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On Understanding Our Needy World through Science Fiction and Utopia/nism

An Epistemological Introduction

*Why did the heathens tremble
and the peoples imagine inanities?*

—Psalms 2:1

The catastrophe is that things just go on as before.

—Walter Benjamin, *Central Park*

When no hope is left,

one has to follow one's principles.

—Old miner in movie *Brassed Off*

(dir. Mark Herman, 1996)

0. Categories

For a forthcoming book of mine dealing with science fiction (SF hereafter) and utopia/nism, I opted for an approach that I call *political epistemology*. It attempts to fuse how we understand what we think we understand (which in humanities or arts one calls texts, whether musical, pictorial, or verbal . . .) with an emancipatory political stance that leads to focusing on contradictions and splits in meaning and in body politic.

Looking at the essay-chapters of that book of mine, *Disputing the Deluge*, I wondered what makes them part of the same argument, that is, how do various parts and levels of a longer verbal text feed back into and reinforce each other? Inevitably, through categories illuminating and, one hopes, largely justifying the whole. (Once and for all, I do not mean categories must be explicitly presented as a system anywhere in such a text, though many texts that owe allegiance to scholarship or systematized knowledge may do so.) Categories are up to a point, maybe obliquely, always present in a text. But their teasing out and understanding by a reader also ought to illuminate the main nodes of the text, making it richer and clearer. These nodes are mostly, as Jameson (2005: 317) put it, “formal peculiarities of . . . narratives,”

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with all the rich thickness of artistic cognition, which then may be in a preface or conclusion—or indeed a loyal review—be thinned down to the ideational or notional skeleton indispensable for an overview. How does one pick the categories needed for understanding? They must not be too many—to my mind, using more than ca. five main categories confuses the memory of reader and writer—and it would be economical if they reinforced each other. The rest is situational wisdom, what the Germans call *Fingerspitzengefühl*, an intuitive flair for the situation in the text (on the author’s side) and of the book (on the reader’s side). I do not propose to do it here in a systematic way but as induction from my interests.

I shall here concentrate on a few categories needed for understanding or cognition, which I take to be particularly necessary here since I explicitly claim that the ideal horizon and cases of SF and utopia/nism are cognitive. I trust that can be done without falling into a vicious epistemic circle. However, it needs to remain an abbreviated overview for whose fleshing out I must regretfully often refer to other works of mine (based on insights by a lot of other people).

1. Knowledge, Frames, Structures of Feeling

1.1 What is knowledge or understanding for me? And what is the function of us intellectuals as their bearers? Let us start from our dire class situation where most of us live by our work, that is we are objectively a part of the working people against whom a more and more stringent class war from above is being waged by our rulers, the capitalists and their henchmen. Today we live in a perverted “knowledge society” where the brainwashing images and words have polluted the very structure of our perception and experiencing; so that useful knowledge and perniciously fake knowledge are closely intertwined, and any realistic understanding must include a detoxification and deprogramming of the hegemonic understandings. Knowledge as use-value for living is being evicted by knowledge as exchange-value for profits, with its logical end in “smart bombs” for mass killings, and just now “smart” work through the internet that may be a stopgap but finally increases alienation as against sociability. This is why I cannot see how a civil life can survive without establishing first a great deal about how do we know what we believe we know: that is, there is no way around focusing on some knots within understanding, formalized as a *political epistemology*. I adopt the definition of epistemology as the theory of human knowledge, dealing with its possibilities and limits, with the analysis of propositional and metaphoric—thus logical and affective—cognitive

1 systems, and in particular with the critique of language and other sign
 2 systems as concrete consciousness (see also Suvin 1994 and 2001; for
 3 more, see my discussions of epistemology in Suvin 2010b and 2010C).
 4 Epistemology speaks to “how do we know what we (think we) know”
 5 not in terms of individualist psychology but of the collective conditions
 6 that make knowledge possible. It stages on a theoretical level an
 7 encounter of knowledge, art, science, and liberatory politics, which
 8 started out together in practice and, at its best, mediates between the-
 9 ory and a return to practice: who, and in whose interests, decides the
 10 meaning of terms and what they enable or disable?

11 Now any epistemic tool of ours defines equally its object-types
 12 and its subject-wielders *as* something and *to (for)* something: it allows
 13 an access to the world of signifying and finally of significant potential
 14 actions. We must realize, as Lenin and the feminists did, that episte-
 15 mology does not function without our asking the political question
 16 “In whose interest?” Interests and values decisively shape all percep-
 17 tion: it was Marx’s great insight that no theory or method can be
 18 understood without the practice of social groups to which it corre-
 19 sponds. Thus our answers can be found only in feedback with poten-
 20 tial action. As Vico argued, whatever we cannot intervene into, we
 21 cannot understand: it follows that *the epistemological and the political*
 22 *intertwine.*

23 To advance in this lush jungle of opinions and prejudices, I need
 24 to begin with two foci: on categories and on structures of feeling. Cat-
 25 egories first.

26
 27 1.2 I see categories as *frames*. Understanding and action proceed by
 28 means of groupings into kinds of things: a pine is a tree, a plant, and
 29 so on. All seeing is seeing-as (Wittgenstein), in categories. The always
 30 already existing frames are cultural mega-presuppositions, latent in all
 31 the resulting positions. How am I going to see or understand X with-
 32 out them? As a rule, there is a set of concentrically embedded frames
 33 that determine this X. My operative frame is SF and/or the horizon of
 34 formulating utopia. This story Y is inside such a framing. Outside of
 35 it, it is not readable. You can register, but not read with understand-
 36 ing, an opening line like *They landed in the light of the blue sun* if you
 37 don’t know the presuppositions it carries. This line, if you’ve never
 38 read SF, makes no sense. But what does it mean when framed? Easy:
 39 we are in another solar system, and not in ours, where the sun is yel-
 40 low; and the inhabitants of the planet can be anything the author
 41 pleases, except that they are always analogies of our hopes and fears,

utopian or antiutopian. The opening feeds into what the theoreticians call a reading protocol for this kind of story. How do you understand it? By reading a lot of this stuff with interest! If you are a fan, you won't wonder. But if you are not? After five sentences like this, you'll get lost because you don't know which category—to begin with, which literary genre—you are in. Surrealist or nonsense poem, weird disturbance of sight, an experiment by malevolent Lovecraftian gods?

However, this operative frame can only come into being because it grows out of a matryoshka-style embedding into wider frames. The widest one for our purposes would be “human collective understanding/s of common reality,” and a middle one would be “imaginative literature” or “fiction.” The widest one can be, freely following Lakoff and the Eleanor Rosch school, briefly summarized as “Thought is embodied, imaginative, and a *gestalt*.” First, human understanding begins with perception, body movement, and situated physical and social experience. Second, “those concepts which are not directly grounded in experience employ metaphor, metonymy, and mental imagery” (Lakoff 1990: xiv). Third, the concepts (I would prefer to call them propositions) are not atomistic but have an overall structure in dynamic feedback between particular and general imaginative structures. This view of understanding implies an axiomatic commitment to the existence of a common world, which necessarily places constraints on human imagination, as well as to the existence of a shared though constantly changing knowledge of that world.¹ As Putnam provocatively put it, meaning is not in the mind—but in mind's interaction with world (cited in Lakoff 1990: 206; cf. Putnam 1975).

Thus categories are our indispensable cognitive tool. Of course, when seeing X, different people will not only see it in slightly different ways and use slightly different categories to understand the seen, but there can be outright illusions, frauds, and mass hysterias (example: the UFO sightings in the US; or today, Trumpism and other forms of fascism 2.0 as bearers of mass salvation). Furthermore, some categories are graded and with fuzzy boundaries (example: a tall person) and others may have clear boundaries (example: bird) but then may have a graded spread, so that some members are better or worse examples of the category (cf. Lakoff 1990: 56). But this model of seeing is linguistically unavoidable, in good part automatic and unconscious, and then ideologically fortified as the norm (cf. Lakoff 1990: 180, 126–29). True, categorizing can be, like almost everything, abused for purposes of pedantry and/or dogmatism. However, it is potentially a deeply philosophical cognitive pursuit: it determines the Possible World of a text.

1 **1.3** Yet one more tool is needed to explain deep ideological and episte-
 2 mological oppositions between large human groups and classes pres-
 3 ent at categorizing: the often basically divergent class interests. A crass
 4 example is under all our eyes: in a pandemy such as the present Covid-
 5 19 one, a very large majority of people wants their superordinated
 6 community (here the State) to take as an absolute priority their sur-
 7 vival; a small minority, as a rule about 1 to 2 percent, takes as an
 8 absolute priority their profits—and using national chauvinism and
 9 other demagogic illusions, they can enlist maybe 30 percent of people
 10 to follow them, as Hitler and Trump did. The reigning *doxa* or com-
 11 mon sense can be built up into huge and apparently seamless systems
 12 of fake categories, of which the most important in late capitalism is
 13 the Social Darwinism going from Rockefeller Sr. to Trump (see Suvin
 14 2010a and 2020c). A wonderful particular example is the brief 1984
 15 kerfuffle in the US press that Lakoff (1990: 209–10) notes, based on
 16 the report by Robert Half Inc.—described in Google as the world’s
 17 biggest accounting firm, with a revenue of US\$6 billion in 2019—
 18 that US office employees steal on average four hours and twenty-two
 19 minutes per week from their employers by malingering. When you
 20 compare this with Marx’s labor theory of value, by which almost ALL
 21 profits from capital originally come from appropriating a major part
 22 of the workers’ labor-power (that is, unpaid working hours in com-
 23 parison to what they actually produce), the divergent class interests
 24 will be quite clear. The categories collide.

25 The richest way to understand them is to use Williams’s “struc-
 26 tures of feeling” or structures of experience, as I often attempted in my
 27 work (most extensively in Suvin 1983 and 1996). According to this
 28 theory, all artistic works—and more fuzzily, one could infer, all our
 29 systems of understanding—embody an overriding epistemological
 30 framework that reposes on a “structure of feeling” or of experience,
 31 differentiated by period, generation, and in cases of acute social ten-
 32 sion by class groupings, making for hegemonic, nostalgic, and opposi-
 33 tional horizons as well as for different “semantic figures,” that is, forms
 34 and conventions (Williams 1981: chap. 9, “Structures of Feeling”).

35 **2. On Collective Understanding of Shaping Words**

36 Let me therefore advance from the outermost frame of any collective
 37 understanding/s of common reality as just argued—always bearing in
 38 mind there can be competing collectives—and restrict political episte-
 39 mology here to the already daunting domain of understanding or cogni-
 40 tion in words (language). If my book, in searching what we need for
 41

collective and personal salvation, arrived finally at the need of a fusion between an organized plebeian political upsurge and depth utopian energies, it would seem useful to propose here some initial, necessarily laconic theses on a method for radical utopian cognition. They are an amendable initial view and stance. They reproduce—that is, both repeat and advance from—some of my writings of the last quarter century.

It follows from my brief discussion of Williams that cognition is not only open-ended but also codetermined by the social subject and societal interests looking for it: its horizons are multiple. Not only is this legitimate, it is unavoidable and all-pervasive. The object of any praxis can only be “seen as” that particular kind of object from a subject-driven standpoint and bearing that is personal but also collective. If you want to be Master of your Company, you have to treat profit-making concepts as raw material on the same footing as profit-making laborers and iron ore. The bourgeois civilization’s main way of coping with the unknown is aberrant, said Nietzsche, because it transmutes nature into concepts with the aim of mastering it: that is, it turns nature only into concepts and furthermore makes a more or less closed system out of concepts. It is not that the means get out of hand but that the mastery—the wrong end—requires consubstantially wrong means. The problem lies not in the Sorcerer’s Apprentice but in the Master Wizard.

2.1 Premise

In both our presuppositions and positions, a double cognitive movement is necessary: *destruction* (deconstruction) of old ways of thinking, focusing on useless interpretation of key terms; *construction* of dialectically flexible, usable meanings of such terms, having a constant denotative core yet pulsating—expanding and shrinking—periphery of connotations. The rhythm and direction of the pulsations is historically contingent and situational; it too is subject to *phronesis* (practical wisdom) rather than *theoria*.

Our tools as essayists are no doubt notional; they are regulative ideas. However, I shall argue in 2.2 that in all richer cases they repose on a metaphor (in the widest sense of a trope). They are all initially located in the imagination, but “imagination becomes reality when it enters the belief of masses” (Marx, slightly tweaked).

All understanding carries its own delight, of a piece with its end to make life easier and more pleasant. Cognition—artistic, scientific or any other—is a joy and pleasure; it fuses logic and emotions. It is always an imaginative synergy between Pascal’s *esprit géométrique*, the intuitive

1 *esprit de finesse*, and last not least (in a somewhat archaic metaphor) the
 2 *esprit du oeur* or emotional wisdom. If emotions, as I argue in Suvin
 3 1994 and [redacted], are tools for understanding the world, they can be right
 4 or wrong, clear or muddled, just as a propositional or notional system:
 5 another highly important but usable and misusable tool or faculty.

6 *A first axiom: The survival of Homo sapiens sapiens has precedence*
 7 *over the profit principle*

9 *2.2 Cognitive Acts in Words*

10 First, cognitive acts in words (often called “discourse” in French the-
 11 ory) are not closed or walled off—simply a combination of discrete
 12 linguistic units—but rely on an interplay of identification (what is
 13 presented as being in singular: Peter, this table, the fall of Rome) and
 14 predication (a quality, a class of things or a type of relation) in any
 15 sentence or proposition: who or what relates how to X. Was the fall of
 16 Rome to supposed barbarians that we take as ending the slave-own-
 17 ing system a terrible crash or a refreshing renewal, a palingenesis? For
 18 whom was it either or both?

19 Second, when dealing with language sentences, Frege’s *Sinn und*
 20 *Bedeutung* (see Frege 1985: esp. 56–71) are best translated as *sense and*
 21 *meaning*, avoiding the huge minefield of competing uses of “refer-
 22 ence”: sense operates as relationships within the sentence language
 23 correlating the identification function and the predicative function,
 24 while meaning refers to the Possible World of the text, where “lan-
 25 guage is directed beyond itself” (I use here some insights of Ricoeur
 26 1976: 20, also 1–14, 25–31, but within a dissenting frame akin to the
 27 late Wittgenstein). A text’s propositions and metaphors always arise in
 28 given situations, and Sartre would add within our freedom to under-
 29 stand situations (cf. also Haraway 1988), within an imagined commu-
 30 nity; in all poetry or narration they imply, shape, and in turn presup-
 31 pose a Possible World on the analogy of what we imagine is “our
 32 world,” and only within it do they have a meaning

33 Third, cognitive acts in words are sometimes seen as divided
 34 into two distinct sub-ensembles: propositional and metaphoric. But
 35 this seems to me outdated semantics, based on linguistics à la Ben-
 36 veniste, for meaning encompasses very much also all connotations,
 37 implications, affects, echoes, and analogies of the so-called proposi-
 38 tional content. There is NO “said as such” (contra Ricoeur 1999: 9,
 39 12, *passim*)—unless maybe for specific narrow purposes, as in much
 40 specialized philosophy. Conversely, every true metaphor is a dialecti-
 41 cal contradiction: in each metaphor, kinship appears where ordinary

vision or ruling common sense sees none, in what stricter philosophers like to dub a “category mistake” (Ricoeur 1999: 50–51). This ought to induce us to use categories prudently.

Between the beginning and the end of any unit of cognition-in-words the reader may understand something, in the best cases a novum—a new event or existence—by induced experiencing. His take on the world in which he acts or is being acted on is modified by the experience of other possibilities, of Possible Worlds.

A second axiom: Human nature abhors meaninglessness.

2.3 On Dialectical Totalities

Preindustrial totality was ideally stable; it could accommodate slight or at any rate nonstructural changes in the fashion of Tomasi di Lampedusa’s slogan in *Leopard (Il Gattopardo)*: “everything changes [in politics] in order to remain the same [in economics].” Such totality was then perverted by Gentile and Mussolini into the ideology of “totalitarianism,” meaning the total organization of society by the State from above, fusing politics and economics; Nazism brought this to perfection, while Stalinism largely came to follow a kindred, equally bloody if in technologically backward societies more productive idea. Both were centrally aspiring to a kind of divine perfection, perhaps relevant to times before the Industrial Revolution and its new normality of disconcerting change within one lifetime, beginning with the Napoleonic wars: not to speak about the following revolutions in technology and cognition, in perfectly evil feedback with bigger wars. Shocked by all these politics, Arendt and the liberal *doxa* of postmodernism not only rightly refused them but also threw the baby out with the bathwater, logically ending in “weak thought.”

It is much more economical to wash and grow the baby: that is, to retain the concept of strategic, flexible, and imperfect totalities (see Suvin 1998). “Strategic” means shaped by deep and cognitively argued macro-situational necessities; “flexible” means changeable in extension and intension; “imperfect” means not only unfinished but in principle unfinishable dualities and multiplicities. No image or notion is graspable except as such a (provisional!) historical totality. Thomas More’s great insight, philosophical and literary, was to formalize such a totality in his book 2 of *Utopia* as a happy and virtuous country and counter-universe organized in politico-economical categories—not simply a fable about a piecemeal problem as were his Polylerites, Achorrii, and Macarenses in book 1 (cf. Jameson 2005: 38–39), estranged into moral abstraction rather than into sociopolitical analytics.

1 Total in this discussion does not mean all-exhaustive, or that
 2 everything is to be planned from above and violently enforced, as
 3 Cold War propaganda insinuated. Many major SF and utopian writ-
 4 ings are *open-ended totalities*. Indeed, every poem, story or book is an
 5 invitation to the readers' cognitive participation and remembering.
 6 Any totality has inbuilt contradictions which make for changes, gla-
 7 cially slow or explosively sudden. The art of planning, of being ready
 8 for the unforeseeable future, is to find the dominant contradiction (see
 9 Mao 1968: essays 2 and 3).

10 *A third axiom: Strategic, flexible, and imperfect totalities are the*
 11 *only thinkable cognitive acts.*

13 3. Some Transitive Aspects of Utopia/nism: Around Antiutopia

14 From a number of categories under which the cognitive investigations
 15 of SF and utopia/nism can be grouped, I can here dwell only on free-
 16 dom versus destiny, some further aspects of antiutopia, and our salva-
 17 tional choice: violence versus care. The first of these three foci leads
 18 into some further delving into antiutopia and the third follows logi-
 19 cally as its upshot.²

21 3.1 Freedom and Destiny: The Arbiter Actant

22 As Marx clarifies in *Capital III*, in the sphere of material production—
 23 which is under the sway of necessity—“[freedom] can consist only
 24 in. . . the associated producers govern[ing] the human metabolism
 25 with nature in a rational way. . . . The true realm of freedom, the
 26 development of human powers as an end in itself, begins beyond
 27 it. . . . The reduction of the working day [in material production] is
 28 the basic prerequisite” (Marx 1981: 958–59). I speak of freedom in
 29 our unhappy epoch where millennial class society is breaking down
 30 yet redoubles its tenacious hold in its death throes (to which I shall
 31 return under the rubric of repressive *intolerance*), while the truly free
 32 society of the associated producers cannot yet be born. In this most
 33 dangerous interregnum of ours, the arts, and imagination in general,
 34 register deeply and durably both the disalienated horizons and the
 35 fullness of human alienations. As an extraordinary passage by Simmel
 36 (1989: 603) has it, “the intellect is egalitarian and as it were commu-
 37 nist,” for its contents are both generally communicable and, if correct,
 38 generally shareable “by every sufficiently educated mind (*Geist*) . . .
 39 and the potential infinity of disseminating theoretical imaginations
 40 has no influence on their meaning, [so that] they exclude private prop-
 41 erty”; he is probably echoing, with more prudence in more complexly

alienated times, Plato's equally astounding proposition in *Meno* that any slave is capable of understanding geometry.³ Centrally, disseminated fiction's contract with the reader is "not just egalitarian . . . [but constitutive of] the story-teller's art itself. The moral of the very act of fabulation was the equality of the intelligence" (Rancière 1995: 82). Such a striving for freedom through understanding, assumed from Aristotle to Rousseau as a natural human right though often unnaturally suppressed, is here discussed within the "word art," literature in the widest sense of all oral and written instances, and taking as its *pars pro toto* narrative agents, with a focus on the *actant of arbiter*.

Among the structurally necessary functions of narrative agents, as pioneered by Propp and Lévi-Strauss and worked out in many variations from Souriau to Lotman, the most important for the narrative horizon and the outcome of events is the actant of Mandator or *Arbiter*. Usually called Destiny, as the Greek *ananke* it was a religious (mythical) notion fusing violent power with transcendent necessity, best codified at the outset in the Oedipus myth and plays. But historically hegemonic necessity may change, as already foreshadowed by Sophocles's *Antigone*, nostalgically loyal to the old values and, in overtly subversive fashion by Aeschylus's *Prometheus*, for the moment—a long historical age of class society—bound. Thus the opposition of freedom and destiny can be used as one key to the interplay of the posed intratextual and the presupposed extratextual elements of narration (argued above, also in Suvín 1988b). This interplay varies according to the writers' and readers' structures of experience and feeling about force relationships in history. In what I call metaphysical genres like Horror or Heroic Fantasy—and better in myth—Destiny is sovereign; in early bourgeois "Realism" and SF it is not—characters and its actions, successful or failed, are decisive. This means that the SF plot is typically open or "epic," whereas the plot of metaphysical genres is typically closed or "mythic" (see Suvín 1988b and 2016).

I ought to discuss here at length, were there world enough and time, a hypothesis about narrative agents I have held since the early 1980s but never developed at monograph length. It arose out of my work on dramaturgy where it is easier to detect—hence the stress on visualizing—but I would defend its extension to all narration. To cut a long story short, I have condensed my findings in table form and ask the interested reader to look up the justifications and details in Suvín 1985, 1988a, 1989, and 2005. Table 1 is organized with the depth agents downmost and rising toward the textual surface from 1. to 3.

Table 1. Narrative Agents

Agential level	Predicative articulation	Narratological locus	Verbal status; deep structure	Visualizing status	Definition	Historical duration
Character <i>Personage</i> or <i>personnage</i> ; <i>personne</i> ; “round”; presence not obligatory	A great (though not unlimited) number of predicates/traits, at least two of them conflict	Always textual and a <i>dramatis persona</i> (when it exists)	<i>Proper name</i> ; deep structure = illusion of large number of not fully fixed attributes, only imperfectly retrievable from text and all contexts	Necessarily figurative (depictable); necessarily individual	Individuality as presupposed by bourgeois practice (e.g., economics) and ideology (e.g., psychology)	Almost pointlike, changeable for each different ensemble (interest group) of spectators or readers
Type <i>Type</i> or <i>personnage-type</i> ; “flat,” e.g., Vice, Pantalone, Miser, Father, Soubrette; presence obligatory	A small number, usually 2 to 6, of compatible predicates/traits	Metatextual or textual, according to whether level 3 exists or not	<i>Common or generic noun</i> , incl. proper name raised to that status; deep structure = noun and one or a few attributes, or nominal syntagm	Necessarily figurative; not necessarily individual	Societal type, by age, sex, and profession, and/or social group, and/or temperament . . .	Middle historical duration: generations or centuries
Actant Protagonist, Antagonist, Value, Mandator or Arbiter, Beneficiary, and Satellite; presence obligatory	One predicate as common denominator of a bundle of semic predicates	Always metatextual; no discrete appearance as <i>dramatis persona</i>	<i>Common noun</i> ; deep structure = “force which does what is indicated by the noun”	Not necessarily figurative; necessarily not individual	Function in narrative action	Long duration: epochs or millennia

In the Middle Ages, Destiny was subsumed under the equally capricious and numinous monotheistic God (cf. Todorov 1971: chap. on the Grail story). But the corrosive hegemony of bourgeois individualism downgraded Destiny and annexed it to the—more or less typical—individual conflict of the Protagonist’s versus the Antagonist’s wills and forces. This was in a way a huge liberation from under an idealized Miceanean—later feudal—Lord (*anax*, Dominus). Such a liberation was foreshadowed in the best Athenian rebels: from the quite explicit and programmatic *Prometheus Bound* to the less monolithic but still exemplary *Bacchae*. But this latter play already prefigures the downfall of the free aspect of the polis, overwhelmed by the slave-owning empires, which defeat finally bred Christianity as a real *tertium datur*: slavery, oppression, and misery on Earth; freedom, equality, and bliss in the heavens. This illusory compromise collapsed with the dominance of merchant capitalism. Modern SF after Verne and Wells then at its best shared the liberatory aspect of bourgeois realism—nothing is foreordained, it all depends on the situation and the actions in it, mainly by our Protagonist: Le Guin’s Shevek, or Dick’s Hoppy, or the Strugatskys’ explorer hero with many names. At any rate, from the nineteenth century on, the ideological master code of industrial society became History as Destiny and Power, I found in a depth investigation of UK SF from 1848 to 1885 (Suvín 1983: 407–8). True, an open ending does not, again realistically, lead to necessary success: within the spread of SF horizons between utopian and dystopian, it may well lead to utter defeat. But the defeat is as a rule causally explicable and contingent rather than destined: it can be undone by other actions and/or other situations, in the same Possible World or other ones.

What happens to Destiny in these last three or four decades of boundless financialized imperialism, under the new hegemon of existential antiutopia (early noticed by some of us, most prominently by Jameson)? It is omnipresent and inescapable as its grimmest ancestors were, from Zeus and Yahweh on; it punishes by death and torture as they did, but it has also grown *actantially invisible*—a hidden yet powerful God, not posed or explicit but presupposed and structurally necessary in order to make readable sense of the stories. In what one should concede is a masterpiece of monolithically successful inculcation by massified means, antiutopia inculcates its theology tacitly. It is the system of feral Social Darwinism where the strong man fights and the weak man dies, the allegorical “man” standing both for machismo and for entire human groups and classes (see more in Suvín 2005). As usual, the Nazis’ “racial” theory, flying in the face of the fact that *there*

1 *are no races* within the species *Homo sapiens sapiens*, carried this system
 2 to its ultimate and clearest extreme; however, in their situation of
 3 incomplete hegemony the Arbiter had to be biologized and enforced
 4 by both open and hidden mass murder. It is much more economical
 5 for globalized capitalism to enforce it by misery plus tacit assumptions
 6 that cannot even be noticed by the mass reader or TV consumer,
 7 though ongoing structural violence causes tens of millions of prema-
 8 ture deaths, while tens of thousands of outright murders whenever
 9 rebellion rises are an indispensable complement.

10 This as it were inly interfused and monstrous Destiny degrades
 11 power struggles between people into total inhumanity, well emblema-
 12 tized in the SF militarists' predilection for "Bugs" or Bug-Eyed Mon-
 13 sters that have to be squashed like rats or bacteria (pardon me, viruses)—
 14 see Heinlein at his most virulent in *Starship Troopers* and the movie
 15 made from it. The old enlightened adage even for better religions, "hate
 16 the sin not the sinner," is swept into oblivion, physical repression by
 17 hunger, untreated pandemy or bullet is getting to be the order of the
 18 day. Going Marcuse one better after the demise of the Welfare State, we
 19 have to update his 1960s concept of repressive tolerance into repressive
 20 intolerance, sometimes masquerading as repressive quasi-semi-demi-tol-
 21 erance. If God and Communism are dead, all is allowed, we do not
 22 really need all those silly parliamentary masks anyway; Twitter and vio-
 23 lence suffice (personifications: Trump, Bolsonaro, and the mini-dicta-
 24 tors in size but not cruelty from the East European bosses Orban and
 25 Kaczyński to General Al-Sisi and the hereditary Kim).
 26

27 3.2 *Antiutopia as Black Norm: Closed Horizon and Infiltrating Form*

28 US SF as a whole was for four decades, from the New Deal on, socio-
 29 logically based on an ascending middle class that now began rapidly
 30 falling behind, falling down in power and confidence, and falling
 31 apart; and in particular, on the intellectuals (the apprentice ones from
 32 roughly thirteen to twenty-five years, and the adult ones after that
 33 age). The closing of the Golden Age of SF and its implied utopianism
 34 can be precisely dated to circa 1974 (cf. Jameson 2005: 132–33, pas-
 35 sim), the end of the antiwar and Black protests in the US and the
 36 beginning of an initially slow but soon strengthening right-wing
 37 offensive. US SF was always ideologically "two-souled," and it was
 38 further hollowed out both by the *Zeitgeist* and by a well-funded turn
 39 to militarist fiction (see Suvin 2005). True, feminist utopias held on
 40 significantly longer and were in the 1980s joined by the best cyber-
 41 punk, since both had important and active constituencies—US and

European feminists, the new media and internet intellectuals of the globalizing North. But these two important dissident movements proved too isolated for a successful counteroffensive, especially since SF was getting downgraded into a poor relative of Tolkien, Conan, and Horror Fantasy (cf. Jameson 2005: 68, 71). This made for a Social Darwinist reduction of history to a point-like eternity where only quantities matter and only fashions change, and squarely aimed at expunging the indelible “amphibiousness” of utopia that participates in the present and in the (possible) future (Jameson 2005: xv).

Intellectuals are two-souled, oscillating between the rulers and the ruled, the exploiters and the exploited; and such is the case with US SF, as I found in Suvin 2000 and confirmed in Suvin 2005. I saw the opposed poles as being a destructive soul focused on adolescent fears, technological fixes, violence, and war—exactly like today’s Trumpists—and a cognitive soul focused on salvation, where truth shall make you free (if you recognize and practice it with large human groups). In other words, the intellectual’s need for freedom and control over one’s own product, in order simply to ply his/her trade, may be oriented either toward a liberatory hybrid between *citoyen* and comrade or toward dreams of a new ruling class based on themselves. The latter can be well seen in their grasping for alternative yet quite hierarchical power systems from top down, pioneered by the ambiguous Bacon and the more resolutely closed Campanella, where the adumbrated worlds are either a rigid lay monastery or a rigid research science set-up (Jameson 2005: 17). Utopias by intellectuals—are there any other ones?—have also a taste for closing systems, Barthes found, or more precisely an anti-cognitive ideological aspect, fortunately in the best cases recessive rather than dominant (Jameson 2005: 43, 171). All these were easily squelched by commercial capitalism and absolutism, well shown by More’s fate as an epochally significant but failed political heresiarch; and his “first new image of the role of the intellectual” since Augustine of Hippo, the glimpse of humanists as a new ruling class, was definitively downgraded by the industrial *grande bourgeoisie* (Jameson 2005: 25–26) that created the prevailing image of utopia as a synonym of the impossible and ridiculous.

Enter at the turn of our twenty-first-century antiutopia, a subject so new and so important that it will bear revisiting. My thesis is that antiutopia as horizon and form is a major novelty, correlative to its original bearers being not only and not primarily professional intellectuals but professional politicians, the State apparatus of violence, and its embedded think tanks. Antiutopia is the latest crown of the ruling

1 classes' repressive tradition, evolving in my generation from the Wel-
 2 fare State pseudo-tolerance into intolerance. Intolerant repression was
 3 always the material truth of violent power. Lately, it ranges from refusal
 4 of money and careers for deviant thinkers, proclaimed unthinkably
 5 confused and/or dogmatic (!), to incarceration (probably the case for a
 6 great majority of officially assumed "terrorists," if we are to judge from
 7 the US criminal justice as applied to the poor, beginning with the visi-
 8 ble "others"—women, Blacks, and immigrants). It ends with assassina-
 9 tions, so frequently instanced in US politics by the Kennedys, the Black
 10 Panthers' leadership, M. L. King, Malcolm X, and many humbler peo-
 11 ple under the media radar. Antiutopia is the horizon of holding that all
 12 the central power and ideological pillars are untouchable, like Yahweh:
 13 I am that I am. But it is also the vector of intolerant repression in order
 14 to eternalize the ruling system as the best possible locus (see my "Uto-
 15 pia" 2021). The ruthless saturation of imaginary space in an eternal
 16 present makes antiutopia's grip powerful.

17 A very revealing light is thrown on the genesis and form of antiu-
 18 topia, and on its rise to the age's *doxa* or common sense crowding out
 19 Destiny, by the new political ontology of the US ruling class—and to a
 20 degree all rulers of its allied and even enemy States—after 9/11. In this
 21 oligarchic ontology, imagination directly issues into factual states.
 22 Whether the US federal government really feared a worldwide "Is-
 23 lamist" insurrection or simply used this as a godsent opportunity to
 24 invoke "Homeland security," creating in 2002 the titanic eponymous
 25 department, what it also excogitated and engaged upon was the evil
 26 novum of "a parallel . . . extra-legal universe" (Scarry 2010: xviii–xix).
 27 This was an alternative, largely secret, and hidden world obeying new
 28 procedures of violent power and creating new spaces for it: on the one
 29 hand, "extraterritorial rendition networks, prison archipelagos, and
 30 secret 'black site' facilities"; on the other, "indefinite detentions, mili-
 31 tary tribunals, and executive circumventions of national and interna-
 32 tional law" permitting planned kidnappings and killings of anybody
 33 the central security agencies deemed important enough (Saint-Amour
 34 2011). This parallel world in the interstices of our daily one ruthlessly
 35 jettisoned not only basic principles of international law but also the
 36 whole of lay theory and practice of humanist-cum-liberal history and
 37 culture; that is, it jettisoned the revolutionary *citoyen* values in favor of
 38 a blend of slave-owning empires, colonial subjugation, the Holy Inqui-
 39 sition, and strictest World War–type secrecy and disinformation. It is
 40 the best empirical approximation to Lovecraft's vague but malignantly
 41 powerful Dark Gods.

Two factors seem to me central here: first, the establishment of what Elaine Scarry calls an alternative universe with different permissibilities—“different bases for fact, standards of proof, evidentiary parameters, rights, procedures, penalties, guarantees, and expectations” (Saint-Amour 2011). It fits well the urge of rulers in late capitalism for the state of exception or a de facto martial law, piecemeal applicable at will. This was theorized most clearly by the Nazi theoretician Carl Schmitt, undergoing a revival at those times, and observed also by Judith Butler within a critical Agambenian frame. However, Butler (2004: 61) goes one important step further, noting that it is “a paralegal universe that goes by the name of law.” For the second defining factor of the existential antiutopia systematically developed from within the nuclei of our ruling classes—and zealously followed by (sad to say) very many intellectuals right down to a tacitly new understanding of dystopia—is that this new universe is not openly affirmed, as in its four historical predecessors identified above and their culmination in the Nazis; on the contrary, it propositionally and axiologically splits off from the official universe, still ruled by publicly accessible contracts and remaining in force for the docile masses of the ruled (in the more affluent North, at least) insofar as they remain exploitable or otherwise usable. The secret world works by covertly yet systematically infiltrating the overt one, in which it is revealed first by macro-events that cannot be denied (but can be misnamed), such as the mass bombings from Afghanistan and Serbia to Syria or Libya, and then by the occasional courageous whistleblower, who is made to pay dearly: from Frank Snepp (relating to the CIA in 1977) and Mordechai Vanunu (Israeli nuclear weapons, 1986), to John Kiriakou (CIA, 2007), Chelsea Manning (US Army, 2010), Edward Snowden (NSA, 2013), and so on (see Wikipedia.org. 2020, the rich “List,” which strangely does not include the most famous whistleblower, Julian Assange of WikiLeaks). Were there space, I would undertake to show that the existential antiutopia is the left hand of darkness, whose right hand is the incessant murderous warfare of late capitalism that has never stopped from 1914 on. It is indeed warfare that in our capitalocene first clearly grew into the substitute for liberatory politics and the unacknowledged economic pillar of the system (see more in Suvin my “Utopia” 2021).

I concluded in “Utopia” (2021) that antiutopia was a targeted and embattled ideologico-political use of a closed horizon to render unthinkable both the eutopia of a better possible world and the dystopia as awful warning about the writer’s and readers’ present tendencies. It stifles not only the right to dissent but primarily the desire for

1 radical novelty—in brief, it dismantles any possibility of plebeian
 2 democracy. This was a world-historical novum by which the ideologico-
 3 political development of capitalism, which had all along produced
 4 fake novums galore, morphed by the beginning of the twenty-first
 5 century into this encompassing monster—the existential antiutopia as
 6 a super-weapon. One of its pillars was the Cold War misuse of 1984,
 7 whose ambiguities, weaknesses, and plain errors (see Suvin 2020b)
 8 allowed its use for proving that any alternative to capitalism would be
 9 even worse. I think Orwell himself would be horrified by the horizon
 10 of a world where all people and human possibilities existed only as
 11 adjunct exploitable labor for profit—unless also as mercenary servants.

12 In the style of the *Communist Manifesto* and Brecht's question
 13 "What is the robbing of a bank compared to founding a bank?," we
 14 could ask: within the production of human suffering, what are Attila,
 15 Genghis Khan, Stalin, and even the most horrible but short-lived Hitler
 16 State compared to agribusiness, Big Pharma, the Seven Sisters of oil,
 17 and the capillary grip of financial capital? And especially, adding
 18 insult to injury, when their values are blandly infiltrated as the new
 19 existential norm: antiutopia.

20 3.3 Violence versus Care: An Ending in Creation

21 I could think of several worthy ways in which, and themes with
 22 which, to end an article on these concerns, but one stark dichotomy
 23 seems most useful: the one between Violence and Care in relation-
 24 ships between people, including their metabolism with nature.⁴ On
 25 the side of Violence is Class Power and Embedded Science, on the side
 26 of Care is Liberating Knowledge (see Suvin 1983: 418). *Violence*, as
 27 part of the semantic cluster of "power in operation" (Roget 1978: no.
 28 173), is one keyword of any political epistemology. I have discussed it
 29 at some length (in Suvin 2009 and 2020d), concluding that power
 30 (*Macht*) is inherent in any interhuman situation or politics, whereas
 31 violence (*Gewalt*) is predicated on the manifold tensions between and
 32 inside groups or classes of dominators and dominated. I defined as
 33 violence psychophysical lesions of people, usually with irreversible
 34 traces, deviating from the hegemonic British sense of "opposition to
 35 legal power" (cf. Williams 1983: s.v. "Violence"). Economic harm to
 36 commodities or other property may well be destructive and punish-
 37 able, but it constitutes violence only if it leads to wounds, hunger, or
 38 similar lesion. Capitalism can only exist by means of a ceaseless and
 39 pitiless "primordial accumulation" violently ruining the lives of entire
 40 lower classes, as exemplarily posited in Marx's pages on sixteenth-cen-
 41

tury England and reactualized by Rosa Luxemburg even before the World Wars and other globalizations. The permanent violence needed for the accumulation of capital was consubstantial with militarism. Much the largest amount of violence is in ripe capitalism due to high-technology wars, which in the twentieth century caused at least 110 million deaths (see much more in Suvin 2020a); I would include into violence the severe psychological lesions, from prolonged stress to terror, that victimizes hundreds of millions. While all violence is contemptible, it can be divided into individual, group, and State violence against people, and as a rule State violence towers above group violence by a factor of about 2000:1. Mutually reinforcing causal factors of violence are State violence, omnipresent everyday alienation in work conditions and its repercussions on all human relationships, and other forms of “structural” or “systemic violence”—such as extreme poverty leading to death by hunger and/or avoidable diseases, at present threatening more than three billion people.

Are there situations when violence is justified, and if yes, for what ends and in which measure?

First, not all violence, whatever its excuse may be, is allowable: for example, killing civilians in declared or undeclared wars, or any torturing. All violence testifies to a profound sickness of the system and persons generating and using it. Nonetheless, *self-defense* is recognized by most historical systems. If it aims to counteract and minimize societal violence as a whole and to diminish its causes, this may justify counterviolence. I have come to the conclusion—as finally did Thoreau, M. L. King Jr., and even it seems Gandhi—that *counterviolence is not so hurtful as the want of it*. When individual and communal human rights are routinely violated, oppressed people can and should react, first by using their power of disbelief, in order to recognize the disinformation and cultural lies used to keep them in their place, and then by coming together in collective action. For, central to and constitutive of violence is a denial of personal psychophysical integrity and therefore of freedom as a basic human need and right. It amounts to an overt or covert racism that classifies certain types of people as not Us but Them, so that inhumanity to them can be masked, denied, and normalized. In particular, counterviolence is inescapable in situations involving armed repression by the police, military, or private mercenaries. This does not mean disallowing, but on the contrary allying with, the parallel right of self-defense by nonviolent intervention. A strict differentiation between justifiable and unjustifiable violence then becomes mandatory; it necessarily centers on State militarised repression but should

1 also include reactive groups and individuals internalizing the institu-
 2 tionalized violence. Even when forced counterviolence is permissible, it
 3 is fraught with long-range dangers, so that keeping it to the necessary
 4 minimum must remain a permanent objective.

5 The central argument has been most memorably formulated in
 6 the final two articles of the Jacobin *Declaration of the Rights of Man*
 7 *and the Citizen* of 1793:

8
 9 Article 34: The societal body is oppressed when any of its mem-
 10 bers is oppressed. All members are oppressed when the societal
 11 body is oppressed.

12 Article 35: When government violates the rights of the people,
 13 insurrection is the most sacred right and the most indispensable
 14 duty of the people and of any part of the people.
 15

16 In conclusion, I would go further and claim that violence and
 17 creation (*poiein*), are the two opposed poles of power. All creation, the
 18 domain of disalienation, relates to people and values. It does so directly
 19 as *care*, and indirectly as *understanding* about situations and causes of
 20 events. Taking a cue from Ricoeur's (1976: 63) note that human
 21 beings are "designated as a power to exist," I am presenting in table 2
 22 the alternatives of the Alienated, corresponding to class societies, and
 23 the Disalienated, corresponding to classless ones. Brecht's seminal
 24 notion of *eingreifendes Denken* (intervening thinking) goes from the
 25 "Understanding" to the "Intervening" column in table 2; it translates
 26 into modern emancipatory terms Paul of Tarsus's "For the kingdom of
 27 God is not in the Word but in the Power" (1 Cor. 4:20). Within alien-
 28 ation, the fake "seeing" is today mainly mercenary and/or power-hun-
 29 gry rather than religious. Within disalienation, the use for systematic
 30 cognition about people and for practical relationships of people to
 31 each other is mediated by means of Brecht's central category of stance
 32 or bearing (see Suvin 1999), which seems now to me a theoretical
 33 breakthrough as important as estrangement was at the outset of my
 34 approaching SF and utopia/nism.

35 Creation is both seeing AND doing. What it creates is a novum
 36 as possibility—a full or only embryonic Possible World. What it
 37 denies and forecloses is violence, as shown for example at the begin-
 38 ning of *Prometheus Bound*, where the liberator of humanity is
 39 enchained by Power and Violence—but he knows it is not forever!
 40
 41

Table 2. Varieties of Power to Exist

	<i>Understanding/seeing</i>	<i>Intervening/doing</i>
Alienated	Religious, mythical, mercenary	<i>Violence</i> : domination, embedded science
Disalienated	Lay, contradictory, “concretely utopian” (Bloch 1986)	<i>Creation</i> : liberation, care, understanding

This table is an initial cut-out from much more complex relationships. A few pointers: it entirely neglects game-playing (sports, cards) as a potentially free play of imagination, very usable and very misusable; it does not expatiate on the consubstantial element of the writer’s freedom, however crassly impacted on by Destiny. More on capitalist science and its opposition to useful understanding wisdom is in my *Disputing* (ch. “Colloquium”).

Notes

1. Lakoff 1990: xiv–xv and passim. For a listing of main works about frames, schemas, or scripts by Fillmore, Lakoff and Johnson, Langacker, Rumelhart, Schank and Abelson, and Minsky, see Lakoff 1990: 68, 116; and for Putnam, see Lakoff 1990: 206, 229ff. Not all of Lakoff’s 600-odd pages are indispensable or applicable to my purposes, but *j’ai pris mon bien où je le trouve* (I took my good where I find it). I approach a specific and necessary discussion of language, which is in this view not simply information but characterized by symbolic models that pair it with propositional and metaphoric systems, in 1. below.

2. I cannot enter here into further rectification of terms such as *estrangement*, *novum*, *horizon*, and *narration as hidden parable*. See for them, in the same order, *estrangement* in Suvin 2017, while the rest is discussed in my forthcoming book *Disputing*: *novum* in the chapter “On Splitting,” “Horizon (Utopian)” in the chapter “Going,” and the central trinity of locus, horizon, and orientation in the chapter “Utopia”; for parable see also Suvin, *Positions*. In the ch. “Considering” of *Disputing* I also speak further to the false dichotomy of reason versus emotion.

3. Simmel’s whole long argument on the communism of the intellect (1989: 603–6) ends with an unusually outspoken stress on the “bloody mockery” (*blutiger Hohn*) of the pseudo-egalitarianism of educational material (*Bildungstoff*), which is, as is true of “other freedoms within the liberalistic doctrine,” in fact accessible only to those in favorable circumstances: a Marxian correction of Plato. It should be carefully scrutinized, also for echoes in his student Lukács.

4. I concentrate here on violence, hoping to return to care in another piece. I am not in favor of Hans Jonas’s concept of care in his influential *Das Prinzip Verantwortung*; whatever incidental usefulness it may have, this is for me outweighed in his express purpose of countering the radical horizon of Ernst Bloch’s *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* in order to sanitize liberal capitalism. I find useful Carol Gilligan’s stress on the horizon of democracy for care and some developments by Joan Tronto that insist on a preferential option for the most vulnerable and most privileged receivers of care as well as the key nature of institutions in the field of caring.

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