

# Definitions and Histories of Utopia

By Ivana Milojević

**From: “FUTURES OF EDUCATION: FEMINIST AND POST-WESTERN CRITIQUES AND VISIONS”, PhD Thesis, School of Education, The University of Queensland, 2002**

## 2.2 Definitions and Histories of Utopia

While we might assume that utopias are not relevant to us, in fact, we daily live the many utopian and dystopian visions of the past. Utopian thinking, or prescriptive and improved imagined states of collective and/or individual being, has been to some extent responsible for many successful and unsuccessful social experiments. Given the extent of scholarship on the histories of utopias and utopian thinking, and the similarity of their content, it can be argued that there is a general consensus as to what constitutes utopia and what does not. As influential utopian historian Krishan Kumar (1987, p. vii) writes:

One is bounced through the ancients—the biblical prophets, Plato and the Greeks; hurried throughout the Middle Ages, with a glance at Augustine; served up More, Campanella and Bacon as a substantial dish; then finished off with the nineteenth-century socialists: often with a coda which proclaims or laments the death of utopia in our own century.

Which literary texts are included as utopia ultimately depends on how ‘utopia’ or ‘utopian’ is defined. Kumar (*ibid.*, p. 3) argues that “modern utopia—the modern western utopia invented in the Europe of the Renaissance—is the only utopia”. He rejects all claims of universalism, such as George Orwell’s assertion of the “constancy and consistency of the utopian vision” (*ibid.*, p. 2). Or, as Orwell wrote:

The dream of a just society which seems to haunt the human imagination ineradicably and in all ages, whether it is called the Kingdom of Heaven or the classless society, or whether it is thought of as a Golden Age which once

existed in the past and from which we have degenerated. (Orwell quoted in Kumar, 1987, p. 2)

Similarly, Kumar disagrees with George Kateb (quoted in Kumar, 1987), who also speaks of utopianism as the:

. . . system of values which places harmony at the center' of individual and social life, and asks: 'Is not this the vision of utopianism through time; is not this the substance of the longings of common humanity? Is not utopianism the moral prepossession of our race' (p. 425).

So, for Kumar, there is no such thing as a “classical” or a “Christian utopia”, utopia being “a distinctive literary genre carrying a distinctive social philosophy” (Kumar, 1987, p. 3). Such a definition has led Kumar to conclude:

But, firstly, utopia is *not* [italics added] universal. It appears only in societies with the classical and Christian heritage, that is, only in the West. Other societies, have in relative abundance, paradises, *primitivist* [italics added] myths of a Golden Age of justice and equality, Cokaygne– type fantasies, even messianic beliefs; they do not have utopia. (ibid., p. 19)

Kumar’s definition is problematic as it uses western categories to describe the multiplicities of the non– west. This excludes the possibility of discussion and debate incorporating any notion of non– western utopias. However, adopting a definition that would limit utopianism to “traditions of intellectual practice in Europe and America” (Collins, 1998, p. 560) is a common practice within western thought. As Collins (ibid.) points out, the argument holds in reverse—concerning South Asian categories and the European tradition—but it is rarely made in terms of: “what a shame Europe knows no *Purana-s!* But at least we can recognize texts there which have *puranic* elements” (ibid.). Kumar not only excludes the non–west, but his theory of utopias, as might be expected, excludes the long history of western feminist utopianism, with only a few feminist authors mentioned in passing.

Attempting to provide a more inclusive definition of utopia, both Ruth Levitas (1990) and John Carey (1999) speak about the necessity of “desire”. Levitas thus rejects “all restrictive definitions in terms of form, function or content of utopias”, and suggests that “the essential element (is) desire—the desire for a better way of being” (Levitas quoted in Collins, 1998, p. 556). John Carey (1999, p. xi) similarly states that “[t]o count as a utopia, an imaginary place must be an expression of desire. [And] to count as a dystopia, it must be an expression of fear”. Such a definition enables a more inclusive history of utopianism, as seen

in Carey's *Book of Utopias* in which he includes an Ancient Egyptian poem from 1940 BCE, a poem by Tao Qian dated ACE 400, as well as numerous writings by women (Carey, 1999).

However, defining utopias in terms of 'desire' is problematic. For example, from a Buddhist point of view, writes Steven Collins (1998):

If Levitas' definition is applied to nirvana, the English word "desire" immediately runs afoul of Buddhist distinctions between (i) unwholesome and de-meritorious Craving (*tanha*) or Attachment (*upadana*), (ii) forms of desire (*kama*) which can be meritorious and wholesome but which still operate with the samsaric world of Conditioning Factors, and (iii) the aspiration to nirvana, which must be or become free of Craving and the Corruptions even to discern the real nature of its object, let alone attain it. (p. 556)

So, although Levitas' definition is "usefully nonexclusive", it is also "too broad, and too imprecise when mapped onto Buddhist categories" (Collins, 1998, p. 556). Therefore, Collins argues that other definitions of utopias are more relevant for an exploration of *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities*. In his work, 'utopia' is intended in two ways. First, in a general, everyday sense, "to point in an overall manner to Buddhist versions of what the Oxford English Dictionary calls 'a place, state or condition ideally perfect in respect of politics, laws, customs and conditions'" (ibid, p. 293). Second, he attributes to it a more specific meaning, as one of five different types of ideal society: the Land of Cockayne, Arcadia, the Perfect Moral Commonwealth, the Millennium and Utopia proper. The latter classification has been developed by J.C. Davis (1981), who distinguishes utopia and four alternative types of ideal society by the way in which they deal with the "collective problem": "the reconciliation of limited satisfactions and unlimited human desires within a social context" (p. 36). The main characteristics of these five diverse categories follow.

*The land of Cockayne* tradition was strongest in late medieval Europe, but its themes have been expressed from ancient times and in many cultures (Davis, 1981, p. 20). It was basically "a dream world for the laboring classes, allowing them to conceive of a paradisaical retreat into a land of physical, as opposed to spiritual or intellectual, pleasures" (Hollis, 1998, p. 42). In this world, "the paucity of satisfaction is solved by imagining a superabundance of them" (Collins, 1998, p. 294). In sum, it is a world of "instant gratification, of wishing trees, fountains of youth, rivers of wine, self-roasting birds, sexually promiscuous and ever-available partners" (ibid.; Davis, 1981, pp. 8-9).

*Arcadia* is about "harmony between man and nature" (Davis, 1981, p. 22), and the desire for satisfaction is "tempered through moderation" (Hollis, 1998, p. 14). Originally

describing a specific place in Greece, and championed particularly by Hesiod, it was later revived by Renaissance humanists, e.g., Jean-Jacques Rousseau (ibid.).

*The Perfect Moral Commonwealth* tradition accepted the social arrangements and political institutions then existing (e.g., monarchy, Christian church) (Davis, 1981, p. 27). Society is then made harmonious by “the moral reformation of every individual in society, and hence of every class and group” (ibid.). The perfect moral commonwealth “idealises man”, but also assumes “a change in the nature of man, his regeneration, and hence in the nature of men’s wants” (ibid, pp. 38, 37).

*The Millenium* focuses on the ‘second coming’, a process rather than an outcome of achieving an ideal society. What is at issue is ‘perfect form of time . . . rather than a perfect form of society’ (Davis, 1981, p. 31). This is done, not through human effort, but by some kind of supernatural intervention, *deus ex machina*, God, messiah (Jewish), *matteyya* (Buddhist) or *avatar/bodisathwa* (Hindu). But a human’s fate is decided by his or her previous actions (e.g., during cataclysm as believed by Christians, or by their *karma*, as believed by Buddhists and Hindus). Closely related to the idea of 'The Millenium is Messianism, “a religious movement that involved an activist, usually revolutionary, agenda for change in society” (Hollis, 1998, 148). Examples of messianism can also be found in many religions around the world, such as in Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and nature religions (ibid.).

*Utopia proper* takes humans and nature “as they are, wicked and inadequate” and imposes the solution through the imposition of a particular order, or system of social organization and control (Collins, 1998, p. 295). The prime aim is “not happiness, that private mystery, but order, that social necessity” (Davis, 1981, p. 38). Utopias are sometimes, but not always, given the form of literary fiction (ibid.) Such utopias are concerned to project a total social environment and are preoccupied with detail (ibid.). The aim is not merely to improve, but to perfect. Therefore, totality, order and perfection could be considered to be cardinal characteristics of the utopian form (ibid.). The systems of social organization therefore inevitably become “bureaucratic, institutional, legal and educational, artificial and organizational” (Collins, 1998, p. 295). It is precisely these qualities that have led many, especially in 20<sup>th</sup> century, to see such a society as “exactly the opposite of ideal, as a dystopia” (ibid., p. 295).

Using the above mentioned classification, Collins explores pre-modern *Pali* (canonical Buddhist texts) and their promises of “multiple felicitates, including the ultimate kind, nirvana” (ibid, p. 39). Apart from nirvana, which offers “the most all-embracing and

secure resolution of suffering, defeating it conceptually, in the broadest, most abstract and ultimate way”, Buddhism offers numerous other felicities—heavens, earthly paradises, Metteya’s millennium, the Perfect Moral Commonwealth of a Good King, and so on (ibid., p. 110).

According to Collins, if utopia is understood in a ‘strict’ definitional sense there are no non–western equivalents to such ‘utopias’. That is, if utopias are defined as an “. . . imagined human society of the normal productive and reproductive kind where social problems are solved collectively, that is by the reorganization of society and its institutions, by education, by laws and by sanctions” (Davies quoted in Collins, 1998, p. 557).

For Collins, this represents:

. . . a sign of good sense on the part of Buddhism, and other traditional ideologies in South Asia: for this kind of ideal society all too often ends, perhaps inevitably ends—and sometimes also begins—as a dystopia of regimentation and the increasingly strict imposition of discipline. (ibid., p. 557)

This is not to say, however, that non–western traditions have not developed alternatives to the present order or imagined blueprints for the ideal individual or collective state of being. As Collins (ibid., p. 560) argues:

Philosophy or Utopianism in English very often do refer, in a genre–specific and self-conscious sense, to traditions of intellectual practice in Europe and America, for which precise counterparts outside the west scarcely ever exist . . . [but it is also] . . . true—unsurprisingly if one starts from the presumption of a shared humanity—that these styles of thought and cultural production are readily visible elsewhere.

Supporting this view, Qingyun Wu (1995, p. 10) writes on the subject of Chinese utopias and utopianism that “[s]cholars generally agree that China has three major schools of utopian thought: Daoist (Taoist) Utopianism, Confucian Datong (which has been translated into Grand Union, Great Harmony, or One World, in English), and Buddhist concepts of paradise”.

Outside (or on the margins) of the west there are also ‘hybridities’ resulting from the fusion of native culture and traditions with western utopian concepts. An example of such hybridisation is the existence of Native American Utopias where “Native Americans developed utopian ideas by blending their own traditions with the ideas of Western civilization” (Hollis, 1998, p. 169). In his *Utopian Movements*, Hollis argues that:

The most enduring Western influences among non–Western peoples have been Christianity and socialism. Thus many utopias in Africa, Asia, the Pacific and the Americas can be connected either to millennialism or messianism. Whenever socialism impinged upon non–Western societies, it was refashioned to suit the local conditions. Nonetheless, the non–Western utopias are both fascinating and instructive about the evolution of those societies, and they demonstrate that the ideal of utopia is not limited ultimately by place or peoples. (ibid., p. xiv)

To limit the utopian, as Ernst Bloch (1986, p. 15) wrote as early as 1940:

. . . to the Thomas More variety, or simply to orientate it in that direction, would be like trying to reduce electricity to the amber from which it gets its Greek name and in which it was first noticed. Indeed, the utopian coincides so little with the novel of an ideal state that the whole totality of philosophy becomes necessary . . . to do justice to the content of that designated by utopia.

For Bloch, utopia represents the expression of hope, a hope that “is not taken only as emotion, as the opposite of fear”, but more essentially as “a directing act of a cognitive kind” (ibid., p. 12). Seen in this light, as the expression of hope, rather than a particular (western) literary genre, it is impossible to limit utopia to the experiences of one civilisation. The more recent histories of utopias (e.g., Hollis, 1998; Carey, 1999) acknowledge this and are therefore more inclusive of non–western traditions. However, given the global scope of available histories, attempts for greater inclusion of non–western traditions are still embryonic.

To return now to defining terminology, ‘utopia’ is understood to mean both ‘nowhere’ or ‘no–place’, and a ‘good place’, or ‘perfect place’. Most commonly, it is understood as an idealistic but unrealistic vision of the future. ‘Dystopia’ on the other hand, means ‘bad place’, while eutopia literally translates as a ‘good place’. While John Carey (1999, p. xi) argues, “strictly speaking, imaginary good places and imaginary bad places are all utopias, or nowheres”, in this thesis I distinguish between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ places. In addition, I distinguish between utopias, seen in the positive sense as desired and presumably good or perfect places, dystopias, or bad places, and eutopias, as good but not perfect places. It is clear that any discussion of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ assumes particular ethical position. The ethical position that I assume while using these terms is explicitly stated in Chapter One. In addition, I investigate prescriptive and improved imagined states of *both* collective and/or

individual being, as the former is, in general, more prevalent in the west and the latter outside of the west. Here, I follow current implicit or explicit utopian ideas and debates about what constitute ‘good’ future societies. In addition, as education has always been the utopian measure *par excellence* (Hertzler, 1965, p. 292, see Illustration 2.5 for example), I particularly focus on debates that investigate the role of education in helping achieve such vision/s. I contrast this approach to more ‘reactive’ views on what the role of education should be. This predominantly means that the role of education is not to help create, but rather to help students adapt to particular futures. This I further discuss in the chapters that follow.

Illustration 2.5



Every community, utopian or not, needs the children to survive and continue its existence. However, the utopian ideals such as children rights, concern about futures generations that are not yet born and universal education have not been universally present throughout the history and among diverse societies and civilisations. Children’s Hour at the Oneida Community of Free Lovers (Corbis-Bettman), from Hollis, 1998, front cover.

### 2.3 From Utopia to Dystopia: Is Utopia Dead?

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century western world, historical developments in relation to utopias have been marked by the emergence of a distinctive dystopian genre, prevalence of dystopian images in the media and discussion on the “end of utopia” (Marcuse, 1970). Dystopian

visions take two basic forms: being a description of “a place or condition in which everything is as bad as possible”, or taking the form of anti-utopias (Jennings, 1996a, p. 211). In the first form, dystopias play the important role of emphasizing “the serious problems that may result from deliberate policies, indecision and indifference, or simply bad luck in humanity’s attempts to manage its affairs” (ibid.). As anti-utopias, dystopias are “satirical or prophetic warnings against the proposed ‘improvement’ of society by some political faction, class interest, technology, or other artifact” (ibid.). In this latter sense, dystopias can “poison our outlook on the present, or even prompt us to give up trying to do better” (ibid.). Or as Bloch (1986) wrote:

The future dimension contains what is feared or what is hoped for; as regards human intention, that is, when it is not thwarted, it contains only what is hoped for. Hope, superior to fear, is neither passive like the latter, nor locked into nothingness. The emotion of hope goes out of itself, makes people broad instead of confining them, cannot know nearly enough of what it is that makes them inwardly aimed, of what may be allied to them outwardly. The work of this emotion requires people who throw themselves actively into what is becoming, to which they themselves belong. (pp. 3–4)

But, as Jennings (1996a) further argues, it is important to take a critical view of both dystopian (based on fear) and utopian (based on hope) visions and balance the need to “prepare for the worst with a desire to achieve the best” (p. 212).

However, the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been marked by the prevalence of dystopianism in its anti-utopian sense. The standard critique of utopia “maintains that utopia is not only unrealistic and impractical but dangerous” (Hudson, 2000, p. 4). This is because it has the capacity to encourage human beings to “give vent to totalist adolescent psychological states” and provide “an illusory basis for human action” (ibid.):

According to this critique, utopia is a form of subjectivism which ignores the fact that we cannot reshape the world in our own image. It is irrational in its refusal to acknowledge objective reality, immature in its inability to realise the limited nature of the possible, and irresponsible in its failure to understand the role of fallibility in the realisation of the good. (ibid.)

And although this “standard critique of utopia” recognises that “there are different kinds of utopias, and that utopianism can adopt a scientific as well as Messianic guise” (ibid.), it still maintains that “[a]ll utopians err in preferring the fulfillment of ideal



representation to the mundane improvements which are possible in their time. It also faults utopians for opting for maximal value orientations” (ibid.).

Dystopian images have now become prevalent in the media, both in fiction and especially in the news, where images of “natural disasters, accidents, crime, war, disease, social injustice . . . convey a picture of a world where nothing works—in short, dystopia now” (Jennings, 1996a, p. 212). A recent article in *Time* (Hughes, 2000, pp. 84–85) is typical of negative attitudes towards utopia which have developed at this particular time in western history. The author of the article argues that utopia is necessarily about failure, because its subjects are “the fallacies and delusions of human hope” (ibid., p. 84). Hughes (p.84) also argues that “utopia means conformity, a surrender of the individual will to the collective or the divine” and, as such, Utopia is basically for “authoritarians and weaklings”. In this article, both nazism and communism are linked with 19<sup>th</sup> century utopian experiments, and while some might think “that to be deprived of a life in Utopia may be a loss, a sad failure of human potential” this can be the case only until they “consider how unspeakably awful the alternative would be” (ibid., 85). In sum, Hughes claims that utopias are social experiments and ideas which do not succeed and are, inherently, totalitarian. In regard to whether utopias succeed or do not succeed, Hertzler (1965, p. 266) offers different view to the one Hughes represents: “Not all of any of the utopias has been realized, but as much of them have been, as is the case in any improvement scheme”.

Illustration 2.6



“Declaration of the Rights of Man”, Niquet Le Jeune, Paris, *Chez l’Epire*, 1789, image at [www.nypl.org/utopia](http://www.nypl.org/utopia) Although “no places”, much of utopian elements have been realised (Hertzler, 1965) as yesterday’s utopia often becomes today’s social philosophy (Polak, 1973).

Similarly, Fred Polak (1973) has argued that yesterday’s utopia often becomes today’s social philosophy (see Illustration 2.6):

Many utopian themes, arising in fantasy, find their way to reality. Scientific management, full employment, and social security were all once figments of a utopia–writer’s imagination. So were parliamentary democracy, universal suffrage, planning, and the trade union movement. The tremendous concern for child-rearing and universal education, for eugenics, and for garden cities all emanated from the utopia. The utopia stood for the emancipation of women long before the existence of the feminist movement. All the current concepts concerning labor, from the length of the work week to profit–sharing, are found in the utopia. Thanks to the utopists, the twentieth century did not catch man totally unprepared. (pp. 137–138)

Hughes’s second argument, that utopias eliminate individualism and are inherently totalitarian, has often proved to be accurate. But this argument, however, takes the value of individualism as an unchallenged category and assumes its unquestioned superiority over collectivism. Such a ‘common sense’ universalistic approach to individualism has been challenged (e.g., by both postcolonial theorists and feminists). In addition, the argument that utopias eliminate individualism also discounts the fact that the very idea of ‘individual freedom’ is in itself a utopian concept.

While most arguments that explain the emergence of anti–utopian dystopia in the 20<sup>th</sup> century concentrate on failed utopian social experiments, the emergence of totalitarian societies and two world wars in Europe, it could also be argued that the current dystopianism represents reflective realism. Darko Suvin argues that for most of the planet, dystopia is a reality (Suvin, 2000). For Suvin (2000), the most appealing utopia is:

Diametrically opposite to present–day capitalism without a human face (or is it showing its real face now that it fears communism no longer?), that is, a type of relationships between people using the stupendous productivity developed by capitalism to ensure a by now quite possible life of dignity for each human being. Dignity means first & foremost getting rid of the totally unnecessary starvation, epidemics, druggings, and other brainwashings enforced by the war of each against each, breaking out into innumerable small

wars (such as in the streets of many U.S. cities) and medium wars between states.

Whatever the reason for the increase in anti-utopian sentiment, it is interesting that it appeared at the time when, due to capitalism and technological advances, almost “any form of the concrete world, of human life, any transformation of the technical and natural environment is a possibility” (Marcuse, 1970, p. 62). What numerous utopians dreamed in the past—for example, societies where abundance is the norm—has materialised in so-called ‘post-scarcity society’ in the west. It could then be argued that some societies finally live in the “utopia now”:

The greatest irony of the concept of Utopia is that people are still searching for it when, at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, most citizens of the world’s industrial democracies are already living in one. If we could communicate with even the wealthiest people who lived much before 1900, and told them we live in a time when even ordinary people have clean clothes and houses, nutritious food and potable water, the freedom to quit any job we dislike, the ability to hear symphonic music and watch dramas without leaving home, and vehicles to transport us anywhere in the world in a matter of hours, who can doubt that they would cry out, ‘you live in paradise!’? (Anonymous, 2000, p. 12)

A similar argument was offered by Marcuse (1970) some thirty years ago. He believed that we (western societies) have reached “the end of utopia” as a revolutionary goal:

Today, we have the capacity to turn the world into hell, and we are well on the way to doing so. We also have the capacity to turn it into the opposite of hell. This would mean the end of utopia, that is the refutation of those ideas and theories that use the concept of utopia to denounce certain socio-historical possibilities. (p. 62)

However, that we can have ‘utopia now’ through technological innovation does not solve the problem of the impossibility of realising many simultaneously diverse and competing utopias. While the ideal of utopia is universal, particular utopias, utopian images and movements are always influenced by the particular cultural and civilizational traditions within which they are developed. What is seen as ‘utopia’ by one social/cultural group can be considered as ‘dystopia’ within different social and historical contexts, and/or by different social and cultural groups. At any given time there are competing utopian and dystopian visions that are constantly being negotiated, locally and globally. In that process, not every

social group has the opportunity to exercise equal power within local and global societies and contribute towards the ‘universalisation’ of utopian ideals. Thus, certain utopian visions are always privileged, and privileged social groups get the opportunity to define what becomes the dominant image of the future. Fred Polak has argued that, although utopian visions are usually created by the intellectual elite, “the utopia is really on the side of Don Quixote and not Don Carlos” (Polak, 1973, p. 172) (see Illustrations 2.7 and 2.8). That is, dominant social groups have seen the realisation of their utopian vision so they can afford to abandon the utopian in favour of ‘continuation of the present’ futures.

On the other hand, disadvantaged social groups are usually interested in disturbing the status quo. They might be more interested in the creation of alternatives to the present order. In that sense, in our highly hierarchical world, there will always be a social group in need of utopia—as an expression of the hope that the future can, indeed, be different.

#### Illustration 2.7

Although partly influenced by western utopian ideals, “virtually all comparisons with Western ideas fail



to comprehend the uniqueness of the Gandhian utopia” (Hollis, 1998, p. 87). Development of non-western utopias is important in opening up the future, and part of social transformation. What we can imagine we can create—including “alternative” and “dissenting” futures (Boulding and Boulding, 1995). Image from Hollis, 1998, p.86.



## Illustration 2.8



Martin Luther King, addressing the gathering at the march on Washington for jobs and freedom where he delivered famous “I have a Dream” speech, 1963, Image retrieved from <http://www.life.com/Life/mlk/mlk06.html>

Because dominant social groups have a greater capacity/more power to control the discourse, they propagate the idea that it is their own vision for the future—as the continuation of the present—that is more realistic. Political projects in favor of disadvantaged social groups are labeled ‘utopian’, in a sense which implies their impossibility. In short, dominant social groups claim that any break from the realistic present and realistic future is utopian, and by definition, unrealistic, naïve and impossible. This is because it is in the interests of these dominant social groups to define alternative futures to be unrealistic, naïve and impossible. By labeling these visions that challenge their domination utopian view, powerful social groups express their own desires, their own desirable futures. Mannheim (1936) made this argument long ago: “The representatives of a given order will label as utopian all conceptions of existence which *from their point of view* can in principle never be realized” (Mannheim, 1936, pp. 176–177). As did Polak (1973):

In common usage, and even among the majority of the intelligentsia, the utopia is considered imaginary, dangerous, and misleading . . . Of the many aspects hidden under the one concept of a utopia, one aspect, its imaginary quality, has stamped its mark on the whole and thus distorted it. (p. 162)

While discussing mainstream/hegemonic, counter and alternative discourses it is important to first de-mask alleged ‘realistic’ futures that are championed by dominant social groups. That is, these futures should be seen as emerging from particular utopian discourses, rather than from some universal and neutral space. For example, capitalism and economic globalisation in many ways continue a particular tradition within the west. This tradition focuses on expansion, unlimited supply of material goods and successful control of natural

and biological processes. At the myth level, this is the idealised future image of The Land of Cockayne, which was particularly popular in medieval Europe (Hollis, 1998). The Land of Cockayne is the land of milk and honey, the ‘golden age’ where the nature provides abundant resources and the magic porridge bowl never empties. It is the land of unlimited consumption, limitless choice, and ever increasing growth and progress. Another dominant image of the future, that of a technologically advanced information society, is also located within a particular western tradition of “discovery, exploration, colonization and exploitation” (D. Bell, 2000, p. 697). For example, cyberspace is routinely referred to as a ‘new world’ or a ‘new frontier’, even a ‘new continent’, whose conquest and settlement is often compared to the conquest and settlement of the ‘New World’:

A typical example comes from Ivan Pope, editor of the British cyberspace magazine *3W*, who described cyberspace as “one of those mythical places, like the American West or the African Interior, that excites the passions of explorers and carpetbaggers alike”. Similarly, the headline for a cover story from the San Francisco–based cyberpunk journal *Mondo 2000* declared simply, “The rush is on! Colonizing Cyberspace” (Pope, quoted in Wertheim, 1999, p. 296).

And second, parallel to unveiling utopian elements within hegemonic futures discourses it is also important to discuss alternatives—as equal to hegemonic ones and not as inferior or naïve. That is, both should be seen as equally valid discourses about the future, as simultaneously real, imaginary, utopian, desired and feared.

However, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century hegemonic discourse labels as ‘utopian’ only images and visions that counteract the capitalist, technological, patriarchal and western civilisational project for the future. This project is perceived to be ‘realistic’ as it entails the continuum of the present realities, no matter how harmful they are to a local and global society or particular social groups. Articulation of alternative eutopian visions is therefore important in opening up the future and breaking down common assumptions of what is ‘immanently’ going to happen. Development of alternatives to the present, coming from the perspective of the disadvantaged groups, is one of the important strategies in both rethinking the present and developing informed decisions for the future.

## **2.4 From Utopia to Heterotopias and Eutopias**

Heterotopia can literally be translated as other or diverse place. It is a term used by postmodern thinkers to note imaginary ‘places of otherness’. This term was partially developed by Michel Foucault in his article “Of Other Spaces” (1986). Foucault (1986, p. 22)

argues that while the great obsession of the nineteenth century was history, “the present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space”:

We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein. (p. 22)

The space in which we live, Foucault further argues, is a heterogenous space. To depict this heterogeneity, Foucault has introduced the term heterotopia, to describe places that are “absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about”, and also as a way of contrasting them to utopias, which are “sites with no real place” (ibid., p. 22). He argues that probably in every culture and every civilization such ‘real places’ do exist and are formed in the very founding of society. They are “[s]omething like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted (p. 22).

Such a conceptualization of heterotopias is extremely important in every pluralistic society—and every society is always in essence pluralistic—as it can open up the possibility of developing alternative discourses. The term heterotopia thus focuses on both the multiplicity, as well as current ‘yes-places’ and ‘somewheres’ where otherness is enacted. But for Foucault, heterotopias are not resources that can be used to create alternative futures. This is because, for Foucault, the function of heterotopias is not in creating the future but in creating “a space of illusion that exposes every real space”—a distance from the present (ibid., p. 27). Their function is in creating “a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled” (ibid.). Such an approach to heterotopia leads Foucault to conclude that it is the ship that is “the heterotopia *par excellence*”—as the boat is a “floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself” (ibid.). Other heterotopias include brothels, colonies, festivals, museums, libraries, gardens, rest homes, psychiatric hospitals, prisons, retirement homes, boarding schools, honeymoon trips, or cemeteries. Therefore, anything that is “perfect”, “meticulous” and “well arranged” can legitimately be called heterotopia, because it is not clear in which ways cemeteries, retirement homes, prisons, and hospitals are “exposing every real space”. Are not retirement homes, prisons and hospitals *real* places for their inhabitants?

Foucault’s heterotopias and heterologies are “frustratingly incomplete, inconsistent, incoherent” argues Edward Soja (1996, p. 162). They seem “narrowly focused on peculiar

microgeographies, nearsighted and near-sited, deviant and deviously apolitical” (ibid.). In Foucault’s descriptions, Mannheim’s and Marcuse’s upward striving social groups and classes, Polak’s ‘positive’ image of the future or any notion of ‘progressive’ social projects, are conspicuously absent. At the same time, as Soja (1996, p. 162) notes, Foucault’s heterotopias are also “the marvelous incunabula of another fruitful journey into Thirdspace, into the spaces that difference makes, into the geohistories of otherness”.

The importance of Foucault’s term heterotopias lies in his insistence on the plurality of spaces of otherness. While ‘classical’ utopian thinking was preoccupied with uniformity, order and singularity of truth, postmodernism, as developed in the previous chapter, is characterised by attempts to include diversity and chaos, defining reality as the sum of everything that exists (Siebers, 1994). Heterotopias could then be seen as the sum of numerous utopias which negotiate their own futures visions within the actuality of that space. What characterises heterotopias is a vision that recognizes its own limits (Doll, 1995, p. 89). Rather than being built on certainty, as was the case with the modernist visions, utopia becomes reconceptualised to include flexibility, questioning, and the work in progress.

The ideal of the creation of ‘perfect societies’, inhabited by ‘perfect’, ‘rational’, ‘selfless’ humans, excluding ‘real people’ and including only the right, ideal, utopian types, has by now been abandoned. Among others, Robert Nozick has argued that a universally–shared utopia is not a real possibility (Nozick in Nandy, 1987). Therefore, the first task ahead, argues Ashis Nandy (1987, p. 4) is to engage in dialogue of visions: “At a time when most visions are struggling for survival, a dialogue of visions must first be a statement against uniformity”.

No dialogue is possible with a utopia that claims “a monopoly on compassion and social realism”, or presumes “to be holding the final key to social ethics and experience” (ibid, p. 11). The criteria by which a utopian vision should be judged should not be so much what is done in its name, but “its ability to sanctify accountability and self-exploration” (ibid, p. 7). Utopias therefore need to build conceptual components which sanctify self-doubts, openness and dissent.

The shift from understanding utopias as ‘perfect societies’, to utopias that are marked by self-doubt and questioning is implicit in the increased use of the term eutopia. This term implies that while it is not possible to create perfect societies, we could still hope to create better ones. Such societies may not be perfect, but could represent improvements on the past and the present. Such understanding and reconceptualisation of the term utopia is implicit in work of western feminist utopians, claim Bartkowski (1989), Sargisson (1996) and Halbert



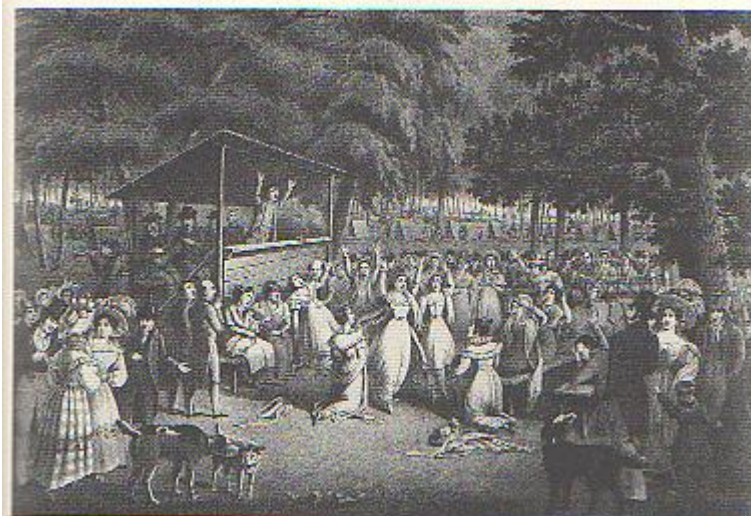
(1994). According to these authors, the main role of feminist utopias is not to provide blueprints for the perfect polity, but to describe alternatives to patriarchy. Lucy Sargisson (1996) argues that feminist utopias are critical of approaches that emphasize perfection. They are spaces for speculation, social dreaming, subversion and critique, intellectual expansion of possible futures, and expression of a desire for different (and better) ways of being. It is not uncommon within contemporary feminist utopian literature and theory, Sargisson further points out, to find descriptions of several worlds, sometimes contrasting—none perfect (Sargisson, 1996).

The reconceptualisation of utopia as pluralistic heterotopias and imperfect eutopias is important because it implies that no utopia holds ‘the final solution’. While the utopia might be dead in our present time, the need for heterotopias of diversity and eutopias of improvement is still very much alive. As Ashis Nandy (1999) argues that it is the responsibility not only of intellectuals but of all citizens to continue to incorporate futures perspective in order to:

Respond to the world around them meaningfully, not only for their own sake but also for the sake of their children and grandchildren (and to) defy and subvert the ‘inevitable’ in the future, which is only another name for a tomorrow that dare not be anything other than a linear projection of yesterday. (p. 232)

#### Illustration 2.9

“Women played a key role in the great religious revivals of the early nineteenth century, as is



suggested by this 1829 lithograph of a camp meeting” (Foster, 1991, p. 121). Hollis (1998, p. 69) argues that, “Female equality in a utopian setting appeared first among the eighteenth-century Shakers who—in addition to practicing celibacy—implemented spiritual equality, though they retained a patriarchal leadership”.

## 2.5 Colonisation of the Future and the Power to Define

Historically, non-western peoples have been excluded from the development of the western utopian project. Women were excluded as well, but to a lesser degree (see Illustration 2.9). It was assumed, and still is, that non-western societies could not develop images of advanced future societies because they themselves were 'pre-industrial' and 'pre-modern'. The colonization of knowledge by the dominant (western) perspective has thus led to a view of the future defined mostly by three pillars: (1) the capacity of technology to solve all problems; (2) linear progress as the underlying mythology; and (3) the accumulation and expansion of material goods as the main goal of civilization. This has resulted in looking at the future as "a single, dominant by myopic projection" (Sardar, 1999):

The future is little more than the transformation of society by new Western technologies. We are bombarded by this message constantly from a host of different directions. The advertisements on television and radio, in newspapers and magazines, for new models of computers, cars, mobile phones, digital and satellite consumer goods—all ask us to reflect on how new technologies will transform not just our social and cultural environments but the very idea of what it is to be human. ( p. 1)

Similarly, since women's 'place' was defined by patriarchy to be in the private sphere, women's contributions to the future were primarily limited to the personal domain. But there is a "profound ambiguity" when it comes to women and the future, argues Elise Boulding (1983, p. 9). On one hand, women's historic roles have been those of:

Stewards and conservers of resources for their families, as nurturers, fending off the effects of change as much as possible to preserve a space of tranquility for those in their care. They are therefore seen as conservative, cautious, unwilling to take risks, and as needing to be protected from the vicissitudes of larger social processes. (ibid., p. 9)

On the other hand, women are "the womb of the future in every society", continually preparing in their minds for future possibilities and anticipated needs (ibid.). Women were excluded from public sphere, but, Boulding (1976) further argues, every woman with responsibility for the household became a "practicing futurist" (p. 781). Since the advent of patriarchy, women, in general, were forced into the private spaces of society. This is one of the reasons they experience the world somewhat differently from men; they have dreamt from other places and thus dream other spaces. 'Futurism' that women developed is different

from “the manipulative futurism of planners” (ibid.). What Boulding believes sets them apart is that:

[w]omen’s futurism is the futurism of the Tao, the way, rather than the futurism of projected end states. In its idealized form it involves an attunement to cosmic processes which makes action seemingly effortless because it is based on the intersecting realities and potentials of the individual and the social order. It is not a heroic futurism, overcoming all obstacles, but a gentle, listening futurism, moving with the sun, the moon, the tides and the seasons of the human heart. (ibid, p. 9–10)

But, because since the invention of patriarchy it was predominately men who were ‘in charge’ when it came to ‘controlling the future’, they are still seen as creators and leaders of everything that is ‘new’, radically different and progressive. The belief that it is men who create the future is also cemented in widely accepted symbolic language, as can be seen in the representation of women and men (Milojević, 1998, p. 88). Looking at the male symbol, which is also the symbol of Mars, Greek god of war, we can see that its main characteristic is a pointed arrow that aims upwards. In a similar way, this is how trends and movements towards the future are represented on diagrams. The dominant metaphor of the future, illustrating the future understood as a linear progression from the past and present, is also that of an arrow. Symbolic language for women—that of Venus—is, on the other hand, represented by the circle and a cross that is firmly rooted to the ground. While the circle in each symbol is in the same position, the cross in women’s sign indicates that the essence is in the body, the arrow in men’s symbol indicates transcendence and action (ibid.).

Patriarchy is thus everywhere, as Mary Daly (1978) proclaims: “even outer space and the future have been colonized” (p. 1). One example of this is futures studies itself. To give a more concrete example, just one look at futures studies can make us conclude that “the only relevant futurists in the world are a handful of old, white, American men” (Dator, 1994, p. 40). This, of course, has significant influence on debates within the futures field (see Milojević, 1998; 1999, pp. 61–63), as well as on the overall view of what constitutes the future. As can be seen from images in Illustrations 2.10, 2.11 and 2.12, it is predominately the (white) man who has created past and present and who will continue to create the future.

Illustration 2.10 is particularly indicative of an hegemonic view of time, past, present and future, the view that allegedly describes ‘objective’ and ‘universal’ human experience. This theme is consistent throughout: it is clearly identifiable in both the ‘official’ futures field

as well as in more popular futures imaging. What such ‘future’ imaging does not change are existing social hierarchies in general, and gender relationships in particular.

Popular imaging in science fiction is another example of this (Illustrations 2.13, 2.14, 2.15 and 2.16). Gendered and race hierarchies remain implicit in what is to be desired, as in ‘fainted blonde maiden’ (Illustrations 2.13 to 2.16). The heroes, as well as ‘the Others’ (aliens, monsters) have therefore at least one common denominator. (White) women remain objects upon which technological development is to be practiced (Illustrations 2.17, 2.18 and 2.19). Alternatively, they are to be replaced by technological (‘birthing machines’, ‘sexy robots’ and cyborgs) altogether (Illustrations 2.20, 2.20a, 2.21, 2.22 and 2.23). (White) men continue to dominate, (white) women are to be ‘saved’ (Illustration 2.24) or to remain in men’s background (Illustrations 2.25 and 2.26). The technological promise to ‘liberate modern women’ (Illustration 2.27) is increasingly questioned (Illustration 2.28). But what is rarely questioned in popular futures imaging are existing gender roles as defined by patriarchy (Illustration 2.10, 2.29 and 2.21 to 2.23). Women are to remain ‘passengers’ on the ‘Spaceship Earth’ and in vehicles that orbit it (Illustrations 2.30 and 2.31).

Illustration 2.20a



Baby-making machine: A French pro-nationalism poster from 1906, in *New Internationalist*, 303 (July 1998, p.27).

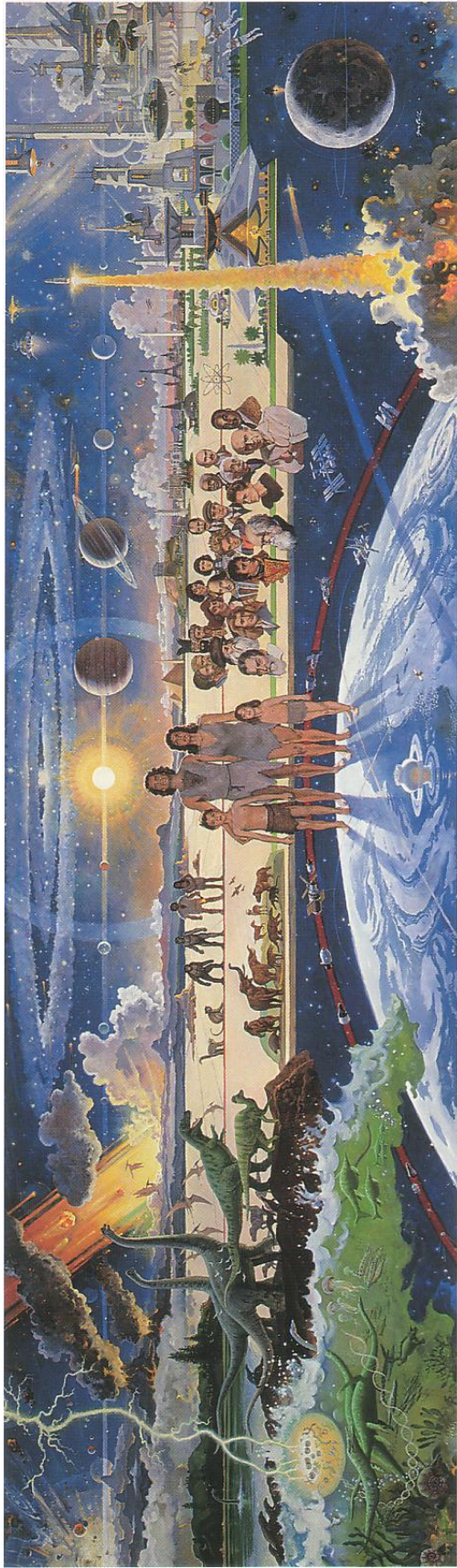


Illustration 2.10

Cosmic Evolution by Robert McCall, Foundation for the Future logo.



Illustration 2.11

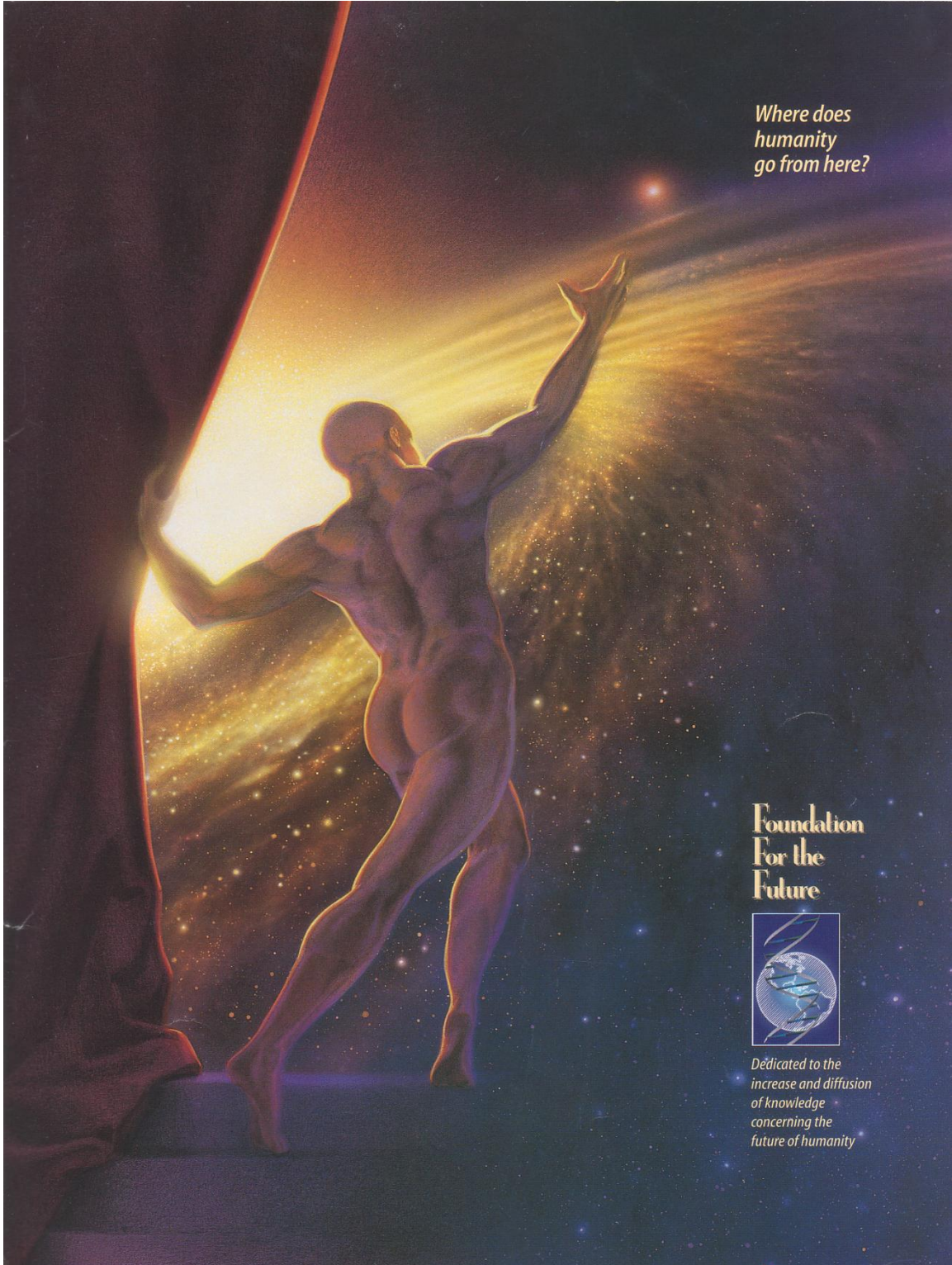




Illustration 2.12

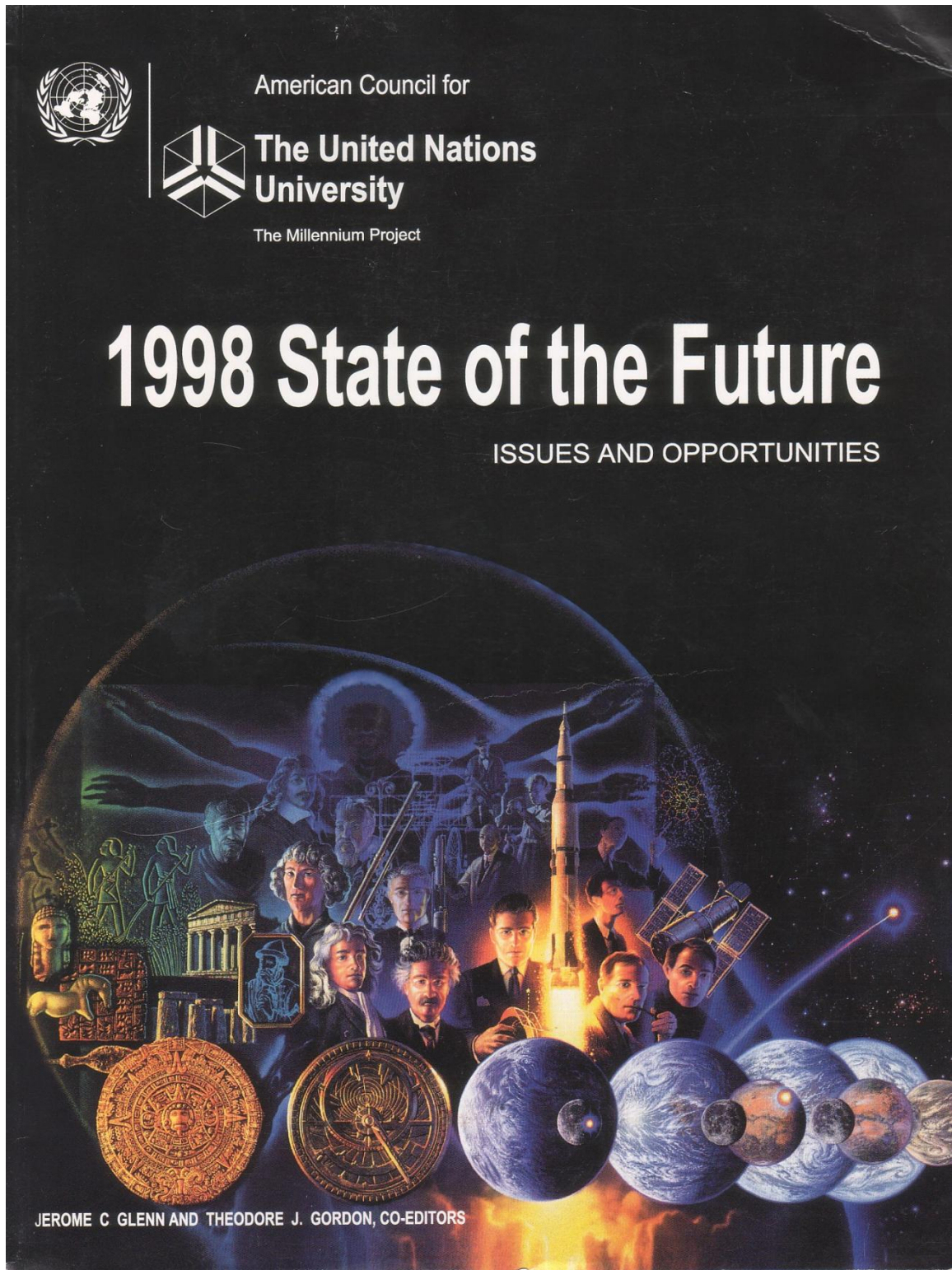


Illustration 2.13



Image from Ackerman, F. (1997, front cover).



Illustration 2.14



1972 Image from Ackerman (1997, p. 22).

Illustration 2.15

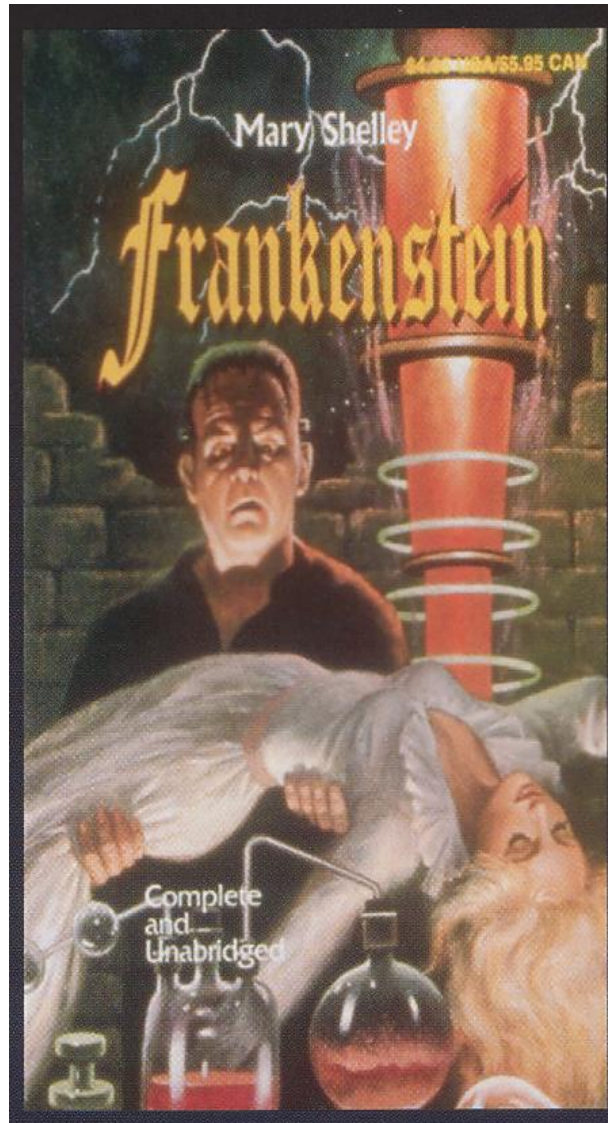
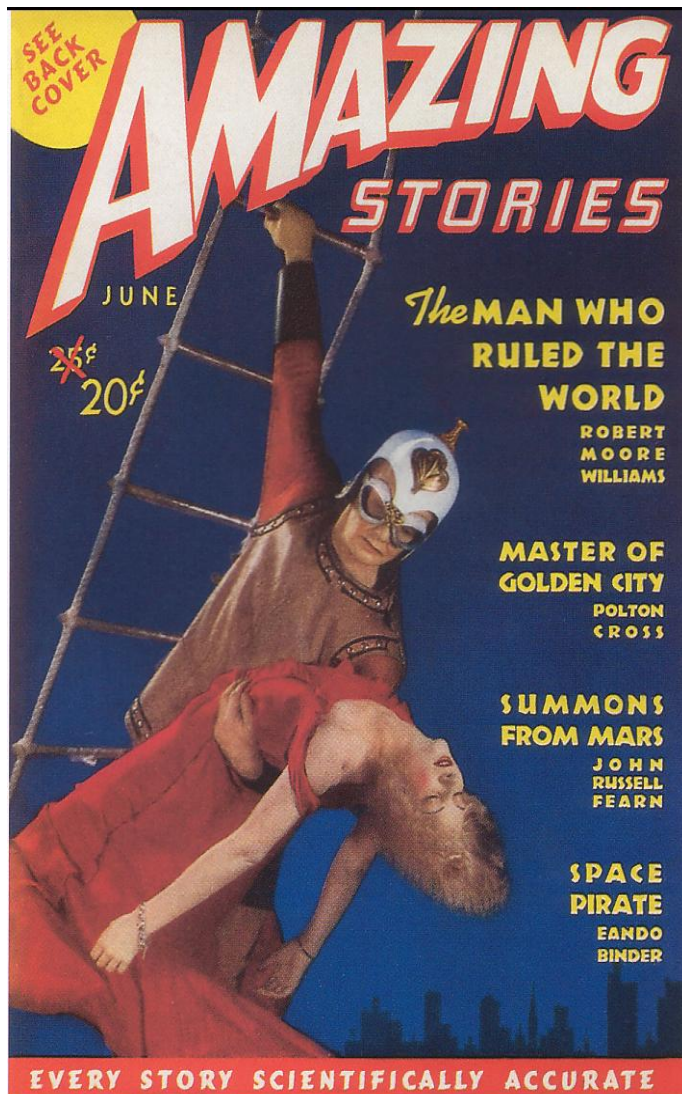


Image from Ackerman, F. (1997, p. 39).

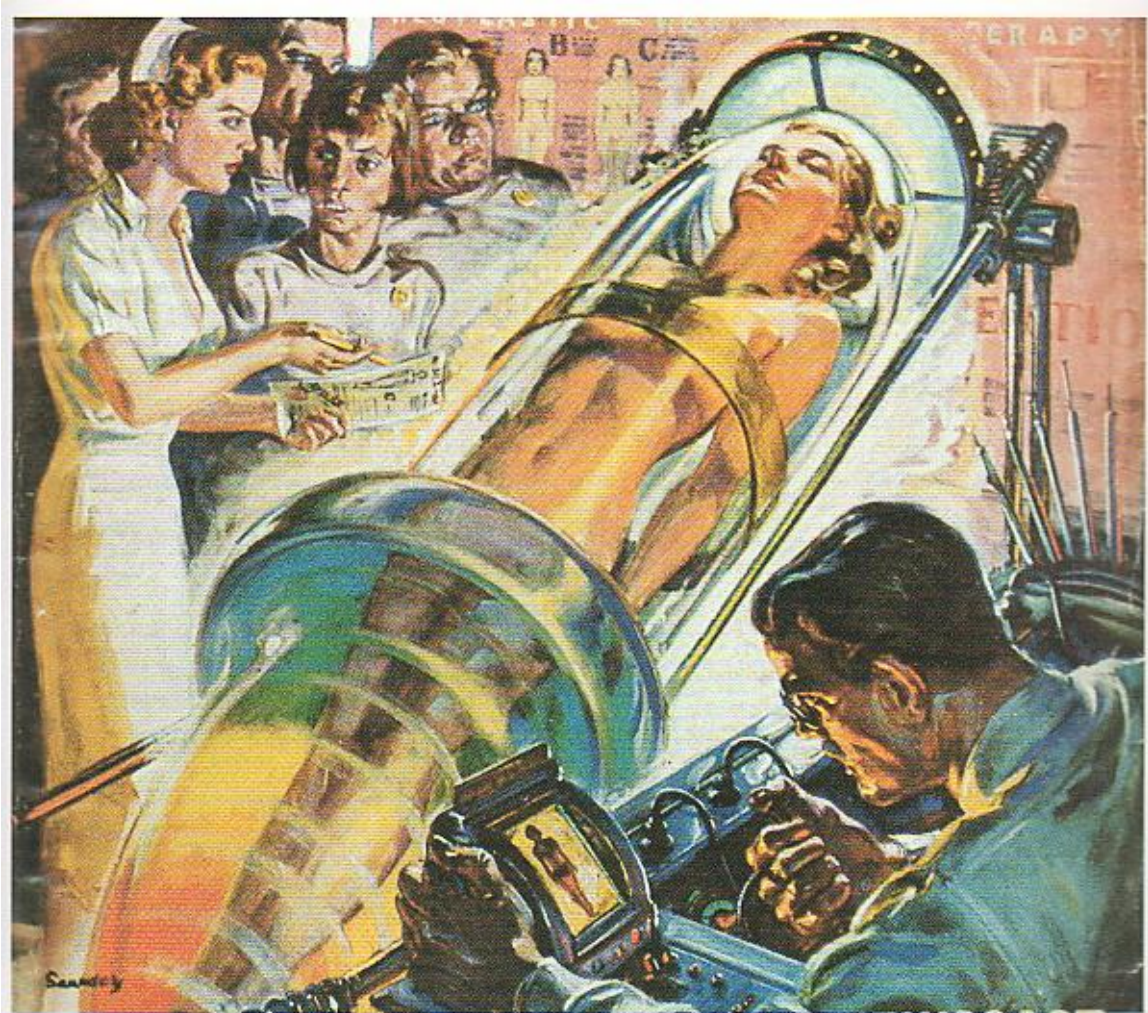
Illustration 2.16



1938 Image from Ackerman, F. (1997, p. 111).



Illustration 2.17



15. Neoplasic will give you, without risk, a perfect body. 1939

1939 "Neoplasic will give you, without risk, a perfect body". Image from Canto & Faliu (1993, p. 69).



Illustration 2.18



1954 "An android of rare perfection". Image from Canto & Faliu (1993, p. 73).

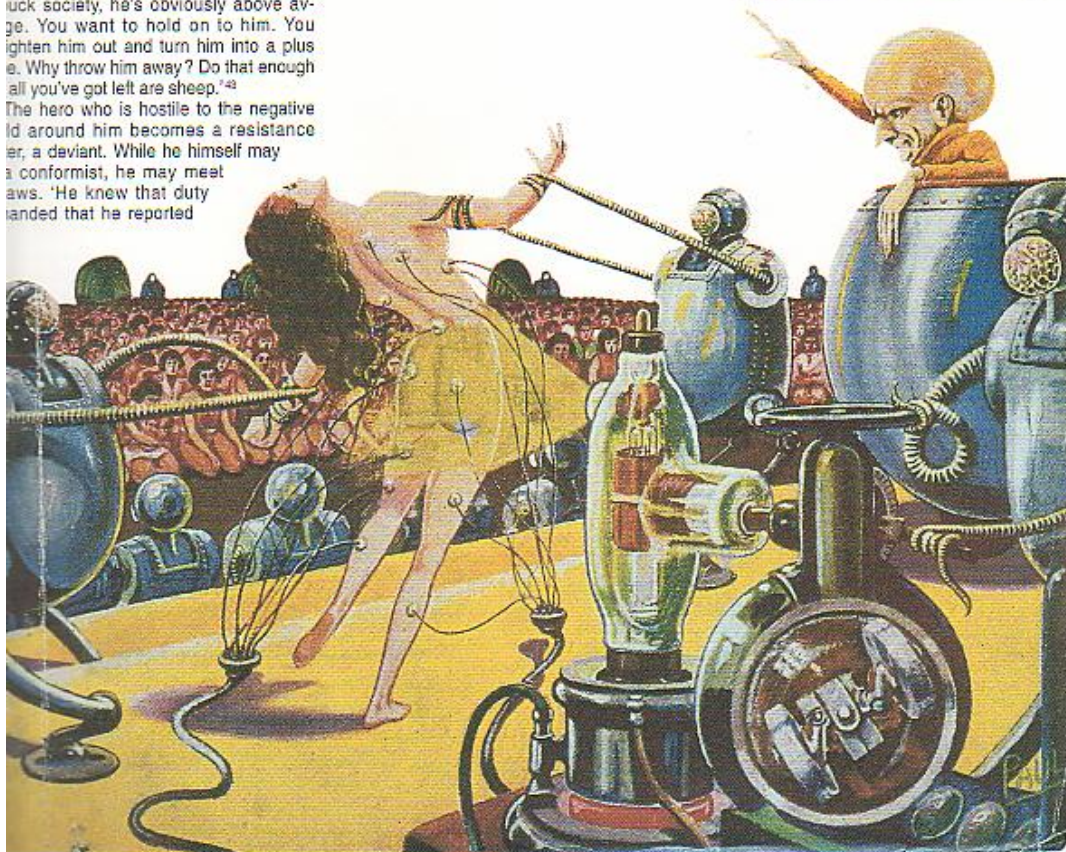


**Underground Deviants.** Programmed, hed and lost, man drowns and dies in the ultimate negative order, in great computer. He obeys the shine; he is sometimes even sacrificed to it. He is an intelligent and he concentrates in his poor ds all the hopes of the world. In the distance fighters become living books, ted savages who associate in secret organisations. Refractory, nonconformist, many will escape normalisation, conformation, lobotomy, 'the big operation'? This mess may take the form not of an execution, but of a terrible annihilation followed by birth: 'If a man's got the talent and guts in a luck society, he's obviously above average. You want to hold on to him. You mighten him out and turn him into a plus one. Why throw him away? Do that enough and all you've got left are sheep.'<sup>44</sup> The hero who is hostile to the negative order around him becomes a resistance fighter, a deviant. While he himself may be a conformist, he may meet his fate. 'He knew that duty was his and he landed that he reported



an atavist on the run. He was aware of the chaos that these individuals had caused in the past, in rousing people against the established order, in fanning the last flames of revolt in order to foment brief conflagrations, with their stories of beauty, love and freedom.'<sup>44</sup> Where we come across retrograde individuals who are hostile to progress, to automatic happiness, to 'soma', to ersatz emotion, to registration, we find that they are recruited from among the savages who live in reserves, or the 'conservers' (conservationists), or mediaevalists and other such 'atavists'.

Sexual relationships are controlled. Fertility may be regulated, with the number of children and time of conception set by the

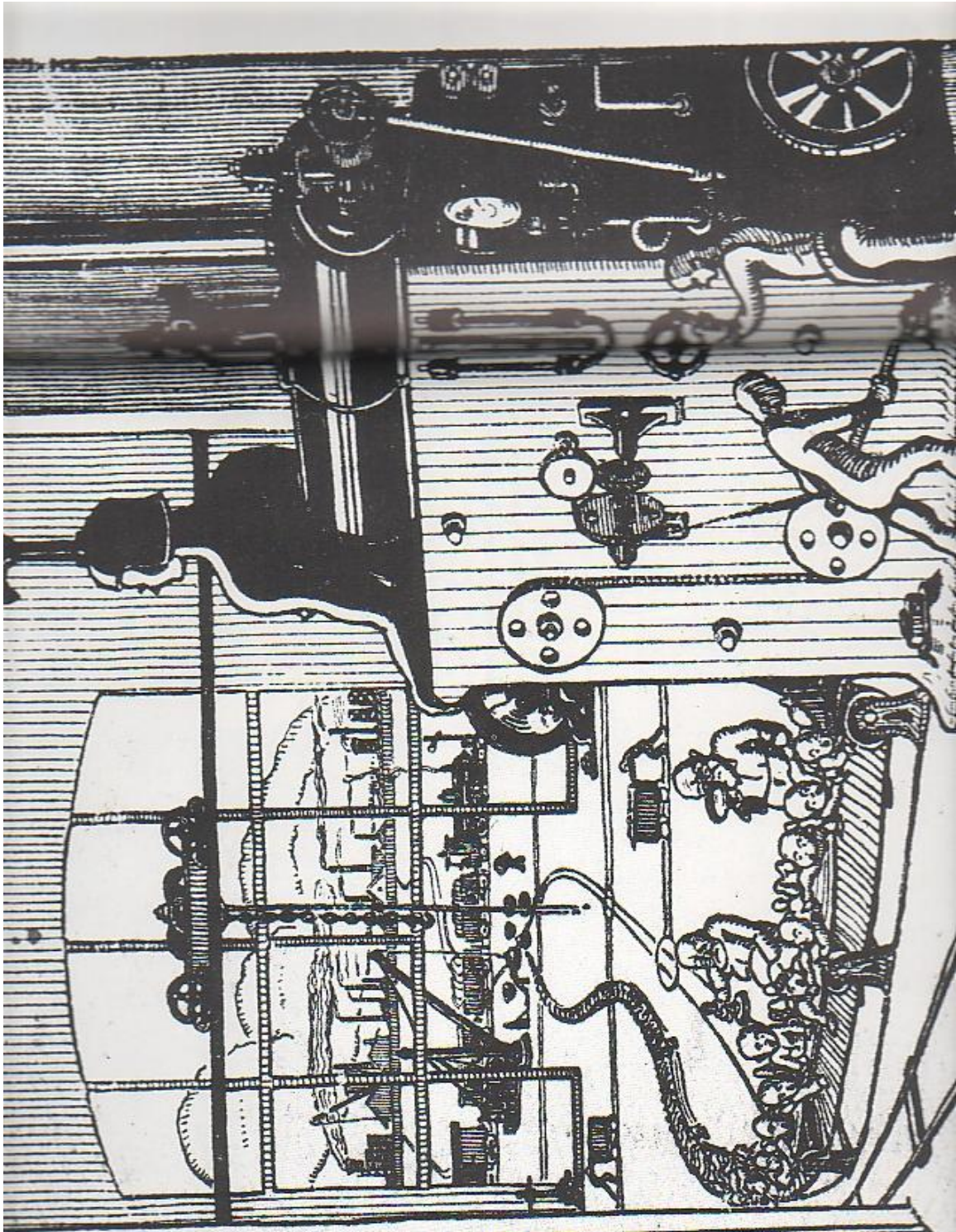


Beings from the future will throw humans into a time trap. 1938

1938 "Being from the future will throw humans into a time trap". Image from Canto & Faliu (1993, p. 117).



Illustration 2.20

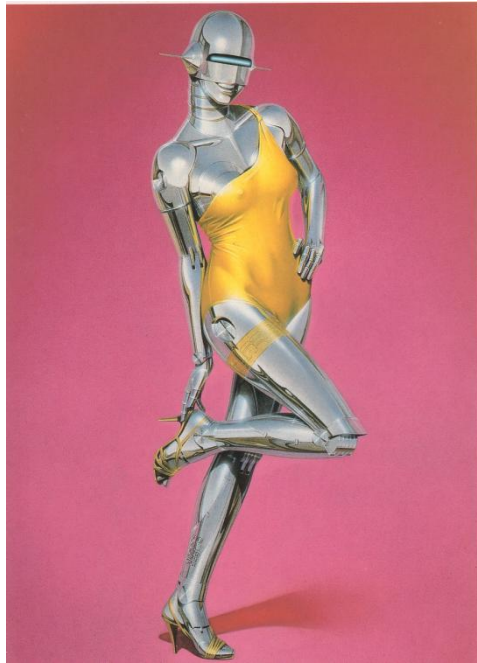


1920 "The Mother-machine". Image from Canto & Faliu (1993, p. 66).

Illustration 2.21  
1988 "Sexy Robot", by Hajime Sorayama.



Illustration 2.22 and 2.23



1988 "Sexy Robot", by Hajime Sorayama.



Illustration 2.24



1951 "A real hero will always save the interstellar pin-ups". Image and Comment from Canto & Faliu (1993, p. 140).



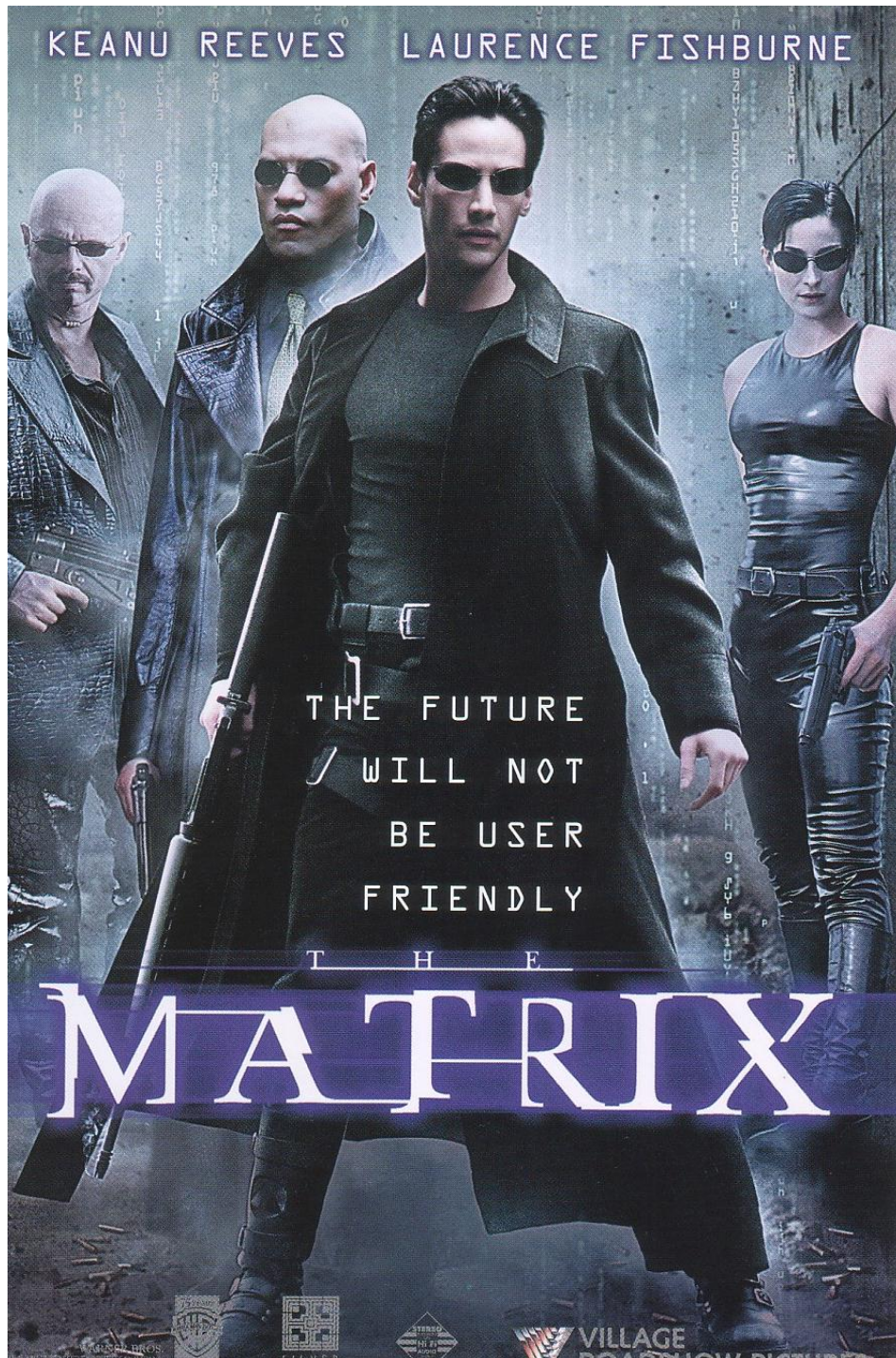
Illustration 2.25



1936 Flash Gordon, “archetypal conquering hero of the future”, Image from Canto & Faliu (1993, p. 142).



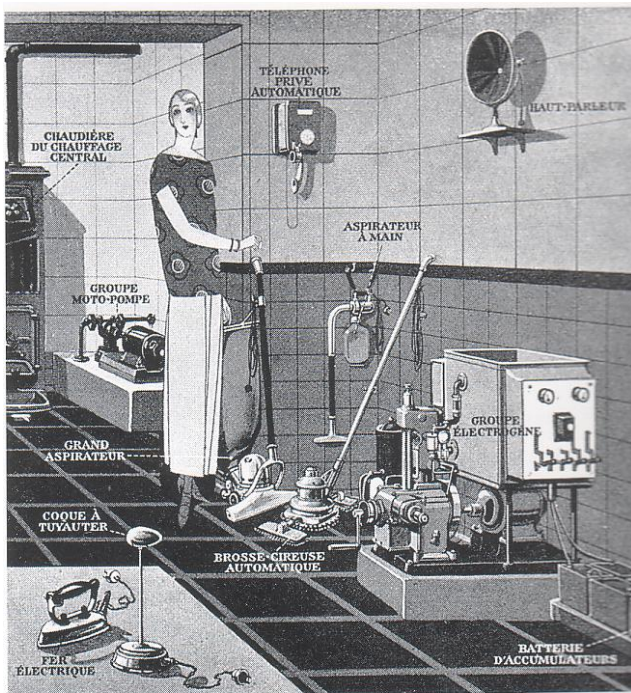
Illustration 2.26



*The Matrix* movie, video tape front cover.



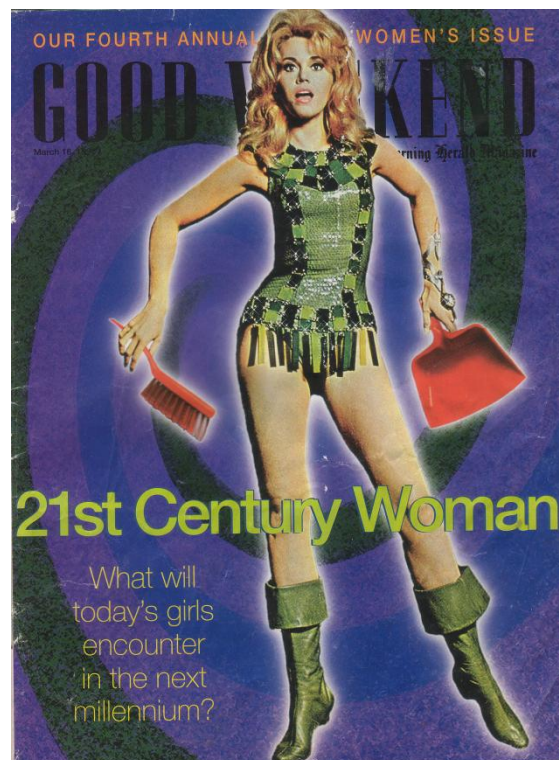
Illustration 2.27



8. Domestic appliances will liberate the modern woman. 1924

1924 “Domestic appliances will liberate the modern woman”. Image from Canto & Faliu (1993, p. 44).

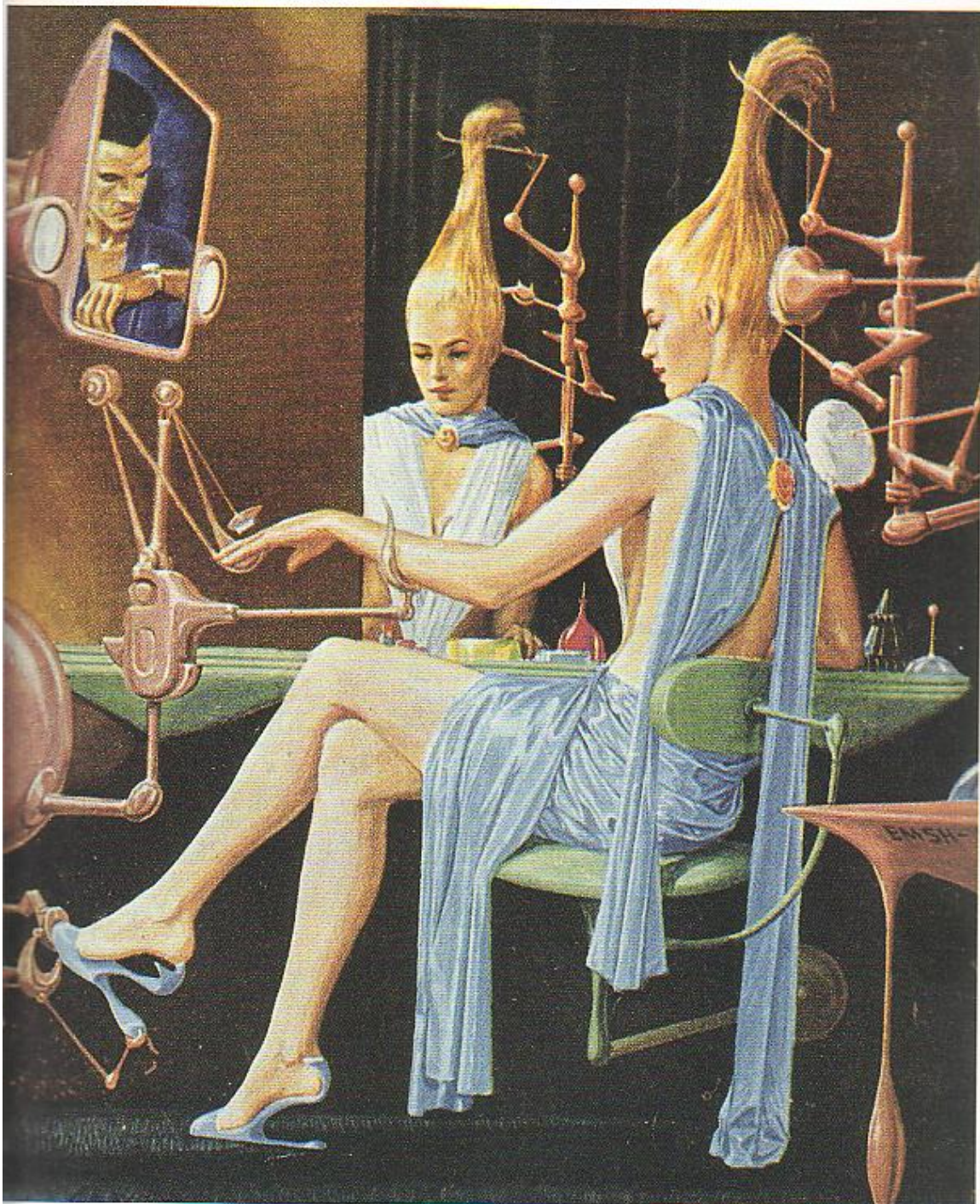
Illustration 2.28



March 16, 1998, Good Weekend, Sydney Morning Herald Magazine, front cover.



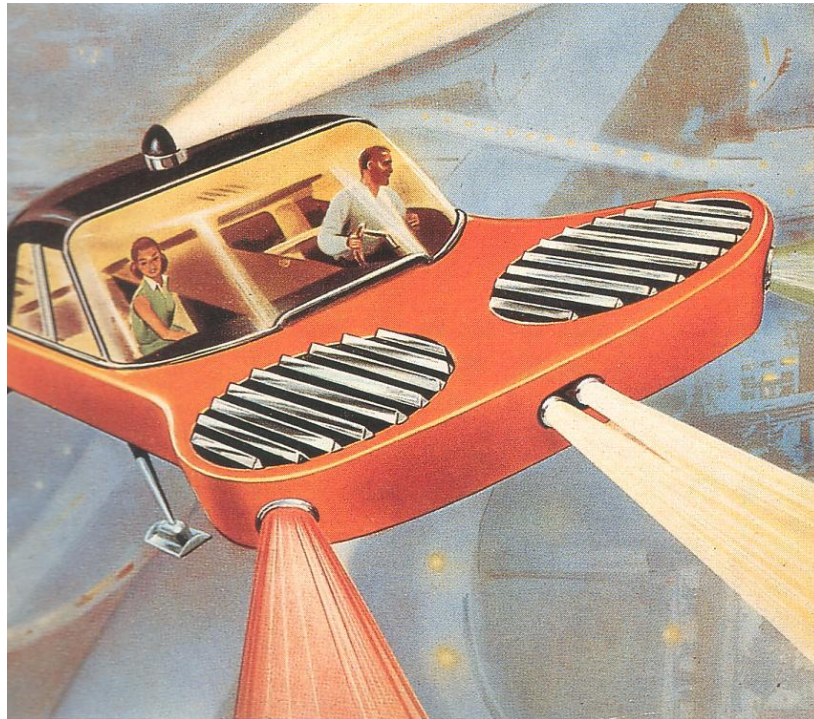
Illustration 2.29



1955 "A beautiful lady being cared for by her hairdresser—beautician—robot in the year 2000". Image and text from Canto & Faliu (1993, p. 52).

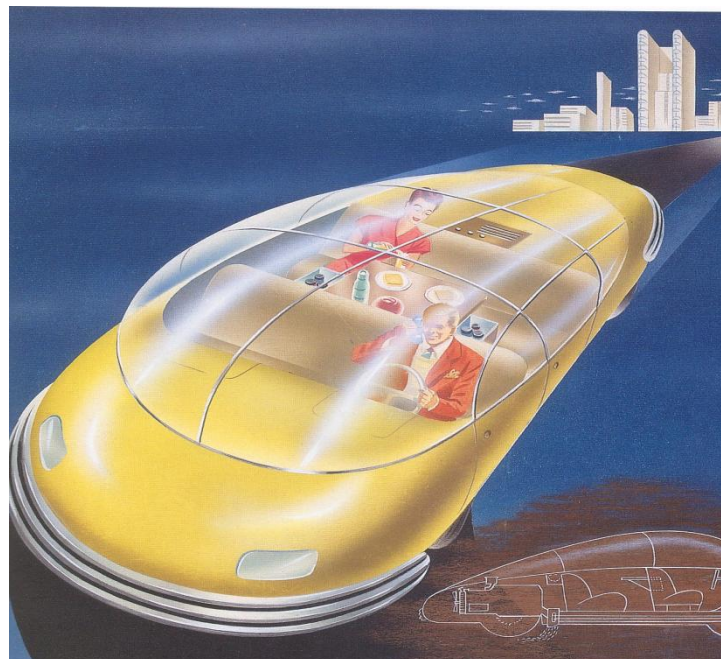


Illustration 2.30



1958 "Paris-London by jet-powered aero-cab". Image from Canto & Faliu (1993, p. 61).

Illustration 2.31



1948 "Bubble-top car". Image from Brosterman (2000, p. 31).

Interestingly while Illustrations 2.30 and 2.31 are recognised as ‘futuristic’, they also bear a remarkable resemblance to desired gender relationships from the 1950s (Illustration 2.32). This ‘futuristic imaging’ has both failed to accurately ‘predict’ the speed of change and technological development (that is, we are yet to see ‘flying cars’), but even more so the dramatic influence of late 20<sup>th</sup> century women’s movements. As seen earlier (e.g., Illustrations 2.10 to 2.12), this ‘dramatic influence’ seems to have passed by some in the futures field who keep futures locked within ‘traditional’ history and the traditional approach to futures; the approach that has consistently excluded women.

Illustration 2.32

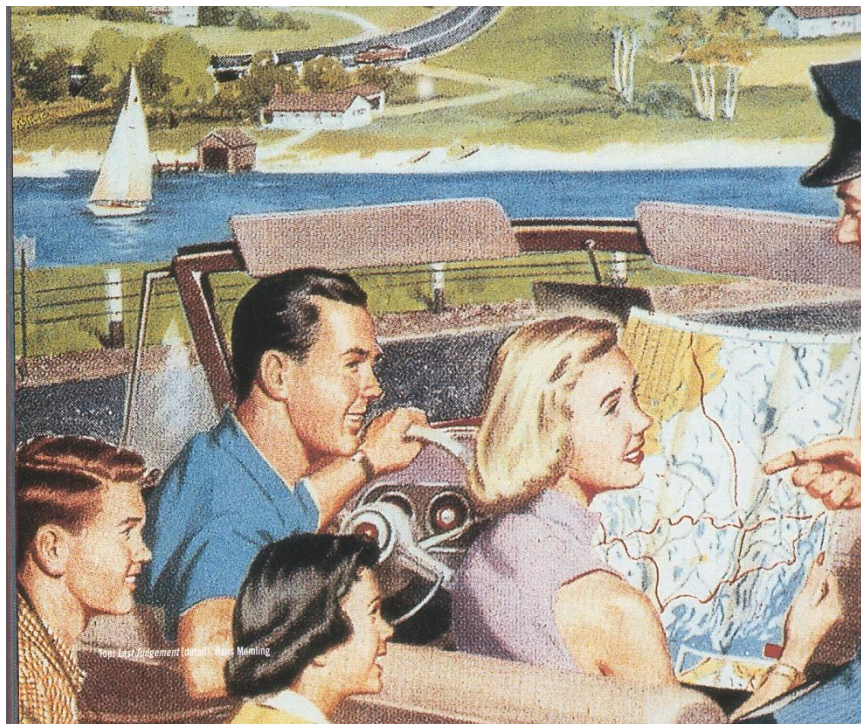


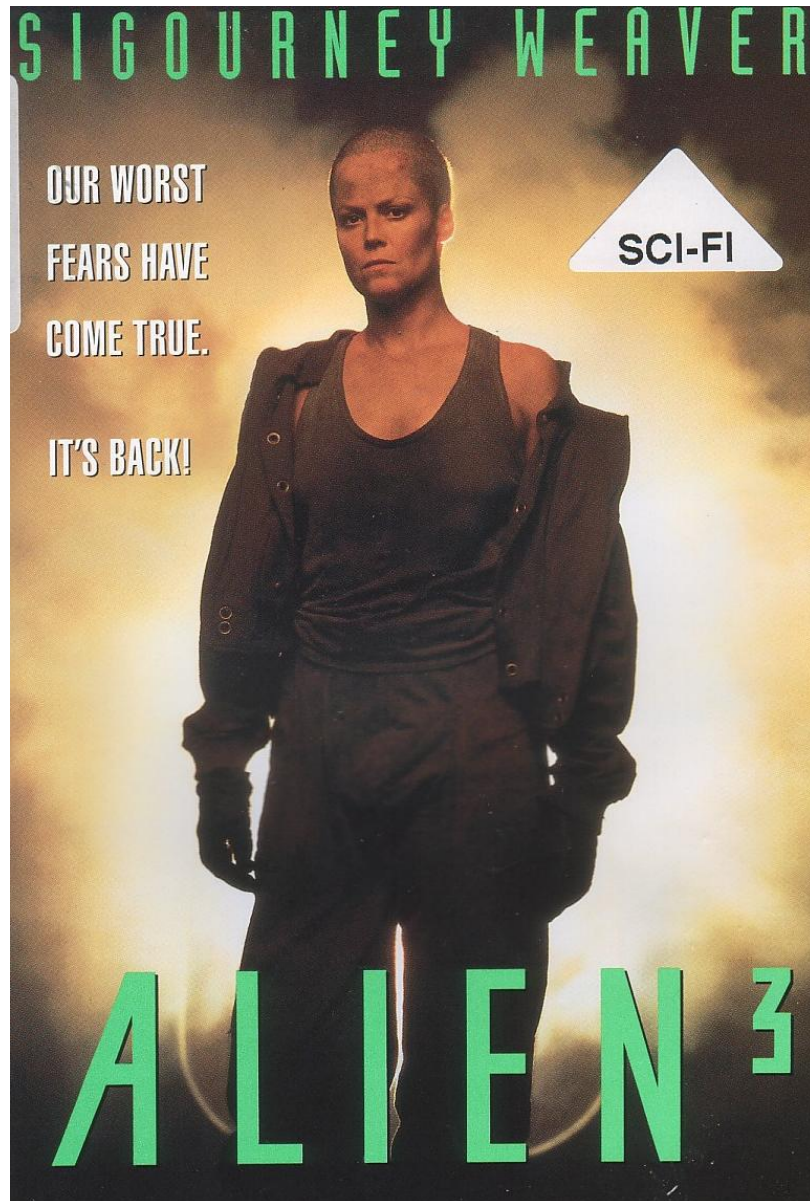
Image from Clute (1999, p. 214).

In popular imaging, women have recently seemed to ‘toughen up’, if only to adapt to the dystopian futures created within the context of patriarchal and other hierarchies (Illustrations 2.33 to 2.37). They have become more muscular and stronger, but the need to dominate ‘the Other’ has remained. This domination of the Other is seen in further set of ‘futures’ images (Illustrations 2.38 and 2.39). It is still the same type of image, dystopian, violent, brutal, that is immediately recognisable as a futures’ image. The question is, why would most people not be able to recognise an image portraying the emerging ‘Gaian paradigm’ (Illustrations 2.40 and 2.41) as also being a futures’ image? What are the criteria



used to distinguished a 'futures' from a 'non-futures' image? Why is it only technological? And, most importantly, whose interests are best served by such colonisation of the future? As I have suggested earlier, the criteria used to define the future are technologism, linearity and materialism. Social innovation, cyclicity and spirituality are not seen as futuristic, but as other.

Illustration 2.33





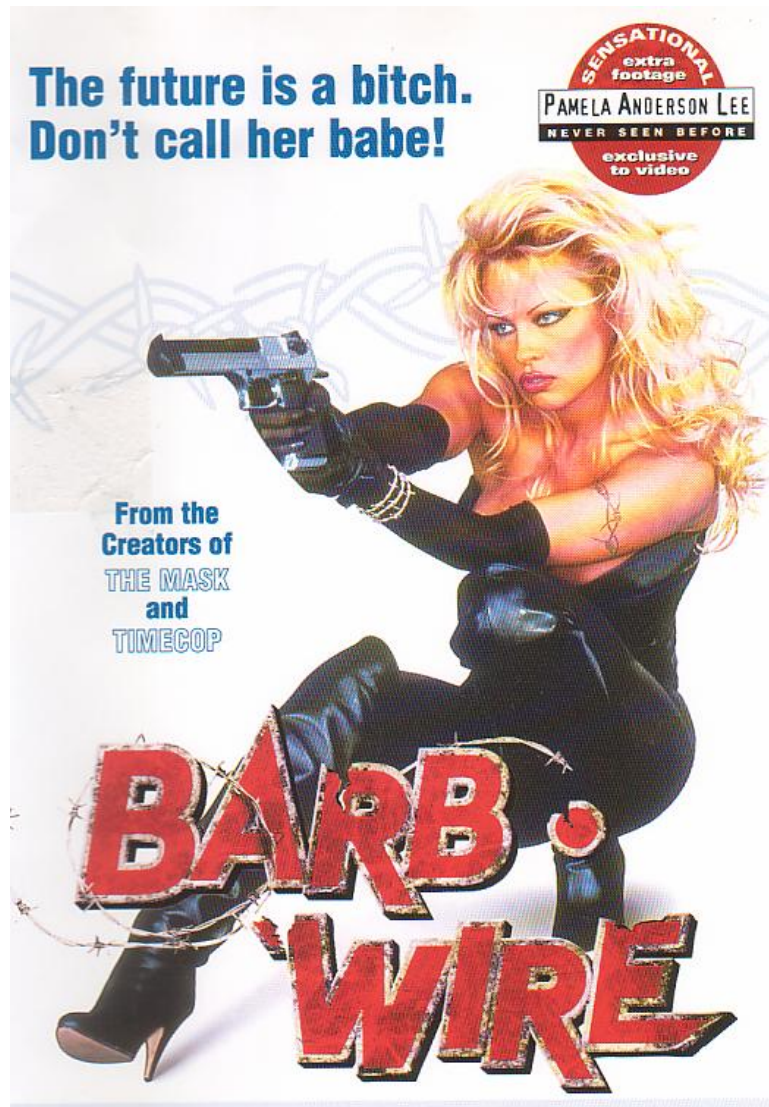


Illustration 2.34



Illustration 2.35





Illustration 2.36



Illustration 2.37



Illustration 2.38



Illustration 2.39



1993 Judge Dread, Image from 2000AD comic, 18<sup>th</sup> September 1993.



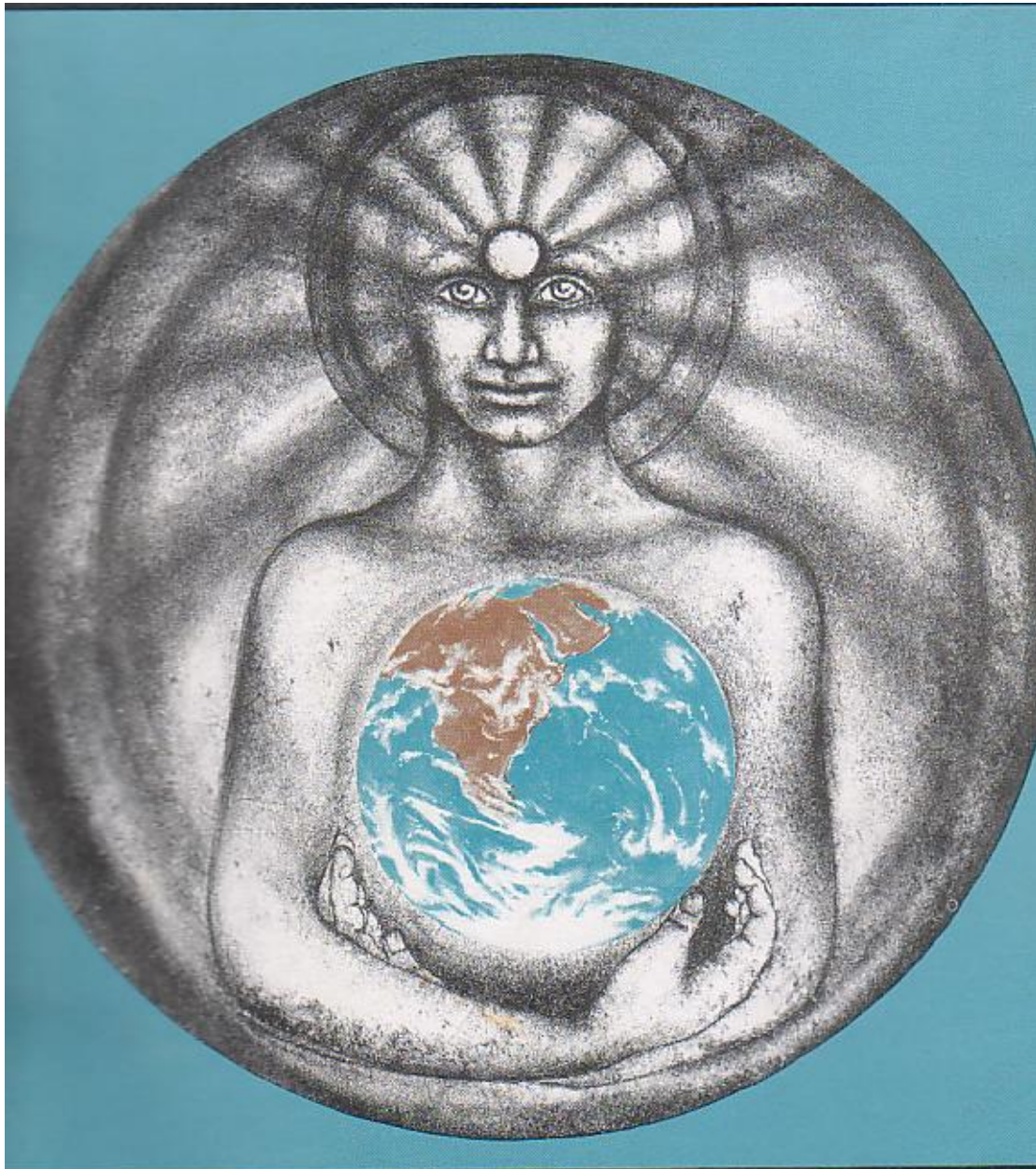
Illustration 2.40



1988 illustration by Finger Prince. Image from *In Context: A quarterly of Humane Sustainable Culture*, Special issue on “Transforming Education”, No.18, inside front cover.

Illustration 2.41





# THE NEW STORY

Life From A Planetary Perspective

1985 Illustration by Deborah Koff-Chapin, from *In Context: A Quarterly of Humane Sustainable Culture*, 12, front cover.



As argued earlier, the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century has been marked by both prevalence of the dystopian genre and the prevalence of what are seen to be ‘realistic’ discourses about the future. In addition, the idealism of the 60s and the 70s seems to have been replaced by the materialism of the 80s and 90s. The current discourse of the future therefore remains dominated by technological/scientific, uni-civilisational and androcentric worldviews. Two mainstream visions of the future that dominate are the image of a ‘post-industrial’, ‘information society’ and the image of a globalised, pan-capitalist world. Cyber-utopia is seen as realistic, and so is the utopia of free and open markets. Both are promoted as the main ways forward and have become hegemonic images of the future. They form ‘rationalistic’ and ‘realistic’ futures discourse where discussion about the desired is taken out of the equation. Instead, *realistic* futures subtly promote implicit assumptions about the nature of the future society (high-tech, globalised) and impose these views on other futures discourses. All other discourses about the future are made to adjust to and negotiate with these, arguably, most likely futures. In addition, these alternatives are virtually unknown and rarely debated. Examples include the ‘popularity’ of Elise Boulding’s vision of a gentle/androgynous society, Riane Eisler’s partnership society/gylany or Sri Aurobindo’s ‘the coming of the Spiritual Age’ as compared to the ideas of ‘post-industrial’ and ‘information’ society.

However, as argued by Foucault and discussed in Chapter One, this process of colonisation, or normalisation of particular dominant views, ideas and images is never complete. While cyber utopia still dominates, it is important to stress that, approximately since the 1960s, many previously excluded social groups, such as people of colour and women, have started to vocalise their own utopian visions. These utopian visions imagine a future multicultural, partnership-oriented and ecologically sustainable society. This I further discuss in Chapter Five. At the same time, the hegemonic discourse has since proclaimed that these utopias are ‘unrealistic’ and that utopia herself is dead. This too is telling of the overall colonisation of the future, or at least, of the attempts by dominant social groups to colonise and define it.

**From: Ivana Milojević, “FUTURES OF EDUCATION: FEMINIST AND POST-WESTERN CRITIQUES AND VISIONS”, PhD Thesis, School of Education, The University of Queensland, 2002, pp. 40 – 85.**