ABSTRACT

UTOPIA, KINSHIP, AND DESIRE

By Jordan Smith Carroll

This paper explores the notion of expanded or universal kinship featured in literary utopias, particularly Samuel R. Delany’s science fiction novels, Trouble on Triton: An Ambiguous Heterotopia and Stars in My Pockets Like Grains of Sand. Drawing on theorists of utopia including Ruth Levitas, Carl Freedman, Tom Moylan, David Harvey, Ernst Bloch, and Theodor Adorno, this paper examines the ways in which kinship provides a way of figuring utopian solidarity. Kath Weston’s ethnographic description of families of choice is given as a model for overcoming the problems posed by solidarities patterned after blood or identity based kinship.
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CHAPTER 1: UTOPIA AND KINSHIP

The (Fatal?) Germ Cell of Utopia

CHAPTER 2: THE UTOPIAN FICTION OF SAMUEL R. DELANY

I refuse to join any Utopia that would have me as a Member.

The Utopian Process of Desire

The Politics of Bestiality

Works Cited
Chapter 1: Utopia and Kinship

Conventional definitions of utopia and utopianism are inadequate when compared to most literary utopias, including Thomas More’s *Utopia*. Implicit in the colloquial understanding of utopia are two problematic assumptions: utopias are intended to represent perfect or ideal societies (Sargisson 19) and utopias are executable blueprints for revolution or reform (Marin 259; Moylan 39). It is clear that these assumptions do not accurately describe most of the novels termed utopian, let alone the intentional communities, visionary architecture, political theories, musical film, pornography or any other phenomena that have been labeled utopian. While utopianists have repeatedly criticized this stereotype of utopia, it returns again and again, as Ruth Levitas put it, “like a familiar but nonetheless rather troublesome ghost” (*Concept* 3).

The notion that utopias are perfect or ideal—and therefore also static, unchanging, idealistic and boring—is held by many utopian commentators and anthologists (Levitas, *Concept* 33). This definition of utopia, however, can be exploded by an examination of what was, in retrospect, the founding text of the genre—More’s *Utopia*. Just from a superficial reading, many features of Utopian society—crime, punishment, slavery, war—would presumably be eliminated if Utopia was, in fact, an ideal commonwealth. Even if we allow for an irreducible amount of social strife in an optimal society, it is still unclear that Utopia holds that distinction. As Lucy Sargisson points out, More’s *Utopia* is subtitled, “‘Concerning the best state of a commonwealth and the new island of Utopia,’ and ‘best’ need not be perfect or even ideal” (24). Indeed, there is considerable evidence of irony, ambiguity and satire within the text, making it difficult to decide if we should take the society of Utopia at face value, let alone maintain its perfection. The second book ends with the statement by More, rather like a punch line, that:

there occurred to him quite a few institutions established by the customs and laws of that nation seemed to him quite absurd, not only in their way of waging war, their religious beliefs and practices, and other institutions as well, but also (and above all) in the very point which is the principal foundation of their whole social structure, namely their common life and subsistence with no exchange of money.

(134)
What begins as a slight exception (“a few institutions”) becomes a dismissal of the island Utopia in its entirety. More’s equivocating is underlined by the self-deprecating or self-contradicting puns he uses to name his creation (Sargisson 24-5). More’s punning is not just an erudite in-joke; he telegraphs them to his audience: “the island is [named] nowhere, the city is a phantom, the river has no water, the ruler no people” (More 138-9). These would be strange rhetorical choices if More’s island of Utopia was intended to be read as a straightforward paragon of political and civil virtue. Drawing on the work of Stephen Greenblatt, Philip Wegner argues that Utopia can be read as an intellectual “playground,” a blameless and free sandbox that “enables More to accomplish the important work of thinking through his own place and sense of self” (30). Yet, even if we bracket the rhetoric of the text, it still remains that Hythloday, Utopia’s proponent, does not actually claim that the country is ideal or absolutely perfect—only that it is better than existing European society. Especially when read in light of the dialogue in Book One, Utopia functions as a site-specific entry into a series of contemporary debates, not as a timeless exemplar (Sargisson 25). Some literary utopias, such as Plato’s Republic or Charles Fourier’s Theory of the Four Movements, might boast of their perfection, but this status is not an obvious feature of More’s Utopia. If we take the conventional definition of the utopian as true, More’s Utopia is not a utopia or, at least, stands paradoxically as the original “Ambiguous Utopia.”

Looking beyond More’s Utopia to later novels typically categorized as utopian, we find even less evidence for perfection. The absence of even any discussion of perfection in most literary utopias is striking. Many 20th century utopian novels do not present us with ideal commonwealths but instead emphasize the unfinished and contested politics of their utopian societies (Moylan 11). To cite just a few examples, in the Marxist Feminist utopia of Mattapoissett, described in Woman on the Edge of Time by Marge Piercy, there are vigorous ongoing debates about issues ranging from the role of the artist to policies governing the nature and extent of genetic engineering (Moylan 141). While Mattapoissett is characterized by unresolved but nevertheless peaceful tensions from within, it is beset by violent struggles from without. Mattapoissett is at war in space and time with the last vestiges of authoritarian capitalist society, which strikes at them from space platforms and Antarctic colonies (Moylan 136-8). Mattapoissett does not enjoy a placid “epoch of rest” but instead must fight through futuristic warfare and intervention into our own world through time travel to remain in existence. Another
example can be found in *The Red Star: The First Bolshevik Utopia* by Alexander Bogdanov, in which one faction of utopian Martian society calls for the extermination of the backwards humans of our world to make room for Martian expansion. This debate—in an otherwise straightforwardly propagandistic novel—indicates there are profound unanswered questions in Bogdanov’s utopia. Many of the utopian novels of the 20th century make it clear that there are still political choices to be made and positive change remains possible; the texts do not describe their imaginary societies as in their final or best possible state. Any definition of “utopia” or “utopianism” that demands a pretense to perfection must exclude a number of texts that work within the utopian tradition, texts commonly read as utopian, including More’s *Utopia*. The Oxford English Dictionary’s characterization of More’s *Utopia* and its definition of “utopia” as “a place, state, or condition ideally perfect in respect of politics, laws, customs, and conditions,” while reflecting a common interpretation of More’s text and the colloquial usage of the term, are inadequate when used as criteria for inclusion in the field of utopian studies or as descriptions of many of the things we designate “utopian.”

An even more persistent misconception about utopian novels is that they are best read as schemas for a better future society, to be acted upon or rejected by their readers. Science fiction author Samuel R. Delany disavows utopianism on these grounds, criticizing literary utopias because they cannot or should not be realized. Delany, responding during an interview with a “Utopian and Anti-Utopian (Science) Fiction” seminar at Concordia University, writes that “utopia presupposes a pretty static, unchanging, and rather tyrannical world” (“Interview” 323). His criticism of utopianism is at once explicitly Marxist and implicitly liberal-democratic, dismissing them as “idealism” and faulting them with “social engineering fallacies… which, in practical terms, lie in wait to turn utopian applications into oppression” (326). With his charge of idealism, Delany draws on Friedrich Engel’s denunciation of utopian socialism, “Socialism: Utopian and Scientific.” Engel’s objections to the utopianism of Fourier, Owen and Saint Simon had little to do with their particular visions of utopia but were instead directed at their methodology and revolutionary tactics (Levitas, *Concept* 57). The utopian socialists believed that they could solve the problems of the world not through direct analysis of and engagement with the material base of society—the capitalist mode of production—but through pure reason, and that therefore the discovery of a utopian way of organizing society would be accidental and by some single great genius (Engels 687). Because it originated in idealism rather than
materialism, their method of revolutionary change was, naively enough, rational persuasion or propaganda; they imagined that if everyone just knew how wonderful and reasonable a society governed by Fourierism or Owenism or Saint Simonism would be, people would peacefully change their ways (693).  

Delany’s liberal-democratic argument against utopianism—which does not sit well with orthodox Marxism—is very similar to the one espoused by Karl Popper in The Open Society and Its Enemies (Popper 138-148). This argument, like Engels’, attacks utopianism’s perceived methodological and epistemological problems. Delany, Popper, and other anti-utopians believe that utopias constitute complete blueprints, acting as ideal ends that demand to be suddenly instituted, whole hog, with no compromises (Popper 138). Instead of this large scale “utopian engineering,” Delany and Popper call for “piece-meal engineering,” experimental, pragmatic, small-scale adjustments typified by things like “the introduction of a new kind of life-insurance, of a new kind of taxation, of a new penal reform” (Popper 143). Delany argues that

We know that what’s wrong with utopian thinking in general is that large-scale social engineering just doesn’t work. Everybody who tries it botches it royally…. There’s no way to make sure similar factors working together won’t render some preconceived administrator, committee, or functional group necessary. That can be only learned by trial-and-error—along with careful, analytical observation of the real workings of the realized community. (“Interview” 330)

Delany and Popper imagine utopians in a predicament like that of the Sorcerer’s Apprentice, in which his original instructions are carried out, disastrously, with no reference to new information, objections or changing conditions. When this happens, they maintain, the utopians must become tyrants and thugs in order to protect their idealistic blueprints from justified criticism.  

What Delany and Popper fail to realize is that many utopias are more flexible and

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1 For more extensive accounts of Marxist arguments against and intermittent praise for utopian socialism, see Goodwin and Taylor (72-77) and Levitas (Concept 35-58). Marxist anti-utopianism was not without its critics, even from within the movement. Theodor Adorno held that “the horror” of Soviet Communism was “partly connected to the fact that…the idea of utopia has actually disappeared completely from the conception of socialism. Thereby the apparatus, the how, the means of a socialist society have taken precedence over any possible content, for one is not allowed to say anything about the possible content” (“Something’s Missing” 12-3).

2 It is curious that utopianism is often associated with violence when so many of the politically motivated atrocities in the 20th and 21st century have been carried out by avowed anti-utopians: capitalists and Stalinists. Meanwhile, Goodwin and Taylor observe that only a minority of authors of literary utopias have chosen violent revolution as their means of realizing utopia, while others most others—if they imagine the transition at all—have suggested an array of peaceful ways including “change by the example of experimental communities, by enlightened lawgivers or
dynamic than they think; as political theorists Barbara Goodwin and Keith Taylor point out, “what the reader gets is necessarily a snapshot of utopia. Utopian theory is not an architect’s blueprint but a suggestive model, and utopian practice would doubtless allow freedom to change” (108). Indeed, if one were to attempt to implement most literary utopias, one would find a number of absences, uncertainties and contradictions in the texts that would demand to be somehow clarified or resolved before proceeding. Delany and Popper may or may not be correct in their opposition to grand scale social engineering but they are incorrect in their definition of utopia as an executable blueprint. Popper was describing less a literary genre and more of a political pedigree, stretching from Plato to Josef Stalin, and therefore used the term “utopian” figuratively, with little reference to Thomas More, William Morris, et al. Delany, however, deploys Popper’s critique of a particular kind of “utopian” politics to denigrate literary utopias. This is a common but no less pernicious category error. Delany confuses a particular class of utopian thought (i.e., utopian socialism of the early 19th century) with utopianism in its entirety, throughout all time, and then submerges or suppresses the complexities and nuances of utopian literature that do not jibe with this. Many authors of literary utopias do not intend their writings as schematics for a realizable society and even texts written by utopian true believers can be read as literature in much the same way as religious texts do not have to be taken as articles of faith when studied in the academy.

Some utopias are, undoubtably, written as proposals and blueprints for the future. The utopian socialist Charles Fourier is perhaps the most avid of utopian proselytizers. Fourier believed his utopia could be instituted in his lifetime, and with no coercion, violence, or even legislation (Four Movements 12). Many authors of literary utopias, however, are not so constitutional governments, by education, via a cataclysmic event, by evolution, by setting up of colonies away from the corrupt Old World, or simply through the force of the utopian’s revelations on rational men” (103).

3 The blueprint metaphor may not even be coherent, let alone apt. As Peter G. Stillman notes, “in discussions of utopias, the term ‘blueprints’ usually carries the connotations of rigidity, whereas anyone who has built a house knows that blueprints are constantly being re-examined, re-evaluated, and changed as the project moves along” (225n).

4 For example, Roland Barthes highlights the literary and metatextual aspects of Charles Fouriers’ works in Sade / Fourier / Loyola. Defining “system” as a “body of doctrine” that is “closed,” “dogmatic,” and “applied,” Barthes argues that “Fourier’s work does not constitute a system; only when we have tried to ‘realize’ this work (in phalanstiries) has it become, retrospectively, a ‘system’ doomed to instant fiasco” (Barthes 109-110). In contradistinction to Fourierism as system, Barthes analyzes Fourier’s work as systematics: “systematics is the play of the system; it is language that is open, infinite, free from any referential illusion (pretension)…. [I]t is discourse without ‘object’ (it only speaks of a thing obliquely, by approaching it indirectly: thus Civilization in Fourier) and without ‘subject’ (in writing, the author does not allow himself to be involved in the imaginary subject, for he ‘performs’ his enunciatory role in such a manner that we cannot decide whether it is serious or parody)” (110).
optimistic. The belief that utopias are impossible—as the OED definition maintains—is itself political, frequently used by conservatives to maintain the status quo (Levitas, Concept 3-4). At the same time, however, immediate realizability has never been a universal feature of literary utopias. Most utopias are situated in contexts far removed from our own: in geographically remote locations, different time periods, distant worlds, or even alternate universes. If discussion of the transition between the existent and utopia is weak, it is not simply a failure on the part of the utopian but also because of clear narrative choices used to distance utopia from us. This distance, which Fredric Jameson calls the “utopian leap,” serves a number of purposes (“Politics” 38). These include the production of critical distance, exploration of the present through cognitive estrangement (Suvin 53), the ability to move beyond description of the existent (Goodwin and Taylor 31), and a way of interrogating and diagnosing the very perceived impossibility of obtaining a better society (Jameson, “Politics” 38).

It is clear, then, that literary utopias should be interpreted using different reading protocols than those used for manifestos or political platforms. To read many of the literary utopias of late 20th century as nothing more than fictionalized blueprints is reductive and, often, beside the point. In his analysis of More’s Utopia in Utopics: Spatial Play, Louis Marin goes so far as to say More’s “projects are not realizable because they cannot and should not be realizable without losing their strength” (259, emphasis original). Evaluations of utopias that focus solely

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5 Fourier’s optimism extends to the content of his utopia as well. Drunk on his perceived success, he teases his audience with scenes of the perfect world for fear that, if he were to reveal too much of this imminent future to too soon, “weak and sensitive people” would “fall ill with shock and sorrow at the sudden sight of so much happiness, which they had never had and which they would now be able to enjoy” (Four Movements 67). Some of the outlandish pleasures he does present are more akin to Cockaigne or Big Rock Candy Mountain than More’s Utopia. Fourier imagined his utopia would transform the cosmos itself. The changes would include the appearance of a “Northern Crown,” a celestial phenomenon which would warm the polar regions and fill the ocean with "boreal citric acid," effectively turning it into lemonade. Not only would this global transformation help maritime travel—sailors would be able to strain ocean water of salt and citric acid to drink it—but the lemonade ocean would also wipe out the “ghastly legions of sea-monsters,” those "vile creatures, images of our intensity of passions," and thus prepare the way for “new sea creatures, which would provide a host of amphibious servants to pull ships and help in fisheries” (Four Movements 50n).

6 Karl Mannheim’s influential analysis of the utopian mentality in Ideology and Utopia reverses the colloquial understanding of utopias as impossible. Mannheim argues that the utopian mentality, like ideology, is “incongruous with the state of reality within which it occurs” but, unlike ideology, utopianism “bursts the bonds of the existing order” in order to enstate these incongruous ideas (173). Utopias are only impossible within the present order of things, causing utopians to enact change so that they might be realized. The criteria for utopianism, then, is not impossibility but potential “realizability” (Ricoeur 176). Paul Ricoeur argues that this distinction between ideology and utopia is “nearly useless” because it can only be applied in retrospect, after utopias have already effected change, and never to undecided conflicts in the present (178). Mannheim’s definition of utopia, while more productive than the OED’s, is equally unhelpful for the study of utopian literature, being focused entirely on very general trends in politics (i.e., chiliasm, liberalism, conservatism, and communism). Mannheim’s archetypal utopian is not Sir Thomas More; it is Anabaptist Thomas Munzer.
on their programmatic content fail to recognize and appreciate their literary aspect as well as their critical, pedagogical, and archeological functions. Goodwin and Taylor argue that any construction of alternatives to the present is, at least implicitly, a critique of that present. They point out that even “suboptimal institutions….serve to criticize our own, by their superiority in some dimensions, even if they manifestly lack others, such as the aesthetic, so that one would not wish to realize them literally” (3). Furthermore, a number of critics describe utopias as vehicles for revolutionary values, providing an “education of desire” that might help us realize a better society (Levitas, Concept 124). Utopias have other pedagogical uses, including as teaching tools to promote what Kenneth Roemer calls “speculative literacy,” the ability to “measure oneself and one’s environment against alternative possibilities” (“Empowering Students” 394). And, as Ruth Levitas points out, utopias are also reflections of the historical moment they are written in. By analyzing utopias, we can unearth, reconstruct and assess the desires, values and dreams that inspired them (Levitas “Imaginary” 57). These and other dimensions of literary utopias are ignored or reduced when we only consider them as blueprints.

The dominant mode of the science fiction utopia since the late 60s and early 70s has been what Tom Moylan calls the critical utopia, a movement away from the doctrinarism found in some traditional utopias. According to Moylan, the critical utopia attempts to carry out the risky task of reviving the emancipatory utopian imagination while simultaneously destroying the traditional utopia and yet preserving it in a transformed and liberated form that is critical both of utopian writing itself and of the prevailing social formation. (42)

In many ways, the critical utopia is to traditional utopianism what critical theory is to precritical thinking. Just as critical theory attempts “to interrogate its own presuppositions and to engage its own role in the construction of the objects of its own knowledge” (Freedman 3), critical utopias self-reflexively examine the very possibility of utopia and their own role as provocations of

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7 Speculative illiteracy is surprisingly common on today’s college campuses. Roemer, surveying his students on what their utopian reforms of Arlington, TX, would be, received incredibly modest answers including the addition of more parking lots, a winning season for their favorite sports teams, and at least one vote for no change at all (“Empowering Students” 394). Utopianist Chris Ferns, who asked his students to write down three wishes, reports similar results: some asked for “World Peace” but other’s utopian desires were limited to things like good grades, a job, and “a forest-green Jetta” (255). When told they had unlimited resources and control over Oxford, OH, the majority of my Freshman composition students wrote that they wanted sunny weather, improved public transportation, repeal of laws concerning public intoxication or the drinking age, a mall, and a number of corporate chain restaurants. Only a few mentioned the elimination of social and economic problems or political change.
utopian change. This form of utopian writing focuses less on hard and fast constructive alternatives to our own moment and more on critique of the present and “the contradictory and diverse multiplicity of a broad utopian dialogue” (Moylan 210). Critical utopianism does not pose a single, monolithic answer, but instead engages in exploration, speculation and self-criticism, revealing the flaws and ambiguities as well as the positive attributes of its utopian projections (44-5). While critical utopianism has been criticized as a symptom of “a lack of confidence about whether and how a better world can be reached” (Levitas, Concept 196), this more open and dynamic form solves many of the genre problems that have plagued utopian writing since More’s Utopia. Because critical utopias emphasize the changing, contested, and at times problematic nature of their utopias, they allow more space for novelistic elements such as plot and character (Moylan 45). Whereas traditional utopias read like travel narratives, with the outsider moving to different locations that each occasion further exposition of the institutions that make up utopian society (e.g., the children’s crèche, the factory, the home, etc.), critical utopias typically follow utopia’s conflict with other societies or a character’s conflict with utopian society. Not only do such conflicts allow for a more interesting, engaging and unpredictable narrative, they also free literary utopias from the monologic “prescriptive quality” that many critics complain about (Ferns 4, 232). While many literary utopias produced “the illusion, rather than the reality of dialogue” between an expert utopian and an all-too-easily convinced traveler (Ferns 23), critical utopias narrate real antagonisms, negotiations and intercourse between different “worlds.” Critical utopias thereby avoid many of the charges leveled by anti-utopians.

It is therefore surprising that Delany—who Moylan names as the most radical of critical utopians—should espouse such anti-utopian views. The folly of Delany’s criticism of utopianism can be better seen if we were to apply it to a genre he promotes—science fiction. Delany takes pains to distinguish between literary utopias and science fiction. His main point of distinction is the writerly method used by utopians and science fiction authors. 8 Utopians, Delany claims, begin from “some large and overarching notion such as ‘freedom,’ ‘happiness,’ or ‘equality’” and then “work down and in, to determine what the texture of life might be for the

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8 Delany’s second point of distinction, drawing on W. H. Auden, is that science fiction is about the continual “interplay” between four or six eutopian and dystopian images (New Jerusalem, Brave New World, Arcadia, Land of the Flies and, in postmodern science fiction, also Junk City and the Lo-Teks) that, when brought to rest in one of the images, becomes less vital or interesting (325).
individual in a world run according to such ideas” (“Interview” 328). The science fiction author, however, first begins that “texture of life around some character,” regardless of whether it is good or bad, so long as it is “interesting,” and then works outward to imagine the rest of society (“Interview” 328-9). For Delany, life texture signifies the character’s “everyday world” (“Interview” 329) and includes things like what kind of built environment the characters live in (Triton 156). There really is no way to determine whether or not science fiction authors begin with life texture, short of polling them, because science fiction readers have a very different experience of the genre; more than one critic has argued that science fiction is literature in which the “idea” is “hero” (Kingsley Amis qtd in Moylan 37). When one reads Ursula K Le Guin’s The Left Hand of Darkness, the most pressing concern in the novel is not the hyper food cubes or the techniques for dealing with snow covered roads—interesting life texture though they may be—but the central premise of a genderless society. This is all the more obvious in classic science fiction novels such as The Space Merchants by Frederik Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth or The Demolished Man by Alfred Bester, where the bigger ideas are still fresh and relevant but the text’s depictions of futuristic popular culture seem very quaint and at times corny. Attempts at imagining future or alternative life textures “fail” for the same reason that utopias “fail.” The epistemological problems associated with projections of the future multiply in inverse proportion to scale. As Engels states in his polemic against the utopian socialists, “the more completely they worked out [their utopias] in detail, the more they could not avoid drifting off into pure fantasies” (qtd in Levitas, “Educated Hope” 68). It is far easier to predict large scale trends—and these speculations are more forgivable when they prove false—than it is to predict specific fads, customs or events. We are not scandalized when we realize the interplanetary travel depicted in 2001: A Space Odyssey has not come to pass but the imaginary slang phrases “Feather me fasure!” or “Bip bop bim bam!” would strike most readers as ridiculous. If Delany’s criticism of literary utopias is applied to science fiction, the very thing that separates science fiction from utopia becomes a weakness. Conjectures about things like galactic fashion, etiquette or cuisine prove to be an even grosser form of idealism than utopian dreaming. Yet from these examples it is clear that there is something unfair and wrongheaded about faulting science fiction authors for not accurately predicting future life texture. Science fiction and utopias may seem to confront insurmountable epistemological problems but this is only an effect of a category mistake. There is a fundamental difference between futurology and science fiction,
just as there is between political science or urban planning and the literary utopia. The value of science fiction and utopianism is not predictive or prescriptive but aesthetic, critical, transformative and descriptive. Any reading that does not recognize this is missing the point. Delany can be forgiven for his misunderstanding of utopia because he was speaking in 1986, an anti-utopian moment in American politics and the heyday of cyberpunk, an anti-utopian subgenre of science fiction. But, as we shall see, despite Delany’s protests, he is a closet utopian.

**Utopian Desire**

If the blueprint model of utopianism is incorrect, what do we replace it with? I will begin with a description of the utopian and move to a description of the literary genre situated within the utopian. The most dedicated and influential theoretician of the utopian is Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch, author of the utopian magnum opus *The Principle of Hope*. Bloch’s description of utopianism is rooted in his model of consciousness and being in the Not Yet. Bloch believed that that there were two forms of the preconscious: the unconsciousness or No Longer Conscious, which is the repository of forgotten or repressed material described by Freud, and the Not Yet Conscious, which Bloch calls “the actual space of receptivity of the New and production of the New,” a place of “forward dreaming” or “dawning” most active during creative periods, youth, and times of change (115-6). The Not-Yet-Conscious is the “subjective correlate of the Not-Yet-Become,” with the Not-Yet-Become defined as the sum total of possible futures that can arise from the present moment (Levitas, *Concept* 87). The Not-Yet-Become contains both “latency and tendency: unrealized potentialities that are latent in the present, and the signs

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9 Ursula K LeGuin comments on this in her introduction to *The Left Hand of Darkness*: “Oh, its lovely to be invited to participate in Futurological Congresses where Systems Science displays its grand apocalyptic graphs, to be asked to tell the news papers what America will be like in 2001, and all that, but it’s a terrible mistake. I write science fiction, and science fiction isn’t about the future. I don’t know any more about the future than you do, and very likely less” (iv).

10 The other possible explanation for Delany’s resistance to utopia is territorial. Science fiction was and remains an under-theorized and unappreciated genre in the academy; any attempts at linking science fiction to utopia—an older and marginally more prestigious genre—might be viewed as a misguided attempt at legitimation or a threat to the autonomy of science fiction criticism.

11 William Gibson’s *Neuromancer*, the most prominent work in the cyberpunk subgenre, is the epitome of Delany’s “interesting life texture” and anti-utopianism. Gibson describes the commodities surrounding, adorning, and penetrating his characters in fetishistic detail, dwelling on brand names, styles, and features—often to the exclusion of all but the vaguest of discussions of how the rest of the novel’s dystopian world works. Gibson’s speculation never seems to stray beyond the ambit of a futuristic shopping mall. For a critique of cyberpunk’s conservatism and resignation to late capitalism, see Freedman 195-199.
and foreshadowings that indicate the tendency of the direction and movement of the present into the future” (Kellner 81, emphasis original).

Within this schema, utopia is defined as the “expressive and instrumental function” of the Not Yet, both anticipating the Not Yet and helping to bring it about (Levitas, Concept 87). Ruth Levitas describes it as “wishful thinking,” which is “not merely fictitious compensation for the discomforts of experienced reality, but a venturing beyond that reality which is essential for the inauguration of a transformed future” (Concept 86). Bloch’s concept of utopia includes a strong activist element that demands the world be changed to make it more adequate to humanity, so that our perennially unfulfilled desires might be met (Hudson 51). That is not always the case, however. Utopian wishful thinking is more often anodyne or odious than progressive. Bloch’s definition of the utopia as “dreams of a better life” includes not only literary utopias and intentional communities but also the wish-fulfillment fantasies of advertising, fairy tales, Hollywood films, television, sports, self-improvement and self-beautifying (Kellner 83). The list of utopian dreams is potentially endless and includes even the abhorrent fantasies of racist and fascist organizations like the Ku Klux Klan and Nazi Germany (Jameson, Archaeologies 8). That the utopian impulse has such a broad and eclectic appeal is a testament to both the inadequacy of the existent to fulfill our desires and to the cunning of ideology to defuse utopia, turning it into compensation, consumption, and diversion. Fredric Jameson likens the utopian impulse to Freud’s notion of the repressed desire, which is turned away from its object and forgotten only to return in a less disruptive and more acceptable form (“Reification and Utopia” 138). Ideology then uses sublimated utopianism as “a fantasy bribe to the public about to be manipulated,” providing glimpses of a dream of collectivity beyond alienation only to manage it and profit from its energy (“Reification and Utopia” 142). The work of the utopianist, Bloch and Jameson argue, includes seemingly apolitical or even anti-utopian texts, which can be excavated to discover the utopian impulse carefully buried within them.

Ruth Levitas’ incomparably useful survey of definitions or descriptions of utopia, The Concept of Utopia, critiques Bloch’s definition and provides a better, modified version of it.

12 Brazil, dir. Terry Gilliam, is an excellent example of utopia as compensation. The protagonist Sam Lowry daydreams a phantasmagoric utopia while performing the banally evil work of processing information on suspected terrorist detainees. While Lowry eventually resists the dystopian Ministry of Information, the film ends with Lowry’s retreat into his utopian fantasy during government interrogation and torture.

13 Paul Gilroy extends Bloch’s list of undesirable utopias to the fantasies of black nationalism, which he calls “armored utopias,” motivated by “the desire for unamistic solidarity, rigid natural hierarchy, and authoritarian kinship” (333).
Levitas argues that Bloch’s utopian philosophy has two, related problems. The first problem lies in Bloch’s account of the utopian impulse. Bloch believes that the utopian impulse is “rooted in human beings as an ontological category, a fundamental propensity” and yet, as a Marxist, he also maintains the “social determination and historical transformation of human nature, and thus the absence of a ‘fixed generic essence’ of humanity” (Concept 101-2). This contradiction in Bloch’s work is important because it leads him to presuppose an ahistorical vision of utopia, one that humanity seems to yearn for regardless of time period or context. Bloch terms this particular vision of utopia the concrete utopia, utopia that is a genuine possibility in the Not Yet and just so happens to be identical to Marxist socialism. Bloch sets his notion of the concrete utopia against abstract utopias, the impossible utopias of ideological compensation (Concept 88). This distinction is important because it serves as a criterion for inclusion into the utopian: dreams, wishes, and fantasies that are similar in content to the concrete utopia are singled out as objects of study while others are dismissed. Without this criterion, utopias would proliferate endlessly, including an effectively infinite number of unfulfilled and often very heterogeneous wishes (Concept 100). The problem with the distinction between abstract and concrete utopia is that it is tautological and teleological (Concept 101). Bloch locates premonitions of a socialist future in works where, biographically and historically, they could not be. This lends an almost metaphysical cast to Bloch’s work, one that is incompatible with his professed Marxism. Ultimately, Levitas insists, Bloch’s division of concrete from abstract utopias must be recognized as political and not as the scientific discovery of a future which is “somehow objectively given as the end of a teleological unfolding of what we have all ‘really’ wanted since time immemorial” (“Educated Hope” 79).

Levitas’ critique is not a rejection of socialist politics, however. What Levitas is working towards is a historicization of utopian desire. Levitas describes utopianism as “the desire for a different, better way of being” (181). But, unlike Bloch, Levitas recognizes that utopian desire is not an innate, ahistorical, and unchanging thing:

utopia is a social construct which arises not from a 'natural' impulse subject to social mediation, but as a socially constructed response to an equally socially constructed gap between the needs and wants generated by a particular society and the satisfactions available to and distributed by it. All aspects of the scarcity
gap are social constructs, including the propensity to imagine it away by some means or another. (Concept 181-2)

Levitas’ idea that our desires are constructed is in no way new. It can be traced at least as far back to Capital, in which Marx notes that the price of reproducing labor-power varies from nation to nation because “the number and extent of [the worker’s] necessary requirements, as also the manner in which they are satisfied, are themselves products of history” (275). Levitas’ insight allows utopianists to escape the essentialist mire that preoccupies many utopians. Utopian thinkers from More to Marcuse have attempted to discern the difference between real and inauthentic desires and pleasures, proscribing the inauthentic while prescribing the real but, in light of postmodern and poststructuralist critiques of the subject and authenticity, their project proves futile. Levitas lets us move beyond that and realize that “there can be no universal utopia, not just because needs are differently perceived by different observers but because needs actually do vary between societies” (184). Thus, for example, Marshall Sahlins writes in Stone Age Economics that hunter-gatherers are the “original affluent society”—affluent not in the sense that they possess access to the same goods and services available in the overdeveloped world but affluent in the sense that their historically determined needs are commensurate with their available satisfactions (36-9). Levitas’ concept of the utopian is therefore inclusive and non-normative. Like Bloch, Levitas’ definition is capacious enough to include conflicting, non-oppositional and at times abominable visions of utopia but she does not include Bloch’s caveat that some utopias are more concretely utopian than others. Objectionable dreams of happy robots, consumerist fantasies, and right wing utopias are included in the field of study (Levitas Concept 185-8), as are seemingly impossible utopias, such as those of the cargo cult and the land of Cockaigne (190-1). “Utopia” is no longer solely determined by the hopes and desires of the utopianist scholar.

14 The science fiction short story “Eutopia” by Poul Anderson expresses a remarkably similar sentiment. The story describes a Greek-derived utopia of order and reason, Eutopia, which has sent agents out to alternate worlds to find other “Good Lands.” One such agent, Iason, visits the Norse-Magyar-Native American land of West Fall and leaves in disgust: “these are precisely the bright temptations that we have turned our backs on in Eutopia. For we deny that we are apes. We are men who can reason. In that lies our manhood” (274). His contact, Daimonax, tells him that West Fall, too, is considered a Good Land and criticizes Eutopia a “country of cows” where there is no “color and contrast” (277). The people of West Fall, though violent and lawless, “know an aspect of being human which [Eutopia’s] careful world has denied itself” (278). While the terms of this dichotomy are crude (i.e., barbaric vitality and civilized decadence), the text nevertheless challenges the common idea of a single, universally desirable utopia. The story ends with a twist, emphasizing Anderson’s utopian relativism: the men of Eutopia, like their forebears, practice pederasty.
We may derive a description of the utopian genre from Levitas’ concept of utopianism: literary utopias are fictional representations of the fulfillment of a desire for a better way of being.\(^{15} \) It is important to note this is a description of the literary utopia, not a definition. As Delany points out in “Politics of Paraliterary Criticism,” genres are “social objects” that resist any rigorous definitions and any attempt at rigidly delimiting a genre only stifles its potential for change and growth (238-9). There has been no shortage of attempted “definitions” of the utopian genre. Lyman Tower Sargent defines positive utopias or eutopias as “a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably better than the society in which that reader lived” (Sargent 9). While these features hold true for most literary utopias and provides a useful thumbnail sketch of the genre, Carl Freedman’s Critical Theory and Science Fiction demonstrates that is more useful to think of genre not as a neat classification but as a tendency within the work, one among many (20). Freedman’s concept of the generic tendency prevents the taxonomic hairsplitting that attends science fiction and utopian genre criticism while maintaining genre’s usefulness for providing context and a method of comparative study. The phrase “literary utopia” is therefore shorthand, denoting texts which display a strong utopian tendency in addition to science fictional, realist, fantastic or other tendencies.

If we use this description of the utopian genre, Delany’s science fiction texts Trouble on Triton: An Ambiguous Heterotopia and Stars in my Pockets like Grains of Sand both display utopian tendencies and therefore can be productively read as literary utopias. Delany himself admits that the “social system” of the Outer Satellites depicted in Triton “represents an improvement on our own” (“Interview” 323), making it a clear example of the fulfillment of desire for a better way of being. In Stars in my Pockets like Grains of Sand, Delany imagines a galactic federation called the Sygn that solves many of the difficulties surrounding racial and colonial identity politics. Also, regions of one planet featured in Stars seem to have eliminated scarcity, capitalism and class division. Moreover, both novels describe societies which embody

\(^{15} \) I specify the fulfillment of desire and not simply desire because Levitas’ definition seems to contain a loophole. When read in context, Levitas’ definition is clearer—she is describing texts in which the impediments to utopian desire and the scarcity gap are eliminated—but Lucy Sargasson’s Contemporary Feminist Utopianism reads Levitas as if she includes all texts that are critical of the present moment and do not deny the possibility of change for the better. Sargasson’s misreading causes her to spend more time on critical theorists such as Derrida and Cixous than on any author of a utopia. While there are certainly utopian moments or tendencies within the work of Derrida, et al, and a utopian reading of them can be productive, Sargasson’s reading threatens to pave over important differences between the texts while leaving work undone in utopian studies proper.
quintessentially Delanean values including cross-identity contact, organized anarchy, and sexual freedom. Despite Delany’s professed anti-utopianism, he has written two powerful and complex literary utopias. After a discussion of utopian figurations of kinship, I will return to both of these texts in a close reading that will place them within the framework of utopian studies and treat them in greater detail.

The (Fatal?) Germ Cell of Utopia

Fredric Jameson argues that the production of literary utopias requires what he calls “enclaves,” heterotopic spaces in which the laws and logics governing the rest of the world do not hold (Archaeologies 15). For example, More’s enclaves included pockets of commerce and trade embedded within a largely feudal world. The limited space and extent of these mercantile relationships allowed More to conceptualize a world without money, imaginatively excising the “foreign body” of market enclaves from his Utopia (Jameson, Archaeologies 16). But in Campanella’s utopia, City of the Sun, an enclave serves a very different purpose; here the author imagines the enclave of the monastery made universal (17). The parallax produced from the difference between the enclave and the rest of social space gives the utopian perspective, allowing her or him to imagine and choose between a number of different alternatives.

Theodor Adorno pointed out that kinship functions as one such enclave. While the family may be “the fatal germ-cell of society,” it is also “the nurturing germ-cell of uncompromising pursuit of another [society]”:

> With the family there passes away, while the system lasts, not only the most effective agency of the bourgeoisie, but also the resistance which, although repressing the individual, also strengthened, perhaps even produced him. The end of the family paralyzes the forces of opposition. The rising collectivist order is a mockery of the classless one: together with the bourgeois it liquidates the Utopia that once drew sustenance from motherly love. (22-3)

For Adorno and many utopian authors, the domestic space of kinship serves as an enclave outside of the cruel efficiency of capitalism and Soviet Communism, allowing them to imagine something else. By providing examples of caring, altruistic relationships, kinship help

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16 Adorno’s praise for kinship is undoubtedly shaped by his closeness to his parents. A recent collection of Adorno’s correspondence, Letters to his Parents: 1939-1951, reveals his unguarded, poignant, and at times embarrassingly sweet relationship with his mother and father, who he called “my dear Wondrous Hippo Cow” and “Giraffe-Gazelle,” respectively (passim).
utopians conceive of a world beyond the alienation of capitalist production—which alienates the worker from her labor while alienating her from other human beings by presenting them as “alien and hostile” (Marx, “Alienation” 370).

Not only does kinship act as a conceptual space to work from, it also functions as a way of symbolically representing utopian sociality. In his anthropological study of American kinship, David Schneider notes that biological reproduction acts as a symbol for unity and sameness, including “the unification of opposites” (i.e., monogamous heterosexual intercourse) and the “unity of biogenetic substance” shared between parents and children (52). This holds true in utopian discourses, where utopian kinship symbolizes unity in classlessness, solidarity and mutual aid. Yet the symbol of kinship is as problematic as it is promising. Schneider’s ethnographic model of American kinship erases conflicts and differences within the patriarchal nuclear family while ignoring and excluding alternative forms of kinship. Similarly, utopian kinship signifies both a world without alienation and a world purged of aliens. This conception of kinship attempts to figure a utopia in which the ethics and sometimes even affect of the family are universal, a place without estrangement, but it also portrays an imaginary space in which unresolved antagonisms are neutralized, alternative utopias have been foreclosed upon and the other is eliminated. In this necessarily brief and incomplete survey of utopian kinship, I will demonstrate that the germ cell of utopian kinship is nurturing and fatal.

The symbol of utopian kinship is already at work in More’s Utopia. Summarizing J. H. Hexter, Chris Ferns describes the patriarchal family as integral to the utopian state:

the fundamental organizational unit of Utopian society is the patriarchal family.…

The family provides the basic unit of agricultural production; it is the family heads who elect syphogrants who constitute the lowest tier of government; and it is the family who instils into Utopian citizens the habit of obedience to authority on which the stability of society as a whole depends. (46)

By representing a state composed of families, More only makes literal what was understood analogically. Aristotle’s account of kingship arising from patriarchy (597) and various contemporary propagandas equating the king with the head of the household (and vice versa) show that the state was already considered a macrocosm of the family. The political content of More’s use of the kinship metaphor, however, is very different from the hierarchical conception of the King-as-father.
The politics of Utopia are expressed not through overt political statements but through 
asences and contradictions in the text. Louis Marin attempts to map the nation of Utopia and its 
city layouts but, despite More’s detailed description, finds it impossible to pin down the 
centralized capital city of Amauratom and the centralized seats of municipal authority: there are 
“blind spots and empty spaces” that are “political places that have been erased from the map, the 
space the discourse speaks about” (131). The import of this, Philip Wegner submits, is that there 
is no locatable sovereign authority in Utopia but, instead, only “national sovereignty, to be found 
everywhere and in everyone” (52). Utopia acts as a precursor of nationalism and the “‘not yet’ 
existent nation-state” (Wegner 55). I would add that the Utopian unity of kinship and the state 
functions to express and solidify Utopia’s nascent nationalism. The kinship metaphor acts in 
much the same way as in the St. Crispin’s day speech in Henry V, another key text in early 
nationalism: “We few, we happy few, we band of brothers \ For he today that sheds his blood 
with me \ shall be my brother; be he ne’er so vile, \ This day shall gentle his condition” 
(Shakespeare 4.3.60-3). Here, kinship connotes the assertion of national community and 
solidarity over and against the ethnic and class differences with the implicit—and, in 
Shakespeare’s play, unfulfilled—promise of social, political and economic equality.

Cognitive linguist George Lakoff argues that the family still serves as a metaphor for the 
nation. A country’s founders are called “fathers,” one’s homeland is a “fatherland” or 
“motherland” and citizenship is “brotherhood” (Lakoff 153). “Family” and “family values” are 
not merely right wing shibboleths; they structure the way citizens think about the nation-state. In 
Utopia, the equality of citizens is figured in the cavalier attitude Utopians take toward adoption. 
If a child does not wish to follow his father’s occupation, he is adopted into another family and, 
we are told, “the move is supervised not only by his father but also by the magistrates, to make 
sure the master of his adoptive household is respectable and responsible” (More 60-1).

17Lakoff describes in detail how this works in American politics. Conservatives imagine the Nation-as-Family using 
a Strict Father model while liberals believe in the Nurturant Parent model (Lakoff 12-3). The Strict Father model 
emphasizes a system of rewards and punishments that produce self-discipline through obedience. For the Strict 
Father conservative, morality is defined as self-discipline and competition tests self-discipline, therefore competition 
should be encouraged (Lakoff 67-8). The Nurturant Parent Model believes that children do not develop or learn 
through punishment or obedience but through affective bonds with their parent or parents that encourage them to 
“display their mastery” and thereby “please their parents and gain respect” (Lakoff 111). This leads conservatives to 
value things like “discipline, authority, order, boundaries, homogeneity, purity, and self-interest” while liberals 
value “empathy, nurturance, self-nurturance, social ties, fairness, and happiness” (Lakoff 114). There are some 
problems with the specifics of Lakoff’s model. The most glaring one is that it is seemingly ahistorical, with no 
reference to either the intellectual or political history of the liberalism and conservatism.
Furthermore, “excess” children are transferred into different households and even to different cities when the population reaches a certain point (66). Child-rearing is not collective, however, and women do nurse their own children, but children are adopted into the home of whoever nurses them if the mother dies (70). One cannot help but be struck by the bloodless way Hythloday describes the shunting of children into different families with no regard for prior relationships and bonds. Chris Ferns rightly argues that Utopia imposes a “masculine order” on the “maternal womb” (47). Yet by creating modular families, More eliminates differences of socioeconomic class while producing subjects similar in thought and purpose so that equality is represented by standardization and interchangeability.

Here there is a connection between the Utopian conception of kinship and human nature. For Utopians, humans are by nature good and happy but may become perverted, warped through confusion and false pleasures, “just as the defective tastebuds of pregnant women make them think that pitch and tallow are sweeter than honey” (87). Therefore, because of humanity’s “natural fellowship,” Utopians are obligated to educate, instruct, and discipline each other to “help achieve the same end” (82). Implicit in this philosophy is both the belief that all Utopians are created equal and the concealed demand for conformity. The Utopians have achieved a more egalitarian society but only through a normative policing of desire, patriarchal control over reproduction and an emphasis on homogeneity. We can better see how this Utopian form of kinship treats difference through its foreign policy. While in many respects Utopian foreign policy is more enlightened than its European counterparts—Utopians “loathe war as positively bestial” (105)—their treatment of their neighbors, the Zapoletes, is hideous. Because Utopians do not fight wars themselves, they use these “rough, rude, and fierce” Zapoletes as mercenaries (109). So, when Utopians are forced to go to war, “just as Utopians seek good men in order to use them, so too they also enlist these wicked men to use them up” (110, emphasis added). Utopians prove unconcerned when the barbaric Zapoletes are slaughtered in war for “they believe the human race would owe them a debt of gratitude if they could purge the whole world of such loathsome and wicked scum” (111). Their genocidal attitude towards the Zapoletes is coupled with Utopia’s commitment to isolationism. Utopia is an artificial island, cut off from other countries by an excavated channel, and immigrants to Utopia are kept as voluntary slaves. (The parallels to proposals for American immigration reform are striking.) This is the dark side of the nationalism figured as kinship. National kinship is a fantasy of non-alienated collectivity,
a utopian wish-fulfillment, but it is also the suppression of internal differences and the exclusion or even liquidation of foreigners.\textsuperscript{18}

The utopian trend toward collectivizing family life continues through utopian socialists such as Robert Owen and Charles Fourier to the popular utopian fiction of the late 19th century. While kinship served as a means of representing early nationalism in More’s \textit{Utopia}, it takes on a very different task in later texts, one closer to Adorno’s Marxist vision. Kinship becomes a way of speculating on relationships freed from alienation, class conflict, and bourgeois individualism. Even in a relatively conservative vision of utopian kinship like \textit{Looking Backward: 2000 to 1887} by Edward Bellamy, the family serves a utopian function. Ruth Levitas observes that many male utopians such as Edward Bellamy and William Morris have failed to properly criticize contemporary forms of family life and many—including Bellamy—simply transplant the patriarchal nuclear family into a kinder, gentler context (\textit{Concept} 109). The familiar “homeliness” of the kinship relationships in Bellamy’s utopia reassures readers that, while the political and economic structures of society might be radically changed, domestic life will remain much the same (Roemer, \textit{Utopian Audiences} 98; Ferns 78). Despite Bellamy’s backwards gender politics, he taps into a powerful shared vision of being at home in the world.\textsuperscript{19}

In his reader response study of the novel, \textit{Utopian Audiences: How Readers Locate Nowhere}, Kenneth Roemer notes that \textit{Looking Backward} draws on the conventions of domestic fictions to portray the utopian Leete family as the “surrogate kin” of Julian West, a man from 1887 (94). The Leete family displays an ease of acceptance of this strange man from the past, inviting him into their home and nursing him through the shock and mental anguish of his displacement as if he were a member of their family. Edith Leete, the daughter of West’s utopian mentor Dr. Leete, even falls in love with West demonstrating “the possibility of a good place where love can triumph over artificial and cruel separations, a place where, to quote Dr. Leete, ‘there are nothing but matches of pure love’” (Roemer, \textit{Utopian Audiences} 94-5). While this may seem like a banal or sentimental scenario of domestic bliss, the novel makes it clear that the Leete’s surrogate kinship with West is typical of 20\textsuperscript{th} century Boston. This point is driven home when

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\textsuperscript{18} Similarly, \textit{Henry V} calls up a national solidarity of Welshmen, Irishmen, Englishmen, peasants and noblemen based on hatred of the French.
\textsuperscript{19}A number of thinkers have discussed this notion of home, including Toni Morrison who, while leery of Utopia, writes in her essay “Home,” “In this new space one can imagine safety without walls, can iterate difference that is prized but unprivileged, and can conceive of a third, if you will pardon the expression, world ‘already made for me, both snug and wide open, with a doorway never needing to be closed.’ Home” (12).
\end{flushright}
West reads a novel from the utopian future, Penthesilia, and is astounded at the difficulty involved in

the construction of a romance from which should be excluded all effects drawn from the contrasts of wealth and poverty…all motives drawn from social pride and ambition, the desire of being richer or the fear of being poorer, together with the sordid anxieties of any sort for one’s self or others; a romance in which there should, indeed, be love galore, but love unfretted by the artificial barriers created by differences of stations or possessions, owning no other law but the heart. (133-4)

Bellamy does not present us with an excerpt or a plot synopsis of this novel from utopia—and later attempts to write it proved failures—because it is impossible to really imagine the characterology of such a world (Wegner 22). The difficulty of representing round characters in literary utopias led Virginia Woolf to describe H. G. Wells sitting on a train, dreaming of some science fiction setting while ignoring the fascinating character of poor Mrs. Brown sitting across from him, for, “There are no Mrs. Browns in Utopia” (241). The author can never fully imagine the utopian character but can only extract utopian latencies and tendencies from within the present, intuited from the germ cell of the patriarchal family the potential for subjectivities governed not by the logic of capital but by the affective bonds of a universal kinship.

But Bellamy’s utopian kinship is not as universal as it may seem. When West calls waiting tables a “menial position,” his utopian guide admonishes him with a lecture on the classless society of 20th century Boston, where all men are joined in “brotherhood” because “the equal wealth and equal opportunities of culture which all persons now enjoy have simply made us all members of one class, which corresponds to the most fortunate class with you” (Bellamy 124-5). Indeed, the future Bostonians seem to live like the most fortunate bourgeoisie; they are represented as enjoying wondrous innovations such as the department store, the credit card, and various forms of mass media and yet they are never actually shown laboring. As a number of critics have observed, Bellamy is tracing the outlines of an incipient consumerism. The Bostonian’s brotherhood is not so much a form of comradeship—Bellamy despised socialism

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20 In her criticism of literary utopias, Woolf states that they seem “incomplete” and that to complete them one must “do something” like “join a society, or, more desperately, to write a cheque” (240). Better, more “complete” novels have the dubious virtue of “leaving one with no desire to do anything, except indeed to read the book again, and to understand it better” (Woolf 240).
and anarchism—but instead a forgetting of the individual self in commodity consumption. Thomas Peyser observes that “for Bellamy, the idiosyncratic purchase and a fondness for rallies go hand in hand: both contribute to the dismantling of the ego” (Utopia and Cosmopolis 45). It is no accident that Bellamy clearly identifies his utopians with consumers. As Philip Wegner demonstrates, “Bellamy’s utopianism involves an embracing of the fruits of industrial production and an erasure of their producers, the industrial worker” (80-1). Bellamy’s utopia is classless only because it has extirpated and forgotten the working class in a fantasy of consumerism without guilt. The utopian kinship of Looking Backward proves to be in part an idealized but no less exclusionary form of bourgeois class identity.

Utopian kinship is even more fundamental and even more discriminatory in Herland by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Sealed off from the outside world, the women of Herland descend from a single virgin mother, reproducing only through spontaneous parthenogenesis. In this society without men, women have raised “mother-love” and “sister love” to their “highest power” (Gilman 49). All relationships are permeated with maternal caring and sisterly closeness. Yet this mother-love is not “brute passion” or “a wholly personal feeling” for the Herlanders; it is their “religion” as “Conscious Makers of People” (58). Motherhood structures the entire society of Herland to create a better environment for their children and thus improve the future generations of Herland. Motherhood is given as the answer to the perennial question to the socialist, explaining why Herlanders work without motivation from competition or the threat of poverty (52). The so-called maternal instinct becomes “channeled” or sublimated into all forms of public service (60).

While motherhood may be deep and pervasive in Herland, it is also carefully governed and controlled. To maintain a steady state society, most women of Herland are only allowed to birth a single daughter. Particularly virtuous women are allowed to birth more, becoming “Overmothers” (59), while the rare woman who is unfit to mother is asked to “renounce motherhood,” resisting parthenogenesis through (apparently) force of will (70). Furthermore, mothers do not raise their own children, but instead give them up to the “most fit” educators (70-1). The Herlander practice of eugenics and state-controlled education has lead to a “cultivated” people, physically and morally superior to Gilman’s contemporary society (61). The sinister cast of this narrative is not the result of reading it, anachronistically, in the shadow of the Holocaust. There is a racial and even racist dimension to the Herland utopia. The Herlander’s “limitless
feeling of sisterhood” is “National, Racial, [and] Human” (58). Whereas the utopias of Bellamy and More were only metaphorically “one big happy family,” Gilman actually posits a solidarity based on shared genetic heritage.

Gilman imagines a homogenous, moralistic and simplified world, excluding men, non-procreative sex, lesbianism, unpleasant animals—and “savages.” The narrator is certain that they are of “Aryan stock, and were once in contact with the best civilization of the old world. They were ‘white,’ but somewhat darker than our northern races because of their constant exposure to sun and air” (46). Though it is presented as an incidental “geographic” detail, the racial makeup of Herland is deliberate. While many feminist critics have attempted to downplay or apologize for Gilman’s overt racism and nativism, Alys Eve Weinbaum argues that they were integral to Gilman’s thought and writing (296). Gilman’s racism shapes her understanding of utopian kinship; as Weinbaum puts it, the national kinship that binds Herlanders together is a “‘pure’ national genealogy” and an “unpolluted pedigree” (284). The parthenogenetic reproduction of Herlanders not only saves them from the world of men but also from having to bear interracial children, including the men of the “slave caste” which attempted to rise up and conquer them or the so-called savages who dwell just outside of the Herland enclave (Weinbaum 283-4). Virgin birth assures Herland’s unmixed whiteness forever. One might be tempted to condemn Gilman’s position on race while salvaging her feminism but Gilman’s racial thinking is inextricable from her views on women, mothering, and sisterhood. In the essay “Reproducing Utopia: Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Herland,” Thomas Peyser draws on Gilman’s Women and Economics to show that Gilman imagined that enforced gender differences made heterosexual reproduction analogous to race mixing; there, Gilman claims that by maintaining sharp distinctions between the genders “we have bred a race of psychic hybrids, and the moral qualities of hybrids are well known” (qtd in Peyser, “Reproducing” 4). Racial thinking shapes the rhetoric, logic, and telos of Gilman’s feminism. Gilman’s utopia of gender equality, Peyser argues, “wants to pay for the attenuation of sexual distinctions with the strengthening of distinctions among the races” (“Reproducing” 4). This leads us to believe that the sisterhood in Herland is predicated on an impossible dream of racial purity. Gilman can only imagine women joined together in an Aryan nation—her women’s separatism is of a piece with white separatism.

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21 Gilman’s inability to imagine sexuality without men in her imaginary world of “Victorian Angels” would seem quaintly old-fashioned were it not the product of Gilman’s homophobia (Gilbert and Gubar 210, 212).
Once more, utopian kinship is simultaneously an inclusion and an exclusion, producing community while policing borders.

The critical utopias of the 1960s and 1970s are much more sophisticated than Looking Backward or Herland and avoid many of their obvious political mistakes. Woman on the Edge of Time by Marge Piercy, in particular, should be lauded for its thoughtful inclusion of racial, ethnic, gender, queer and class concerns. Moreover, unlike other contemporary critical utopias, Piercy’s novel also considers issues surrounding environmentalism, animal rights, and mental health. Even if we disagree on the specifics of the novel’s politics, we cannot fault it as blinkered or exclusionary. Piercy’s multivalent politics are reflected in Mattapossett’s complex process of childbirth and child-rearing. In Mattapossett, all fetuses are genetically engineered and gestated in communally owned machines, which are instructed to produce children only when a member of the commune dies. There is no “genetic bond” between the child and the family or community it is born into, breaking any connection between race and culture or status (Piercy 97). Before the child is born, the community meets and decides who it should be given to. Each child is then given to three co-mothers, who generally have no sexual or romantic ties to each other and are joined together only for child-rearing. Men as well as women act as co-mothers and often receive hormones so that they can help with breast-feeding. The utopia of Mattapossett has strived to eliminate reproductive differences between the sexes because they “enchain” women and prevent men from being “humanized to be loving and tender” (98). Growing up, children are more actively involved in adult work and daily life so there is no separation between the world of adults and the world of children. Like many utopias, Mattapossett emphasizes practical education and lifelong learning over formal, compulsory, academic study. Indeed, children’s play is radically different in Mattapossett: because children have access to adult activities, they are no longer concerned with “imitation things” (Piercy 129). 22 When the youths of Mattapossett come of age, they go off into the wilderness alone for a rite of passage and, when they return, communication between the child and her or his parents is forbidden for three months. This practice “breaks down old habits of depending” and, after the

22 C.f., Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life by Philippe Aries. Aries argues that, before the 17th century, children past infancy were represented and often conceptualized as smaller versions of adults. Children and youths played the same games, had the same hobbies, moved in the same spaces, and enjoyed the same bawdy humor as adults. Only later did childhood become constructed as a separate, enclosed sphere. Charles Fourier, William Morris, Samuel Delany, Shulamith Firestone and many other utopians as well as Piercy have attempted to tear down what they see as the repressive and infantilizing barrier between adult and child.
rite is finished, they stand as equals to their co-mothers (109-110). After that, they can do what they will. Mattapoisett’s method of child-rearing effectively breaks hard-and-fast bonds of kinship while diffusing it throughout the community. Kinship is no longer tied to biological symbols of unity such as heterosexual intercourse or shared genes. Eschewing the authoritarian and nationalistic form of kin-based solidarity described in *Herland* and similar texts, kinship ceases to be nuclear or oedipal and becomes non-locateable and flexible. Unconcerned with origins, genetics or shared identity, this utopian kinship is even extended to Connie, the present-day traveler to this utopian future (297-8).

While Mattapoisett’s inventive kinship system negotiates its way through a number of problems, Connie registers a few complaints. Connie points out, “in [her] time black people just discovered a pride in being black. My people, Chicanos, were beginning to feel that too,” and yet, with the randomization of genetics, pride in racial identity is “lost again” (96). Connie is even more shocked to find that womanhood is no longer connected to procreation or mothering. Connie, whose child was taken from her by social services, asks, “What do they know of motherhood?” (99). Jennifer Burwell suggests that Connie’s objections to Mattapoisett are not those of a confused non-utopian waiting to be convinced but, instead, indicators of a real problem with kinship in Mattapoisett. Mattapoisett’s kinship system abolishes rather than reevaluates what she sees the material basis of women’s identity and women’s oppression—viviparous reproduction. Connie recognizes that “the alliance between people in Mattapoisett is founded on the erasure of difference and the neutralization of power” (Burwell 150). While gender and racial hierarchies are effectively eliminated through mechanized reproduction, so are any meaningful gender and racial differences. Not only does this move foreclose upon the possibility of representing “affirmative identity politics” (Burwell 147-8), it also fails to model a utopian way of embracing or mediating radical differences. It is not simply that Mattapoisett has

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23 Lucy Sargasson argues that *Woman on the Edge of Time*, like Shulamith Firestone’s *The Dialectic of Sex*, operates using a biologistic notion of femininity when it asserts that “women’s identity and nature are rooted in their reproductive capacities” (Sargasson 84). This leads to a wrongheaded and essentialist way of thinking about gender. While the novel’s biologism may be forgiveable in the context of the time period it was written in, the way it solves the problem of patriarchy is more questionable.

24 This is in many ways similar to Theodore’s Sturgeon science fiction utopia *Venus Plus X*, where patriarchy is sidestepped by surgically altering citizens to become hermaphrodites.

25 Drawing on Burwell’s argument, Edward K. Chan’s “Utopia and the Problem of Race: Accounting for the Remainder in the Imagination of the 1970s Utopian Subject” argues that *Woman on the Edge of Time* uses counter-signification and de-signification to break the links between racial and gendered signifier and signified (470). This attempt at figuring a post-racial and post-gender world has the unfortunate side effect of abstracting from the “embodied individual” something similar to the “generic citizen” of liberal democracy (Chan 477).
become homogenous or that a particular identity category is excluded but, rather, the differences between identities have become superficial and insignificant. Thus, for example, while the people of Mattapoisett maintain that “strangeness breeds richness” and consider the cultural enclave they were born into to be “sweet,” cultural differences are reduced to “flavors,” recalling the Diversity Day notion of multiculturalism as a broad appreciation of ethnic cuisines (Piercy 96-7). Villages may have different customs and there are even debates on policy, but there are never instances of unresolvable conflict or friction. The people of Mattapoisett seem to share the same ideology and more or less agree on what they value even if they dress differently or participate in different rites. The fluid, identity-traversing kinship of Mattapoisett is predicated upon disinvesting identities of significance. While the utopian kinship of Mattapoisett is not an outright failure, I believe it constitutes a missed opportunity to imagine a more radical form of kinship.

Literary utopias from Thomas More’s Utopia to Marge Piercy’s Woman on the Edge of Time have attempted to imagine a more capacious form of kinship and yet they have repeatedly failed to fully accommodate difference. It is all too easy to condemn these utopias for their bad politics or insufficiently critical theory. While ideological critique is certainly useful, the positions and assumptions of many utopias require little more than a close reading to ascertain. This should not, however, lead us to believe that literary utopias are just agitprop—dependent on our political agreement, useful for the moment but obsolete in a few election cycles, aesthetically simple—nor is it productive to spell out the ways in which they would fail as actionable blueprints. While we may disagree with these literary utopias—and some of their faults are inexcusable—the failures of utopianism are often more interesting than their successes. Louis Marin maintains that utopian failures or absences hint at “unthinkable theoretical concepts in forms to be thought about” (140). Utopian projection is “a blind activity, but one that would trace out the place, or the topic, of its concept for knowledge of action” (Marin 163). Utopia’s failures, then, are prospectuses for future theorizing, sketching out a problematic to be explored by others. Utopian kinship poses not a solution but a theoretical problem about identity and difference. Its apparent inadequacy moves us to speculate on how we might move beyond alienation without excluding, assimilating, or de-signifying that which is alien.

26 This seems to be a trend in more decentralized or anarchic utopias such as William Morris’ News from Nowhere. Morris and Piercy both solve the problem of conflict by imagining either agreement or dispersal of feuding parties.
Utopians have stretched the concept of kinship to the limit, ultimately abandoning the notion of kinship as a formed of unity or shared essence. Yet despite utopian reforms of the family, they have failed to fully imagine kinship with the other. This, I think, is the task set forth for Samuel Delany. Delany learns from and avoids many of the weaknesses and impasses of previous utopian kinships. In the following section, I will describe how Delany arrives at a more adequate model of kinship, one that incorporates but does not neutralize radical differences, by drawing on alternative forms of family life.
Chapter 2: The Utopian Fiction of Samuel R. Delany

While Delany resists any equivalence between science fiction and utopia, a number of critics including Carl Freedman, Tom Moylan, and Jose Esteban Munoz, have produced insightful readings that put Delany’s work in the context of utopian studies. That is not to say that Delany’s work sits easily in the utopian tradition. Delany’s novels and non-fiction works maintain a critical and at times incisive dialogue with literary utopianism. Delany’s most sustained foray into utopianism is *Triton*. Tom Moylan notes that Delany’s *Triton*, “negates and transforms utopian writing and creates a qualitatively new form which avoids the authoritarian tendency of the classical utopia” (193). The novel’s complex relationship with other literary utopias, along with its subtitle of “An Ambiguous Heterotopia” and the inclusion of an epigraph from Michel Foucault’s *The Order of Things*, has led some to call it a “heterotopia.” For Moylan, the term heterotopia signifies the most extreme and thoroughgoing form of the critical utopia, one that “preserves the utopian impulse, releases it from the traditional genre, and stakes out the terrain of a radically new development in that particular discourse where our dreams and fictions intersect” (161). Other critics, however, have taken the subtitle to mean that it founds or participates in an entirely different genre. Neil Easterbrook conceives of the heterotopia as “a postmodern liberal utopia” that is “an authentic anarchy” (70). From his description, which is widely divergent from Foucault’s, it is difficult to say what a literary heterotopia should look like. Easterbrook gives as variety of ideological labels for the heterotopic genre (not surprisingly, they are all ideologies that many critics cleave to: liberalism, libertarianism, poststructuralism, postmodernism) but he fails to give another example of a literary heterotopia (72). Even if we are careful to think of genres as tendencies rather than classifications, there is no such thing as a genre of one.

Foucault’s implied distinction between utopias and heterotopias is just as doubtful. There is nothing in our description of the literary utopia (a fictional representation of the fulfillment of a desire for a better way of being) that suggests they must, as Foucault argues, “afford consolation” or that they necessarily take place in “a fantastic, untroubled region” (xviii). Furthermore, there is no reason to believe utopias cannot take on characteristics of Foucault’s heterotopia, which are

disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this and that, because they shatter common names,
and they destroy ‘syntax’ in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and opposite one another) to ‘hold together’. (xviii, emphasis original)

While some classical utopias may seem tame in comparison to Jorge Luis Borges, Foucault’s example of an author of heterotopias, a number of utopian authors have produced literary utopias which also defy linguistic and spatial ordering. For example, Barthes writes that Fourier’s literary utopias “subvert” both “the laws of ‘nature’” and “the laws of language” through neologisms and technically or grammatically impossible concepts such as the lemonade ocean, masculine matrons, or the third sex (119). More recent literary utopias have proven equally disturbing in form and content. Utopia and heterotopia are not mutually exclusive and can both exist as tendencies in a text. Therefore, I shall read Triton as a literary utopia.

Triton describes the futuristic space colony Tethys on the Neptunian moon Triton. The novel follows the ill fated love life of Bron Helstrom. Bron Helstrom, an immigrant from a capitalistic and repressive Mars, lives on Triton. Unlike the planets Earth and Mars, Triton is a permissive and socialistic society dedicated to the happiness of the individual. Bron Helstrom finds, however, that though he is able to fulfill any desire he might have, he is unable to decide just what it is he wants. Bron Helstrom’s moody behavior and backwards 20th century attitudes towards sex disrupt his brief relationship with a theater performer named The Spike, and ultimately spur him to receive a form of psychosexual reconditioning and sex reassignment surgery, making him a heterosexual woman. This comedy of manners is played out against a much larger backdrop. Bron tags along on an unexplained political mission that takes him to Outer Mongolia and later, on Triton, lives through a brief war between the Outer Satellites and the planets that ends in the utter devastation of Earth.

Part of the work of Triton is to refine the problem of kinship in utopia. Delany’s utopia must therefore avoid some of the grosser mistakes of previous attempts. One common problem many literary utopias share is that they present themselves as universal utopias. As Ruth Levitas suggests, all needs and desires are socially constructed, which means that a single utopia can

27 Moreover, as we have seen through Jameson’s notion of the enclave, heterotopic spaces provide crucial material for the conceptual production of utopias. Kevin Herrington has also noted that utopias and heterotopias are intimately connected. He argues that the utopias of modernity “[tried] to provide society with a vision of an orderly and just way of life… through using or creating sites such that the difference that they came to embody—the Otherness of modernity—constituted those sites as heterotopia” (71).
never satisfy the needs of all existing cultural and historical standpoints (Concept 181-2). Universal utopias always turn out to be particular utopias so that, by positing themselves as universal they must passively forget, actively exclude, or drastically condition the desires of other standpoints. Pastoral utopias negate the desires of city dwellers, men’s utopias negate the desires of women, and so on. This has undoubtedly led to the dialogic and at times polemical nature of utopias, as different utopian authors respond to fulfill needs and desires unconsidered or denied in previous literary utopias. Thus, for example, Edward Bellamy imagines a universal utopia of urban leisure; William Morris counters with News from Nowhere, an agrarian utopia of strapping men and women who joyously rush to the harvest. The tendency to envision universal utopias has contributed to the inadequacy of many figurations of utopian kinship. Utopian kinship, while sometimes exhibiting pretensions of universality, fails to include all individuals because it, too, is always particular. Thomas More’s Utopian kinship is actually a national kinship, Bellamy’s universal brotherhood reduces to the bonhomie of the bourgeoisie, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s sisterhood is white.

One solution to this problem is a form of utopian separatism. A universal utopia being impossible, a utopian might limit admission to her or his imaginary community to subjects whose desires would be satisfied by it. Yet if the universal utopia is false, the separatist utopia is even more misguided. Responding to utopian Etienne Cabet’s announcement that he would leave to found a secluded commune in America, Karl Marx convincingly argued that not only was Cabet’s proposed commune impractical but that it weakened the communist movement in Europe and would ultimately result in a community of “an absolutely exclusive and sectarian nature” (qtd in Marin 277). Marx made it clear that utopian separatism demands a disengagement from the rest of the world that is tantamount to political quietism, leading to the weakening of critical perspective and thus dogmatism. While universal utopianism is only the lesser of two evils, it is marginally better to gloss over or forget otherness than to actively exclude it through imagined gates, trenches, or oceans. In order to formulate a more sophisticated vision of utopian kinship, then, Delany’s must avoid both utopian universalism and utopian separatism while including and satisfying the desires of multiply situated identities.

Marge Piercy’s parallel attempt at utopian diversity produces only a pyrrhic multiculturalism, sacrificing the difference it seeks to accommodate. Delany, however, maintains radical differences in Triton by synthesizing utopian universalism and utopian
separatism. The utopia of Triton is not a single, uniform utopia, but a space that supports a multiplicity of different utopias. This poly-utopia allows individuals to choose or construct their own living arrangements, including co-ops or communes that are homosocial or mixed gender, heterosexual or homosexual, or, alternatively, organized based on other principles including religious, philosophical, and artistic collectives. As one character puts it, if you enjoy piercing eighteen year old boys with “red hot needles,” there is a place where the eighteen year old boys and their torturers “have all gotten together in a mutually beneficial alliance where you and they, and their Labrador retriever, if she’s what it takes to get you off, can all meet one another on a footing of cooperation, mutual benefit and respect” (Delany, Triton 100). Moreover, no one is limited to a single co-op or collective or even to a single identity; Tritonians can surgically or genetically alter their genders, races, and sexual preferences with ease. Triton’s pluralism extends to politics as well. Voters are governed by and receive the benefits of whichever political party they vote for so that all thirty to thirty-seven political parties win every election (Delany, Triton 185). Citizens do not even have to live under any state if they so choose: the city includes anarchist “unlicensed zones,” areas of the city where no law or authority holds. And this endless variety of differences seems to be completely free of serious conflict or domination; Triton has eliminated economic, philosophical, and sexual oppression. Class is virtually nonexistent in this socialist future because, while are still differences in wealth or prestige based on job position, everyone is guaranteed employment, the same level of education and access to at least a minimum amount of food, shelter, and credits.

Delany’s figuration of kinship is therefore much more open and elastic than that of previous utopians because the character and structure of families is not determined in advance.

In a confusing but typical move, Delany names many of the space colonies in the universe of Triton after moons they are not actually on so that, here, the colony on the moon Triton orbiting Neptune is called by the same name as the moon Tethys, which itself orbits Saturn. This kind of persistent denial of reader expectations reaches a fever pitch in the later novel Stars in My Pockets Like Grains of Sand. For the purposes of this paper, I will refer to Tethys by the name of the planet it is on, Triton.

Here, I am coining the term poly-utopia to indicate a polyvalent utopian space that both allows for and supports other utopias within it. The poly-utopia leaves the values and institutions of its constituent utopias undetermined and unconstrained, giving citizens the freedom and ability to build their own utopias. Robert Nozick deploys a similar term—“meta-utopia”—in Anarchy, State, and Utopia to designate “a framework for the birth of trial communities, with a minimal central authority to arbitrate between the communities if necessary” (Goodwin and Taylor 51). Delany’s Triton, however, does not share Nozick’s free market capitalist ideology. The key difference between Nozick’s meta-utopia and the poly-utopia is that, while the meta-utopia passively allows multiple utopias to co-exist and compete, the poly-utopia actively provides for and promotes a diversity of utopias. Furthermore, unlike the meta-utopia, Delany’s poly-utopia is not driven by an economy of scarcity: one can choose and move between any number of different utopias. Citizens are not bound to a single utopia at a given moment making the poly-utopia, as the name suggests, the political analog of polyamory.
Another way in which Delany’s figuration of kinship represents a departure is that the enclave—the space or spaces governed by alternative rules—that he uses as the nucleus for his utopian projection differs from that of his predecessors. Piercy and others derive their models for utopian solidarity from the patriarchal nuclear family (albeit in a modified form). Delany, on the other hand, resists and critiques traditional notions of kinship throughout his work. In Triton, family values are expressed by the character of Mad Mike. When Triton is sabotaged, Mad Mike attempts to wrest his children from a lesbian co-op where they have been raised (Delany, Triton 206-7). One of the members of the co-op, Audri, explains that Mad Mike is violently abusive and that “this sudden revitalization of interest only started a year back when he became a Christian. Apparently he wasn’t very interested in them back when she was having them, or in the two years right after” (210). Though Mad Mike has failed to play the role of father in every possible way, he claims kinship because “the children of her body are one with the objects of [his] hand” (Delany, Triton 213). Despite physical abuse and neglect, Mad Mike lays claim to his genetic offspring as “his” or “mine” (Delany, Triton 206-7). Delany demystifies Mad Mike’s hidebound notion of kinship, revealing it to be based on the concept of property, including both the essentialist notion of a shared inherent quality and capitalist private ownership. Because Mad Mike conceives of kinship in this way, he imagines the children to be at his disposal no matter how poorly he treats them.

Delany expands on his critique of traditional kinship as a homogenizing and hierarchical institution through the faction of the Family in Stars in My Pockets like Grains of Sand. The Family is an interstellar movement whose goal is to achieve cultural stability and stave off the ever looming potential for apocalyptic self-destruction (“Cultural Fugue”) on the planets under its sway. To achieve this, the Family organizes its members into “power structures” characterized by patriarchal kin-based roles; the “strong power, mediating power, and subordinate power” are termed father, mother, or son, respectively (Delany, Stars 129). These power structures are in turn ruled by a single “Focus Family” which is a “strange form of rule by celebrity, by media, [and] by notoriety” (Delany, Stars 194). Undoubtedly inspired by James Dobson’s fundamentalist Christian organization—Focus on the Family—each Focus Family regiments reproductive groups on its home planet to produce modular father-mother-son units. The Family claims it originated on Earth—which has long been lost and may never have existed—but it is important to note that the Family “model” is applied to humans and aliens.
alike, accommodating manifold variations “so that any you can have lots of fathers, lots of mothers, lots of sons; and any woman of any age or gender can always fill any of the roles” (Delany, _Stars_ 129). Like contemporary fundamentalisms, the Family is more of a reaction to the new than a return to ancient tradition (Shaviro 241). Whereas its competitor, the Sygn, respects the differences between planets or cultures, the Family assimilates disparate worlds into the same conceptual and power structures. As in previous failed attempts at utopian kinship, the Family negotiates difference by reducing it to sameness. Delany’s example reveals that this is never an innocent mistake. Unsuccessful utopian kinships are more often than not universalizations of privileged and powerful identities like those of the world-commanding Focus Families and this move inevitably serves these groups by colonizing or erasing other positions. While traditional kinship is one way of imagining a planetary solidarity, Delany clearly opposes this formulation.30

Instead of utilizing heteronormative families of blood or the private space of the home as utopian enclaves, Delany begins instead with the homosexual family of choice and the public space of the gay cruising venue. Kath Weston describes the family of choice in her ethnographic study _Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship_. Weston argues that, for gay families, kinship is not synonymous with the symbolism of biology, heterosexual intercourse or procreation. While traditional American kinship is derived from a system of symbols surrounding blood or the law, members of the gay and lesbian community have constructed a new form of kinship based on choice, love, or desire. Families of choice consider love, “a symbol well suited to carry the nuances of identity and unity so central to kinship in the United States,” to be “both the necessary and the sufficient criterion for defining kinship” (Weston 107). Weston states that, for many homosexual families,

> in the absence of a procreative reference, individual discretion regulated who would be counted as kin. For those who had constructed them, gay families could evoke utopian visions of self-determination in the absence of social constraint (40).

30 Another critique of the traditional family can be found in _Dhalgren_, in which the Richards family attempts to uphold the fiction of a stereotypical family lifestyle in a stateless, post-capitalist city. They fail miserably in part because of the absence of support from the state and civil institutions that give the family its substance. Delany makes it clear that traditional kinship is not a natural given but, instead, is something structurally imposed and maintained.
Unlike David Schneider’s concept of kinship, voluntary kinship is not limited to notions of homogenous shared substance (blood or biogenetic material) or unity achieved through heteroerotic reproduction. Nor does it even require “erotic relations”—voluntary kinship brings “friends, lovers, and children together under a single concept” (Weston 107). Families of choice therefore include a wide variety of relationships including homosexual couples, adopted children, lesbian mothers, and even close friends. It is important to note that, here, “choice” does not connote consumerist choice. Voluntary kinship is not held at will nor that it can be formed or dissolved with ease—families of choice share the same “enduring diffuse solidarity” that characterizes traditional notions of kinship (Schneider 50). Families of choice may be more mutable and elastic than families of blood, but they are nevertheless powerful.

There are, however, fundamental differences between voluntary kinship and blood kinship. Schneider notes that kinship of blood is conceived of as “involuntary,” in that it is “part of the natural order and therefore follows the laws of nature and not the laws of man” and also because “a man cannot choose who his blood relatives will be” (37). While kinship imbues what is perceived as biology or nature with significance, kinship of blood is not identical to scientifically determined genetic heredity. Adherents to traditional notions of kinship may believe that “the real, true, verifiable facts of nature are what the cultural formulation is,” but this is obviously not the case (Schneider 24). We cannot derive filial piety, motherly love, primogeniture or any other ideology or practice of kinship from a positive match on a DNA test. The relationship between biological nature and the nuclear family—or whatever kinship system is in place—is therefore “arbitrary,” making the relationship between the two “symbolic” (Schneider 31). The symbolism of blood is merely a means of naturalizing a culturally bound kinship system; what presents itself as a spontaneous and involuntary is, in fact, authoritarian and against our will. Delany clearly rejects this and any other type of biological essentialism. That is not to say that Delany is opposed to monogamous heteroerotic sex and reproduction but, rather, that he is against ideologies that establish any particular relationship as the natural model. Voluntary kinship, then, is not defined as a given set of kinship relations (e.g., polyamory, homosexuality, adoption or artificial insemination, etc.) but as an open and constructivist attitude toward kinship.

31 Even physical traits statistically correlated to gender such as height or size are revealed to be a matter of cultural conditioning rather than genetic determination in Triton (254).
Delany would have been well positioned to experience and participate in families of choice. He wrote *Triton* at the dawn of the lesbian baby boom of the 1970s (Weston 165-193) and even became a gay father himself just months before the novel was completed (Delany, “Steiner” par 36). It is no surprise, then, that Triton contains families of choice, including lesbian and homosexual family communes as well as any number of other different living, romantic and child-rearing arrangements in Triton. Furthermore, the absence of legal contracts of marriage and the proliferation of equally valued types of households suggest that Triton actively supports these families of choice by maintaining the positions of anti-normativity and state non-interference in matters of sexuality and reproduction.\(^{32}\) Families of choice perform an important function in *Triton*, providing new models for utopian solidarity to replace previous notions of solidarity based on shared, fixed identity. In his essay “Utopia and the Problem of Race,” Edward K. Chan points out that, because citizens of Triton can instantly become a member of another race, gender, sexual preference or any other identity category, “identity…[has become] a fluid system of desire and choice” (476).\(^{33}\) Since identity in Triton is both changeable and voluntary, it cannot provide the basis for discrimination and oppression (Chan 477).\(^{34}\) Once identity ceases to lose its stable, inborn character, it also ceases to entail automatic belonging. Instead, Tritonians choose who they are and who they belong with. Even to remain in the identity one was born with becomes a significant decision, as in the case of Lawrence, the aging “political homosexual” who refuses to “have his sexuality refixed on someone, or thing, that can get it up for him” (Delany, *Triton* 76). It becomes clear, then, that all solidarities in Triton are, in a sense, voluntary kinships. Because kinship in Triton is a function of choice rather than identity, the novel avoids the exclusion performed by other utopian kinships. While both kinships of blood and choice are socially constructed, participants in Triton’s kinship of choice are necessarily aware of this fact. Eschewing biological and other

\(^{32}\) For arguments complimenting these positions, see *The Trouble With Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* by Michael Warner, *Against Love: A Polemic* by Laura Kipnis and “Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?” by Judith Butler.

\(^{33}\) Compare this to Weston’s account of families of choice in the San Francisco Bay Area: “Fluid boundaries and varied membership meant no neatly replicable units, no defined cycles of expansion or contraction, no patterns of dispersal. What might have represented a nightmare to an anthropologist in search of mappable family structures appeared to most participants in a highly positive light as the product of unfettered creativity” (109).

\(^{34}\) Chan’s reading of Delany is not altogether salutatory. He notes that Delany, like other utopians of the 1970s, is still “constrained by the limits of the abstract subject of liberal democracy” (482). At the same time, however, Chan admits that it is impossible to think a way out of this constraint (483).
essentialisms, voluntary kinship is more therefore negotiable than blood kinship, making it more receptive to otherness.\textsuperscript{35}

If the private sphere on Triton is derived from families of choice, the public sphere is modeled on public sex culture. Delany has written extensively on gay cruising and public sex in a book of critical essays, Times Square Red, Times Square Blue and in his memoir, The Motion of Light in Water: Sex and Science Fiction Writing in the East Village 1960-1965. On Triton, it is common to pick up sexual partners in bars, which are organized by predilection (e.g., bars for adolescents, bars for older men interested in younger women, etc) and include special areas for cruising called “runs” (Delany, Triton 260). Indeed, there are even socially acceptable hand signals—not unlike the gestures in the recent Senator Craig scandal—to indicate sexual willingness in these and other settings. While the novel is never explicit on this, some form of polyamory or open relationship must be practiced by the vast majority of Tritonians because it is illegal to “make a redressable contract across either a sexual or a sectarian subject,” including marriage (Delany, Triton 72). This is clearly an institutionalization of Delany’s own lifestyle but, more importantly, it is an instantiation of values informed by Delany’s social criticism.

In Times Square Red, Times Square Blue, Delany argues that, under capitalism, life is at its most rewarding, productive, and pleasant when large numbers of people understand, appreciate, and seek out interclass contact and communication conducted in a mode of good will (111). Interclass contact not only ameliorates the effects of capitalism—and, presumably, any system it is conducted under—but also provides benefits to the class members who participate in it. Conventional wisdom holds that careers are furthered through networking at professional events such as writer’s conferences, where large numbers of people with similar goals try to compete for attention. Delany points out, however, that networking situations are set up so that “the amount of need present…is too high for the comparatively few individuals in position to supply the much needed boons and favors to distribute them in any equitable manner” (Times 136). Rather than distributing rewards or advancements, these networking events are much better at disseminating knowledge about the field they are in (Delany Times 138-9). But in what Delany calls contact situations—chance encounters between people of different classes and positions—the relatively low demand allows for an easier distribution of favors. Contact situations are most

\textsuperscript{35} For another nonidentitarian model of solidarity, see Solidarity with Strangers by Jodi Dean.
successful when there are “a range of contrasting needs and desires, as well as differences in social skills and, yes, institutional access” (Delany, Times 142). For Delany, the archetypical cross class contact situation is public sex in gay cruising venues such as the pornographic theaters in Times Square. Contact through these sites inspires Good Samaritanism, neighborly concern and a sense of solidarity between people from diverse backgrounds and positions (Delany, Times 125-7).

By placing these social spaces in his utopia, Delany indicates that, while Triton is composed of a number of independent, specialized utopias, there are areas where their constituents engage with one another in solidarity. Triton is not simply a collection of separatist utopias but a united poly-utopia. Delany’s sign and symbol of social cohesion is not a mass rally but an orgy. In his memoir, The Motion of Light in Water, Delany describes the sense of “political power” that “massed bodies” produced (Delany, Motion 268). Delany recounts how, in the 1950s, homosexuality was imagined as a “solitary perversion,” and this illusion was reinforced even by the institutions of public sex, the “subway johns or the trucks [that], while they accommodated sex, cut it, visibly, up into tiny portions” (Delany, Motion 268-9). But when Delany saw eight or nine gay men fleeing a police raid or even more men frolicking in a crowded bathhouse, he realized that this silent and fragmented gay population constituted a greater “totality” (Delany, Motion 269). As Jose Esteban Munoz remarks, these “glimpses and moments of contact [that Delany describes] have a decidedly utopian function permitting us to imagine and potentially make a queer world,” a world that transcends “fragmentation” and “alienation” to constitute a queer “whole” (“Future” 98-9). The heteropic enclave of the gay public sex venue suggests a way of constructing larger scale families of choice, voluntary kinship that extends to an entire society and beyond. Whereas previous notions of utopian kinship were based on a fantasy of essential unity, Delany imagines a universal utopian solidarity generated by heterogeneous desires and needs coming together to satisfy one another.37

36 Munoz returns to public sex and the performance of utopia in another essay, “Ghosts of Public Sex: Utopian Longings, Queer Memories.” In that essay, he draws on Ernst Bloch and Theodor Adorno to discuss the political uses of what he calls “queer utopian memories” of pre-AIDS public sex culture, memories that are idealized but nevertheless “offer us a critique of the present, of what is, by casting a picture of what can and perhaps will be” (“Memories” 357, emphasis original).

37 This formulation is remarkably similar to grouping by affinity, which Donna Haraway defines as “related not by blood but by choice, the appeal of one chemical nuclear group for another, avidity” (155). Like Delany, Haraway resists unities founded on heterosexist reproduction (177). Instead, she posits a politics modeled on “regeneration” that promises “the utopian dream of the hope for a monstrous world without gender” (181).
The notion of non-exclusionary solidarity may seem like a paradox.\textsuperscript{38} In \textit{Solidarity with Strangers}, Jodi Dean notes that conventional solidarities, which include kinship, “can be modeled as an interaction involving at least three persons: I ask you to stand by me over and against a third” (3). Yet this exclusive and identitarian concept can be retrofitted for utopian purposes. Just as the Christian commandment, “Love thy neighbor as thyself,” cannot be characterized as universal selfishness, the initial germ cell of kin-based solidarity takes on a fundamentally different character when it is expanded and made a function of choice. It could be argued that a wholly new concept might have been developed to fill this need but, as Delany writes, “the alien is always constructed of the familiar” (Stars 143). Moreover, while other relationships or ideas could be altered to fit this need (e.g., friendship or empathy), the institution of kinship is more evocative, represents a more enduring and substantial commitment that implies material as well as emotional support, and has the added bonus of reclaiming something that has for too long fallen into the bailiwick of the right.

This does not mean, however, that we should all immediately vow kinship of choice to one another, mutually united in desire and solidarity.\textsuperscript{39} While voluntary kinship is a noble ideal, and one we should strive for, it cannot be realized in the present. As with many utopian goals, voluntary kinship’s very impossibility provides an effective diagnostic tool, illuminating issues and inadequacies in the present (c.f., Jameson, “Politics” 38). Immediately we can see a number of things that would have to be dispensed with before we could reach worldwide solidarity. The material demands of solidarity could not be universalized under conditions of capitalism, scarcity, and inequity, so we would have to somehow eliminate them. Moreover, all the privileges and deprivations of race, class, nationality, gender and all other identity categories would also have to be jettisoned, along with the institutions that produced, maintained, and mystified those inequalities. (No sweat!) It would take a number of political, economic, and social revolutions to accommodate a society of voluntary kin and yet even if we imagine a

\textsuperscript{38} It might better be classified as an “impossibilia” or “adunata,” a rhetorical topos in which “two naturally opposite, enemy elements (vulture and dove) [are] presented as peacefully living together” (Barthes 117). Barthes notes that Fourier often used impossibilia such as the lemonade ocean or the third sex as a way of “subverting” both “the laws of ‘nature’” and “the laws of language” (119).

\textsuperscript{39} Love or desire is well suited to navigate between universal and separatist utopianism because, as Agamben notes in \textit{The Coming Community}, “love is never directed toward this or that property of the loved one (being blond, being small, being tender, being lame), but neither does it neglect the properties in favor of an insipid generality (universal love): The lover wants the loved one with all of its predicates, its being such as it is. The lover desires the as only insofar as it is such—this is the lover’s particular fetishism” (2, emphasis original).
completely reordered world there still remains less tangible changes that would have to occur, including even changes in consciousness. This can be proven by a simple thought experiment, not entirely unlike one performed by Bron Helstrom in Triton. Imagine the first five strangers you encountered today and ask yourself: could I desire them as my kin and, conversely, could they desire me?

I refuse to join any Utopia that would have me as a Member

Readers should not be surprised that Delany’s representation of solidarity is downright pornographic. Indeed, Robert Eliot Fox observes that Delany’s fictions often take on the characteristics of what he calls a “pornotopia” (100-1). Steven Marcus, who originated the term, describes pornotopia as a “pornographic fiction” that takes on the character of “utopian fantasy” (268). In a pornotopia, all other variables (time, setting, plot, etc.) are controlled or bracketed in order to produce the maximum number of sexual combinations. This entails a particular kind of subjectivity or characterology:

All men in [pornotopia] are always and infinitely potent; all women fecundate with lust and flow inexhaustibly with sap or juice or both. Everyone is always ready for everything, and everyone is infinitely generous in his [sic] substance… No one is ever jealous, possessive, or really angry. All our aggressions are perfectly fused with our sexuality, and the only rage is the rage of lust, a happy fury indeed. (Marcus 273)

In Triton, this free, untroubled, non-possessive desire is accomplished in part through permissive customs and a near-instantaneous sexual refixation technology that allows anyone to become sexually attracted or attractive to anyone else. Yet while the citizens of Triton are allowed to reconfigure their sexual predilections at will, other psychological traits remain problematic. Most subjects in Triton are remarkably free from persistent hang ups but the novel’s main character, Bron Helstrom, is unable to achieve pornotopian or utopian consciousness.

Here, Delany’s utopian kinship stumbles. If Delany’s utopian kinship is predicated upon choice or desire, the inability to desire freely becomes a political problem. This is the central issue of the text. Triton fails to find an adequate solution and instead marginalizes inhibited immigrants like Bron Helstrom and lays waste to equally conservative Earth and Mars. But,

40 For more on the intersections between utopian studies and porn studies, see chapter 6, “Hard Core Utopias,” in Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the “Frenzy of the Visible” by Linda Williams and “Ladies First: The Utopian Fantasy of Deep Throat” by Laura Kipnis.
even if a problem remains unsolved in a utopian world it does not necessarily signal an impasse for the reader. In an interview with Ernst Bloch, Theodor Adorno gave a description of utopia that is useful here: “utopia is essentially in the determined negation…. of that which merely is, and by concretizing itself as something false, it always points at the same time to what should be” (“Something’s Missing” 12). Adorno’s description of utopia implies that, by producing and interpreting (necessarily) imperfect utopias, we can pursue what a better utopia might be negatively, by determining what utopia is not. This, I believe, is what Samuel Delany attempts to do in his *Triton*. Delany re-stages the problem of utopian kinship, a figuration of all embracing and all inclusive solidarity, only to reenact its breakdown. Delany engages in a form of conceptual crash-testing; his depiction of the catastrophic failure of utopian kinship in *Triton* directs us to solve the problem by attempting to imagine voluntary kinship with even the most odious of subjects.

Bron Helstrom is one such subject, shaped by growing up on more conservative, capitalist and in many ways Earth-like Mars, where he spent many years as a male prostitute. Because of the trauma of his youth, Bron Helstrom has many of the expectations and personality flaws of a mainstream, privileged, heterosexual, white, male subject of our era. Thus, for example, Bron Helstrom constantly “projects” experiences and intentions onto other people rather than actually listening to them (Delany, *Triton* 76, 81). Bron Helstrom’s projections are not without motive, as Delany later points out:

> what Bron usually does to justify his behaving in the selfish and hateful ways that make him such a hateful man is manufacture perfectly fanciful motives for what everyone else is doing—motivations that, if they were the case, would make his actions acceptable. (“Interview” 335)

Because Bron Helstrom blocks out information that might inform him of other people’s actual motivations—and thereby clue him in on his own boorishness—the reader must frequently revise her or his interpretation of key scenes in light of other character’s reactions. This confusion in the text leads readers to the realization that Bron Helstrom is unable to understand or empathize with others, even to the point of being “solipsistic” (Moylan 178). Ultimately, Bron Helstrom’s self-imposed alienation and backwards attitudes lead him to take refuge in stereotypes of “particular male aloneness” that produces “ingenuity” and “bravery” needed “to protect the species, the women, [and] the children” (Delany, *Triton* 216). Alcena Madeline Davis Rogan
notes that, while Bron Helstrom is in an ostensibly liberated society, “he is incapable of negotiating the proliferation of sexual identities available on his adoptive planet without recourse to esssentialism” (448). Because of this, while Bron Helstrom lives in a place better than our own and better than any other he’s known, he is still “not happy with the world he lives in” (Delany, *Triton* 98).  

Bron Helstrom’s estrangement bars him from voluntary kinship. Throughout *Triton*, Bron Helstrom yearns to found or be part of a family while resenting people who have actually achieved this. Bron Helstrom was never close with his parents, nor does he have a relationship with the child he donated sperm to produce and he believes that his chances of joining a family are “pretty unlikely” (71). Even the mention of family life rankles Bron Helstrom, who usually attributes his reaction to a peculiar sense of decorum. Bron Helstrom loathes his boss, Philip, because he has a “family [Bron] would have given his left testicle—hell, both of them—to be a daughter or a son to” (Delany, *Triton* 103). While this form of kinship is available to him—his other boss, Audri, eventually asks him to help her found a family—Bron Helstrom cannot ask for it because he is so wrapped up in himself that he does not know how to articulate just what it is he wants from other people (Delany, *Triton* 104). Moreover, even if he could ask for it, Bron Helstrom’s essentialist values and beliefs are antithetical to the kind of voluntary kinship maintained on Triton. Bron Helstrom flounders in Tritonian family settings because, unlike in traditional kinship, there are no stable authoritarian power structures or even fixed positions in Triton’s families of choice. Bron Helstrom is dismayed to find that, in a Tritonian family, “any blow you struck was absorbed and became one with the structure” (Delany, *Triton* 103). Alienated by his damaged subjectivity, Bron Helstrom is not so much denied kinship but left to languish without it.

Ultimately this leads Bron Helstrom to a sort of conservative utopianism. While surrounded by the riches and rewards of a radically open utopia, Bron Helstrom desires to escape to the past:

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41 Here it is useful to compare Bron Helstrom to another Delany protagonist, the unnamed “cocksucker” of the pornographic novel *Hogg*. Cocksucker is a young boy who has been taken in by a rapist for hire, Hogg, who degrades and sexually abuses him. While cocksucker lives in a dreadful world inhabited by mass murderers and rapists, he is utterly content and even longs for someone who might treat him worse than Hogg. For Delany, happiness is subjective and subjectivity is contingent.

42 Despite the enormous popularity of conservative utopians like Robert Heinlein, libertarian capitalist and socially conservative utopias remain largely ignored in the field of utopian studies. For a survey of rightist literary utopias, see “Utopia Beyond Our Ideals: The Dilemma of The Right-Wing Utopia” by Peter Fitting.
Bron sighed. ‘It’s so strange, the way we picture the past as a place full of injustice, inequity, disease, and confusion, yet still, somehow, things were… simpler. Sometimes I wish we did live in the past. Sometimes I wish men were all strong and women were all weak, even if you did it by not picking them up and cuddling them enough when they were babies, or not giving them strong female figures to identify with psychologically and socially; because, somehow, it would be simpler that way just to justify…’ But she could not say what it would justify.
(Delany, *Triton* 254, emphasis and ellipses original).

Bron Helstrom finds these thoughts “bizarre, uncomfortable, and unnatural,” but he unknowingly maintains them throughout the novel (Delany, *Triton* 254). Oblivious to himself, Bron Helstrom is constantly encountering his own thoughts and behavior as uncanny, the return of the repressed. While it is uncertain just what gender inequalities would justify, it is obvious that Bron Helstrom is using the myth of lost manhood to rationalize and excuse his selfish isolation. Bron Helstrom maintains that his “male aloneness” is a virtue because it allows him to “act outside society” during times of crisis (Delany, *Triton* 216). Women, however, are just “too social” to handle disaster situations (Delany, *Triton* 216). This gives us a clue as to the origin of Bron Helstrom’s utopian nostalgia, indicating that it is, in part, a compensation for his feelings of alienation. While Bron Helstrom’s musings glorify aloneness, they are merely an alibi. What Bron Helstrom really wants, and what he cannot find in Triton, is what Mad Mike wants— the idealized patriarchal family (Delany, *Triton* 212, 231). Bron Helstrom signals his desire for the conservative family dream by undergoing sexual reassignment surgery and sexual refixation in order to birth and raise “real men,” men who are conditioned for patriarchy, so that he might “reproduce the species” (Delany, *Triton* 232). While Bron Helstrom’s uses the cover story of the manly and rugged individualist, his sex role reversal confirms that this dream ultimately derives from his yearning for social acceptance and kinship. As Jameson notes, the patriarchal authoritarian family, however problematic, is “a figure of collectivity” or “an object of a Utopian longing, if not a Utopian envy” that represents “social reintegration” as well as “protective security” (“Reification and Utopia” 145).

We find further insight into the nature of Bron Helstrom’s trouble when the Spike attempts to explain “the vast difficulty of performing pre-twentieth century theatrical works for a twenty-second-century audience” which, she claims, “results from the peripetia’s invariably
pivoting on sexual jealousy”—a concept that is “just so hard for contemporary audiences to relate to” (Delany, *Triton* 113). In response, Bron Helstrom reveals that he does, in fact, get jealous: “maybe not specifically sexually…. but as far as attention goes, I’m as possessive of that in people I’m having a thing with as it’s possible to be” (Delany, *Triton* 114). As this exchange indicates, Bron Helstrom shares more in common with the protagonists of nineteenth century plays than with his fellow Tritonians. In many respects this discussion of the impossibility of pre-twentieth century art in utopia parallels a similar conversation in *Looking Backward*. In Bellamy’s novel, the narrator Julian West compares Charles Dickens to Homer, claiming that, while Dickens’ “genius” remains, the world depicted in his novels “has passed away as utterly as Circe and the sirens, Charybdis and Cyclops” (Bellamy 120). The psychology of West’s capitalist era is lost, as well, and is therefore totally absent from texts from the future such as the aforementioned *Penthesilia* (133-4). Both passages serve as indicators of the immense span between the dystopian present and the utopian future. Only after reading the novels of future Boston does West understand how different his contemporaries and the utopians are. From this estranged perspective, West’s contemporaries may seem fantastic and chimerical but Bellamy’s utopians are nevertheless more understanding than Delany’s. Edith Leete—the utopian who eventually marries West—tells him that, “We have made a study of your ways of living and thinking; nothing you say or do surprises us, while we say and do nothing which does not seem strange to you” (136). While Bellamy’s utopians no longer produce art influenced by capitalist poverty and excess, they still have a historical or anthropological understanding of that age. The Spike’s audience, however, is only alienated by art from the heyday of capitalism and seem to know nothing about our era.\(^4\) Even avant-garde twentieth century art like Jackson Mac Low’s *Asymmetries* is considered “conservative,” a work performed only in extremely backwards parts of the solar system like Outer Mongolia on authoritarian Earth (Delany, *Triton* 146).

This passage suggests that Triton rejects not only Bron Helstrom but also, through him, 20\(^{th}\) century Earth. Though Bron Helstrom is clearly an unsympathetic character, Delany makes it clear that his solipsistic psychology is not fundamentally different from our own: “Freud and Lacan both brought us the unhappy news that this is, in effect, the way we all move through our lives” (“Interview” 335, emphasis original). Bron Helstrom just happens to be the worst in a bad

\(^{4}\) One index of the relative estrangement between the existent and utopia is geography: Bellamy’s utopia takes place in a radically altered Boston while Delany’s utopians are unable to guess where Boston is within a few thousand miles or even if there is a Boston anymore (Delany *Triton* 148).
lot. In this regard, *Triton* is similar to Joanna Russ’ “Nobody’s Home,” a short story that *Triton* engages in “direct dialogue” (Delany, “Interview” 322).\(^\text{44}\) Russ describes a future inhabited by hyper-intelligent people, where even children are capable of incredible feats of genius in parlor games such as “Barufaldi,” which hinges on “guessing the identity of famous dead personages” from multiply-encoded anagrammatic sentences proposed by other players (Russ 98). Russ’s epigraph for the story calls this world a “utopia—for some” (93) and, indeed, there are others who do not fit in. One woman, Leslie Smith, is repeatedly rejected by the utopians because they find her unextraordinary in every way. While she is “above-average intelligence” for our time period (“the bad old days”), in the future she is considered dull (Russ 112). When her English-speaking hosts attempt to banter with her in Finnish or include her in Chinese round robin poetry, she can only give them blank stares. Russ’ utopia is, as the title suggests, “nobody’s home” because subjects produced by our time would not be at home in it.\(^\text{45}\) Tom Moylan points out that Bron Helstrom is in many ways like Leslie Smith; he is someone who represents “the defects of [our] bad old days,” a “pre-revolutionary personality seeking refuge in a post-revolutionary world” (177). In Russ’ story, Smith is rejected because she is found deficient in a specific mental property—intelligence—but in *Triton*, as we have seen, more subtle and pervasive reasons that bar Bron Helstrom and all Earthlings from utopia.

Unlike Leslie Smith’s situation, Bron Helstrom’s personal difficulty is, in fact, part of a trend. A social commentator in the *Triton* universe, Ashima Slade, notes that Bron Helstrom’s plight is all too common. Immigrants from Earth and Mars are given both “instruction on how to conform” and “the materials with which to destroy themselves, both psychologically and

\(^\text{44}\) Delany also borrows from another Joanna Russ short story, “A Game of Vlet,” which describes a magical board game that controls the reality it models. In *Triton*, the game—while apparently non-magical—attempts to simulate complex events (ocean voyages, mythological combat, etc.) in much the same way as role-playing or war games do. The inclusion of this game highlights the ways in which the enjoyment of gaming and the enjoyment of literary utopias are similar. Jameson associates utopianism with the “pleasures of construction [and] miniaturization,” comparing literary utopias to “erector sets” and “model railroads” (“Politics” 40). An even more apt comparison, I think, is the role playing supplement, which frequently describe fantastic settings in minute detail, informing the player such things as the names of shops on a particular street, even naming and describing individual shopkeepers and patrons while providing random tables for events that might occur in a given city quarter. Literary utopias are struck with the same impossibly completist fervor, including information on every aspect of utopian life along with maps, architectural diagrams, alphabets, etc.

\(^\text{45}\) Delany singles out the characters of Freddie and Flossie as a response to Russ’ story in *Triton*. Freddie and Flossie are a mentally challenged father and his neurotypical son who live with Bron Helstrom in a men’s co-op. Freddie is aided by computerized rings that supplement his memory (a common Delany trope) and seems able to move about the city of Triton with ease. While they are perhaps misfits like most of the members of The Serpent’s House, they do not seem as miserable as Russ’s Smith. I would argue that Russ’ story resonates with even larger themes in the novel.
physically—all under the same label: Freedom” (Delany, *Triton* 302). When emigrants fail to conform, “the materials of instruction are pulled further away and the materials of destruction are pushed correspondingly closer” and they are given more liberty to destroy themselves (Delany, *Triton* 303). On an even larger scale, the interplanetary war between the Outer Satellites and the Inner Worlds echoes Bron Helstrom’s psychodrama. The Inner Worlds, as their name suggests, are not just an alliance of planets. Here, Delany uses the word “world” to connote both a planet and a worldview or state of mind. In his science fiction criticism, Delany often gives the phrase “her world exploded” as an example of a literal meaning available in science fiction that cannot be found in realistic texts; in realist novels, the phrase might denote “a female character’s emotional state” but, in a science fiction novel, it could just as well mean that “a planet belonging to a woman blew up” (Delany, “Interview” 317, see also Delany, *Triton* 285). In *Triton*, this trope takes the form of the literalization of “the cliché about people being from ‘two different worlds’” (Fox 114). When Bron Helstrom attempts to explain himself to the Spike, she is shocked and uncomprehending, calling his narrative “like a vision from another world” and Bron Helstrom agrees that he is “from another world,” Mars (Delany, *Triton* 106). Earth and Mars are planets or “worlds,” but they also stand in metonymically for a set of “nameless social attitudes” they produce (Delany, *Triton* 225) and metaphorically for our contemporary forms of subjectivity.⁴⁶ Triton’s destruction of the dystopian Inner Worlds, Earth and Mars, therefore symbolizes its rejection of Bron Helstrom’s dysphoric inner world and our own.⁴⁷

The Outer Satellite’s devaluation of our literature, psychology, and our “world” is a manifestation of a persistent fear that much of who we are will “have disappeared without a trace” in utopia (“Politics” 52). Critics worry the achievement of utopia will produce what Fredric Jameson terms “plebeianization,” the “anonymity” or “depersonalization” of utopian characters, which signifies “our desubjectification in the utopian political process, the loss of psychic privileges and spiritual private property” (“Politics” 40). Our passions fueled by addiction, our sexuality that is produced by repression, and even our sense of self-preservation may vanish in a world after capitalism (Jameson, “Politics” 51-3). While it is impossible to

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⁴⁶ Indeed, in *Triton*, it takes on yet another meaning as the “Inner Worlds” are a political bloc including the more conservative planets Earth and Mars but also Luna and excluding the more progressive Satellites, leading many Tritonian characters to utter the seemingly impossible sentence “We’re not in the world” (Delany *Triton* 30, emphasis original).

⁴⁷ Earl Jackson, Jr., notes that this conflict may represent reader resistance to Delany’s radically disorienting texts: “ruptural encounters between the reader’s world and the fictive world in the dialogic engagement are often refigured within the diegesis specific critical antagonisms” (105).
ascertain whether utopian subjectivity would look like Jameson’s predictions, our personalities are conditioned by and contingent upon this dystopian moment of history, so it is certain that utopians would be radically different from us. Herbert Marcuse, who writes extensively on utopian psychology, maintains that utopians will “face each other with truly different needs and truly different modes of satisfaction” (228). What, then, will become of us? William Morris’ literary utopia, News from Nowhere, is perhaps the most pessimistic about the fate of our dystopian subjectivity in a utopian world. Morris’ novel ends with the expulsion of the traveler from his day, William Guest, who cannot live in the utopian future because he is marred by his epoch. A utopian tells him as he slips away, “you cannot be of us; you belong so entirely to the unhappiness of the past that our happiness even would weary you” (Morris 220). This is a gloomy statement about the judgement of posterity on our own psychic lives, damaged by the present.

While literary utopias have always been critical of the author’s world, casting a baleful eye to the capitalist past or a benighted Europe, Triton is one of the few instances in which a utopia declares war on it. The novel’s move from criticism to outright hostility creates a dilemma in the text, one that has been largely ignored by critics. On one hand, Earth and Mars are, indeed, “emblematic of capitalism, fascism, oppression, and ecological destruction as well as of [imperialism]” (Moylan 174). Triton’s war on Earth and Mars can therefore be read as what Jodi Dean might call “the exclusion of exclusion” (31). Triton is certainly inclusive of all identity categories but, at the same time, it must also resist anyone who might compromise that ideal. The world of Earth and the subjective world of Bron Helstrom are both hostile to the utopian goal of universal kinship therefore they are—paradoxically—excluded from universal kinship. As Bron Helstrom puts it, “people like me should be exterminated” (Delany, Triton 106). On the other hand, as readers expelled from utopia, as Earthlings whose planet is destroyed, and as ethical subjects, we immediately recognize that Triton is wrong. A utopia for some—with “some” being the progressive minded—is patently inadequate and, while the mass destruction on Earth and Mars may sweep away the awful old order, it nevertheless constitutes

Marcuse imagines a utopian consciousness characterized “resurgence of pregenital polymorphous sexuality” in which the whole body becomes “an instrument of pleasure” (201). Marcuse compares this state of being to phantasy, art and childhood play. For a critique of Marcuse, see The Concept of Utopia by Ruth Levitas (131-55). Like Bellamy and Delany, Morris comments on art in his literary utopia. Morris’ utopians are more interested in handcrafts, decorative art, and gothic architecture than anything else. In representational art and literature, they find it difficult to treat their present utopia and instead dwell on “the dreadful times of the past” (Morris 105).
genocide. Jackson points out that Triton “complicates the margin-center antagonism, so that the marginal subject in the world of the story corresponds to the hegemonic subject of the reader” (104, emphasis original). It appears, then, that Triton has merely reversed this binary while maintaining its logic. Thus the pathetic figure of Mad Mike the fundamentalist Christian stands outside the shelter of a lesbian commune, barred from entering and begging to have his children back. What remains to be done, then, is to eliminate the binary altogether. Triton’s war with Earth reveals the need for a method of coping with the enemy of utopia that does not marginalize or exterminate him.

Triton’s shortcomings should not lead to an outright rejection of Triton, as in a dystopian novel, but instead to a dialectic movement beyond it. Triton is what Bülent Somay calls an “open-ended” utopia, one that “portrays a utopian locus as a mere phase in the infinite unfolding of the utopian horizon” (26). Even characters within the novel recognize that Triton is “nowhere near the best [of all possible worlds]” (Delany Triton 99) and most of its citizens condemn the atrocities committed by Triton and the other Outer Satellites. Yet, at the same time, despite its foreign and immigration policies, Triton’s civil society, economic structure, and political system are clearly improvements on our own. Rather than take the novel as a dystopian warning or fault it as yet another utopia that fails to keep its promises, I would argue that we are encouraged to extract elements from Triton that presage an even more inclusive utopian vision while negating more problematic aspects of this world. As Adorno might put it, Triton is a “determined negation…. of that which merely is, and by concretizing itself as something false, it always points at the same time to what should be” (“Something’s Missing” 12). As Earthlings excluded from or negated by Triton, we must construct the utopian negation of the negation.

The Spike provides one example of a precursor to an even better utopia, a figure that must be preserved in the sublation of Triton. The character of Bron Helstrom bears out the fact that utopia is not reducible to a series of institutions or practices; utopia also requires utopian

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50 Somay’s reading of Triton, however, is curious and atypical. Somay argues that the “[utopian] horizon and urge are altogether absent and that leaves his characters purposeless and confused” (33). Somay fails to notice the purposeful fulfillment of Sam and Lawrence and the utopian commitment to change through art represented by the Spike, as well as the flurry of political activity and protest that occurs in the background of the text. Somay has taken Bron Helstrom’s fecklessness and anomie as indicative of Tritonian character despite the fact that it is always described as his “Martian confusion” (Delany, Triton 106, emphasis added).

51 Similarly, Tom Moylan writes that utopia “cannot be left in its traditional form, for then it will either be coopted or ignored. It must be negated to insure the future-bearing impulse,” a “dialectic” which is “present in the heterotopian form which activates utopia and breaks it open, which writes and deconstructs utopia on every page” (194).
forms of consciousness. Just as contemporary art functions as a symptom of our dystopian subjectivity, the Spike’s utopian state of mind can be accessed through her micro-theater. As one fictional critic puts it, the Spike’s art “pushes familiar objects, emotions, and actions, for often as little as a minute or less, into dazzling, surreal luminescence” (Delany, Triton 42). Like Ernst Bloch, the Spike locates the utopian within the present through her work. Not only does the Spike create something like the utopian structure of feeling, she also does this in the context of engagement with random bystanders. The Spike is a mastermind of Guerilla Theater, drawing in unknowing outsiders in a practice similar to Delany’s notion of contact. By incorporating these people into her work, the Spike performs a utopian solidarity with strangers. She gives them an unasked for gift, one that leads Bron Helstrom to cry and breathlessly thank the Spike when he receives it (Delany, Triton 16). Even the aesthetics of her work is informed by desire for a better way of being; her performances are designed to produce “verbal and spatial disorientation” that is “freeing” to the audience, allowing them to “break out” and experience “a greater order than the quotidian can provide” (Delany, Triton 75). The Spike’s works are machines for inciting utopian consciousness.

The Spike’s inclusive utopianism carries over into her private life. The Spike demonstrates that she is open to the marginalized hegemonic subject when she tries to become friends with Bron Helstorm as well as people from Earth and Mars. She fails—noting that they “recognize and respond to different emblems of friendship”—but her attempt represents a valiant effort to correct the mistakes of the Outer Satellites (Delany, Triton 155). The Spike is more successful at finding kinship with the alien in her other relationships. By the end of the novel, the Spike has rebuffed Bron Helstrom’s advances and started a romance (or, as a Tritonian would put it, a sexualizationship) with Fred. Fred is a member of a “really strict, self-mortification and mutilation sect,” the Rampant Order of the Dumb Beasts, whose mission is to “put an end to meaningless communication” or perhaps “meaningful communication”—no one is ever quite sure which (Delany, Triton 12). Another stricture held by the Beasts involves taking on the appearance, hygiene, and manners of their namesake. To complete the look, Fred and his fellow sectarians are surgically altered to resemble something like a scarified, prodigiously endowed ape. Fred’s calling leads him to attack the Spike and Bron Helstrom when they first meet as a last ditch effort to prevent their communication. Despite the fact that Fred strikes her in the jaw, the Spike later tries to befriend him—much to Bron Helstrom’s consternation and disapproval.
Eventually the Spike becomes romantically involved with him, keeping him on a chain and feeding him raw meat, just the way he likes it. While this relationship is “not exactly her concept of the ideal,” the Spike genuinely cares about Fred and seems close to him, surmounting the enormous social, emotional, and even intellectual barriers between them (Delany, Triton 246). Despite Fred’s fanaticism and animalistic state, the Spike achieves a rapprochement with him through mutual desire. By taking part in his fantasies she has made contact with Fred and begun to construct a voluntary kinship with him.

The Spike’s relationship to Fred demonstrates that it is not enough to maintain a laissez-faire attitude towards difference. The stated political ideal of Triton is to

make the subjective reality of each of its citizens as politically inviolable as possible, to the point of destructive distress—and the destruction must be complained about by another citizen; and you must complain about the distress. (Delany, Triton 225-6).

While this allows the citizens of Triton to enjoy an unprecedented number of freedoms, it also allows them to “to remain oblivious to other peoples’ pain” (Delany, Triton 303). It becomes clear that, for Delany, a better way of being requires liberty and equality but also fraternity. Before Fred encountered the Spike, he was free from domination and want but he was also—like Bron Helstrom—a social pariah. While Triton presents kinship based on choice or desire as a viable model for utopian forms of solidarity, it also shows us the failure of that desire in order to exhort us to follow the example of the Spike; we are asked to expand our notion of who or what is desirable to include figures such as pigheaded Bron Helstrom and bestial Fred. As a literary utopia, Triton represents an “education of desire,” with the aim to “teach desire to desire, to desire better, to desire more, and above all to desire in a different way” (Miguel Abensour qtd in Levitas Concept 122). Triton instructs us to desire the other, even the abhorrent other. By giving the readers an estranged view of themselves through the rhetorical stances of “future-views-the-present” and “alien-views-the-familiar” (Delany, Triton 286), Triton forces us to realize that, like the political and social conservatives of our time, we, too, shall some day seem backwards and retrograde and this new perspective builds empathy in the reader. Rather than casting out those who are hostile to difference, the novel seems to suggest that we might make contact with them, not for some mediocre bipartisanship or a condescending project of uplift but in an attempt at mutual understanding through desire and voluntary kinship. As Bloch and others
have noted, even the most vile and regressive ideologies, like Bron Helstrom’s, are born out of bad utopianism, from the frustrated desire for collectivity without alienation. The solution, then, is not to eradicate conservative or fascist utopias but to obviate and supplant them by fulfilling that desire.  

The Utopian Process of Desire

While there is little evidence that Delany is constructing a coherent universe, as Ursula K. Le Guin does in her various Hainish tales, one can still find coincidences in Delany’s works. For example, the Sygn appears as a cult in Triton and then again as an apparently unrelated interstellar bloc in Delany’s later novel, Stars in My Pockets Like Grains of Sand (Fox 104-5). This lends to the feeling that Delany’s œuvre is less a series of complete and self-contained works and more an unending work in progress. Delany frequently returns to and reworks the same ideas, tropes, characters and obsessions, throwing them into radically different contexts and often coming to very different conclusions. Stars in My Pockets Like Grains of Sand can therefore be read as a continuation of the meditation on utopia begun in Triton. Drawing on Spaces of Hope by David Harvey, I will show how Delany introduces even more indeterminacy into his utopian vision, constructing an agile and open-ended utopianism of process in the form of the Sygn.

Stars is a love story set in a distant future following the brief and interrupted romance of Rat Korga and Marq Dyeth. Rat Korga begins the novel as a slave on the backwater planet of Rhyonon. He is named “Rat” because he has undergone the futuristic equivalent of a lobotomy, Radical Anxiety Termination. Radical Anxiety Termination, or RAT, not only terminates anxiety and aggression; it excises all independent thought, will, and interest in the world from the patient, rendering her or him docile, pliable, and zombie-like. In this condition, Rat Korga is able to endure abject slavery without any psychic response, carelessly sleeping in filth or going in rags. While we experience very little of the world through Rat Korga, it becomes clear that it is a dystopia. Poverty is common, women are oppressed, access to information about the other worlds is forbidden, and sex is repressed by strange taboos concerning relative height and face masks. While it is never completely clear how or why, Rat Korga’s planet becomes embroiled in the galaxy spanning conflict between two competing ideologies, the Family and the Sygn.

52 Similarly, Jameson writes, “a Left which cannot grasp the immense Utopian appeal of nationalism (any more than it can grasp that of religion or of fascism) can scarcely hope to ‘reappropriate’ such collective energies and must effectively doom itself to political impotence” (Political Unconscious 298).
Perhaps because of this turmoil, Rhyonon undergoes “Cultural Fugue,” a state in which the “socioeconomic pressures… reach a point of technological recomplication and perturbation where the population completely destroys all life across the planetary surface” (Delany, *Stars* 70). By sheer luck, Rat Korga, the only known survivor, is rescued by a recovery team from the Web, an interstellar information network and intelligence agency. Web agents—called Spiders—regenerate Rat Korga’s body and provide him with an ancient set of cybernetic rings that, when worn, reverse the Radical Anxiety Treatment. Unfortunately, one lasting side effect of the Treatment remains: Rat Korga remains unable to mentally jack in to General Information or GI, a sort of cyberpunk Encyclopedia Galactica that includes instant knowledge of the languages, customs, facts and skills needed to navigate the busy universe of *Stars*. Rat Korga’s inability to access GI and his information-impoverished past leave him helpless in an infinitely complex and “overdetermined” galaxy (Delany, *Stars* 164).

Rat Korga’s condition leads the Web to search out a caretaker for him. They find one in Marq Dyeth, a male human from planet Velm who has been statistically determined to be Rat Korga’s “perfect erotic object,” and vice versa (Delany, *Stars* 179). If Rat Korga’s world is poor and provincial, Marq Dyeth’s world is abundant and cosmopolitan. Marq Dyeth is an Industrial Diplomat (ID) who travels from planet to planet negotiating the manifold cultures of the galaxy in the interest of trade. When his job is done, Marq Dyeth goes home to the city Morgre, where he and his kin live in an ancestral manor called Dyethsome. The Dyeth clan consists of humans and evelmi, multi-mouthed, six-legged reptilian aliens native to Velm. The two species live together as one family, accommodating one another’s profound cultural, psychological and even physiological differences. They are the ultimate family of choice; as Dyeth explains, “there is no egg-and-sperm relation between any of our parents and any of this generation of children, nor between any of my sisters—human or evelmi—and each other” (Delany, *Stars* 220). If Rhyonon is dystopian, Morgre is utopian. Class differences, hierarchy and sexual repression are completely unknown in Morgre in part because Velm is a “bureaucratic anarchy,” which means “a socialist world government in which small sections are always reverting to some form of feudal capitalism” for short periods of time (Delany, *Stars* 184-5). But Delany continuously reminds us that “a world is a big place”—while humans and evelmi are at peace in the Sygn-53

The presence of yet another party, an unknown or unknowable space faring alien species known as the Xlv, may have been a factor in the planet’s destruction. These and other mysteries are still unresolved because the second half of the diptych, *The Splendor and Misery of Bodies, of Cities*, remains unfinished after several decades.
influenced geosector of Morgre, humans are committing genocide against the evelmi in other parts of the world (Delany, Stars 91). The Web delivers Rat Korga to Marq Dyeth and, for a single night, they know a complete and utopian satisfaction of desire. Despite being from different worlds with vastly different social arrangements, subjectivities, and desires, the two find pleasure in one another. But Rat Korga’s presence on Velm proves disruptive; gigantic crowds amass to see the last survivor of a dead planet and Xlv space ships appear overhead. The Web decides, for reasons unknown, to take Rat Korga from Marq Dyeth, leaving him in anguish.

The Dyeth family, along with the entire region of Morgre, are members of the Sygn faction. The Sygn, clearly influenced by poststructuralist thought, are “committed to the living interaction and difference between each woman and each world from which the right stability and play may flower” (Delany, Stars 86). The Sygn is what David Harvey would call a “utopianism of process” rather than a “utopianism of spatial form” (173). In Spaces of Hope, Harvey explains that a utopia of process is not so much a fully imagined good place but, rather, a series of temporal choices or strategies that are intended to produce a better way of being (174). Harvey cites Hegel, Marx, and Adam Smith as classic utopians of process (Harvey 175). One example of a utopianism of process is free market capitalism which maintains the ideology that the process of unfettered economic competition—in whatever space it occurs—can produce wealth, progress, and happiness for all (Harvey 175-6). This open-ended process can be imported into a variety of contexts: the market functions whether the society is libertarian or authoritarian, socially progressive or staunchly conservative, etc. In Stars, the utopian process of the Sygn works not by specifying what a good society should look like but by recommending certain relationships, values and ways of doing things. Thus, the Sygn’s “most widely spread tenet” is that

history is what is outside, in both time and space, the current moment of home. And without history, there is no home. A second tenet that usually (though, like all else, not always) goes along with the first: when you go to a new world, all you can take of your home is its history. And if you are a [human], your choice is to take it knowingly and be its (and your new home’s) silent friend, or to take it unknowingly and be its (and your new home’s) loud slave. (Delany, Stars 104)

Whereas the Family believes every world should be refashioned in the eternal image of a man’s long lost homeworld, the Sygn teaches that its adherents should be open to change. The Sygn
recommends a reflective awareness of history, one that acknowledges the past in the present but refuses to be shackled to it: “Live life moment by moment, as intensely as possible, even to the moment of one’s dying” (Delany, Stars 139). Members of the Sygn adapt to the worlds they live on rather than force those worlds to adapt to them. Thus, the Sygn cannot give a predetermined image of what a Sygn utopia would look like because doing so would violate its tenets of pluralism, local accommodation and change. The Sygn is therefore an even more open poly-utopia than Triton, including an even greater multiplicity of possible utopian worlds.

Of course, utopianism of process never remains simply a movement in time. Utopias of process are always “materialized” in particular places; utopias of process inevitably become utopias of spatial form (Harvey 177). Thus, for example, the utopian process of market competition in reality requires a strong state to provide infrastructure, vouchsafe private property, protect business interests, eradicate alternatives to capitalism, etc. (Harvey 177-9). Just as the free market cannot exist in anarchy, there are certain states that the Sygn could not thrive in. The novel makes this clear by providing the negative example of Rhyonon. Rhyonon is not only a dystopia but a polemic against certain kinds of utopias.\footnote{Ruth Levitas remarks that most utopias function by eliminating what she calls the “scarcity gap,” the “gap between needs and wants,” either by reducing needs or increasing satisfactions, or both (Concept 181-2). This could mean a utopia such as Triton, where desires and satisfactions are virtually limitless, or it could just as easily mean a world in which desires are constrained to meet meager or nonexistent satisfactions—what Levitas calls “the happiness of the cheerful robot” (Concept 185). While, by Levitas’ description, both of these scenarios can be considered utopian, it remains for utopian authors to propose an ethics of utopianism that enables us to choose between possible utopias. When Rat Korga undergoes Radical Anxiety Termination, he enters a state of being not unlike that of the happy robot. This is part of the appeal of the RAT procedure. RAT was initially invented as “a medical method for dealing with certain social intractables,” but it eventually became an “art form” or a form of “mental suicide” which earned the suicide prestige, and finally, after dying out and reappearing in Rat Korga’s era, it became a “gesture of public philanthropy” extended to the desperate lower classes of Rhyonon (Delany, Stars 162-3). As its genealogy indicates, for most of its history RAT has been sought after rather than imposed. Even some of the RAT technicians imagine or at least pretend that it is a desirable state; in the

\footnote{Unfortunately, there is no word for a limited or targeted anti-utopia.}
first lines of the novel, one informs Rat Korga that, “Of course… you will be a slave….but you will be happy” (Delany, Stars 3). It is not so much that Rat Korga will receive more or better sources of satisfaction through RAT but, rather, that he will “be happy with who [he is] and with the tasks that the world sets [him]” (Delany, Stars 5). RAT forecloses upon all possibility for desire and therefore upon all possibility of desire’s frustration. Rat Korga is thus at least formally happy, accepting everything that happens to him and desiring nothing more, but his satisfaction is obtained at the expense of almost everything that made up his personality. Rat Korga is repeatedly assured that who he is will not change and he himself seems to believe this but, when his desire returns, he comes to that he has become a different person (Delany, Stars 48). 55 SomethingsignificantissacrificedinthetransfertoRATconsciousness. Even before Cultural Fugue destroyed his planet, Rat Korga states that he lost his “world” to RAT (Delany, Stars 57, 176). Certain utopian states of consciousness, like RAT, are revealed to be diminishing and degrading. Rat Korga, and all others who undergo the treatment, do not suffer but they are clearly harmed by it. 56

It would be a mistake, then, to confuse Delany’s cultural relativism with moral relativism. Delany is rarely outright moralizing but here he presents a choice between the literally and figuratively atomized world of Rhyonon and the nurturing, desirous world of Dyethshome. While Delany has no teleological utopia, these examples seem to suggest normative criteria for a positive utopia. Contrary to Rhyonon’s formulation of happiness, Delany shares with Fourier the notion that “happiness… consists in having many passions and many means of satisfying them” (Movements 95). Delany’s dream of a better world therefore includes not only the open-ended utopianism of process represented by the Sygn but also a utopianism of spatial form: Delany favors worlds structured so that desire is educated and allowed to flourish and multiply. This implies diversity, information richness, an end to scarcity and, above all, the freedom to desire. 55, 56

55 When Rat Korga returns to his zombie-like ataraxia again, one slave master remarks, “he’s just not the same rat anymore” (Delany, Stars 60). Here is another cliché made literal: it is not simply that Rat Korga has experienced an uncharacteristic change of mood or a personality shift but that his entire psychic identity is lost and any personal continuity between the Korga of the past and the Rat Korga of the present is in doubt. 56 Ethicist and animal rights activist Tom Regan points out that harm is not limited to the infliction of pain or suffering. Harm can also be “deprivation,” or the “loss of those benefits that make possible or enlarge the sources of satisfaction in life” (Regan 97). Thus, for example, if Tom Regan were to keep his son in isolation in a “comfortable cage,” feeding and caring for him and causing him “no unnecessary pain,” he would not actually “hurt” him but would cause him “harm,” that is, “the loss of opportunities for satisfaction” (Regan 97-8). Similarly, while Rat Korga under RAT does not long for something else, and does not even react to pain or injury, he is harmed by the RAT’s damage to his ability to produce and satisfy desires.
Thus, in an almost Fourierist move, Delany argues that all persons “have the right to erotic gratification and jouissance” (Byrne 171, emphasis original). Only within spaces covered by the guarantee of desire can the utopianism of process that is the Sygn flower.57

In Critical Theory and Science Fiction, Carl Freedman argues that the concept of desire is central to Stars. Freedman suggests that the project of Stars is to show “how desire functions as cognition in the comprehension of difference” (161). In the world of Stars, it is desire that allows the unimaginably alien beings to coexist in peace together. When Marq Dyeth and Rat Korga come together as men from two different worlds, their relationship to one another is not that of “liberal toleration” but, rather, “an active embracing of difference with unimaginably keen enthusiasm” (Freedman 162).58 Here, it is useful to make a comparison to Triton. Rat Korga, like Bron Helstrom, comes from a socially and politically regressive world, yet his fate is fundamentally different. This is because, in extremis, most citizens of Triton merely tolerate undesirables such as Bron Helstrom or Fred. Slavoj Zizek comments that liberal multiculturalist tolerance is, in fact, the “violent ‘intolerance’ [of] every proximity of the Other’s enjoyment [so that] tolerance means: leave me alone, I don’t want to be disturbed too much by you” (117). It is no surprise, then, that Bron Helstorm is allowed and encouraged to suffer alone. In stark contrast, Rat Korga is not only accepted into Marq Dyeth’s world but, after less than a day, he is declared a member of Marq Dyeth’s family of choice (Delany, Stars 222). This is in part because the city of Morgre represents a “utopic space” where “difference” is not kept at a respectful difference but, rather, “managed and regarded… in terms of sexual and familial desire” (Freedman 157). Freedman ventures that it is desire that spares the city of Morgre from the genocide of Velm’s northern geosector and desire “may, in fact, ultimately be all that stands between survival and Cultural Fugue” (163).

Delany does not conceive of desire as selfish pleasure. Delany’s notion of desire is fundamentally different from the process utopianism of capitalism in which “individual desire” is “mobilized through the hidden hand of the perfected market to the social benefit of all” (Harvey 175). On the contrary, Delany’s figuration of desire is always already social. Desire facilitates contact. Contact is communication, like the first contact with an alien species, but it may also

57 Indeed, the negative utopia of Rhyonon closes down any possibility of utopianism. If utopianism is, as Levitas suggests, produced by “desire for a better way of being,” then any projected utopia that forecloses upon desire contradicts itself, sawing off the very branch it rests upon (Concept 191).
58 Freedman also notes that “mixed marriage is, perhaps, the only fully satisfactory (that is, the most radically nonidentitarian) way to deal with ethnic and national otherness” (157).
entail sexual contact, as in the case of Rat Korga and Marq Dyeth. Moreover, Delany’s contact is the antithesis of Zizek’s characterization of liberal tolerance: it implies closeness or association and therefore contagion, the unavoidable seepage and entanglement between two proximate persons. At the same time, contact is not unification—there must be at least two different beings to make contact. As Rogan points out, the human-evelmi desire is not homogenizing but, rather, “allows for the dialectical interplay of difference” (450). This figuration of desire is expansive, including even subjects from different species, and when desiring subjects are joined together they are changed.

But, while the desire of Rat Korga and Marq Dyeth is utopian, it is also tragic: Web agents steal Rat Korga away from Marq Dyeth after a single night. As Bloch observed, the utopian impulse includes the “unrealized potentialities” in the present, frustrated possibilities that are never made manifest (Kellner 81). In addition to the utopianism of wishes granted, there is a negative utopianism, one that traces out what might have been. It is the utopianism of the young artist cut short in the prime of her life, the politician assassinated, the uprising put down, the child slain, the manuscript lost, or the genius squandered in penury. In some ways the alternative histories these events produce are more powerful and evocative than any realized achievement. Compared to the promise of these dashed hopes, our successes are often, to adapt Bloch’s phrase, “wish dreams… made banal through fulfillment” (“Something’s Missing” 2). Thus, while we catch a glimpse of two men finding their perfect erotic object, it is just as quickly snatched away before the relationship devolves into the everyday work of love. Rather than its fulfillment, we are only given desire’s undescribed trajectory.

Yet, in a way, this is the condition of all erotic desire. In his plea to Web agent Japril, Marq Dyeth argues that “desire isn’t appeased by its object…only irritated into something more than desire that can join with the stars to inform the chaotic heavens with sense” (Delany, Stars 370). Marq Dyeth’s statement seems to suggest that, while desire can be frustrated, die out, or turn into something else, it can never be fully satiated or exhausted (c.f., Simmel 133). This is in part because of the nature of desiring cognition. While it is true that, as Freedman suggests, Marq Dyeth uses desire to “comprehend [the universe], to keep stars in his pockets like grains of sand” (163), the object of desire is never fully apprehended in its totality. For Marq Dyeth, his perfect erotic object exists in “recognition memory” but not in “reconstruction memory” so that he can remember scattered details about Rat Korga (e.g., “a backlit ear clawed by rough hair,
casting shadow on a pitted jaw”) but he can never imagine Rat Korga as a “as a self” (Delany, Stars 197). It is this “absolute absence from reconstruction memory” that “becomes the yearning that is, finally, desire” (Delany, Stars 198). What this means is that desire provides a form of cognitive estrangement (an “illuminating” but “distorting lens”) that allows the desiring subject access to the object of desire only in its particularity, revealing the object’s idiosyncrasies while never allowing the observer to abstract from them a whole and coherent identity (Delany, Stars 198).⁵⁹ In Delany’s formulation, the object of desire never becomes stereotyped but, at the same time, the object of desire is never completely understood, either. The object of desire is always an anomaly or exception. Desire remains, therefore, in process. It is not a knowledge that is ever fully reached, nor does it approach its object asymptotically. Instead, desire has no end state, no goal to be achieved, just the quixotic striving to understand the unimaginable other. Desiring cognition, bearing an unspent potential that is wished for but never obtained, hovers in the utopian Not Yet.

The perfect erotic object does not deny the subject pleasure or some level of understanding but, at the same time, the desiring subject never fully comprehends or possesses the perfect erotic object, either. Instead, they remain together in what could be called a perpetual state of flirtation. Georg Simmel describes flirtation as “an intermediate state between having and not having,” one that is not simply a linear journey from not-having to having but, rather, a carefully maintained suspension between the two (149). What does this figuration of desire suggest about utopianism, a desire for a better way of being? There are important differences between erotic desire and utopian desire. Erotic desire is, at least in the case of Rat Korga and Marq Dyeth, desire for a living, breathing person.⁶⁰ Desire for a better way of being, however, is directed at a state or condition. Utopia is not an other that can respond in kind or be hurt or have an opinion about something so the notion of an erotic or otherwise personal relationship to utopia itself is meaningless. Nevertheless, we might still read the desiring subject’s relationship to the perfect erotic object as a metaphor for the text’s relationship to utopia: Delany’s relationship to utopia is flirtation. Whereas Bloch and many other utopians imagine that the process leading to utopia will some day reach its hoped for conclusion (Hudson 112-113), Delany’s utopian texts

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⁵⁹ Here I am using “estrangement” not in the sense of economic or social alienation but the way in which Darko Suvin uses it to describe science fiction. Quoting Bertolt Brecht, Suvin describes estrangement as a “representation” that “allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar” (6).

⁶⁰ It is a testament to the strangeness of Delany’s novel that we cannot be for certain that this cliché literally holds true: do the amorphous Nepiyans breathe? Are evelmi mouths used for respiration?
are committed to a never-ending process of flirtation with utopia. Thus, Delany does not commit the sin of the last, correct utopia, the totalitarian “possession” of the truth represented by the doctrinaire utopianism of the Family, nor does he embrace the anti-utopianism of Rhyonon and the Radical Anxiety Termination, that sad resignation to “not-having” utopian desire. Delany’s works intentionally remain in vibration and tension between these poles, recognizing that, while neither utopia nor the perfect erotic object can be fully grasped, to relinquish or cease the utopian process of desire is to give in to despair and give up one’s world. The worlds described in Triton and Stars are, relative to the reader, better ways of being and yet the inhabitants of these worlds still look to an even farther utopian horizon.

The Politics of Bestiality

What sort of desire passes between the humans and the evelmi? Marq Dyeth recalls an evelmi professor quoting a philosopher at length to answer this question:

The real affinity between us is that all our myriad cultures, and all yours, are founded on love of illusion. It is not that we both talk, but that we both talk endlessly of persons, places, things, and ideas that are not currently before us to taste. It is not that we both build home-caves [and so on]… but that we both build, construct, lay out, and put together imaginative schemes that, until we have realized them, have no real existence. (Delany Stars 231-2)

The professor impresses upon Marq Dyeth the precariousness of this affinity, noting that, in the north, she participated in murderous raids against the humans and that her kin were slaughtered in kind. What stands between the evelmi and human genocide is desire for the absent and a peculiar sort of desire—utopian dreaming. Yet embedded within the evelmi’s statement is an allusion that belies its meaning. Delany is clearly borrowing from Marx, who wrote that

A spider conducts operations which resemble those of the weaver, and a bee would put many a human architect to shame by the construction of its honeycomb cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is that the architect builds the cell in his mind before he constructs it in wax. (Capital 284)

Whereas the evelmi thinker uses imagination as a means of joining species together in affinity, Marx deploys imagination to sunder man from animal. This parallel reveals a subtle but no less persistent discourse on bestiality and the animal that runs through the text.

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61 The two states are almost the same. Yevgeny Zamyatin explores this paradox in the dystopian novel We.
This discourse erupts in full force in the encounter between the Dyeth clan and the Thants, a family of humans. The Thants are new members of the Family, an ideological bloc in opposition to the Sygn that proclaims “eternal,” unchanging, and supposedly traditional values (Delany, *Stars* 139). The Family’s sacred relics are measuring devices, emblems of an absolute standard that treats all objects as undifferentiated and interchangeable (Delany, *Stars* 103). The most central of the Family’s absolutist beliefs is a commitment to the Oedipal family organized around a father figure, mother figure, and son figures (Delany, *Stars* 129). The Thants are old friends of the Dyeths but, after a series of misunderstandings and the Thants’ conversion to Family doctrine, they have a falling out. At an elaborate dinner, the Thants snub the Dyeths by hiding in privacy clouds and refusing to accept proffered morsels of food. The Thants’ refusal to participate in dinner short circuits evelmi custom, which dictates that diners must offer food to ones who have not fed them (Delany, *Stars* 324). Dinner ends with the Dyeths and their other guests frantically circling around the Thants carrying food on spits, waiting for them to accept or at least acknowledge and decline their gifts (Delany, *Stars* 328-9). While the Dyeths bustle around them, the Thants ignore the dinner party and talk amongst themselves. Marq Dyeth overhears the Thants discussing his family as if they were not there. From within their anonymous privacy clouds, the Thants opine that the humans of Dyethsome are “reduced to animals who copulate with animals, call animals their sisters and mothers” (Delany, *Stars* 326). One Thant compares human-evelmi relationships to bestiality, saying that they remind him or her “of the stories of our shepherds up at the equator,” who are the butt of jokes about their sexual relations with “their favorite fur-balls in the pack” (Delany, *Stars* 327). Another believes that the human members of the Dyeth family are less than animals because the word animal “suggests an innocence that, frankly, they don’t warrant” (Delany, *Stars* 328). Others agree, calling the Dyeths diseased and calling for “cure by the most primitive means: quarantine, fire, prayer” (Delany, *Stars* 328).

It is all too easy to read this scene, as Robert Eliot Fox does, as an “extrapolation” from “present day prejudice,” including racist attacks on miscegenation (120). Aliens and interspecies sexuality, from H. P. Lovecraft’s racist panic to the more progressive message of the *Star Trek* franchise, have often been deployed in science fiction to talk about race and ethnicity. But, as Freedman observes, the Dyeth family is used not only “to estrange ideologies of race, nation, and ethnicity” but also “earthly interspecies relations and animal rights” (157). While both concerns
are clearly operating in the text, beyond Freedman’s remarks there has been only scant treatment of the place of the animal in *Stars.* Thus, for example, Rogan writes that the evelmi only “look like animals,” and suggests that to consider them as such is just interstellar prejudice (450). Meanwhile, Mary Kay Bray has stated that the Thants display “dehumanizing contempt and disdain” for the humans and evelmi (23). In *The Sexual Politics of Meat,* Carol Adams contends that the metaphorization of the animal is common maneuver in discourses that describe or enact oppression. In the rhetoric of the oppressor as well as the victim, animals act as “absent referents, whose fate is transmuted into a metaphor for someone else’s existence or fate” (42). Thus the animal becomes a free-floating metaphor of objectification, designating persons who are excluded from the realm of ethical responsibility and thereby legitimizing their oppression (Adams 44). While the metaphor of meat is powerful in analyzing and fighting human domination and violence, many have failed to “simultaneously criticize both that which the metaphor points to and that from which it derives” (Adams 45). That is to say, critiques of oppression imply that it is wrong to treat a human like an animal but stop short of interrogating why *animals* are treated as subhuman things or pieces of meat. Thus, in their discussion of *Stars,* Fox, Rogan and Bray write as if the categories of the animal and the inhuman are givens and that we can take for granted the idea that anything inhabiting those categories is an object to be treated with “contempt and disdain” (Bray 23). While all critics condemn the Thants’ quasi-racial prejudice against the Dyeths, very few critics critique or even acknowledge their speciesism.

This critical oversight would be unremarkable were it not for the fact that the evelmi and other aliens in the novel are so clearly non-human. Unlike many representations of aliens, the evelmi do not approximate the bodily configuration of a human; they are not typical science fiction humanoids with rumpled features or pointed ears. The evelmi seem to resemble dragons more than anything but it is difficult to say for certain just how they appear because the narrator generally does not describe in detail anything he is familiar with (Blackford 35). So, for example, the reader has no idea just what an evelm face looks like and the task of imagining it is

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*62 Even Freedman’s remarks are only in passing. Freedman calls on in Adorno’s utopia to describe the worlds of the Sygn. Adorno’s anti-genocidal utopia is a place which “would not require the leveling of difference among its component members, and this scrupulous respect would extend not only to all men and women but to nonhuman aspects of the social totality as well,” noting that Adorno anticipated “the movements against environmental pollution and animal rights” (Freedman 155-6). Yet, like the other critics, he also takes up the language of “dehumanization” to refer to the treatment of the rats (Freedman 160).*
all the more difficult because we are told that they have an unspecified number of mouths. Where these mouths are or how they are even hinged is an unknown. Our mental image of the evelmi is left unsettled so that it can never become familiar, making the evelmi are irreducibly alien.

Even the sensory apparatus and psychological drives of the evelmi are fundamentally different from those of humans. The evelmi, like other trisaurians on Velm, encounter the world primarily through taste and are motivated by “a yearning for a variety in tastes that can, if stifled, become true pain beating through the skull,” as well as “a gentle bodily urging toward certain kinds of motion” that leads them to flit about from stimulus to stimulus (Delany, *Stars* 269). Elsewhere, Marq Dyeth meets an alien with even more radically different sense perception. The unnamed alien that states that it “has twelve different faculties you would call senses. But the ones you humans call sight, taste, and smell are not among them” (Delany, *Stars* 359). Instead, the alien perceives a nearby star as “a kind of aural rendition that requires the light to be translated into ultrasound waves,” describing it as “like one of his own home world’s dawns, only much vaster, harmonious, resonant” (Delany, *Stars* 360). Delany’s descriptions of alien perceptual worlds recall the work of zoologist Jakob von Uexküll. Uexküll maintained that animals “do not move in the same world as the one in which we observe them, nor do they share with us—or with each other—the same time and the same space” (Agamben, *Open* 40). Instead, they each live in a separate “Umwelt,” which Giorgio Agamben defines as “the environment-world that is constituted by a more or less broad series of elements that Uexküll calls ‘carriers of significance’… which are the only things that interest the animal” (Agamben, *Open* 40, emphasis original). Thus, for example, the tick does not experience sight, hearing, or taste, but does experience limited smell and touch. The tick’s perceptual world or Umwelt is therefore comprised of only three carriers of significance: the scent of the butyric acid found in mammalian sweat, the temperature of mammalian blood, and the “typology” of mammalian skin (Agamben, *Open* 46). If the tick’s carriers of significance are absent, it falls into an indefinite “state of suspension”—its world disappears (Agamben, *Open* 47). Unlike the tick, some entrée into the umwelten of the evelmi and the unnamed alien is possible through language. Marq Dyeth has been acculturated so that, like the evelmi, he frequently experiences the world in terms of flavor. He tells the unnamed alien that the star “seems at once both bitter and sweet” like “mace, vinegared lichen, and powdered alum” (Delany, *Stars* 360). Moreover, despite their
vastly different worlds, Marq Dyeth and the unnamed alien are both able to “find something matitutinal to contemplate” in the star, a fact that Marq Dyeth believes to be “the most stupendous of cosmic of accidents and… where all real wonder lay” (Delany, Stars 360). Despite the possibility of rapport, the dissimilarities between human and evelmi are not comparable to real or imagined differences between historical racial groupings or cultures. Evelmi are almost as different from humans as humans are from ticks. This suggests that the evelmi and other extraterrestrials in Stars remain completely alien to humanity in a way that only the gulf between species can account for.

Marq Dyeth’s kinship with evelmi therefore represents a very different approach to other species than that of our own. This is further evidenced by his relationships to non-human animals. Humans and evelmi in the geosector of Morgre are omnivores but they only eat meat that has been produced from non-living cloned cultures. Marq Dyeth recounts dining with an employer offworld and biting into a piece of meat only to hit bone. He is shocked to find that “this meat had once been walking around with a skeleton inside” (Delany, Stars 186). This is clearly not a private moral choice for Marq Dyeth but one that he shares with most others because he states, “Although I didn’t, many times when I’ve told the story, I’ve said I left the table” (Delany, Stars 186). More intriguingly, the population of Morge is never described as eating farm animals. Rather, in addition to non-mammalian species such as insects and lizards, they dine on “longpig”—the alleged Polynesian euphemism for human flesh—and “shortpig,” an evelmi “term for the native flesh” (Delany, Stars 185). Cannibalism is an everyday occurrence for the people of Velm; Marq Dyeth is only annoyed when a butcher rudely extracts some of Rat Korga’s genetic material for a cloning culture on the street when he could have “let Rat come back some other day” to do it (Delany, Stars 303). Yet, far from treating Rat Korga like an anonymous piece of meat, the butcher gushes what a “joy and honor” it is to have his sample for cloning (Delany, Stars 303). Meat ceases to be an object to be consumed and becomes a means of communion between species. A similar reversal takes place with hunting. Humans and evelmi hunt dragons, the ancestors of the evelmi with devices called radar bows. But, rather than hurting or killing them, radar bows allow the hunters to enter into their prey’s consciousness, allowing them to experience what it is like to be a dragon for short periods of time. Freedman calls the dragon hunt “a utopic figure of difference,” expressing the desire to “embrace” the other that is so central to Delany’s utopianism (158).
As with Delany and many of his characters, the privileged site of Marq Dyeth’s desire is the hand. The title of the novel, *Stars in My Pockets Like Grains of Sand*, immediately refers to part of an elaborate traditional ritual greeting of the Thants:

> We’re planning to pluck all the best stars out of the sky and stuff them in our pockets… so that when we meet you once again and thrust our hands deep inside to hide our embarrassment, our fingers will smart on them, as if they were desert grains… and we’ll smile at you on your way to glory that, for all our stellar thefts, we shall never be able to duplicate. (Delany, *Stars* 132)

Yet the stars hidden in pockets are also the hands that hide there. Dyeth values “bitten nails in humans and strong claws in evelmi,” but responds with “desire” or “repulsion” based on dozens of different parameters, from “thickness of cuticle” to the “width or narrowness of knuckle” (Delany, *Stars* 367-8). These claws and fingers determine how he moves through crowded space, what he knows about a person, where his attention lies, how he understands the geography of planets and, more generally, how he organizes and interprets all information (Delany, *Stars* 369).63 Marq Dyeth’s umwelt or “universe… is marked by the tips of claws and fingers at every point, touched by them everywhere, you might say” (Delany, *Stars* 369). The hands act as crucial carriers of significance for Marq Dyeth, shaping his attitude toward the world.

What does it mean, then, that Marq Dyeth fetishizes both the hands of humans *and* the claws of evelmi? In the essay, “Sloughing the Human,” Steven Baker observes that hands often stand in as a sign of the human as opposed to the animal. The essay includes photographs of uncanny artworks by Edwina Ashton, John Isaacs, and other artists who have grafted hands onto animals. These works produce an “uncomfortable erasure” of the animal-human boundary, disturbing and disrupting human identity (Baker 155). By the same token, the handedness of other primates has proved a vexed and problematic philosophical problem because to grant them hands seems make them human (Baker 166-7). Martin Heidegger went so far as to dogmatically assert that “Apes, for example, have organs that can grasp, but they have no hand” (qtd in Baker 152).64 The hand’s status as a divider between man and animal suggests that the evelmi’s claws mark them as inhuman. Therefore, by including claws in his catalogue of fetishes, Marq Dyeth reveals a deep desire for the animal qua animal. That is to say, Marq Dyeth does not desire the

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63 Freedman cites this as an example of desire as cognition (162-3).
64 Baker’s observations are also anecdotally confirmed by the fact that the hands, as well as the faces, of medical cadavers are often left wrapped until it is time for dissection so as not to disturb inexperienced students (Roach 21).
evelmi because the category of humanity can be somehow extended to them or because they resemble humans in some way. Marq Dyeth is not in love with the humanoid qualities of the evelmi but, rather, he is firmly committed to bestiality. Marq Dyeth desires the animal other. The Thants are correct in saying that the Dyeths are “animals who copulate with animals, call animals their sisters and mothers”—humans and evelmi are both animals—but they are wrong in implying that this is necessarily degrading or immoral (Delany, Stars 326). Marq Dyeth’s bestiality signifies a non-objectifying relationship to animal others. In many ways his love for the evelmi is similar to the Spike’s love for Fred, a member of the Order of the Rampant Beasts. Despite the vast differences between them, they have forged a kinship through desire.

The category of the animal has important implications for human relations. Agamben posits that “the decisive political conflict, which governs every other conflict, is that between the animality and the humanity of man” (Open 90). For Agamben, humanity is created through the “anthropological machine,” a conceptual device which “functions by excluding as not (yet) human an already human being from himself, that is, by animalizing the human, by isolating the nonhuman within the human” (Open 37). This effectively creates a “state of exception,” a space between man and animal which captures “the non-man produced within the man” including Jews and other victimized identity categories as well as “the animal separated within the human body itself,” represented by the “neomort” and the “overcomatose person” (Open 37, emphasis original). In his earlier book, Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life, Agamben defines the state of exception as “abandonment” by the law, one in which the subject can be killed without incurring the crime of homicide (28-9). As in Adams’ analysis, Agamben reveals that the function of the animal category in domination is to turn human subjects into objects outside of ethical responsibility or concern. This is borne out by historical examples. In Eternal Treblinka: Our Treatment of Animals and the Holocaust, Charles Patterson surveys the numerous instances in which the alleged state of animality has been used to incite and justify violence against oppressed persons. Patterson argues that the domination and brutalization of animals serves as both a practical and conceptual model for the treatment of human victims (27).  

A similar line of thinking led Adorno to write that that “Aushwitz begins wherever

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65 Carol Adams and others have noted this as well (44).
someone looks at a slaughterhouse and thinks: they’re only animals” (qtd in Patterson 53).

Indeed, this is exactly how the category of the animal works in Stars. In Rat Korga’s native Rhyonon, slaves are termed “rats,” while oppressed women are frequently called “bitches” and despised men are secretly referred to as “dogs” (Delany, Stars 9, 36). These animal terms are signs of objectification and disdain. In the northern geosector, humans slaughter the evelmi as animals and even the Thants quickly resort to genocidal rhetoric, declaring them uncivilized beasts, complaining of their “bad smell,” and describing them as a “disease” that must be eradicated (Delany, Stars 328). This suggests that, by breaking the anthropological machine and declaring desirous kinship with the animal, the Dyeths dismantle a powerful tool of genocide (c.f., Freedman 155-6).

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66 As Patterson notes, the techniques of industrialized slaughter as well as the ideology and practice of eugenics were used on animals before they were used on the victims of the Holocaust (109). Indeed, many first and second generation Holocaust survivors were inspired to become animal rights activists (Patterson 139). For more on Adorno and animal rights, see “The Ethics of the Animal in Adorno and Kafka” by Christina Gerhardt.
Conclusion

Kinship with the animal signals the furthest movement away from kinship of blood to kinship of choice. In Morgre, kinship is not even relegated to members of the same species. It extends to all who are desired and, in Morgre, desire is utterly unrestricted. Kinship has provided utopians a way of moving beyond alienation and imagining new bonds of solidarity. But, in previous utopian kinships, solidarity was ultimately predicated on shared identity. Delany reworks this problem in Triton, revealing that kinship is always socially constructed and imagining more flexible kinship bonds based on families of choice. Because Delany’s kinship is a function of choice, love, or desire, rather than shared blood, it can potentially be extended to any and all subjects. Yet, if kinship is established through desire, the limits of our desire mark the farther reaches of solidarity. Undesirables such as Bron Hesltrom, Mad Mike, and the Order of the Dumb Beasts are therefore passively excluded from Triton while Earth and Mars—the antitheses of the free play of desires—are annihilated. To counter this, Delany uses the literary utopia as an education of desire, enlarging the bounds of what is desirable and revealing a way of desiring that he terms contact. Through contact, the subject is implicated and involved with the other, joined together in a solidarity that is not founded on sameness or shared essence.

Yet there is no final state of affairs for Delany. His worlds do not resolve into peaceful tableaus. Instead, they continue in an ever enduring and indeterminate process of erotic and utopian desire, neither reaching a long-awaited conclusion nor ceasing to strive for a better way of being. However, this utopian desire should not be interpreted as a will to perfection. A particularly instructive example of Delany’s utopian method can be found in his early space opera, Nova:

There was a thousand-year period from about fifteen hundred to twenty-five hundred [AD], when people spent an incredible amount of time and energy keeping things clean. It ended when the last communicable disease finally became not only curable, but impossible…. I suppose back then there was some excuse for the [cleaning] fetish: there seemed to have been some correlation between dirt and disease. But after contagion became an obsolescent concern, sanitation became equally obsolescent. (123)

Delany’s medical utopia is not a clean, antiseptic world, or a world in which people are protected from contamination, but a world whose inhabitants are utterly filthy. Delany’s characters, more
often than not, eat with their bare feet, pick their noses, chew their nails down to the nub, and rarely wash or bathe—yet they are never infected. On a different register, his concept of utopian sociality works in much the same way. In Delany’s vision of utopia, Bron Helstrom remains an insensitive reactionary, Fred remains an apish zealot, the evelmi remain inhuman and strange, and those who want to remain abject and debased. Everyone is left to be themselves and yet their relationships to one another are transfigured. Delany’s utopians exist in a state of what Agamben might call “incorruptible fallenness” (Coming Community 39). They are dirty or imperfect but they are never quarantined, exterminated, or reeducated. In Delany’s utopia, the most abominable or alien of figures have somehow learned to live with one another as they are in a relationship of desiring kinship. This is Delany’s utopian method: Delany performs a transvaluation of the marginalized, the undesirable, the profane, and the unclean and constructs new worlds where they might be at home. Delany attempts to imagine a utopia for the non-alienated other.
Works Cited


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