

## CHAPTER II

# What Remains of Zamyatin's *We* After the Change of Leviathans? Or, Must Collectivism Be Against People? (1999–2000)<sup>1</sup>

To Saša Flaker and Mike Holquist, as they were in the 1950s–1960s, friends from whom I learned much

The Revolution – that is: I – not alone, but we.

— A.A. BLOK, diary note

I am responsible for non-attributed translation. Except for direct quotes and the book title, arguments about the philosophical “We” and “I” in and out of Zamyatin are always put into quotes with initial caps. The characters D-503 and I-330 are named (or “numbered”) in full the first time they occur in any paragraph, and after that only as D- and I-. A few more words may be useful about the “braided” structure I experimentally adopted in this essay, which focuses in sections 1, 3, and 5 on the text of the novel *We*, interweaving this in sections 2, 4, and 6 with the changed state of Russia today and how this changes our eyes, that is, our view of the 1921 novel. This spiral shuttling back and forth is held together by the central concern of Zamyatin's, which has not ceased to be of interest even though its terms have more or less shifted, the discussion of the State Leviathan “We” vs. the individualist “I”. This was an attempt to escape what I have increasingly felt as the ghetto of Idealist literary studies and esthetics, which take history into account only if it is the history of other books and writings. This seems to me the bad, alas also increasingly weighty, aspect of our professionalism and specialization, rashly aping natural sciences (who are anyway running into serious problems themselves). While I cannot claim for this article more than presenting one attempt at coping, it seemed much preferable to not trying anything, or (obversely) emigrating from literary studies.

I see in the near future a crisis approaching that unnerves me and makes me tremble for my country [...]. Corporations have been enthroned and an era of high corruption will follow [...].

— A. LINCOLN, letter to Col. W.F. Elkins

The case against saying we seems overwhelming [...]. The epistemological and political need to say we remains, however. Neither a theory nor a politics of irreducible singularity seems very promising.

— N. SCHEMAN, “The Body Politic”

## o. Premise

First premise (epistemological): the rereading of a text which, within radically altered circumstances of a reader, suddenly begins to look significantly different – prompting perhaps a reconsideration of the ethical, political or other values earlier allotted to it by the same reader – poses a puzzle about the nature of textual meaning. It foregrounds an axiom of semiotics which seems counter-intuitive only because our “intuition” has been shaped by

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*Note 2003:* I have resisted the temptation to change this essay for two reasons, pertaining to the twin focus and organization of the essay, evident in the opposition between the odd and even sections. First, the writings on Zamyatin seem to have more or less dried out, now that he is not at the forefront of Kremlinology; at any rate I’m not aware of significant additions to the arguments I cite (say about I-330). Second, the statistics on Russia would of course change in four years, but its economical polarization, which brings immiseration to many, probably most people, is going on (see now Stiglitz, chapter 5), aggravated by the senseless and counterproductive war in Chechnya.

*Note 2006:* Material for this essay was assembled around 1999, at what was probably the economic nadir of Russia. Today, the life expectancy for males has risen, back from fifty-five to fifty-nine years ... And there are many more millionaires, gangsters, and prostitutes than in 1999.

positivistic prejudice: there is no object- "text" out there, independent of the collective or allegorical subject-eyes beholding it. (This does not mean there is nothing out there!) I will be speaking here of a novel, but text may be taken in the semiotic sense of any articulated signic entity able to stand still for the purpose of analysis. No fixed and unmoving central text, analogous to Ptolemy's Earth or to an unsplittable atom or personality, can be opposed to an environing "context" (or even the more recent and modish "intertext"); unless one is to say that the context permeates the text by existing beneath and between each sign-unit and determining their shapes and meanings. Such is the case of the context of any specific sociolect within natural language: Russian or English or indeed the Spanish of Pierre Ménard's word by word reconstruction of Cervantes's *Don Quijote* which nonetheless gives the nineteenth-century reader, as Borges rightly argues, a quite different novel from the reader of Cervantes's age. A text, in brief, exists in the interaction of signifiers visible on its surface with the individual or collective beholder, who allots signification and meaning to the ensemble and articulation of the signifiers. All text studies – and thus also, perhaps more clearly than other genres, SF studies – are historicosemiotic studies, or if you wish cultural studies.

Second premise (political): we have gone through – the globe is still going through – a change of Leviathans that rule and subsume us, which might be dated with 1991 in Russia as the final stage of a world-historical change datable (maybe) with 1973. I extrapolate "Leviathan" from Hobbes's meaning to that of any collective, politico-economic as well as ideological, hegemony, the World Whale inside which all of us are condemned to live. The transfer into the entrails of a new – but just as pernicious and probably more murderous – whale is surely of the utmost significance for understanding the position of all of us under the missing stars.<sup>2</sup> In a dialec-

2 After the first draft of this article I read Michael R. Krätke's excellent analysis of the limits of globalization (esp. 40–55), which proves that the multinational corporations have fully globalized only the currency and capital markets. The ca. 600 big corporations and "institutional investors" are owned and managed, and further they produce, research, and invest, overwhelmingly in one zone of the "triad" (North America, Europe, Japan and East Asia), indeed 80 out of the 100 biggest ones mainly

tical furthermore, this orientation can be of use as a defence against being totally digested by the devouring global whale, the capitalist socioeconomic formation in its new Post-Fordist shape, and indeed as modestly emboldening us to work toward preparing its downfall, from an assumed point of view based upon lineaments of some different, better, today necessarily utopian collective. Wallerstein argues that the prevailing loss of ideological ascendancy and even legitimacy by the State is a prelude to the downfall of the capitalist world-system, since the latter has never been able to exist only through the Invisible Hand of the Market without crucial State support to weaken the claims of the workers, transfer citizens' taxes to the capitalists, and defend them against stronger "foreign" competitors (32, 46–47, and *passim*). Whether this view may be too optimistic or not, it is at any rate crucial to understand the metamorphosis of Leviathan. And what better way to this than by feedback from a classic view of him?

It follows that our very ambiguously new Post-Fordist age – a return of the stalest meat spiced with the sharpest sauces – unambiguously forces an awake critic into new ways of envisaging and talking about text/context. The new ways have unfortunately not been fully worked out by anybody that I can see. The best I can do is to adopt a "braided" structure, which should not be too surprising for readers of Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*, Piercy's *He, She and It*, the Strugatskys' *Snail on the Slope* (see Chapter 18 and Suvin, *Positions* Chapter 11) or the even more complex shuttling in Russ's *Female Man* – as well as for readers of verse, say with the a-b-a-b rhyme. Indeed

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in one country; exceptions can be found in the food and drink, computer, and some other consumer goods firms (McDonald's!). Based on such data, the splendid book by Kagarlitsky rightly argues that "the [...] argument about 'the impotence of the state'" both hides its abuse by financial capital and hobbles struggles for a countervailing, democratic nation-state (vi and *passim*; see also Went 48–50). I dissent only from his analysis of the Bosnian civil war and a few other, minor matters. Amongst them is his term of "New Big Brother" rather than New Leviathan: true, it is more immediately comprehensible but also, as I argue in Section 4, much too personalized for the capillary politics of globalization.

perhaps the compositional principle of all fictional utopias (including dystopias) is necessarily the braiding of showing and telling, lecture and action. And if you believe, as I have often argued, that all SF is not only historically a niece of utopia but is also ineluctably written between the poles of utopia and dystopia, then to the degree this is correct, it further follows that such braiding or more generally patching is also the compositional principle of SF.

All of this finally means that the pretence at a “final” explanation of anything has been well lost. But my project is even more modest: I think it may be too early to achieve a full new overview of *We* (for one thing, most regrettably, many writings by Zamyatin still remain inaccessible or indeed unpublished), and I wish this contribution to be simply a first shot across the bows by a devil’s advocate – whom my subject himself would salute as necessary.<sup>3</sup>

3 A smattering of letters to and about Zamyatin was published in Russia and abroad beginning with the *glasnost* years. Yet there is still a great deal of unpublished writings by him in the archives at Columbia University, in Paris – including a ten-page film synopsis of *We* called *D-503* from 1932 – and in Russia.

It might also be useful to immerse Zamyatin more decisively into his precise locus. First of all, *We* and some of his most significant essays were written in and as a response to the period of War Communism ca. 1917–21, the time of fierce military struggle, direct State dictatorship, and the crudest collectivist hyperboles (for example by the “proletarian” poets and the enthusiasts for Taylorism); Stalin’s post-1928 or post-1934 reign of terror is a rather different period – for one thing, open opposition à la Zamyatin was not tolerated any more. There are indications that a number of Zamyatin’s later and not yet fully accessible works (as the unfinished novel about Attila) again turned to a critique of the West. Second, he would profit from much more comparison to his contemporary Futurist poets or Constructivist painters (see Heller); and within SF and utopia/dystopia, only some first parallels have been drawn to two other major Russian SF works of the 1920s with world-historical horizons, deeply preoccupied with, respectful of, yet not necessarily starry-eyed about the price of revolutionary politics – Alexey Tolstoy’s *Adelita* and Ilya Ehrenburg’s *Trust D.E.* (see Striedter). All three were written by intellectuals who had been living not only in Russia but also in western Europe, of which they were rather critical. All three oscillated in their attitude toward the Bolshevik authorities, Zamyatin being the most resolutely and stridently critical of them.

For Zamyatin himself was and constantly remained both a convinced heretic and a convinced utopian socialist.<sup>4</sup>

So then: just how different is today, after the sea-change of whales inside which we Lucians, Sindbads, Pantagruels or Nemos live, the text of Zamyatin's novel *We*? For one question, which is a technical way of putting it within the debates of Utopian Studies: is it still a living "anti-utopian" novel when nobody can even pretend that the utopia it was "anti" to is still a major, observable actuality?

## I

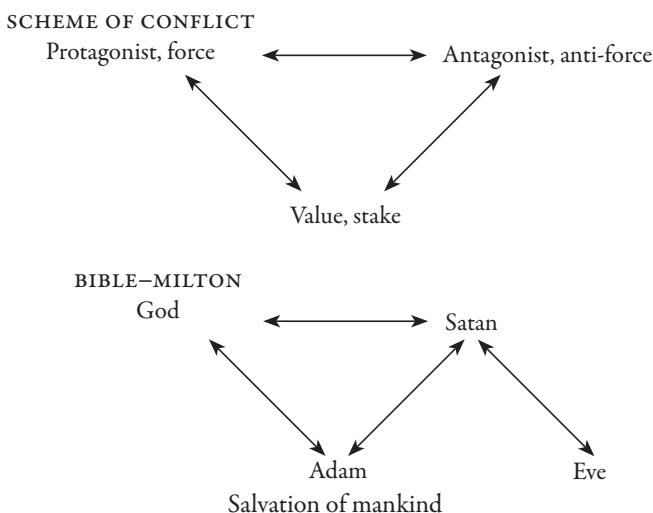
It is well known (and rehearsed from Gregg to Beauchamp) that *We* takes its central agential constellation as well as some of the most important value horizons from a heretical reworking of the orthodox Christian myth of Eden, which echoes powerfully in Milton and Dostoevsky.<sup>5</sup> In mildly

<sup>4</sup> A remarkable unpublished article draft from 1921 propounds: "Only those who do not believe or insufficiently believe in socialism want an orthodox socialist literature and fear unorthodox literature. I believe. I know: socialism is inevitable. It has already ceased to be a utopia, and precisely because of this it is the business of true literature to build new utopias. [...] [T]he future has become the present, it has acquired flesh, earth, steel, it has become heavy, current – and that is why it no longer [...] carries the pathos of utopia and imagination – so that it is necessary to build for man a new utopia of tomorrow and the day after tomorrow" (Russian original in Malm'stad and Fleishman 107–08).

<sup>5</sup> So far as I am aware, having followed criticism on Zamyatin in the main European languages, most critics – many of whom are listed in the bibliography of *Metamorphoses* – who speak about his relation to Dostoevsky mention only aspects from *The Brothers Karamazov*, *The Possessed*, and *Notes from the Underground* (but see the pioneering Shane). Yet Zamyatin knew his Dostoevsky very well indeed, and I think a thorough confrontation of *We* with Dostoevsky's whole opus is a desideratum that one hopes the Slavists could put high up on their agenda, just after the publication of Zamyatin's collected works, even though grants might have dried up. It would be a shame if we had to find out that most Slavists had in reality been more interested in Cold War Kremlinology than in literary cognition when they extolled Zamyatin.

semiotic or narratological terms, and confining myself solely to paradigmatic aspects, one could characterize it as a conflict between a Protagonist (God) – who is both the supreme power and the supreme value – and an Antagonist (Satan as the Serpent tempter) over the Pentateuch's and the Bible's overriding Value – the obedience of Man (Adam) to God. I find it useful for further discussion to present this as a little graph:

Table 1: Agential Constellation behind *We*



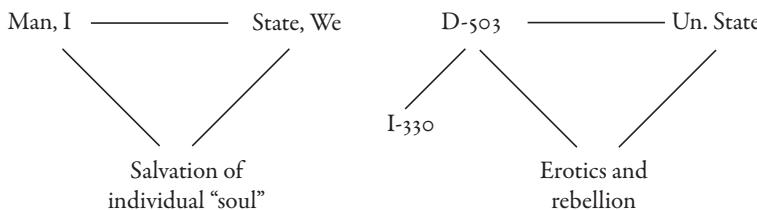
Already in *Paradise Lost* Satan had ambiguously acquired some traits of a political heretic not too dissimilar from examples in the English Revolution of Milton's age; focussing on those traits, Blake could then read Milton as being of the Devil's party without knowing it, and Mary Shelley could rework the Miltonic template into Dr Frankenstein as a bungling and culpable Creator vs. his Creature as a righteous antagonist more sinned against than sinning. This may suffice here as a shorthand to indicate how, between Milton and Zamyatin, the huge earthquakes of the second, overtly political series of revolutions, centered on 1789 and

its results, had changed the landscape. The great lesson from the failure of the radical *citoyen* project, from the bourgeois compromise with the old rulers, was for the Romantics that the heaven's god(s) turned tyrants. Some of the best Blake or Percy Shelley belongs here, while Byron's and then Baudelaire's pseudo-Satanism, echoing throughout European culture, is the strategic hinge to all later *poètes maudits*. Russian poetry (from Pushkin and Lermontov to Zamyatin's elder contemporaries) and the equally great prose of "Romantic realism" after Gogol (see Fanger) were powerfully swimming in the same current, in ways exasperated by a country which had not managed even an initial bourgeois revolution. Theirs was a bitter protest, sometimes revolutionary but in the *fin-de-siècle* Symbolists more and more just privately (for example, erotically) blasphemous – even though its principal names, Bryusov and Blok, came to sympathize more or less actively with the October Revolution. As a rule, the world "out there" was felt as offensive and the real values as residing in the poetic persona's "inner" creativity – Shelley's ambivalent "caverns of the mind" (in Frye 211), or in the Symbolist poet as hypnotic visionary.

Zamyatin became – as did his colleagues Belyi and Bulgakov – a "terminal point" (to adapt the argument for 1984 in Frye 204) of this Romantic subversion. Substituting life in the Unique State, a futuristic glass city walled-in against the outside "Green World" (supposedly because of devastation in century-long wars), to life in the Garden of Eden, he followed the Romantics by resolutely disjoining power and goodness in the new agent that took the place of God as both ruler and addressee of people's absolute worship – the totally planned State, and its head and symbol, the dictator Benefactor, "the new Jehovah, coming down to us from heaven" (140).

Even further, if we take the proper narratological approach that the Protagonist is that agential force which initiates most of the narrated action, the new Protagonist is laicized from God to Man: as in *Frankenstein*, he is a male scientist-creator, the mathematician D-503, chief constructor of the first spacecraft whose possession is supposed (rather vaguely) to ensure victory to the possessing side. As in Blake, Percy Shelley or Byron, he is faced with tyrannical paternal authority; but he will also, as in the more conservative Mary Shelley, get faced with his own inadequacies. The Powers-That-Be still rule, but their basis in Man's obedience is in the story

both shown as increasingly shaken and shown up as simply repressive: their dogmatic pretence to divine infallibility, transferred from Christianity to science, has turned them into the negative Antagonist, taking the place of Satan from the Judeo-Christian myth. The new Adam is not only an exemplary (that is, primarily allegorical) Protagonist, but also his own supreme Value. This constellation, prefigured in Frankenstein's Creature, is here derived from the Man-God Jesus opposed to the Church as Power in Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor legend (see Gregg 66–67), but Zamyatin's atheist individualism reduces salvation to what narratology calls narcissism. It is articulated as obedience to the protagonist D-503's own (that is, humanity's) sensual or "shaggy" nature, which is therefore easily swayed by the supposedly Satanic (but in Zamyatin liberatory) figures from the Miltonic model. The ideal goal or *salus*, the Grail of this quest, is not sinless life in a renewed Paradise but the dismantling of the fake paradise of all-pervasive, Leviathanic politics in favour of either passionate life and/or a freer or more "natural" political life. The salvation of the allegorical Protagonist lies no longer in listening to a collective, institutionally codified and enforced story but in fashioning a new story for himself through sexual passion which is magically analogous to ideological heresy and political subversion; erotics takes the place of theology and largely of politics also:

Table 2: Agential Constellation in *We*

This is not only a most ingenious refashioning of the best-known narrative constellation or “master narrative” of European culture from Palestine to the industrial and bourgeois revolutions. It is also articulated in a masterly, almost Cubist texture of splinters (see Parrinder 137 and my brief discussion in *Metamorphoses*), which has aged as well as the best wine. Further, it also reuses, through the sole narrator’s (tardy) education by events, possibly the second most powerful European narrative. It is the story which spelled the religious one in bourgeois individualism from Bunyan and Fielding on, was best codified probably in Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister*, and meandered through innumerable variants down to Heinlein and today – the hero’s voyage to a true understanding of himself, the “educational novel” (*Bildungsroman*) of what might be called individualistic religion. The hero is simultaneously – and not wholly convincingly – “humanly” representative and yet atomically individual, an investment of the authors’ core personal values and yet an example for all the readers insofar as they are all supposed to be individuals, only individuals, and nothing but individuals. In the best Modernist and dystopian fashion, the educational voyage is at the unhappy end aborted, but its values should have inoculated the reader. We approach here possibly the central contradiction or *aporia* of individualism, clearly shared by Zamyatin: In the end, we are all unsplittable atoms (say of hydrogen), but every atom is possessed of a different, unique, and most precious soul. And yet the soul needs exterior validation – God, or more prosaically, social life (see Marx’s *Holy Family* 148 and *passim*).

Finally, Zamyatin throws into this rich mix the pairing of the Protagonist with an erotic seductress. I shall return to this in section 5.

However, if my argument at the beginning, that the “contextual” side shapes all parts and aspects of the text, has any merit, the long duration model of the preceding Section is always renewed by major synchronic constraints produced in a new historical period. In order to attend to this

overriding determination, I propose to you my (not at all original, I am happy to say) first sketch of the change of Leviathans. It will not have the elegance of Zamyatin's construction but it may have the persuasiveness of recognizability. I will begin the closest I can to the new dispensation of global Post-Fordist rule, and my initial argument is taken from an internet article by Michel Chossudovsky. He is not alone in arguing that we are in the midst of a possible worldwide crisis whose scale already makes it "more devastating than the Great Depression of the 1930s. It has far-reaching geopolitical implications; economic dislocation has been accompanied by the outbreak of regional conflicts, [...] and in some cases the destruction of entire countries. This is by far the most serious economic crisis in modern history."<sup>6</sup>

It is not simply that, in what I see as an omen, 2,300 billion dollars of "paper profits" could in a few weeks after mid-July 1998 evaporate from the US stock market: a plague on its house (except that we all live in this house). More to the point right here, since we are speaking about Russia, from 1992 to 1998 "some 500 billion dollars worth of Russian assets – including plants of the military-industrial complex, infrastructure and natural resources – have been confiscated (through the privatization programmes and forced bankruptcies)" (2). They have been plundered by new domestic as well as the Western speculative capitalists, not interested in long-term investment and production but only in immediate profit: the percentage of investments into durable production is half of the US one, so that productive fixed capital is being reduced by 5–10 percent of Russian GDP per year. The industrial production, the GDP, and the real wages have since the collapse of the USSR plummeted by at least half, and continue to fall. The Russian median income in 2000 was ca. 50 US\$ a month and also falling: incomplete estimates put the majority of population in present-day Russia, that is more than 80 million people, under the poverty threshold,

6 Chossudovsky, "Financial," "electronic p." 1; further cited by the number of "virtual page." Chossudovsky is professor of economics in Ottawa; see also for Russia his *Globalisation*, chapter 11. My thanks to him for generously permitting extensive quotation.

and probably 30 percent more at a very bare subsistence level; “50–80 percent of school-age children are classified as having a physical or mental defect” (Cohen 23). The life expectancy for males has fallen from 65 to 55 years, the level of the famine countries of mid-Africa, compared to the life expectancy of seventy-four years in Cuba (see Cabanne and Tchistiakova, updated by Stuckler). The World Health Organization reported in 1997 an unmonitored rise in diseases for 75 percent of Russians who in the new “free” Leviathan live in poverty without social services, including a 3,000 percent rise of syphilis (Redford, see McMurtry 270), while Holmstrom and Smith report (6) a doubling of suicides and tripling of deaths from alcohol abuse: the population in Russia is falling by about one million people per year (but no humanitarian outcries have been heard from the NATO governments and media)! To the contrary, 2 percent of Russian population have possessed themselves of 57 percent of the total national economic wealth. This super-rich gangster-capitalist oligarchy in banking and export-import has, in collusion with the global corporate raiders dealing almost exclusively in asset-stripping and speculation, illegally transferred out of its country at least 250 billion dollars, and possibly the double of that amount (Clairmont 18, see Flaherty, Holmstrom-Smith, Menshikov and Skuratov). Russia is a country in moral and material ruins.

In cases of refractory States that refuse embedding into world capitalist finances, mercenary armies may still be used, as in Nicaragua, Iraq or Serbia. But Russia is the prime object-lesson that, as a rule, the takeovers by our new Leviathan of private corporate capital substitute for invading armies complex speculative instruments for “control over productive assets, labour, natural resources and institutions” (Chossudovsky 2). Its new paradigm is “concentration of control combined with decentralization of production” (Kagarlitsky 4). The often obnoxious State centralized planning by bureaucracy has been replaced by the no less huge and more powerful global planning by hundreds of millions of “globalization” bureaucrats, from corporations and stockmarkets to international bodies, whose cost is by now 20 percent of the produced commodities (McMurtry 287). Banks, not tanks; computer terminals or cell phones instead of artillery or bombers: the devastation for the lives of millions of powerless people outside the relatively very small ruling class is identical. After Mexico and Eastern

Europe, this “financial warfare” has in a few months of 1997 “transferred over 100 billion dollars of East Asian hard currency reserves into private financial hands. At the same time, real earnings and employment plummeted virtually overnight, leading to mass poverty in countries which had in the postwar period registered significant economic and social progress.” (Chossudovsky 3)

The crises of the 1990s mark “the demise of central [national] banking, meaning national economic sovereignty,” that controlled money creation on behalf of what was at least susceptible of being an overt will of that society. The demise is by no means confined to the “inferior races” of Africans, Asians or Slavs. It is by now threatening both the Nazis’ and the World Bank’s favourite “honorary Whites,” Japan, as “a handful of Western investment banks [...] are buying up Japan’s bad bank loans at less than one tenth of their face value.” It is also hitting countries such as Canada, “where the monetary authorities have been incapable of stemming the slide of their national currencies. In Canada, billions of dollars were borrowed from private financiers to prop up central bank reserves in the wake of speculative assaults” (Chossudovsky 3–4).

Who funds the IMF bailouts, asks Chossudovsky? Where did the money come from, to finance these multi-billion dollar operations from Mexico to Indonesia or Japan? Overwhelmingly – from the public treasuries of the G7 countries, constituted by working citizens’ taxes (businesses as a rule pay no taxes), and leading to significant hikes in the levels of public debt. Yet in the USA, say, “the issuing of US public debt to finance the bail-outs is underwritten and guaranteed by the same group of Wall Street merchant banks involved in the speculative assaults.” These same banks will

ultimately appropriate the loot (e.g., as creditors of Korea or Thailand) – i.e., they are the ultimate recipients of the bailout money (which essentially constitutes a “safety net” for the institutional speculator) [...]. [As a result], a handful of commercial banks and brokerage houses have enriched themselves beyond bounds; they have also increased their stranglehold over governments and politicians around the world. (Chossudovsky 5)

The new Leviathan is at least equally powerful as the old one was and even less accountable to democratic control from below. It ruthlessly subordinates the whole of civil society and democratic self-determination to the objectives of financial capital (see McMurtry, Clarke 356 and *passim*, Kagarlitsky 29–31). It needs and uses States for public brainwashing and coercion to destroy the Keynesian and ensure the globalized Leviathan (see Kagarlitsky 14–19): internally as backup apparatuses for plundering the taxpayers and keeping them quiet by electoral charades and police, and externally as pressure and finally war machines against recalcitrants.

## 3

If my preceding section seems a detour, this is due to the rigid, strongly ideologized boundaries of our disciplinary division of labour, which fortunately does not prevail in utopian studies. For, the change of Leviathans – of the hegemonic collectives or “We’s inside which we all live – is at the root of my revisiting *We*, and revisioning it with this new insight. From the 1950s on, many of us defended Zamyatin against those who did not recognize his pregnancy – not only against Stalin but against all religious and crypto-religious dogmatisms. If we ever get nearer to a *Handmaid’s Tale*-type society, no doubt we will have to return to some form of such defence. But today, we have to delimit within Zamyatin by holding fast to what is still relevant in his vision but also by recognizing that there are at least as relevant limits to it. His novel’s title is an ellipse, unfolded in the text as a sarcastic unveiling into which he positions the reader: it should fully be “the false We vs. the True or Inner I” (see Parrinder 135). My thesis is that the central emotional and notional axis indicated by this device, the opposition of positive individuality to the negative collectivity of State centralization, does not seem relevant any more: both of its poles are by now untenable. Here is one small set of examples, composed of a number of significant, more or less overt uses of this opposition in the novel.

It begins in Entry 1: "I, D-503, Builder of the Integral, [...] shall merely attempt to record what I see and think, or, to be more exact, what we think (precisely so – we, and let this We be the title of my record)."<sup>7</sup> And continues in a number of places where D-503 is still or again a loyal "number"-cog in the mechanism of the State, for example in Entry 20 when he compares "I" to a gram and "We" to a ton: "[...] on one side 'I,' on the other 'We,' the [Unique] State [...]. And the natural path from nonentity to greatness is to forget that you are a gram and feel yourself instead a millionth of a ton."

While there is a lot of semi-overt reference to collectivism in the presentations of Taylorism (the Table of Hours, the machine-like work rhythms on the construction site – Entries 7 and 15), a clear indication of D-'s disarray comes about in Entry 18, a Gogolian grotesque of dismemberment:

imagine a human finger cut off from the whole, from the hand – a separate human finger, running, stooped and bobbing, up and down, along the glass pavement. I was that finger. And the strangest, the most unnatural thing of all was that the finger had no desire whatever to be on the hand, to be with others.<sup>8</sup>

This opposition is conceived exclusively in terms of a power struggle and irreconcilable conflict: either "We" will eat up (dominate, enslave) "I," or "I" will eat up (subvert, destroy) "We." Either "'We' is from God, and 'I' from the devil" (Entry 22), or the obverse: no dialectics may obtain. The former case prevails at the beginning of the novel, as indicated by the first two quotes. The latter case develops slowly and bursts into the open before

<sup>7</sup> Given the several translations in print and used pell-mell in criticism so far, I shall be citing by "Entry" (as the chapters in *We* are called) and not by page of the Ginsburg translation I used. I have checked them all against the original Russian (*My*, New York: Inter-Language Literary Associates, 1967).

<sup>8</sup> This image comes from an old tradition, formulated for example by Plato in the *Politeia* (4: 462d) and Aristotle in *Metaphysics* Z 10: 1035b, where the natural and essential priority of the community to the individual is exemplified precisely as that of the body to the finger. It thence ran through the Stoics and Catholic Schoolmen to Spinoza and the conservative Romantics. It is recalled in 1837 by Emerson in protest against a state of society "in which the members have suffered amputation from the trunk, and strut about so many walking monsters" (54).

the middle of the novel (Entry 16) when D-503 develops the malady of “soulfulness” and an increasing anxiety which can only be allayed – and his isolation rendered tolerable and indeed emotionally validated – by what one might call the privatized mini-collective of the erotic couple: D-503’s desire for I-330. A further “We” is less than clearly and somewhat inconsistently sketched out when D- and Zamyatin proceed to interpret the opposed, “natural” and “shaggy” Mephi in terms of a unanimous collective where “everybody breathes together” (Entry 27), so that D- “cease[s] to understand who ‘They’ are, who are ‘We’” (Entry 28).<sup>9</sup>

This absolutistically individualist horizon was indeed Zamyatin’s enthusiastic creed, identified as the supreme value of the Russian intelligentsia. In an essay that echoes the language of *We* he spelled it out both in national terms – “the stormy, reckless Russian soul” (no less) – and in class terms: “This love, which demands all or nothing, this absurd, incurable, beautiful sickness is [...] our Russian sickness, *morbus rossica*. It is the sickness that afflicts the better part of our intelligentsia – and, happily, will always afflict it” (*A Soviet* 223). In a number of other pronouncements, he speaks of such an idealist “romanticism” as the true artistic attitude toward the world (see for example Shane 52 and 53).

On the contrary, the combinatory of what I shall simply call Value vs. Social Horizons is much richer than the Manichean opposition between “We” and “I” (and other ideological binaries such as public vs. private, reason vs. emotion, *et j'en passe* – so that a strong suspicion arises all such binaries are finally untenable). I cannot imagine any self-aware collective movement (political, religious, and even professional) without a communitarian “We” epistemology that it necessarily implies and invokes. This does not mean that some such “Us” orientations can not be pernicious

9 Huntington’s subtle analysis notes a number of such positive “We’s” in the novel, issuing in the Entry 37 query “Who are we? Who am I?” This jibes with his argument that the confusion in the novel is a deliberate strategy, but seems too strong a reading to me. It is tempting to posit an “unconscious” Zamyatin-the-artist working against the ideologist, but it may be too easy. Nonetheless, as Huntington’s analyses of “thou” also suggest (all 132–34), we have only scratched the surface of this rich artefact: it may surprise us yet.

– examples abound throughout history down to today, the latest being the super-corporate collectivity of the international financial market to which I shall return. However, the “Me” epistemologies and orientations may not only be as pernicious, they are also self-contradictory in a way that the “We” ones are not: for, as Aristotle observed, people who can live outside of community are either beasts or gods. This does not mean that any easy black-and-white way out obtains; indeed I believe that both the strictly collectivist and the strictly individualist ideologies situate themselves in the same double bind, from which we must step out.

In other words, even if we agree to the dubious dichotomy of “We” and “I,” the combinatory allows for at least four cases of pairing the collective and the individual:

Table 3a: Combinatorics of Social Life (Overview)

		<i>Social Horizons</i>		
		Collective	Individual	
	+		+	Good
	–		–	Bad
		<i>Value</i>		

The Upper Left plus Upper Right case or (+ +), a good collective interacting with good individuals, is the best imaginable one, Paradise or Utopia. The Lower Left and Lower Right or (– –) one, the corrupt collective interacting with corrupt individuals, is the worst case, Hell or total dystopia. I would argue that the World Bank/ IMF/ WTO system is today fast approaching this condition, while hypocritically pretending that it is if not the best imaginable at least the best of all realistically possible worlds

(we are in *Candide* country here). Zamyatin however considers only the diagonal cases, LL+UR ( $-\backslash+$ , bad collectivism stifling good individualism) that masquerades to boot as UL+LR ( $+/$ -, a good collectivism voiding bad individualism). This is what his strong but reluctantly admiring critic Voronsky, in certainly the best Soviet response *We* received, called the usual bourgeois equation of Communism with a super-barracks (171 and ff.). For, Zamyatin is here dealing with a nightmarishly distorted version of Leninist War Communism equated with medieval Catholicism (a type of configuration which Stalin did his best to bring about ten years later). Yet this assiduous reader of Dostoevsky ought to have taken into account that Christianity moved between the poles of the Grand Inquisitor, from whom his Benefactor is derived by way of metallurgic metamorphosis, and Jesus, whose method has been fairly called a “Communism of Love” (Bloch) – much different from the privatized frenzy of the D-I couple.

Table 3b: Combinatorics of Social Life (Listing)

Possible pairings:

(++) Upper  $\longleftrightarrow$  = Earthly Paradise

(--) Lower  $\longleftrightarrow$  = Earthly Hell

(+/-) Diagonal U.L. to L.R. = pretense of Unique State

(-+/) Diagonal L.L. to U.R. = reality of Unique State

#### 4

For, what is the Leviathan – briefly glimpsed in section 2 above – that we are facing today? No doubt, it is again a negative collectivism, but in a different form from the still existing one of the brute militarized State gang that returned from colonial ventures to rule Europe in the industrialized and Taylorized World War I, which echoes strongly in this novel by a naval engineer: “The soldiers on the front lines recognized that the [First World

W]ar was like work in an abominable factory" (Gray 121). The high cost of Nazism and high-tech destruction has taught our ruling classes that empowerment by direct physical violence, including mass torture and murder, is to be used only when some of the forcibly impoverished countries, regions, and cities today threaten to revolt. While when necessary we in the richer North can remain in comfortable cahoots with the Francos, Pinochets, and Suhartos of the world, we are today overwhelmingly ruled by the psychophysical alienation of corporate capitalist collectivism. It is, politically speaking, a variant disguising the leaden weight of gang power – but morally indistinguishable from it – by a "velvet glove" in the archipelago of upper-class and (shrinking) middle-class enclaves, while retaining open militarized suppression outside those enclaves. Directly relevant to our immediate concerns here is that this hegemony also functions by fostering the ideological illusions of "individual expression" in the middle classes, while remaining in fact other-steered at least to the same degree as in the Catholic Middle Ages or under Stalinism.

This Post-Fordist collectivism means unemployment, totalizing alienation of labour and dispossession in the working place – including bit by bit but quite clearly the working places of intellectuals such as universities or research groups. It means increasing political impotence of not only the working classes proper but also the "professional-managerial" classes (with the exception of some important groups of mercenaries among the CEOs or the media, sports and scientific stars, equivalent to the military generals). Its insidious alienation constitutes what I would tentatively call *emptying* negative collectivism as opposed to the *brutal* negative collectivism of mass paleotechnic uniformity dreaded and rebelled against in *We*. While the ruled are encouraged to indulge in faddish (and deep-down also uniform) surface garishnesses of dress or music consumption, the rulers are a faceless, diffuse congeries of interlocking directorates: one cannot imagine Mr Greenspan (of the US Federal Reserve) or M. Camdessus (of the IMF) as the Benefactor – the capitalists have learned that Hitler was too dangerous a tool. To what Čapek in his *War with the Newts* called the "male horde" of overt brutal collectivism, there gets substituted in the North a genderless rule by grey suits and attaché cases, which can co-opt women like Mrs Thatcher or Ms MacKinnon. It is "the impersonal Nothing

represented by the manager" (Kracauer 160), and articulated for us in Kafka and Beckett or the best cyberpunk and Piercy. As opposed to the despotic configuration Dostoevsky and Zamyatin attributed to medieval Catholicism, exasperated in overt Fascism and Stalinism, it suppresses individuality by brainwashing the disoriented majority into Disneyfied consumer contentment or at least stupefaction, and driving a minority of us into unhappy isolation. Instead of Medieval choral music or Zamyatin's State odes and music-making machines instilling the sense of the rulers, the emptying terrorism uses senseless *muzak*. Instead of universal ideologies hiding race, nation, and gender by rejecting it Outside, as in the city-State of *We*, racism, sexism, and ethnic exclusivism get now foregrounded in the rule over the motley crowds of our megalopolises and their identity politics. Instead of the Sexual Hours we have commodified pornography and S/M (see Kern 20). Instead of the Unique State's Institute of State Poets and Writers, today in the USA – and thus almost in the world – twenty interlocking media monopolies (in TV, films, publishing) and their bankers "constitute a new Private Ministry of Information and Culture" (Bagdikian xxviii). Everybody is democratically free to be physically and psychically hungry while chewing abundant junk food. The Catholic God acquires in this perspective a certain grim nobility, not to mention the truly noble *Nirvāna* of Gautama the Enlightened (Buddha).

Nonetheless, to the old plus new Leviathans of negative collectivism we ought in reason and with passion to oppose the possibility of (++) , the utopia of a radically better communal arrangement, "an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all" (Marx, *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* 238). As Rabbi Hillel put it almost two thousand years ago: "If I am not for me – who is for me?", but also "If I am only for me – who am I?" Or, as Blok noted while writing his great poem *The Twelve*, testifying to the ubiquity of Zamyatin's theme in that historical moment but also to the availability of a diametrically opposed poetic vision on it, "The Revolution – that is: I – not alone, but

we" (Dement'ev ed. 420).<sup>10</sup> Today, it has grown clear that collectivism is in our overcrowded – massified and urbanized, electric and electronic – mode of life absolutely unavoidable. The only choice we have is between the bad collectivities, suppressing freedom from as well as freedom for, and the good collectivities which, whatever form they may take, would be in feedback and mutual induction with non-narcissistic personalities: it is either "We" against "I" or "We" in feedback with "I"; either Zamyatin or Blok. In such a feedback, as Le Guin put it in *The Dispossessed* (see Chapter 18), "to be whole is to be part."

On top of classical heresies and liberal revolutions, from Gautama and Spartacus to J.S. Mill, we have in this century a number of quite good, if alas too brief, examples of "temporary liberated zones" (the Temporary Autonomous Zones of Hakim Bey) from which to draw lineaments of such a positive collectivism. Eschewing even the best blueprint sketches, such as Lenin's *State and Revolution*, and the imaginative articulations which are to be found in the SF of Mayakovsky, Platonov, Russ, Le Guin, Charnas or Piercy, let me stress here only the experiences of actual liberation movements. These comprise all non-corrupted unions, cooperatives or similar people-power struggles, and culminate in the popular revolutions whose promising beginnings and sad suffocations from without and within mark the twentieth century, from the Russian and Mexican series to Yugoslavia, China, and Vietnam (Cuba may still be largely an exception). A positive collectivism is also posed in religious terms, where all believers are members of a higher body: "Members of a Church congregation enter upon a

10 Many similar statements, not all by second-rate poets, could be found at the time; full titular coincidences are, for example, the great movie director Dziga Vertov's *We: A Variant of the Manifesto* of 1922 and Mayakovsky's poem "We" already in 1914.

It must be acknowledged that all bad variants of collectivism, prominently including Stalinism, stress the individual's subsumption under a Leviathan: the tell-tale semantic sign here is the insipid and covertly religious hypostasis of the collective into a singular unit, either named Leader or allegorical Party, e.g., in Becher's *Kantate 1950*: "Du grosses Wir, Du unser aller Willen:/ [...] / Dir alle Macht, der Sieg ist Dein, Partei!" ("Thou great We, Thou will of all of us:/ [...] All power to Thee, victory is Thine, O Party!"). Brecht's dialectics of "we are it" is here spurned.

‘We’ which signifies the commonality of creatures that both sublates and founds all the distinctions and unifications which cleave to the proper name” (Kracauer 167). Zamyatin was certainly cognizant of this powerful and ancient tradition, reacting as he was against both the decayed Tsarism with Orthodox Christianity and the lineaments of a new modernized Leviathan – both of them unbearably autocratic. His Unique State is what Sartre would call a serial collectivity, one in which each member is alien to others and himself, as opposed to the very unclear possibility of Sartre’s “fused group” (306–19, 384–96) among the Mephis.

Of the “fused” or inclusive traditions I shall choose here only the nearest to us in spacetime, the quarter-revolution of Western feminism, and use for that purpose the representative texts by Mellor, Rich, and Gearhart. I shall begin with Mellor’s book for “a Feminist Green Socialism” which contrasts, in the wake of Carol Gilligan, a “male-experience [...] ME-world” to “[a decentralised and safe] WE-world.” The “We”-world was prefigured by Fourier and Marx, “but subsequently sidelined by later Marxists and socialists” and reactualized in “the interests and experience of women” (250). I would object to the traces I find here of an undialectical tendency to lump all women together as positive – though I imagine feminists might want to except Thatcher, Schlafly, and I much hope also the Fortune fifty female CEOs or the corporate astronauts (certainly Rich does so, 15–16) – and, more cutting, to lump all men as more or less lost causes. Still, I would accept Gilligan’s opposition of personality-types whose relationships are centered on responsibility and care vs. those who are centered on “integrity” as separation, self-actualization, and (in my terms) conflict, and who ultimately depend on “direct exploitation of [not only, DS] women’s time and labour” (Mellor 270–71).

My critique is much advanced by Rich’s truly rich and dialectical keynote speech at the Utrecht 1984 conference. Her engagement with the pronouns “I” and “We” begins with a twin axiom: “there is no liberation that only knows how to say ‘I’,” and “[t]here is no collective movement that speaks for each of us all the way through”; and issues in the conclusion: “We – who are not the same. We who are many and do not want to be the same” (16–17). One can find in Rich also a wonderful meditation, based on her visit to the Sandinista Nicaragua, on what she identifies as

“the deepfreeze of history.” Her description exemplarily encompasses both the bad approach to collectivism and a new “We” resisting it, and is thus most cognate to my discussion of *We*:

Any US citizen alive today has been saturated with Cold War rhetoric, the horrors of communism, the betrayals of socialism, the warning that any collective restructuring of society spells the end of personal freedom. And yes, there have been horrors and betrayals, deserving open discussion. But we are not invited to consider the butcheries of Stalinism alongside the butcheries of [W]hite supremacism and Manifest Destiny. [...]. Discourse itself is frozen at this level. [...]. Words which should possess a depth and breadth of allusions, words like socialism, communism, democracy, collectivism – are stripped of their historical roots. [...]. Living in the climate of an *enormous either/or*, we absorb some of it, unless we actively take heed. (14, emphasis added)

In a more restricted genre discussion, Gearhart points out that the practice of most feminist utopian fiction is characterized by a tendency both toward “collective values as opposed to the individual values [of] male writers [...]” and toward a group protagonist, somewhere between participatory democracy and “out-and-out anarchism” (for example in Charnas, Gearhart, Russ, Wittig). She recognizes there are also different tendencies, as in Le Guin, but argues that even there (in my words) a full focus on the empathetic, “I am Madame Bovary” protagonist never obtains (42–43). Gearhart attributes all such changes in figuration to a “we feeling” that identifies women as vehicles of humanity for collective co-operation “[...] with the earth, with animals, and with each other” (41). I shall not go into ways by which her little essay could be supplemented and even respectfully criticized (beyond the remnants of a “We-I” dichotomy, I think it is by now fatally self-defeating to confine our hopes to women only and in particular to posit lesbian feminists as the vanguard of this struggle) but only note that I would accept the points cited as a part of any good collectivism.

Finally, this “good We” is also a commonplace of communist and other revolutionary movements, as is within SF evident in all works with a however modified eutopian horizon, say Stapledon’s *Last and First Men* (see on him now Suvin, “Science Fiction Parables”), Le Guin’s *The Dispossessed*

or Piercy's *He She and It*. In "warm Marxist" terms, Brecht's poem "Ballad of the Waterwheel" articulates a utopian plebeian "We" of suffering and rebellious solidarity:

Ach wir hatten viele Herren  
 Hatten Tiger und Hyänen  
 Hatten Adler, hatten Schweine  
 Doch wir nährten den und jenen [...]. (Brecht 14: 207)<sup>11</sup>

Many other works of his, say the radio-play *Ocean Flight* or other poems, delve at more length into the "We" vs. "I," indeed "We" vs. "It" syndrome. As Jakobson commented about another Brecht poem, "'we' is here an unalienable part of 'I' as well as of 'thou.' But [...] [this is] the inclusive 'we,' which includes the addressee" (668–69).

Philosophically,

the indisputable and exacting consciousness of "human rights" always risks masking by its legitimacy the other legitimacy that has been and remains indispensable: that we ought to be able to say "we" [...], at the point where neither God nor master says it for us [...]. For, not to be able to say "we" throws each "I" – individual or collective – into the madness of not being able to say "I" either. (Nancy 62)

## 5

In this light, and facing the Leviathans of today and not yesterday, it seems to me decisive that Zamyatin lived at a historical moment when non-individualist utopianism, in a wide spread from theocracy to warm Marxism (from Solovyov through Lenin to Bogdanov) had been debated and when its possibility, however precarious, was on the agenda of the post-1917 revolutionary openings. In numerous articles, he situated himself within

11 Non-poetic translation: "Oh we had so many bosses / They were tigers or hyenas / They were eagles, also swine, / But we fed this one and that one [...]."

this debate and pleaded for a radical utopia, one of tomorrow and not – as the Bolshevik one – of today; and I do not wish to retract my argument from *Metamorphoses* that *We* judges its nightmare from the vantage of such a utopian-socialist tomorrow. Yet he was unable to imagine a workable utopian variant (the “soft primitivism” of the country Mephi is obviously not such, which is acknowledged in the novel by the attempt to take over the city). This is both the strength and the weakness of *We*. The strength resides in his fierce concentration on the creator-diarist D-503, the weakness in the consubstantial absence of views and norms alternative to the Romantic individualism Zamyatin and this creature of his come to share. The hiatus or indeed contradiction between his overt doctrine of permanent heresy or revolution and his covert untranscendable doctrine of individualism grows into what Marx called “the Robinson Crusoe fiction,” not only born of alienated relationships typical of capitalism but also acquiescing in the dichotomies that constitute the alienation. E.J. Brown may be one-sided when he focuses on the “belated Rousseauism” of the fact that “[t]here is no adequate attempt in [Zamyatin, Orwell or Huxley] to examine the concrete social or economic factors that would lead to the debasement of human values: they offer only an abstract argument in favor of the simple and primitive as against the complex and cultivated” (222); but he is also right.

I have argued in Section 1 that Zamyatin is a terminal point of such Romantic individualism. My examples were drawn mainly from English Romanticism but, except for Byron, Zamyatin was more familiar with the German tradition, in Goethe's *Faust* (from whose denying figure his Mephi took their name) and in the late Nietzsche's distinction of elite vs. herd which exactly matches the relationship both of D-503 to the grey masses of the Unique State and of I-330 to the colourful subversives she leads (though D- oscillates guiltily while I- is sardonically uninhibited). The novel's Romanticism has been rightly found in the contrast between innocence and experience, in the pathetic fallacy equating nature with D-'s moods, in the “noble savage” notion present both in the Mephi primitivism and in D-'s shagginess (Edwards 44 and 62, see Hoyle 108), and in the lineage of Zamyatin's heroes which comes from the solitary and brooding, rebellious or even salvational, Byronic types in Russian culture, such

as the male outcast – often the sensitive artist – right down to Gorky (see Scheffler 91, Barratt 355). This was blended with Zamyatin’s overwhelming inspiration from Dostoevsky.

Paradoxically, however, in comparison to that theocratic populism Zamyatin’s atheist stance is both less clear and more elitist. Who is in *We* the equivalent of the heretic Christ confronting the *apparatchik* Great Inquisitor? D- is too weak for this role, and the true heretic I- and her Mephi Green World are not only finally defeated but also to my mind an ambiguous brew of incommensurable, if potent, erotic and political traits. In this Section I shall focus on I-, an object of much libidinal investment inside and outside the text, who has disturbed a number of critics as functionally a self-interested political Snake yet axiologically part of the book’s core values, sex (and brains) as heretic rebellion: the point is that she is, richly but confusingly, both.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Critics’ opinions about the role of Zamyatin’s splendid I-330 have been diametrically opposed. A brief sample of a few more recent ones yield some extreme pro and con opinions.

*Pro:* In Ulph, one of the most stimulating critics, I find references to “dialectic duality – siren and revolutionary [...] Superwoman [...] Belle Dame Sans Merci [...] one of the most sadistic, frenetic and comical seductions of the faltering male by the determined vamp in Western [?] literature [...]” (82–85 *passim*). In Hoisington, whose entire article is praise of I-330 as the real heroine of this novel “[...] both in the sense of the mover and the character who best exemplifies the novel’s governing values,” I- “is the stimulating, fertilizing force”; “a rebel [...] who chooses to remain true to her beliefs, to suffer and to die rather than recant” (82–85).

*Con:* For Mikesell/Suggs I- is failed trickster, “the love she demands [of D- has] destructive effects,” “the world desired by I-330 and her Mephi [...] harbors [...] violence and deceit,” and “finally she is not a facilitator but, like the Benefactor himself, a tyrant” (94 and 98). For Barratt, I- is “a Mata Hari figure, who has been using her sexual attractiveness as a means [...]”; her ultimate aim is freedom but paradoxically “her initial act [...] was to enslave [D-] by luring him against his will into compromising his allegiance to the One State” (346 and 355). For Petrochenkov “I-330’s most ominous feature [are] [...] the vaginal teeth that castrate [...]. Her mouth is associated with a knife and dripping blood [...]” (246–47).

It should be noted, first, that the critics’ opinion does not follow their gender; and second, that most “pro” critics note I-’s ambiguous (both-and) characteristics,

Zamyatin spoke of pathos and irony as the cathode and anode between which the literary current is created (*A Soviet* 130); but if the irony suddenly loses relevance, pathos is the only (inert) pole that remains. As some of his novel's other central devices, the *femme fatale* I-330 (see Praz, chapter 4) is taken from the overheated, reach-me-down quasi-Romanticism of the European *fin-de-siècle*, and in particular from the Russian Symbolists' mysterious and supremely alluring Beautiful Lady (*prekrasnaia dama* – see *A Soviet* 32), also descended from the Byronic semi-demonic female (Lamia), and characterized by stock Decadent props such as the sharp liqueur (probably out of Huysmans's *A rebours*, 1884; English as *Against Nature*). This figure-type is, of course, a figment of the (male) imagination reacting after the mid-nineteenth century against the threat of transgressive female independence. However, I- is overdetermined in complex ways, so that it is imperative to distinguish, in the tradition begun by Propp, her narratological plot position and her characterological role.

I-330 is narratologically placed in the position of Eve from the Biblical-Miltonic model. In his essay "On Synthetism," Zamyatin claimed this literary movement of his was sublating in a Hegelian fashion – assuming and transcending – the tragically unattainable "Eve as Death" from Vrubel and Blok; so that instead of Schopenhauer they were following the ecstatic Nietzsche. But whatever the theory, the transcendence is not noticeable in *We*.<sup>13</sup> Rather, it hesitates between Symbolism (mystery) and Cubism (new understanding). Furthermore, the plot of *We* is quite consciously taken (see Entry 18) and refunctioned from popular penny-dreadfuls: it is a political

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while the "con" critics concentrate on the negative ones. The problem seems to me to be which of the undoubtedly present two aspects of I- predominates within the plot and the ethico-political concerns of Zamyatin – and then, our concerns today.

<sup>13</sup> See Zamyatin, *A Soviet* (82); see also Scheffler (29, 92, and *passim*), and Rooney. To my mind Zamyatin's handling of Hegelian historiosophy as well as of Nietzsche's Superman vs. herd is rather simplified. He was a *bricoleur* in the philosophy of history and of politics. While this may be quite enough for writing one novel, it will not do to extrapolate his pronouncements as indubitable cognitions about the State Leviathan in general and the Soviet State in particular; as a theorist he catches fire only when he can integrate his overriding Modernist avant-garde allegory of entropy vs. energy with other symbolism.

spy-thriller with a vamp who comes to a bad end, as popularized at the time by the sensational Mata Hari case. (By the way, this became, mainly through Orwell, the template of much subsequent SF in the “new maps of hell,” most often losing the redeeming qualities of *We* and just keeping the stereotype of individual – anguished protagonist – plus female sidekick vs. State machine.) The seductive Satanic force from *Genesis*, Milton, and the Romantics has been fully laicized and displaced from the position of antagonist (now reserved for the rulers), though echoes of its former status richly if somewhat confusingly persist. In *We* the most alluring sexual and political seductress I-, aided by the eponymous S-for-Satan-4711, turns out to be politically and ideologically positive. Thus I- oscillates between two narratological positions. Traditionally, she would have been an aide or satellite to D-: Juliet to his Romeo, or better Eve to his Adam. But in *We*, consonant with her characterological upgrading as pillar of heretic strength, she is Snake rather than Eve (besides its role in Eden, the Snake was also a nineteenth century theatre role of faithless *femme fatale*); that is, I- becomes an *al pari* co-protagonist, who in fact initiates all the political and most of the erotical actions in the plot (though she is not a co-narrator).

Characterologically, I-330 is much stronger than the sensitive and indecisive D- who is, in a subversion of the usual gender roles, “feminized” by her bee-sting of pollination, her vampirical pointed teeth, her sexual initiative fulfilling him, and her politico-ideological leadership and guru or commissar status (see Hoisington 83). Yet she is also, against the grimly Puritanical Unique State, the emancipated flapper in a world of Symbolist decadence, materialized in the Ancient House – a commonplace of the SF-cum-utopian tradition from William Morris through Wells’s *Time Machine* – and whose forbidden and intoxicating qualities are emblematized by the sharp green liqueur (absinthe?). A further way of characterizing her is to oppose her, in a series of very effective love-and-jealousy triangles – taken from the theatrical conventions of vaudeville, melodrama, and boulevard comedy near and dear to Zamyatin the playwright – to O-90 (and subsidiarily to U-). This furthermore employs Dostoevsky’s usual contrast between two strong female types: the gentle, mild, and humble woman vs. the predatory woman with demonic traits, corresponding to epileptic hyper-sensitivity of her male prey. It is O- who is the Eve to D-’s Adam (Entry 19) where I- is

Lilith. O- is round and rosy where I- is straight line and associated with extreme colours, O-'s love and sex are comfortable where I-'s are "bitterly demonic and untamed" (Edwards 65, from Billington 502), O- is transparent where I- is opaque, O- is maternal where I- is non-procreative though intellectually and erotically "pollinating" D- (see Hoyle 104–05). In Entry 19, however, O- begins to take on some traits of I-: she is energized and subverted through her love for D- and the child she bears, the maternal becoming the political (somewhat like Gorky's *Mother*). Finally (Entries 29 and 34), I- saves O- and her child among the Mephi.

The unresolved ambiguities about I-330 may be understood as the confusion of two forms of Zamyatin's overriding positive principle of energy: political subversion and erotic passion. In Zamyatin's novel, these two forms and goals, co-present only in the pivotal I-, are equated. But they can coincide only if, as Orwell realized, a love affair is also a political subversion of the State. Empirically, this is nonsense in any mass State; in this respect, Huxley's *Brave New World*, where sex is a drug in the hands of rulers, has proven much nearer to our unromantic concerns today than Zamyatin or his imitation in Orwell. The novel can only work if D-503 is taken as the axiologically representative subject of the Unique State, that is, not a "realistic" character but an allegorical protagonist. As constructor of the politically crucial spaceship, he is much too important to be simply Everyman: rather, he is the allegorical Intellectual, without whose support no revolution can win. Both as creator of spaceship and as creator of the diary entries, D- is the archetypal creative individual: an enthusiastic scientist and a reluctant artist. Written at the same time as Joyce, Zamyatin's novel might be called, among other things, a "portrait of the artist as (sexually) awakening dystopian." After seducing D- sexually, I- therefore sets about persuading or educating him politically – with mixed success. But the sexual carnality remains entirely non-allegorical, it is a (no doubt very appealing and brilliantly executed) carry-over of Dostoevskian possession, a matter of depth psychology and possibly theology but not of politics. Within the political strand of the plot, the carnal affair with D- must necessarily be backgrounded, so that he comes to function as a patsy, used for the advantages he can bring the Revolution by delivering

the spaceship to its side. The Benefactor tells him so, though D- does not really want to hear it.

However, Zamyatin uses the political strand of the plot much as I- uses D-: as means to a higher end – the sexual growth into a “soul.” His aim is to show a sincere believer turned inside out by *what is missing* in the Unique State: the pleasure of the senses, a feedback loop between the brain and sexual *jouissance*, the colours, tastes, smells, and hormonal delights experienced by his body, an eversion that would translate as a subversion. Very realistically, D- really wants only such “soulful” erotics, and he is dragged into politics reluctantly and with relapses. That he would be dragged into subversion at all belongs to the penny-dreadful, melodramatic hinge between politics and sex. But sexuality in *We* is not heretical in the utopian “constructivist” or “synthetist” sense announced by Zamyatin’s essays. Rather, it is strung between proclamations of freedom and experiences of death: D- associates it with caveman violence, fever, and death (not only the “little death” of epileptic and orgasmic fits).<sup>14</sup> At the end, the exemplary sexual pair D-I is sorted out into death as liquidation (I-) vs. indifferent looking-on (D-). Erotics and individualism seem defeated, while the political struggle remains undecided.

Besides the emblematic I-330, the Mephi outside the Wall are supposed to be another incarnation of the union between great sex and liberatory politics. But apart from her preaching, in a philosophically to my mind unimpeachable but politically rather vague way, the necessity of permanent revolution, what alternative program are we given in the Mephi world, even in glimpses? Back to the land? For a mass industrialized society? Even to pose such questions shows that *We* is concerned with politics only in the sense of individual protest against its course, but not really in the high philosophical or cognitive sense claimed by Zamyatin. A critic in

<sup>14</sup> It would be interesting to compare this with Walter Benjamin’s views on the woman’s body in Baudelaire’s civilization as “death-body, fragmented-body, petrified body” and “a metaphor for extremes,” issuing in the Baudelairean abyss (or, I would add, Zamyatin’s vertigo); the quotes are from the approach to this aspect of Benjamin in Buci-Glucksman 226 and 228. A crucial question for *We*, so far as I remember not yet posed, would here be: “Who is D-’s diary really addressed to?”

the mid-1990s could therefore rightly observe that Zamyatin and similar dystopians had “lost almost [all] of their interest and relevance” shortly after their publication in the Russia of the late 1980s: “it is as if ‘we’ had won the battle against the ‘One State,’ but what we find beyond the Green Wall is increasingly not what we expected ...” (Lahusen 678, ellipsis in the original). This is what I attempted to discuss earlier by way of the “We” vs. “I” dichotomy.

## 6

Zamyatin commented in 1932 that *We* “is a warning against the twofold danger which threatens humanity: the hypertrophic power of the machines and the hypertrophic power of the State” (Lefèvre 1). The comment may say more about how the author’s stresses had shifted in the intervening dozen years – and pursuing his ideological shifts after the mid-1920s, apparently to the Left, might prove very revealing – than about the much more ambiguous treatment of technoscience in the novel.<sup>15</sup> This fascination with and yet mistrust of technoscience can be taken beyond State sponsorship of massive drives such as the Soviet Five-Year Plans and the US Manhattan Project or Marshall Plan, so that it remains applicable to our concerns today: the Post-Fordist capitalist corporations’ full symbiosis with computers, automation, and gene manipulation; and of course to the ever more horrifying ways of mass military murders in “small” (but tomorrow perhaps

15 As a number of critics from Lewis and Weber on have remarked, insofar as the ideology of “mechanized collectivism” is the target, *We* is a polemic with the school of Proletkult poets propagating the extension of Taylorism (see for those themes also Scheffler 186–91) – the pet focus of Zamyatin’s sarcasm from his English 1916 stories on – into all areas of life. It is not a polemic with super-technological ways of life in Russia, quite non-existent there until recently, but was in fact meant by Zamyatin equally, if not more, for the capitalist “West” (see Myers 75–77).

again global) wars.<sup>16</sup> Yet should we not focus on who (what social group) deals with the machines of technoscience how, what for, in whose interest and to whose detriment?

Finally, amid all the mathematics, architecture, and construction technology, it may be still cognitively useful, and thus acceptable, that *We* is inhabited by faceless crowds marching four abreast. Perhaps one can even accept as realistic for 1920 that these crowds then resolve into women in various variants of sexual desire – named stereotypically by “soft” I, O, and U vowels – or of janitoring, and into men as doctors, poets or secret-service “Guardians” – named by “hard” consonants D, R, and S. After all, *We* is a novel, grotesque, Cubist kind of allegory (though again, Zamyatin had some doubts about Picasso and especially abhorred Le Corbusier’s architecture of cubes – *A Soviet* 134–35). But it is built around a central absence: except for some brief and not very enlightening scenes in the shipyard, there are within the horizons of Zamyatin’s novel no economics, nor productive labour, nor working people – no accounting for the distribution and maintenance of the food, housing, “aeros,” telephones, electric whips, walls for fencing in, and streets for marching. The anonymous (unnumbered?) masses are there only as a backdrop for D- and I-. The “I vs. We” translates as private vs. public. Most perniciously perhaps, reason is insistently identified with “We,” and emotion (or imagination) with “I.” This aspect in Zamyatin is late, impoverished, ideological individualism.

However, I would not like to end merely on a negative note about a dialectically contradictory masterpiece I still in many ways admire. If the

16 As in all nations which had quickly to recapitulate “western” modernization, and thus serve to show its underlying structure, modern science was in Russia too first introduced for military purposes as part of a centralized State; the first use of the term *nauka* (science) was in a 1647 military manual in the sense of “military skill” (Billington 113). It is most eye-opening that the one thing the two Leviathans, Zamyatin’s Fordist one and our Post-Fordist one, have obviously in common (remember the imperialist interplanetary rocket D- is building!) is the massive war technology and nationalist propaganda playing it up, both of which they’re not only engaged in but in fact deeply dependent on; this is the visible tip of the iceberg of continuing murderous class-rule.

humanization of the overwhelmingly center-stage protagonist has been defeated and the temptress firing his imagination and organizing rebellion has been cruelly suppressed in the best Jehovaite tradition, at least two important aspects remain relevant and fertile today. The first and perhaps most important one may be signalled by the inferences hidden in its technology of writing: for all meaning resides in the form, and form cannot be disjoined from meaning. As Voronsky was one of the first to have pointed out, Zamyatin was a master of the word, the sharp observer of incisive details. His Cubist texture and some other aspects (for example the astounding believability of the rather improbable D-503 and I-330) have only rarely been matched since in any SF – utopian or dystopian or anti-utopian. A post-realistic or properly Modernistic texture, say, can be found in a very few items after the 1960s: much William Burroughs, one text by Golding (see Parrinder 139), some Bester or Le Guin (for example "New Atlantis"), Harlan Ellison, and Kathy Acker. Thus, like his revered Wells, Zamyatin has rightly entered world literature. Furthermore, I have in this essay dealt more or less solely with the paradigmatic aspect of this allegorical narration, its central conflict. I have scarcely touched upon its very rich syntagmatic unfolding, from the tripartition of each Entry to the full agential constellation and the intermingling of the action with dreams, comments, and so on, and to its metaphoric scaffolding. A salient point is that while the story of D- and I- ends in total defeat, the novel's ending remains ambiguous, not quite closed: the battle rages on, and O-90 has left the State to bear D-'s child. Most important: as I argued in *Metamorphoses*, the defeat IN the novel is not the defeat OF the novel – that is, of its potentially liberatory effect on the reader.

The warnings against capitalist industrialization with its military drill incorporated in the paleotechnic machines, and the Soviet enthusiasm for it, are incorporated strangely and richly into the precision and economic clarity of *We*, where even the "irrational number" enters into a system of lucidly functional oppositions and mathematics turn into ambiguous

metaphor if not allegory.<sup>17</sup> The novel's organization, texture, and "style" (see Heller 235–37) evince a Cubist or Constructivist confidence which is not only utopian but also deeply complicitous with, indeed unthinkable without, the very urbanization and industrialization whose one, malevolent variant they so doggedly stigmatize. They bear the imprint of Zamyatin the engineer and shipbuilder, the extoller of the persecuted theoretician of science Robert Mayer, and constitute the hidden positive, utopian socialist, values in the name of which the repressive aberrations are envisaged and judged. I doubt this would provide any comfort to the present-day savage corporate capitalism subjugating national states, the new Leviathan.

And second, more narrowly but perhaps more acutely, the old State apparatus is neither fully nor definitely off the agenda of present history. The Global Corporate vs. State Leviathans do not spell each other as participants in a relay race or train connections. Rather, they relate at least as intimately as do geological strata, where a new formation can for long stretches be interrupted by remains or even re-emergences of the old formation upheaving and sticking up as whole mountain ranges.<sup>18</sup> Though the "transnational" corporations are still mainly "national companies with

17 The shock or even horror at such numbers as square roots or similar, well conveyed by the mistranslation of "irrational" (from *alogon*, see Russo 56), arises from their enforcing abandonment of the ancient Pythagorean conception that a line is constituted by an enumerable succession of points. In other words, one cannot explain basic relationships in the real world by means of whole numbers only.

18 Perhaps the succession of not only modes of production but also of their main stages might best be understood as imbricated articulation rather than simple abolition, see Jameson 67. – As to my little geological metaphor: any metaphor or model has limits of applicability. But if we were to proceed to a meta-level of theorizing, it should be noted that Marx's key notion of "social formation" refunctions the geological "formation" of his admired Lyell, which wittily fuses a historically specific process and its result. In geology, terms like primary and secondary formation suggest simultaneously the nature/structure and the evolutionary collocation of rock strata (see Godelier 343); if not metaphors they are at least puns. In that sense the historical figures of the two capitalist Leviathans of centralized Fordist State and globalized Post-Fordist speculative finances are both distinct ideal types and inextricably mingled within the latter's contradictory domination over the former.

a transnational reach" (Wood 7, and see Krätke), the partnership and collusion between the capitalist global corporations and the nation-States seems to me finally dominated by the former. Yet, as we have seen in the mendacious and cruel war against Serbia, the old State Leviathan can be summoned into operation at the touch of a cellular phone call or of a computer button whenever the new Leviathan needs it: they are, after all, still instruments of class rule, brothers under the skin. State apparatuses have largely become local enforcing committees of the big oligopolies conveniently designed as the IMF/WTO/World Bank triad; it may in fact turn out that the new Leviathan is a true dialectical sublation of the old one, both denying and preserving it in selected aspects. Dialectically, the old Leviathan is also, at given propitious places and times, available for useful work, bundling and accelerating a large national consensus in order to improve life, for example, to institute medicare or social insurance. That was especially the case in some approximations to popular sovereignty in poorer states brutally attacked by the subversive forces of international capital. This was prefigured by the Mexican and Kemalite revolutions, this is what Lenin's State decayed into at its best moments of defence of the USSR, and this is what continued into the postwar experiences of the "non-aligned" peoples from Tito through Nkrumah and Nehru to Castro. But where are the snows of yesteryear?

Even so, Zamyatin's generous indictment of life in a "super-barracks" society is of a much diminished importance for getting our bearings in a super-Disneyland society. *We*'s bad collectivism recycles what are by now "paleotechnic" (Mumford) or Fordist elements and attitudes predating speculative finance capitalism. The insipid food in *We*, made from petroleum and distributed by the State, does not collate to our problems with the overspiced and cancerogenously hormonized "macdonaldified" burgers pushed by brainwashing us in the "free" market. Even less does it speak to the hungry and freezing unpaid millions of "freed" Russia.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> My thanks go to colleagues connected with the Society for Utopian Studies November 1998 meeting where a briefer version was first presented: Naomi Jacobs; Carol Franko whose writing led me to Adrienne Rich's article, which she kindly sent me; and

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Savas Barkçin, my co-panelist, whose paper on Kemalism reminded me of what became my next-to-last paragraph. They also go to Patrick Flaherty for sending me some unpublished papers of his on Russia today, from which I learned much, and to Dubravka Juraga's critiques. I did not note in my first overview of *We*, the less than 2,000 words in the chapter on Russian SF from *MOSF*, and should now, that the direct stimulus to deal with it was for me, within the general Titoist reappraisal of the Soviet experience, my (then) friend's Saša Flaker's rediscovery of Zamyatin in his book *Heretici i sanjari* (*Heretics and Dreamers*, Zagreb 1958).

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