscovered countries and promising futures. In the utopian imagination, there were supposed to be ideal forms outside of this mundane existence, or hitherto unknown lands to discover, or a promised future that would unfold over time, any of which would disclose a utopian formation unavailable to us in the here and now. Yet, today, such ideals, places, and times seem all but foreclosed, and it is difficult, if not impossible, even to imagine radical alternatives to the status quo. On nearly all sides and across many ideological positions, the present world system in the era of globalization is imagined as a paradoxically dynamic yet fixed space. This postmodern, postnational condition posits a superstructure in which a bewildering array of largely imperceptible, but thoroughly effective, processes pervasively influence the most minute aspects of lived experience. But at the same time this structure is envisioned as a stable, mostly immutable system. If utopia is the realization of seemingly impossible dreams, then the global expansion of the capitalist mode of production, its extension to the far-flung regions of the planet and into the most intimate zones of individual human experience, would appear to spell the end for any hope of a fundamentally different state of affairs. As a form and discourse of radical alterity, utopia appears to have no place in the world.

And yet, surprisingly, utopia has not only made a comeback in the postmodern age of globalization, persisting long after the epoch to which it would seem most suited, but has become a powerful discursive mode and object of inquiry in literature, critical theory, cultural studies, and social thought over the past few decades. As a disciplinary subfield, or really an interdisciplinary field unto itself, utopian studies is relatively recent, tracing its origins to the 1960s, with Lyman Tower Sargent's influential 1967 essay, "The Three Faces of Utopianism," marking an important moment. With the founding of the Society for Utopian Studies in 1975, the field has developed further, and significant contributions to the field have been published, including such influential books as Tom Moylan's *Demand the Impossible* (1986), Vincent Geoghegan's *Utopianism and Marxism* (1987), and Ruth Levitas's *The Concept of Utopia* (1990). Since the millennial threshold of 2000, several major works on utopian theory have appeared, demonstrating the continuing force of utopianism in contemporary criticism. These include David Harvey's *Spaces of Hope* (2000), Fredric Jameson's *Archaeologies of the Future* (2005), Moylan's *Scraps of the Untainted Sky* (2001), Phillip E. Wegner's *Imaginary Communities* (2002), Sargent's *Utopianism: A Very Short Introduction* (2010), and collections such as Moylan and Raffaella Baccolini's *Dark Horizons* (2003) and *Utopia Method Vision* (2007), among many other important books and essays. The Society for Utopian Studies' journal, *Utopian Studies*, was founded in 1988 and offers a venue for innovative research on all matters utopian. Although it sounds rather strange to say, utopia is actually quite timely.

In this little book, I explore the paradoxically untimely timeliness of utopia in the age of globalization. In my view, utopia at the present moment is not to be understood in terms of an ideal society, state, or condition. The earlier visions of utopia are, I believe, inextricably tied to a modernity that has now become a residual cultural phenomenon, if it has not evanesced altogether, in the postmodern condition. Furthermore, utopia has traditionally been associated with the state-form, whether the focus has been on the infra-statist domain of the capital city or the super-state image of a world government, and the age of globalization has in some respects rendered the state itself obsolete or, if not entirely obsolete, then much diminished in power from its former role. The utopias of the early modern era were located in space, discovered in the course of exploratory voyages, and described in travel narratives; although they existed in this world, they were somewhere far away, remote and perhaps hidden from the operations of everyday life.

At a later stage, following the industrial revolution and during the age of imperialism or monopoly capital, utopia was recast into a temporal, rather than spatial, matrix. For the utopians of Edward Bellamy's generation, for instance, a utopian state could be discovered in the future; utopia existed, but not yet. Utopia could be found not through geographical explorations, but through some kind of time-travel. Hence, a variety of utopian Rip Van Winkles stumbled upon their ideal states by somehow sleeping through the intervening years, much as Washington Irving's slothful hero slumbered through the American Revolution only to arrive at a realm of freedom and peace far more visceral and welcome than democracy (that is, widowhood, or freedom from Dame Van Winkle!). For Bellamy, William Morris, and others of the late nineteenth century, gulfs of time rather than oceans separated us from the utopias of our dreams. Again, like their predecessors in the early modern period, such modernist utopias really did exist in this world, just not in our own time.

Utopia in the age of globalization, as I see it, does not exist in this world, whether in its spaces or its times. Utopia is neither an attempt to locate a spatially accessible *other-place* apart from the places in which we live nor a form of imagining a temporal *other-time*, whether in the past or the future. Rather, utopia in the present configuration can only be a method by which one can attempt to apprehend the system itself. To put it another way, utopia is a means of mapping the world. Utopia is an attempt to construct or project a totality, and in this I associate it closely with Jameson's concept of "cognitive mapping." As in that model, the utopian impulse reflects an effort to situate oneself in space and in history, imaginatively projecting a world that enables one to represent the apparently unrepresentable totality of the world system. This act of figuration comes across in utopian texts as a form of literary cartography. As with literal mapmaking, the artist or critic produces an imaginary, even fantastic, image of the space to be represented, developing a more or less useful tool for apprehending the world in which we live, and thereby perhaps inviting considerations of alternative maps. In other words, the utopian impulse is not connected to perfection or to an ideal state, but discloses a rigorously literary process of vision and revision that enables one to comprehend the dynamic world system in its unrepresentable excess, while also providing a practical, though provisional, guide to operating within the world. The utopian practice is not, therefore, epistemological, offering a means of *knowing* the world, but literary, allowing

us to tell stories in different ways as means of representing ourselves and the world in the present time and space.

My discussion engages with two utopian thinkers in particular, Herbert Marcuse and Fredric Jameson, although many others have influenced my thoughts on utopia. Marcuse, in Jameson's words, was "surely the most influential Utopian of the 1960s,"<sup>1</sup> and he represents a turning point in the theory of utopia's principal critical vocation. A member of the generation that was born when utopian promise was likely at its peak, Marcuse lived through the horrors of the dystopian mid-century, and he discovered the one-dimensionality of postwar Western societies in an era of purported peace and plenty. In a sense, Marcuse is emblematic of a new kind of utopian thought that emerged at the very beginning of the age of globalization, just as certain forms of Americanization, neocolonialism, and transnational economic activities were crystallizing into what would only later be recognized as the world system under late capitalism. Marcuse's understanding of utopia as the "scandal of qualitative difference" opens up a conceptual space for later utopian theory, most notably that of Jameson, who was after all a colleague of Marcuse's at the University of California at San Diego in the 1960s, and who has carried on and extended the critical legacy of Marcuse and other utopian fellow travelers into the present. Thus, we might think of Marcuse and Jameson as the key theorists of utopia in the age of globalization, the former operating at the moment of "early" postmodernism while the latter has become the preeminent cultural theorist of postmodernity and of the present condition. Jameson remains one of the most important theorists of what Phillip E. Wegner has identified as "late postmodernism."<sup>2</sup> Hence, my own reading of utopia at the present conjuncture draws upon these two theorists in particular. And, although this is not really a book on Marcuse or Jameson, I have endeavored to think *with* them in formulating my reflections.<sup>3</sup>

I consider this little book an essay, in that most literal and also broadest sense of an attempt or experiment, in which the concept of utopia can be brought to bear productively on questions of spatiality and globalization. Much of my recent work has dealt with the theoretical consideration of these latter terms, but I have found, over and over again, that the discourse of utopia intrudes upon these ruminations in interesting ways. As I have looked into spatial theory and criticism, I have found that the most fruitful research has often aligned or overlapped with utopian theory, and that utopian studies offer approaches

to the problem of representing a seemingly unrepresentable world system that conditions even the most minuscule aspects of daily life, while also constituting an absolute horizon for thinking today. In the seemingly inescapable but unthinkable vast space of the late capitalist world system, the imaginative cartography of this global system is at the heart of the utopian project.

The book is divided into six chapters, including the introduction and conclusion. In my introductory chapter, I begin with Oscar Wilde's well-known quip from "The Soul of Man under Socialism" that "[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." The premise that the current postmodern and postnational condition seems particularly ill-suited for utopian thought is supported in part by the fact that utopia has been historically correlated with modernity and the nation-state form. In the age of globalization, I argue that utopia can be neither an ideal state elsewhere in world geography nor a realization of some ideal future. Rather, utopia today must function as an imaginative effort to map the world system itself. Utopia is best imagined as a form of literary cartography, and utopian theory is a necessary component for critical practices aimed at making sense of the world.

In Chapter 1, I examine the "end of utopia" at the present time. I begin with Marcuse's elegant argument concerning the end of utopia, in which he acknowledges the anti-utopian position that held that the time for utopianism was at an end, before enacting a dialectical reversal in which utopia is revealed to be more timely than ever. In the era of globalization, in which radical alternatives to the present political-economic organization seem all the more impossible or even inconceivable, Marcuse's argument gains renewed relevance. Recent protests, including the Occupy Wall Street movement, represent examples of the renewed utopian impulse, as various groups struggle to imagine and create new spaces of liberty. Although the present world system does not allow for the older sort of "blueprint" utopias, the critical project of utopia as a form of opposition to the apparently intractable state of affairs is all the more vital. Drawing upon the theories of Marcuse, Jameson, and Henri Lefebvre, I maintain that utopia remains a vital force in critical theory and practice in the twenty-first century.

Chapter 2 focuses on Jameson's recent elaboration of utopia, especially in *Archaeologies of the Future* and *Valences of the Dialectic*. Jameson's radical position is that utopia does not embody an alternative state or a future

condition so much as it helps us grasp the limits of our images of future alternatives. That is, rather than seeing utopia as a picture of a possible social formation, Jameson's utopia is a meditation on the impossible. In this view, utopian discourse becomes a key feature of critical social theory itself, and this contributes to the discussion of how utopianism figures in the work of Benjamin, Bloch, and Marcuse, as well as in the Frankfurt School more generally. The critical value of utopia lies in its response to a formal and political crisis in representation, a crisis that might otherwise condemn us to an anti-utopianism so thoroughgoing as to constitute its own impulse towards totalitarian thinking and practice. Thus, in a dialectical reversal, anti-utopian thinking generates the dystopian ends that utopia's detractors had predicted, and utopian discourse as a meditation on the impossible discloses new ways of imagining the world system itself.

As Jameson and others have suggested, the failure to imagine radical alternatives to the present situation, the failures of utopian thinking more broadly, may have more to do with our weak imaginations than with the absolute immutability of the postmodern status quo. Chapter 3 resuscitates a slogan from the Parisian militants of May 1968, "Power to the Imagination," and argues that the theories of Sartre and Marcuse, so influential at that time, can be brought to bear fruitfully on our own situation. Among these philosophical and political ideas that are surprisingly timely in the twenty-first century, existential anxiety has perhaps a heightened salience in the era of multinational corporations and of global economic crisis, and the utopian desire for a life without anxiety has become more pressing. Looking at Sartre's and Marcuse's critical theory in the context of globalization, I argue that the utopian impulse behind Sartre's existentialism and Marcuse's critique of one-dimensional society can be seen in Jameson's aesthetic of cognitive mapping, which provides a model for overcoming the spatial anxieties of the present age, and discloses a rethinking of utopia in the postnational world system. Cognitive mapping, broadly conceived, perhaps not unsurprisingly turns out to be the form of utopian practice.

Taking up this position in Chapter 4, I examine the representational challenges occasioned by a postnational world system. Whereas one model of cognitive mapping involved the sort of imaginary community of the nation-state, in Jameson's idea of national allegory, the world system in the age of globalization is characteristically postnational. As may be seen in the 1980 thriller *The Formula*, this can appear as a

utopia of late capitalism, a vision of a world with “no more enemies ... only customers” (in the words of one character). The notion of a world market overcoming the problems of the nation and of nationalism is utopian in the sense that it posits an ideal mode of life that has eliminated or found solutions for the persistent problems in the societies we know or have known. However, the postnational condition has also rendered traditional models of understanding the world system ineffective. For example, a driving force behind globalization has been the proliferation of exotic instruments of finance, and the growing financialization of the world economy. Financial derivatives are bizarrely utopian in their own right, existing in a liminal space between production and distribution, having “nominal” value only fictionally tied to underlying assets; they are at once ubiquitous and nowhere. Mapping a world in which such things embody and facilitate such postmodern flows presents new challenges to representation. I suggest that the vocation of utopia in the era of globalization is to make sense of the flux of transnational power by projecting a new, postnational map. Utopia, which had historically been the model form for understanding the national condition of modernity, becomes a critical tool for making sense of the postnational condition in our postmodern era of globalization.

In concluding, I note that, if the “map of the world that does not include Utopia is not even worth glancing at,” this does not mean that a properly mapped world with its duly noted utopias will solve all of our problems. Those same early modern maps that sought to represent More’s fanciful island would be wise to include the equally fanciful marginal admonition, *hic sunt dracones* (“here, there be dragons”), a fair warning to those who would presume a complete knowledge of the mobile and protean spaces of the world system. Utopia, like Gilles Deleuze’s notion of *smooth space*, is not going to save us. Yet, in mapping the social, political, and cultural coordinates of a twenty-first-century world, the utopian approach offers strategies for comprehending the system without necessarily exhausting its possibilities. The power of utopia lies not so much in producing a fully formed and accurate cartography, as in the persistent attempt to imagine alternatives to the present state of affairs while remaining assiduously of the world. This worldly otherworldliness, the real-and-imaginary domain of dragons, characterizes the utopian projection, and in the fantastic maps produced, a novel image of our own world emerges.

## Notes

- 1 Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, xv.
- 2 See Wegner, *Life between Two Deaths*, 5.
- 3 For an important analysis of Jameson's theory and criticism, see Wegner's forthcoming *Periodizing Jameson; or, The Adventures of Theory in Post-Contemporary Times*. See also my own forthcoming *Fredric Jameson: The Project of Dialectical Criticism*.

## Acknowledgments

As in the classic utopian narratives, my journey to utopia was unplanned and the discovery of utopia was unexpected. My interest in the relations between narrative and social space began with more traditional forms of realism, critical theory, and cultural geography, but as I read more, I realized the degree to which even the most mimetic forms of literature employed a fantastic mode in executing a kind of literary cartography. I frequently found that the processes and the effects of such narrative mapping were similar to those of utopian discourse, and the resulting visions, whether realistic or fanciful, were somehow also utopian. Along the way, I became familiar with important work being done by scholars and critics in the interdisciplinary field of utopian studies, and I am particularly thankful to the Society for Utopian Studies, which provides both resources and community for those lost at sea, for its continuing service to all manner of scholars of utopian criticism, theory, and practice.

I have benefited enormously from the stimulating questions and helpful feedback received at the conferences at which I presented early versions of these arguments, and I am grateful to the organizers, chairs, fellow panelists, and audiences. Thanks go to the organizers and participants of the following events: the Society for Utopian Studies annual meetings in 2007 and 2012; “Moments of Futurity,” the ninth annual meeting of the Marxist Reading Group at the University of Florida, in 2007; “Critical Refusals,” the fourth biennial conference of the International Herbert Marcuse Society, in 2011; “Educating the Imagination: A

Conference in Honour of Northrop Frye on the Centenary of His Birth,” in 2012; and the Marxist Literary Group’s Summer Institute on Culture and Society in 2012. I would like to give special thanks to the organizers, students, and attendees of the University of South Florida’s 2012 Graduate Conference, “Re-Conceptualizing Cartography: Space-Time Compression and Narrative Mapping,” at which I presented the plenary talk in which some of these ideas were presented. My thinking about these matters has been spurred by the helpful comments of numerous colleagues and friends, including Jonathan Arac, Suparno Banerjee, Paul A. Bové, Michael Hennessy, Ogaga Ifowodo, Fredric Jameson, Douglas Kellner, Andy Lamas, Daniel Lochman, Amanda Meyer, Mark Purcell, James Rolleston, Kenneth Surin, Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek, and Phillip E. Wegner. I would like to thank Brigitte Shull of Palgrave Macmillan for her enthusiastic support for and helpful advice with this and other projects, and I also thank Vidhya Jayaprakash for her careful copyediting of the manuscript.

Some of the material contained in this book has appeared elsewhere in rather different forms, and I gratefully acknowledge the editors and publishers for allowing me to incorporate previously published words into my rethinking of these matters here. My discussion of Jameson’s *Archaeologies of the Future* and *Valences of the Dialectic* in Chapter 2 draws upon two earlier pieces: “Radical Alternatives: The Persistence of Utopia in the Postmodern,” which appeared in Alfred J. Drake, ed., *New Essays on the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2010), 109–121; and my review of *Valences* in the *Marx & Philosophy Review of Books* (January 4, 2011). An earlier version of Chapter 3 appeared as “Sartre, Marcuse, and the Utopian Project Today,” in *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 12.1 (March 2010). My discussion of derivatives in Chapter 4 draws from parts of my essay, “Meta-Capital: Culture and Financial Derivatives,” in *Cultural Logic* 12.1 (2010), reprinted in *Works and Days* 59/60, Vol. 30: Special issue on Culture and Crisis, ed. Joseph G. Ramsey (2012): 230–47.

Above all, I am grateful to Reiko Graham for her love and support, to the Britches sisters for their consistent unpredictability, and to my family and friends for being there for me. Of the many real world “utopias” I have encountered, the Utopia Café in San Francisco deserves acknowledgment, along with Hon’s Wun Tun House in that city and in Vancouver, for their nearly ideal wonton noodle soup. This book is dedicated to my students and to my teachers, who are inexhaustible sources of inspiration.