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RUPTURE, RADICALIZATION, REINVENTION: THE UTOPIAN PROCESS IN KIM STANLEY ROBINSON'S *THE MINISTRY FOR THE FUTURE*

Abstract. The article discusses the utopian mechanisms of transformation behind the post-capitalist transition envisioned by Kim Stanley Robinson in *The Ministry for the Future* (2020). Drawing on Tom Moylan's work on the concept of utopian radicalization, as well as on Ernst Bloch's distinction between abstract and concrete utopia, the article looks at the formation of radical subjectivity and utopian agency in the characters of the novel. Precipitated by a disruptive environmental event, this process culminates in deliberate and collective efforts to secure a postcapitalist future, which can be regarded as a concrete utopia. Dynamic, flexible and open-ended, it constitutes an extrapolation of utopian latencies concealed within the crisis-ridden contemporary world.

Keywords: Kim Stanley Robinson; Ernst Bloch; Tom Moylan; utopia; radicalization; post-capitalism; concrete utopia

PRZEŁOM, RADYKALIZACJA, PRZEOBRAŻENIE: PROCES UTOPIJNY W *THE MINISTRY FOR THE FUTURE* KIMA STANLEYA ROBINSONA

Abstrakt. Artykuł omawia utopijne mechanizmy transformacyjne stojące za przeobraże-niami postkapitalistycznymi przedstawionymi przez Kima Stanleya Robinsona w powieści *The Ministry for the Future* (2020). Opierając się na koncepcji utopijnej radykalizacji Toma Moylana oraz na pojęciach utopii konkretnej i abstrakcyjnej Ernsta Blocha, artykuł anali-zuje proces kształtowania radykalnej podmiotowości i utopijnej sprawczości u bohaterów powieści. Katalizatorem dla tego procesu jest katastrofa ekologiczna, a jego ukoronowa-niem celowe i zbiorowe wysiłki na rzecz postkapitalistycznej przyszłości, którą można uznać za utopię konkretną. Jest to dynamiczna i otwarta wizja rzeczywistości, która stanowi ekstrapolację utopijnego potencjału ukrytego w ogarniętej kryzysem teraźniejszości.

Słowa kluczowe: Kim Stanley Robinson; Ernst Bloch; Tom Moylan; utopia; radykaliza-cja; postkapitalizm; utopia konkretna

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The socioeconomic transition from neoliberal capitalism toward potentially utopian non-capitalist solutions depicted in Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Ministry for the Future* (*TMftF*) is enacted by characters who progress from passivity to radicalization—both individually and collectively. Their pro-utopian stance evolves in response to the mounting pressures of capitalism, particularly climate change-related disasters that rupture their world. Consequently, they recognize the defectiveness of the capitalist system, challenge the notion of its alleged irreplaceability, and begin to work towards alternative arrangements. In tracing these developments, Robinson balances a factual approach characteristic of hard SF with attention to social values, which is emblematic of the novel's strongly utopian angle. While the strategies of hard SF are useful in forecasting the trajectories of deterioration should humanity remain on its current path, imagining alternatives requires a broader perspective, which can be obtained by means of utopian theorizing. The combination of the utopian mode and the hard SF aesthetic in *TMftF* allows Robinson to bridge the gulf between abstract and concrete utopia—between mere fantasy and a coherent transformative project that emerges from the utopian possibilities inherent in the present moment.

1. DYSTOPIAN DISINTEGRATION
AS THE UTOPIAN ENGINE OF CHANGE

Robinson's future history begins as a Capitalocenic dystopia, in which late capitalist trends give rise to eco-catastrophes of near-apocalyptic proportions. These incite the international community to implement countermeasures aimed at enhancing climate stability and achieving social equity. Thus, dystopia may be perceived as a facilitator of utopia, which is how Robinson sees its role—as always subservient to utopia, where the latter is defined as "the main project."[1] Robinson indicates that the contemporary world has reached such a degree of disintegration that catastrophic occurrences are probably inevitable, but they may well occasion a beneficial change.[2]

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[1] Kim Stanley Robinson, "Dystopias Now," *Commune* 1 (Fall 2018), https://commune mag.com/dystopias-now.

[2] Samuel Alexander, a social scientist and degrowth advocate, refers to such a standpoint as "apocaloptimism" in "Post-capitalism by Design Not Disaster," *The Ecological Citizen*, 3 Suppl. B (2020): 13.

The utopian potential is revealed within the dystopian scenario of *TMftF* in a twofold manner. Firstly, the apocalyptic moment necessitates establishing new ways of managing the characters' daily existence: afflicted by a deadly heatwave, the Indian people undertake successful reforms to prevent a recurrence. The challenges posed by the dystopian reality lead to coordinated efforts aimed at adaptation and it is in these efforts that the seeds of utopia are sown. Secondly, the disaster serves as a rude awakening to the various flaws of the system—the characters exude a growing sense of social injustice and economic disparity within capitalism.

Hence, the utopian transformation is catalyzed by an apocalyptic moment, which can be interpreted as the breaking point at which change becomes an acknowledged imperative. The apocalypse may thus initiate a period of renewal in which the old is destroyed, while the new is ushered in as the world is being reinvented. Fredric Jameson calls such a juncture a moment of "world reduction,"[3] while Alain Badiou introduces the concept of "the Event," understood as a rupture which changes the dynamics between "the world as it is and as it could be."[4] It follows that the disruption of the known world paves the way for a renewed subjectivity, which engenders a utopian stance.

2. UTOPIAN RADICALIZATION

Robinson shows environmental disasters as indispensable moments of recognition with regard to the urgency of climate change. These are accompanied by "the experiential and conceptual reevaluation of an oppressive social context and the interpretive re-visioning of that situation."[5] According to Tom Moylan, this mental shift gives rise to the radical utopian subject, "a responsible person and citizen activist"[6] that actively

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[3] Benjamin Noys, "The Untranscendable Horizon of Our Time: Capitalist Crisis and the Ends of Utopia," in *States of Crisis and Post-Capitalist Scenarios*, ed. Heiko Feldner, Fabio Vighi, and Slavoj Žižek (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2014), 73.

[4] Tom Moylan, *Becoming Utopian. The Culture and Politics of Radical Transformation* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021), 8.

[5] Tom Moylan, "Transgressive, Totalizing, Transformative: Utopia's Utopian Surplus," *Utopian Studies* 29, no. 3 (2018): 312.

[6] Moylan, 320.

engages in political praxis in order to challenge the status quo and contribute to its replacement with alternatives. As Moylan explains,

> becoming [a radicalized utopian unit] requires the individual to break from the ideological formation … within which she or he has been constructed and to tear through its sutured confines so as to be able to acknowledge that the existing world order is no longer sufficient, to see that … something better can be achieved for all.[7]

Hence, the transformation begins once an individual is ready to challenge the reality which has hitherto been treated as constant and incontrovertible in its nature. Only this form of understanding may evolve into agency by establishing "the double consciousness of knowing one's own existence in the present but also of grasping the possibilities for a future that does not yet exist."[8] This ability to unlock future potentialities from present latencies may entail a conscious commitment to the cause of social transformation. The utopian turn should thus engender a radically revised and reconfigured subjectivity, producing an individual who is highly aware, confident, self-actualizing, tending towards freedom, politically active, and militant if necessary. In Robinson's novel the radicalization involves a rejection of neoliberal ideology, which normalizes capitalism as the ultimate and insurmountable horizon. Following this intellectual liberation individuals may transcend the norms and boundaries associated with the system, and even pose a challenge to its very existence. However, if this mental shift is to translate into effective political action, collective effort is needed:

> if we are to usefully grow from our own radicalized subjectivity into overt political action, we must come together, we must act collectively. From this new matrix of collective experience, those who have been radicalized, who have been liberated from the dominant sutured reality, can enter into overt sociopolitical activity aimed at a utopian horizon.[9]

The collective character of the utopian turn is its crucial element—the shift begins with individuals, but can only be completed when shared with other radicalized subjects.

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[7] Moylan, 5.
[8] Moylan, 8.
[9] Moylan, 10.

3. POSTCAPITALIST FUTURE AS A CONCRETE UTOPIA

The process of utopian radicalization remains a work in progress: "[one] must *become* utopian, and indeed *continue* to become utopian."[10] Thus understood, utopianism is a perpetual process of reaction and adaptation to circumstances. It generates similarly incomplete utopian realities such as the one featured in Robinson's novel. Pluralistic and open-ended, it materializes in incremental steps; as such, it meets the criteria for a concrete utopia, as defined by the utopian theorist Ernst Bloch. Bloch distinguishes between abstract and concrete utopias: while abstract utopias can be described as "fantastic and compensatory … not accompanied by a will to change anything,"[11] a concrete utopia is "anticipatory, transformative, and linked to the future."[12] Thus, the difference between the two lies in concrete utopia's intentional orientation toward a better future and its anticipation of the realization of the transformative potential latent in the present. The concrete utopian function discerns "future-laden properties"[13] tangible within the present reality. In other words, a solid link must exist between present actualities and utopian theorizing for a concrete utopia to arise. Bloch understands this link as "the point of contact between dreams and life, without which dreams only yield abstract utopia."[14] While abstract utopia is associated with objectless desire, concrete utopia can be effectuated by hope, which goes beyond the limitations of the present and reaches towards the future in a deliberate manner. In Blochian terms, such educated hope—*docta spes*—is a precondition for a successful transformation of an abstract utopia into a concrete utopia. Educated hope, understood as a conscious intellectual proactive force, spans the gap between "passion and reason … dream and dream come true."[15] *Docta spes* is objectively and historically rooted in the present and its potentialities.[16]

The postcapitalist transition in *TMftF* can be regarded as aligned with concrete utopianism in that the shift away from capitalism is shown to

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[10] Moylan, 5.

[11] Ruth Levitas, "Educated Hope: Ernst Bloch on Abstract and Concrete Utopia," *Utopian Studies* 2, no. 2 (1990): 15.

[12] Levitas, 19.

[13] Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 223.

[14] Bloch, 145.

[15] Levitas, "Educated Hope," 20.

[16] Bloch, *Principle*, 158.

be already taking place, often unnoticed and unacknowledged as such. This perspective correlates with some speculative investigations into the onset of the possible postcapitalist transformation.[17] Paul Mason points to the incremental character of non-capitalist developments and the presence of some harbingers of an ongoing transformation within capitalist markets.[18] These include various alter-globalization initiatives already in practice, most of which emerge from the bottom up and rely on horizontal cooperation and communal effort. Non-capitalist options such as those emerge in uncoordinated ways, evolving in a step-by-step fashion. The utopian process of arriving at a renewed socioeconomic reality may also be perceived in this manner—as a gradual transformation rather than a wholesale revolution. According to Benjamin Noys, contemporary utopianism, with its vision of a more equitable non-capitalist future, must be seen in this light:

> the 'utopian' thinking of the present is not the classical utopian desire to radically rework society as a whole and submit it *en masse* to a new order…. Instead it seeks to find utopia already embedded in existent social forms – utopia as *somewhere* rather than *nowhere* – and to reject any imposition of utopia as abstract.[19]

This perspective confirms the dialectical character of contemporary utopianism—it is both visionary and pragmatic, both future-oriented and rooted in the present. Even its relation to the existing reality is of a dual nature—utopian thinking both negates the present it wishes to alter and affirms the signs of change concealed within it.

For Bloch, the potential attainability of concrete utopia stems from the unfinished nature of reality, which includes not only what exists, but also "what is becoming or might become,"[20] so the utopian vision must be regarded as an element—albeit unrealized—of reality. This impacts the character of concrete utopia: it is never a complete end-product, but a work always in progress. Bloch's concrete utopia can thus be

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[17] These include, among others, Peter F. Drucker in *Post-Capitalist Society* (2013) and Paul Mason in *PostCapitalism: A Guide to Our Future* (2015).

[18] Paul Mason, *PostCapitalism: A Guide to Our Future* (London: Allen Lane, 2015), 11.

[19] Noys, "Untranscendable Horizon," 74.

[20] Levitas, "Educated Hope," 5.

described as a utopia of process—anti-perfectionist and open-ended, remaining in a constant state of adjustment and evolution.

Robinson's postcapitalist vision certainly displays such fluidity and adaptability, despite the fact that it can be seen as a literary manifestation of the author's preferred program for the achievement of a more equitable and sustainable reality.[21] Still, this is not blueprint utopianism, which purports to present a final version of an ideal human society. Robinson's transformative vision is far from complete or perfect. Such open-ended utopianism emphasizes the process instead of the outcome, thus escaping the dangers frequently associated with planned societies—those of stagnation, totalitarianism, or simply going awry. However, while blueprint or programmatic utopianism is generally distrusted due to its totalizing tendencies, at least a minimal set of specific ideas and predetermined details is a necessary utopian ingredient, without which utopia faces the danger of falling into the trap of unrealizable abstraction. Concrete utopianism does require "a certain element of closure, specificity, commitment, and literalism about what would actually be entailed in practice"[22] in order to engage in effective social criticism and radical systemic reconfiguration.

Robinson's novel does thoroughly investigate specific solutions to social and economic problems. The author writes his future histories of transformation with detailed worldbuilding, an uncanny degree of realism and scientific plausibility, which allows him to draw together the pragmatic and the utopian. He relies on a combination of utopian impulse and utopian program,[23] as his works show how to bridge the gap between utopian imagination and pro-utopian action. According to Moylan, a fusion of both is essential to fully comprehend utopian alternatives and engage in the utopian process.[24] By indicating links between the known and non-perfect present and a superior future, Robinson

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[21] See, for example, Robinson's speech on the specifics of a postcapitalist transformation: "The Good Anthropocene: Terraforming Earth with Kim Stanley Robinson," virtual lecture, October 29, 2018, posted January 24, 2019, by Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qJuytQ8Xm9g&t=1011s.

[22] Moylan, *Becoming*, 191.

[23] The distinction between utopian impulse and utopian program was drawn by Fredric Jameson in *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (2005). The former can be seen as an internal engine of change, whereas the latter as the informed and deliberate action towards it.

[24] Moylan, *Becoming*, 138.

highlights potentialities that might evolve from the present if certain trends are isolated and reinforced. He thus challenges the idea of utopia as atemporal and aspatial, "separated by space or time" from the reader's reality.[25]

4. RADICALIZATION AND CONCRETE UTOPIANISM IN *THE MINISTRY FOR THE FUTURE*

Following Tom Moylan, utopian radicalization requires a trigger or a series of triggers.[26] In Robinson's novel, the most effective stimuli come in the form ecological disasters, which precipitate rapid radicalization. *TMftF* begins with an apocalyptic event which causes people to reach just the right degree of fury and desperation to consider undertaking radical action. The novel opens with a viscerally realistic account of a lethal heatwave striking India with tragic consequences: twenty million lives lost in a single week. This leaves the Indian people traumatized but also determined to evolve towards a thoroughly transformed New India. Robinson confirms that catastrophe may serve as a utopian stimulant: "the optimism that I'm trying to express is that there won't be an apocalypse, there will be a disaster. But after the disaster comes the next world on."[27] Naomi Klein similarly believes that the experience of cataclysmic events can be a motivating factor: "We do not always respond to shocks with regression. Sometimes, in the face of crisis, we grow up – fast."[28] This process of accelerated maturation entails a liberation from the dictates of a hegemonic system and a rejection of mental chains which inhibit utopian endeavors:

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[25] Derrick O'Keefe, "Imagining the End of Capitalism with Kim Stanley Robinson," *Jacobin*, October 22, 2020, https://jacobin.com/2020/10/kim-stanley-robinson-ministry-future-science-fiction.

[26] Coincidentally, political theorist Paul Mason opines that postcapitalism will be brought about by sudden critical events he refers to as "external shocks" (Mason, *PostCapitalism*, 15). Similarly, Samuel Alexander considers "a crisis or series of crises that cannot be resolved within the existing political economy" as a prerequisite for the onset of a transformation (Alexander, "Post-capitalism by Design," 14).

[27] José Luis de Vicente, "Angry Optimism in a Drowned World: A Conversation with Kim Stanley Robinson," *CCCB*, October 31, 2017, https://lab.cccb.org/en/angry-optimism-in-a-drowned-world-a-conversation-with-kim-stanley-robinson.

[28] Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007), 462.

A "terrible emergency" may generate a growth process in which the self achieves a "creative adjustment" that re-situates the person in a radical relationship with the enclosing regime in such a way that she or he can breakthrough its barriers and emerge as an integral and actualizing person.[29]

Moments of disruption can thus spark utopian energy which translates into transformative action. In *TMftF*, the radicalized inhabitants of India challenge the capitalist status quo by enacting a thoroughgoing remodeling of India, which becomes the locus of utopian transformation later to be imitated by the rest of the world. Indians refuse to remain passive victims of neoliberal climate policy, becoming effective utopian actors with a clear vision of what kind of world they desire and how they want to achieve it. They refuse to follow the Western world's lead, adopting an India-first policy and even acting in defiance of international law with regard to geoengineering, which they launch with considerable success, but without the required consent of other countries. Indians work towards the creation of New India by combining environmental reforms with a social and economic transformation aimed at ensuring social justice and political equity. They stress that only such a thorough transmutation can counter the climate threat: "It is the New India now, and everything is to be reconsidered.… It is also a more general rejection of the bad parts of the past."[30] Hence, sweeping systemic changes are finally possible, such as dismantling the caste system, which has hitherto seemed unalterable.

Acquiring a renewed utopian subjectivity also entails a substantial revision of one's value system. The Indians in *TMftF* discover true value in their communities and in social solidarity. The dichotomy between value and values is a recurring theme in the novel. Understood in the capitalist sense, value is limited to financial worth, whereas non-capitalist perspective, as represented by the radicalized characters, prioritizes values instead: a sense of community, the human connection, and a healthy planet in particular. According to Robinson, the fact that in capitalism value is only attached to monetary profits is the main reason why pro-environmental and pro-social reforms might never be undertaken.[31] Thus, the novel stresses the need to redefine profitability and

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[29] Moylan, *Becoming*, 299.
[30] Robinson, *Ministry*, 127.
[31] O'Keefe, "Imagining."

reassign value to pro-human and eco-friendly undertakings. The eponymous Ministry prioritizes precisely this sort of revaluation, as it is tasked with protecting the rights of future generations. It therefore opposes capitalist logic by looking beyond immediate profits and towards the future security of citizens not yet born. The Ministry translates this attitude into non-capitalist economic initiatives, which prioritize intergenerational and inter-species solidarity. The most important solution of this sort is carbon quantitative easing: a system which rewards biosphere-sustaining actions, while taxing CO_2 emissions. The Ministry thereby manages to completely redress the valuation of what is understood as a profitable activity—carbon burning is made unprofitable and therefore gradually eliminated, while biosphere-friendly endeavors are pursued precisely because they are turned into a source of income. This leads to a reconfiguration of what constitutes efficiency, based on a revised version of Aldo Leopold's environmental philosophy: "What's good is good for the biosphere."[32] The narrator concludes that "in light of that principle, many efficiencies are quickly seen to be profoundly destructive, and many inefficiencies can now be understood as unintentionally salvational."[33] This involves a reversal of perspective, equating profitability with resilience and sustainability.

In the novel, such epistemic shifts begin with desperate but determined individuals, who prompt the transformation from the bottom up, following their utopian radicalization. The radicalizing factor is often found in other, already radicalized people. Robinson shows the utopian process to be a networked phenomenon—it spreads among individuals who begin to share a sense of utopian urgency. An example of individual radicalization in the novel can be seen in the character of Frank May, an American who experienced the Indian heatwave. Left with an acute case of PTSD and a paralyzing fear of high temperatures, Frank feels both a fierce anger and a compulsion to take extreme steps. He decides to make his contribution by kidnapping the head of the Ministry for the Future, Mary Murphy, in order to convince her of the inadequacy of the Ministry's actions. The dramatic encounter radicalizes Mary and transforms her into an active utopian subject. Frank's anguish and her own fear in the hostage situation make her truly appreciate the lengths

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[32] Robinson, *Ministry*, 153.
[33] Robinson, 153.

desperate people might go to in this destabilized ecological and social reality. In consequence, she recognizes the immediate need to go beyond the insufficient tools at the Ministry's disposal. Since the Ministry's mandate is to defend the rights of the future generations and also of non-human animals, she begins to accept guerrilla warfare against those whose actions can be regarded as mass murders of the future entities under her protection.

While the social transformation begins with such ordinary individuals, the novel illustrates Moylan's point that the decisive factor in the utopian transformation is the collectivity of the entire project – without horizontal cooperation and active networking, the transition would not be possible. In *TMftF* the global anti-capitalist revolution gets in full swing only when a sufficient number of people have been radicalized by the precarity of their existence, the effects of continued climate instability and predatory practices of neoliberal capitalism. Robinson refers to this global mobilization as a shift in "the structure of feeling,"[34] borrowing this concept from Raymond Williams. Understood as a prevailing mood, it refers to the manner in which people understand, organize and categorize emotions, which are very much dependent on cultural and historical factors. In the novel the emergent anti-capitalist structure of feeling grows out of discontent: "Everyone felt it. The culture of the time was rife with fear and anger, denial and guilt, shame and regret, repression and the return of the repressed."[35] Consequently, the collective tendency to acquiesce to the increasingly volatile existence within capitalism is abandoned and decisive measures are adopted by the general public to manifest their discontent and force change. Various forms of non-violent resistance are employed: workers' strikes, demonstrations, occupations, boycotts, collective non-participation targeted at capitalist market economy: withholding payments or reducing consumption to necessities. This flurry of innovative solidarity and collective activity grows out of the trends already present within the capitalist framework—the commons and cooperatives have strengthened people's sense of control of their own lives and prepared them for collective action. These activities prove successful, especially fiscal

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[34] Robinson, 287.
[35] Robinson, 227.

noncompliance, which eventually leads to the collapse and nationa-lization of banks.

The coordinated mass civil disobedience of radicalized utopian sub-jects is presented as a necessary stage in the post-capitalist revolution, but it requires a follow-up from policy-makers. This is the conclusion drawn by one of the participants of the new Paris Commune, who oc-cupy the French capital in the novel. Their powerful sense of solidarity enables the protesters to organize themselves, but it eventually dissi-pates as ideological infighting takes over and a lack of a coherent strat-egy proves fatal to the whole endeavor. It is concluded that "the lack of a Plan B can hamstring a revolution";[36] in other words, revolutionary spirit can initiate a collective pro-transition stance, but with no con-sistent and deliberate policy, this transformative potential will not ma-terialize into productive actions, thus stagnating into an abstract utopia. Although the importance of the bottom-up utopian initiative is crucial in the novel, in the end it is a legal intervention that consolidates and guarantees the gains of the revolution: "Riot, occupation, non-compli-ance, general strike: breakdown. Now it's time for Plan B. Time to act—as in, act of parliament. It will be legislation that does it in the end, creating a new legal regime that is fair, just, sustainable, and secure."[37] The staff of the Ministry understand that for the non-capitalist future to succeed, it "would take planning, it would have to be engineered."[38] The Ministry's plan is described as "a total program [written] up in detail, in consultation with the bankers on hand and their staffs, taking all their suggestions … and then in the end, after each bank had consulted with its government back home."[39] The plan is premised on a combination of geoengineering, pro-social legislation, nationalization of banks, and carbon quantitative easing.

Once there is a specific plan of action, a concrete utopia arises, as the utopian impulse morphs into Blochian *docta spes*—that is hope crystallized into conscious directed efforts and specific actions. How-ever, presenting the Ministry's plan as a totalizing scheme brings inev-itable associations with blueprint utopianism, which is often associated with the danger of anti-utopian developments. Robinson, who describes

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[36] Robinson, 408.
[37] Robinson, 411.
[38] Robinson, 316.
[39] Robinson, *Ministry*, 295.

himself as "anti-anti-utopian,"[40] manages to eschew some of the main pitfalls of programmatic utopias by opting for concrete utopianism instead. Firstly, the Ministry's plan is not a uniform single vision, but a multifaceted amalgam of approaches—the novel mentions "various post-capitalisms"[41] emerging "from the multitudes"[42] throughout the transition. The multidimensional crisis of capitalism requires an equally varied set of solutions, and the urgency of the situation requires an inclusive approach. Secondly, the plan is not centrally imposed, but developed in international and interinstitutional cooperation. Next, it is not a purely top-down initiative, but a response to the expressed needs of ordinary citizens. It can be seen as legislative support to already functioning bottom-up ventures, many of which are modelled on real-life schemes. These are widespread phenomena, whose variety combined with their uncoordinated character excludes top-down imposition:

> at the meso- and micro-levels, the good projects that were being undertaken were so numerous they couldn't be assembled into a single list, although they tried. Regenerative ag, landscape restoration, wildlife stewardship, Mondragónstyle co-ops, garden cities, universal basic income and services, job guarantees, refugee release and repatriation, climate justice and equity actions … and more than ever before.[43]

The post-transformation utopian reality in *TMftF* is thus a curious combination of targeted planning and an acknowledgement of the variety of courses of action already in existence.

Finally, the focus of the novel is on the extended complex process of striving towards utopia, rather than on the end product, which is never really finalized. Robinson maintains that one of the goals of his writing career has been to "redefine utopia … in more dynamic terms,"[44] in order to counteract the common belief in utopia's end-stage perfection, which he sees as a potentially dangerous aim. This is the crux of

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[40] Robinson, "Dystopias Now."

[41] Robinson, *Ministry*, 410.

[42] Robinson, 411.

[43] Robinson, 455.

[44] Kim Stanley Robinson, "Comparative Planetology: An Interview with Kim Stanley Robinson," by Geoff Manaugh, *BLDGBLOG*, December 23, 2007, https://www.bldgblog.com/2007/12/comparative-planetology-an-interview-with-kim-stanley-robinson.

concrete utopianism, also entirely consistent with Fredric Jameson's definition of utopia:

> What is Utopian becomes … not the commitment to a specific machinery or blueprint, but rather a commitment to imagining possible Utopias in their greatest variety of forms…. It is no longer the exhibit of an achieved Utopian construct, but rather the story of its production and of the very process of construction.[45]

Accordingly, Robinson depicts the utopian process as a perpetually unfinished struggle, fraught with frustrations and failures, missteps and setbacks, even episodes of violence. When asked whether the Ministry's policies have been successful, Mary answers: "Yes and no and maybe. The usual answer to any question these days."[46] At the end of the novel many problematic issues persist, but the greatest threat is neutralized— a complete environmental collapse is prevented, so the remaining problems can be approached gradually, "solved piecemeal, or worked around, or put off to a later time when even more momentum would be available for deployment against them."[47] The incremental and flexible character of the utopian process is acknowledged, with some problematic aspects being addressed *ad hoc* as they arise. The utopian non-capitalist scheme must therefore be perceived as a transgenerational project, which remains a continuously pursued, ongoing task.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Robinson envisions utopia as a transitional stage—between late capitalism and an evolving alternative socioeconomic reality that can be regarded as postcapitalist. The intermediary character of this vision is part of its concrete utopian character, which corresponds with the manner in which postcapitalism is expected to arise. Firstly, it is supposed to evolve from non-capitalist practices already in operation, combining residual elements of capitalism with emergent non-capitalist practices.

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[45] Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2007), 217.
[46] Robinson, *Ministry*, 420.
[47] Robinson, 480.

Secondly, it is to utilize a variety of perspectives and solutions which are already actively pursued and experimented with. Thirdly, it necessitates a strong focus on the values of solidarity and cooperation. A postcapitalist utopian transformation begins with individuals but turns into a collective responsibility. Finally, it starts from the bottom up but needs to be secured legally from the top down; it is open-ended and spontaneous, but also partially designed. In other words, it needs to stem from the utopian impulse evident in horizontal cooperative networks, but coalesce into a utopian program on a more global level.

If economy, ideology, and social rule are recognized as interrelated social constructs, they can be deconstructed and restructured into a more workable and more sustainable framework. Robinson's narratorial voice in *TMftF* makes this clear: "It's a social agreement, nothing more. This is what makes it so creepy. It's like being hypnotized; you have to agree to it for it to work. So we are all hypnotized in a giant dream we hallucinate together, and that's social reality."[48] Mark Fisher similarly describes capitalism as "a hyper-abstract impersonal structure [which] would be nothing without our cooperation."[49] If the continued existence of the capitalist system is conditional on the resigned or unenlightened compliance of the "hypnotized" general public, it stands to reason that a withdrawal of their support might disrupt the system and initiate a utopian transformation, as dramatized by Robinson in his novel. This gradual process is initiated by individuals who undergo a utopian turn and become radical utopian subjects. As such, they cease to be compliant cogs in the capitalist machine, in order to pursue—actively, purposely and collectively—a better manner of being in society.

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[48] Robinson, 410.

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