RECASTING DYSTOPIA:
TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY NOVELS AND HOME-GROWN TERRORISM

Volume II

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Introduction

Fictional Representations of Home-grown Terrorist Protagonists

On September 11, 2001, in spectacular acts of violence, almost three thousand people died in simultaneous attacks on New York and Washington DC. On that day, Islamic terrorists had succeeded as never before, publicising their cause and exposing the vulnerability of the world's sole superpower – America. The United States (US), led by then President George W. Bush, declared a retaliatory "war on terrorism" based on the moral justification that Western values of freedom, democracy, human dignity and free economic growth were being threatened (United States, Dept. of State, "National Strategy 2003," 2; 2006 Strategy I; Deibel 373-4). Subsequently, with the backing of a large coalition of other nations, the US invaded Afghanistan and Iraq, countries allegedly providing a safe haven for terrorists (Bush "Address," xv-xvi). The Bush Administration, however, lacked sufficient evidence that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction and was concealing Al Qaeda leaders, inciting perceptions that America was simply entrenching and asserting its hegemonic power by force (Deibel 377).

Equally disturbing was a flourishing of a culturally feared "Other" within Western nations – the "home-grown terrorist" – a figure responsible for the death of hundreds of people in Madrid (2004) and London (2005), and holding the same citizenship status as Westerners. These Islamist terrorists were based in the West and had been subject to Western culture during their formative years (Crone and Harrow 522; Precht 9, 15). Some received support, such as training, funding or strategic assistance from international militant groups, but as Crone and Harrow have argued, since 2003 there has been an increase in terrorism where the terrorists are autonomous "self-starters" and not necessarily directly connected to "militants outside the West" (534). Yet this type of terrorism was not an entirely new phenomenon, nor was it confined to those with a jihadist message. Western countries had experienced attacks from their own left- and right-wing radicals in the twentieth century, and this continues in the twenty-first century. The 2011 right-wing terrorist violence in Norway by Anders Breivik and the 2012 shooting at a Sikh temple in the US demonstrate that not all terrorism is Islamist in origin and that some is internally generated in the West.

In the aftermath of September 11, a number of theories proliferated about the rise and allure of terrorism. Such theories included the notion that the war on terror

entrenched US power, and the associated ideological rhetoric used by the Bush administration to justify it demonised and designated Muslims as a group of people likely to be terrorists, ironically, widening the divide between East and West, Muslims and non-Muslims, and enhancing the attractiveness of terrorism for minority Islamic Westerners. The terrorists, and by association those who appeared "Middle Eastern, Arab or Muslim" (de Castro par. 1), were cast as less than human; they became monsters. By depriving individuals of humanity some Westerners permitted themselves to violate their own moral codes when faced with the monster (Zulaika and Douglass *Terror and Taboo* 219). Accordingly, after 9/11 there was a backlash of hate crimes against Arab Americans, vandalism to their property (Zogby 2) and heightened racial profiling by airport security and law enforcement agencies (Volpp 1580).

Research from social psychology supports such findings and seeks to explain why individuals would turn to terrorism, or become "radicalised". While there is, as yet, no clear psychological profile of a terrorist, the research suggests there are some common factors present in home-grown terrorists. These include experiencing a personal identity crisis (King and Taylor 609; Hogg et al. 1061; Choudhury 4; Borum, *Understanding Terrorist* 4) and the presence of certain personality traits, such as narcissism, aggression, and social dominance (King and Taylor 615; Silber and Bhatt 22). One hypothesis is that a *perception* of injustice or deprivation (in relation to issues such as economic and equality status, world affairs) may inspire an individual to take action (Moghaddam 162-163; King Taylor 609-610; Borum, *Psychology* 24-25, 28; Choudhury 4; Sageman 225-226). Thus researchers look to individual psychology and the socio-political-economic contexts that help to produce terrorism (King and Taylor 614; Taylor and Horgan 591; Silber and Bhatt 22). In the context of twenty-first century jihadist violence, the war on terror and its demonising discourse may have exacerbated perceptions of injustice among minority groups.

Indeed, left-wing critical terrorologists such as Joseba Zulaika, William Douglass, Michael Stohl, Ken Booth and Rainer Hülsse and Alexander Spencer argue that terrorism should be understood as a social construction in which discourse is complicit (Hülsse and Spencer 571). The critical terrorologist view is similar to that of political philosopher Slavoj Žižek who emphasises that to understand specific outbursts of terrorist violence (such as the 9/11 attacks) – or what he calls acts of "subjective" violence – we must also understand the underlying "systemic" violence produced by global capitalism, which is often embodied in rhetoric causing a "symbolic" violence (1-2).

However, as David Jones and Michael Smith have pointed out, this approach may lead to individual responsibility for violence being too easily forgotten and violent acts legitimised through the excuse of terrorism's systemic origins ("We're All Terrorists Now," 297 Jones and Smith citing Ken Booth). Thus while systemic issues of the war on terror and demonising discourse may have contributed to perceptions of relative deprivation, personality characteristics and the role of individual responsibility should not be ignored.

Despite the importance of individual terrorist pathology, Bush's rhetoric, often aided by mainstream media accounts, meant that opposing voices struggled to be heard. Scholars expected that Western novelists representing home-grown terrorist protagonists ("HGTP novels") would engage with the terrorist other, and challenge stereotyping discourse, through providing "the enemy's personal story" (Gray, "Open Doors," 135) and making the "terrorist mind less alien" (Head 119).

If this is the challenge, then literary critics, such as Richard Gray, have deemed post-September 11 fiction a failure. Gray criticises early twenty-first century American representations of HGTPs, specifically John Updike's in *Terrorist* (2006), dismissing the portrayal as showing an "imaginative paralysis" by presenting a familiar HGTP that limits a deeper understanding of the strangeness of the enemy Other ("Open Doors," 136). Gray's approach is consistent with that of other literary critics, such as Margaret Scanlan ("Migrating from Terror"), Juanjo de Castro, Jonathan Raban, James Wood, Amal Al-Lethy and Mita Banerjee who argue that Updike's HGTP representation, instead of merely raising awareness of a genuine danger, is actually superficial, stereotypical and part of a neo-conservative system manufacturing threats, reinforcing existing power structures and the status quo (see for instance Scanlan, "Migrating", 266).

Literary critics after 9/11 doubted the ability of the novel to offer a snapshot of the social reality. James Wood, for instance, suggested that novelists were now limited to exploring how characters felt about events rather than telling readers "how the world works" ("Tell Me," par. 14). Building on Wood's analysis, Dominic Head has argued that post-9/11 terrorist fiction, such as Updike's *Terrorist*, has shifted towards "the domestic sphere" (100) while failing to penetrate the terrorist mind (119).

What is striking about such criticism is that it fails to appreciate that HGTP novels such as *Terrorist* often employ a dystopian and utopian dialectic as conventionally found in dystopian fiction, sublimating terrorist fiction into a subgenre that challenges present states of affairs and confronts dominant discourse, while maintaining the urge for a different, better life (Moylan, *Scraps* 157; Baccolini and

Moylan 7). Though terrorist fiction has been considered distinct from dystopian fiction, this exegesis seeks to show that certain twenty-first century HGTP novels are a variation on the dystopian literary tradition. While the writers of HGTP novels would be aware of literary dystopias, there is no evidence to suggest that it directly influenced them. Yet, the commonalities between the genres are compelling, and understanding the HGTP narratives in terms of dystopian writing, reveals subtleties that confront neo-conservative and global capitalist worldviews and what it means to be a Western terrorist. Such an approach also demonstrates how ideas of dystopia, and utopia, have crossed specific modes of narration to inform a largely realist terrorist fiction genre. Further, it shows how the distinction between a novel offering a creative exploration of social reality and the shift to the personal sphere is artificial as both impact dialectically on one another. The post-9/11 novels considered in this exegesis aspire to a nonviolent utopian reconciliation between the social and the personal. The object of this exegesis then is to outline how specific twenty-first century HGTP novels draw on themes, ideas and formal devices occurring in dystopian fiction, and particularly that of the "critical dystopia" (Baccolini and Moylan 6-7).

Three novels are closely examined: John Updike's *Terrorist*, David Goodwillie's *American Subversive* (2010) and my own "Cutting the Cord". The three books depict a dystopian present, and together cover a broad repertoire of ideological causes that pose potential threats to Western societies including religious fundamentalism, eco-terrorism, and deviant-group emergence. Updike's construction of an Arab-American terrorist protagonist in the wake of 9/11 ignited much controversy because of the inherent cultural difficulties of a white, Christian, American writing about a young Muslim extremist. One of the *New York Times* "100 Notable Books of 2010", Goodwillie's *American Subversive*, yet to receive critical attention from the academy, has obtained positive reviews, especially for capturing the contemporary zeitgeist (Watrous par. 1, 3). Both *Terrorist* and *American Subversive* are situated within the rapidly growing genre of twenty-first century terrorist fiction. "Cutting the Cord" is about to enter this emerging subgenre of HGTP novels. It introduces the unique perspective of an Australian female HGTP raised as a terrorist, and who then seeks to abandon her terrorist identity.

The subgenre of HGTP novels is part of a body of terrorist fiction that incorporates novels about terrorism and terrorists, including those concerned with the aftermath of a terrorist attack, where the novel depends upon at least one aspect of terrorism (Appelbaum and Paknadel 397-398). In this context, terrorism is understood to be the threat or use of violence for political, ideological, religious or ethnic purposes

intended to modify the behaviour of a target audience (United Nations Res. 49/60, 51/210; Bruce Hoffman 40-41; Weinberg and Davis 6). Hence terrorist fiction includes post-terrorism trauma, impact and/or aftermath narratives of terrorist events (such as "post-September 11" fiction), and also what I have referred to as HGTP novels. Thus "post-September 11 fiction" is a subgenre of terrorist fiction that "emerged in the wake of, and responded to, the events of" September 11, 2001 (Webb 2) and contains multiple trauma narratives (Webb 2) and specific accounts of survivors and surviving family members of the attacks including the following: Ian McEwan's *Saturday* (2005); Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005); Claire Messud's *Emperor's Children* (2006); and Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007). HGTP novels can also be seen as belonging to a subgenre of terrorist fiction since they focus on the terrorist perpetrator rather than the victims of terrorism.

In HGTP novels, the terrorist figure is, borrowing from Henry James, a "reflector" or a "focal character" (Genette 188) through whose eyes the world of the novel is represented (Jahn 95). Early examples of this subgenre are Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Demons* (1871), James's *The Princess Casamassima* (1886), and Joseph Conrad's *Under Western Eyes* (1910) and *The Secret Agent* (1907). From the 1970s to the close of the twentieth century, literary writers such as Doris Lessing, Eoin McNamee, Don DeLillo, Mary McCarthy, Philip Roth, Robert Stone, Paul Auster, Bret Easton Ellis, J. M. Coetzee, and Chuck Palahniuk, among many others, have also represented the terrorist "from the inside".[1] This tradition of HGTP novels continued into the twenty-first century with texts representing and responding to an increase in terrorist attacks from within Western target nations. Such texts include Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown* (2005); Updike's *Terrorist*; Richard Flanagan's *The Unknown Terrorist* (2006); Moshin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), Chuck Palahniuk's *Pygmy* (2009); Goodwillie's *American Subversive* (2010) and Pearl Abraham's *American Taliban* (2010). This brief history shows a long-standing concern with representing fictional terrorists, implying a societal fascination with their motivations. Differences between these HGTP novels, which will be further examined in chapter three, suggest that the late nineteenth and early twentieth century HGTP works focused on individual culpability, whereas later twentieth century and early twenty-first century representations emphasise how societal problems produced

[1] See for instance Doris Lessing's *The Good Terrorist* (1985); Eion McNamee's *Resurrection Man* (1994); Don DeLillo's *Players* (1977) and *Mao II* (1991); Mary McCarthy's *Cannibals and Missionaries* (1979); Philip Roth's *Operation Shylock: A Confession* (1993); Robert Stone's *Damascus Gate* (1998); Paul Auster's *Leviathan* (1992); Bret Easton-Ellis' *Glamorama* (1999); J.M Coetzee's *The Master of Petersburg* (1994) and; Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* (1996).

individual terrorist psychology. This shift in focus, it will be argued, has an impact on the way dystopia is also portrayed.

A number of generic conventions are apparent in works that deal with Westerners who engage in terrorism against their own country. The actions and choices of the terrorists are a defining element of this subgenre (Blessington 118). Central to such fiction are the reasons a person becomes a terrorist, and what happens in their lives. The very act of representing a terrorist from the inside is to signify the terrorist other as a subject, contra Bush, with a face. That is, the terrorist is named and specified as a subject, a human being, worthy of consideration. Terrorist fiction constructs characters around three archetypes: the terrorists themselves, their rivals (who are generally the police or other government agencies), and finally, the potential terrorist target, which could be either a person or property. Much of the plot is structured around the character becoming a terrorist and conducting or planning terrorist violence, climaxing in a situation demanding his/her choice about how to continue into the future (Blessington 118). Themes involve terrorist motivations, mind-sets, methods and moral responsibility, which are explored in varying detail in different novels. The settings tend to be cities such as London, New York, St Petersburg, Geneva and Belfast. A reader's motivating interest (Pyrhönen 120) in the novel tends to be a mixture of suspense (the violence/crime carried out is intriguing), horror (at the lengths gone to and the association with terrorists acts that occur in the real world) and curiosity (who becomes a terrorist/why/how does a terrorist operate?). HGTP novels are often also a bildungsroman as well as a form of the political novel involving a clash of ideologies (Blessington 120; Ward 264).

Notwithstanding these generic conventions, HGTP novels are often structured around a dystopian/utopian dialectic deployed more commonly in dystopian fiction. Dystopian literature developed out of, and can be seen as a subgenre of, utopian fiction (Cavalcanti 48). Sir Thomas More's 1516 *Utopia* depicts an island paradise, a perfect society. He coined the word "utopia" as a pun from a combination of the Greek "eu-topia" translating to "good place" and "ou-topia, meaning "no place", suggesting a positive place to live that was non-existent and potentially unattainable (Levitas, *Concept of Utopia* 2-3; Milner 827). The novel clearly illuminates the socio-political problems of the time by contrasting reality with an improved fictional world. Literary utopias, then, began and subsequently developed, as an inherently *critical* genre that explored the socio-political issues prevalent in their originating society (Vosskamp 264). Wilhelm Vosskamp argues that literary utopias are defined by the central principle of negation of existing conceptions of reality making them a mechanism to challenge

the status quo (265). The hope is that literary utopias inspire evolution towards better societies by showing how the real world lacks what is promised in the unreal, utopian, imagination (Vieira 23).

The dialectical critique functions only when the literary utopia effectively establishes the *possibility* of a better society. This possibility will not be constructed if the utopia is so preposterous, absurd, irrational and illogical as to estrange a reader. As Darko Suvin argues, what distinguishes utopian and dystopian fiction is the concept of "cognitive estrangement" (*Metamorphoses* viii). That is, they create a setting that is radically or "*significantly different from the empirical times, places, and characters* of 'mimetic' or 'naturalist fiction'" but are still considered feasible within the epistemological framework of the author's age (*Metamorphoses* viii – emphasis in orig.). In other words, literary utopias and dystopias, present new ideas and norms that confront a reader's reality through familiar, factual language with a pretence of realism (Suvin, "Poetics," 374).

Following in More's tradition, literary utopias, particularly, flourished in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Baeten 141) and were characterised by canonical works such as Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1627), Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* (1872), Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1888) and William Morris' *News from Nowhere* (1892) among many others. These imaginary utopias were part of a tradition where ideas of structuring an ideal society also abounded in political philosophy as early as Plato's *The Republic* (around 370 BC), to Enlightenment ideals that reason and rationality would improve human society (Booker 4). In response to the social inequities and poverty generated by industrialisation and capitalism throughout Western Europe, philosophers such as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels constructed socialist alternatives (Baeten 141). However, when socialism began to be implemented later in the twentieth century, "degenerate utopias" emerged (Baeten 141). Over the course of the twentieth century, pessimism and cynicism mounted as the horrors of wars, genocide and totalitarianism became apparent, and idealism, especially on the left, waned. All of these developments were significant in the rise and growth of dystopian fiction over the course of the twentieth century (James 219).

Like the utopia, dystopias also critique their originating society and are found in speculative, science and political fiction genres. The distinction between utopian fiction and dystopian fiction is that the latter imagines "dystopia", from the Greek "dis topos", meaning "a bad place" (Milner 827). Dystopian fiction creates a nightmare view of society, worse than the reader's own, where a dominating force, such as a totalitarian state, oppresses and controls characters ("Dystopia"; Cranny-Francis 125; Baccolini and

Moylan 5). Classic examples of literary dystopias include Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1924), George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-four* (1949) and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932). In each of these works characters have their freedom curtailed to the extent that they lose their individuality. Despite their diversity, the novels share an emphasis in warning readers of the consequences of continuing along certain socio-political paths that could turn the contemporary world into the dystopian societies depicted (Baccolini and Moylan 2).

Dystopia, however, as literary scholars such as Tom Moylan, Michael Gordin, Helen Tilley and Gyan Prakash have pointed out, is not simply the opposite of utopia since that is either an unplanned society or one deliberately designed to be horrible (Moylan, *Scraps* xiii; Gordin et al. 1). A dystopia is typically a faulty utopia. In this sense dystopia is also not anti-utopia, since an anti-utopia is sceptical of utopian claims and pessimistic about an essentially corrupt human nature creating ideal societies (Jameson, *Archaeologies* 198, 199). In contrast, dystopias while retaining an embedded element of commitment to the concept of utopia also seek to warn of some of the dangers inherent in utopian visions. This notion of dystopia creates a tension with utopian ideals, universality and inclusions of difference.

During the 1960s and 1970s counterculture, an influx of ecological, feminist, New Left, civil rights and gay and lesbian thought led to a decline in the number of dystopian works and the emergence of critical utopias (Baccolini and Moylan 2; James 225). Here "critical" indicates that, while the novel criticises the social context out of which the author writes, it also shows utopian societies with flaws, rejecting utopia as a blueprint while at the same time "preserving it as a dream" (Moylan, *Demand* 10-11). A prominent feature of twentieth century critical utopias is caution about the potentially restrictive nature of utopia that arguably dilutes the effective functioning of the utopian dream, potentially lessening the critical capacity of such novels to question and challenge the writer's/reader's own society.

The deferral to the problematic of utopia as a destructive and oppressive force generated an ethos of negativity instructive for later twentieth-century dystopian writing. Raffaella Baccolini and Moylan trace the historical development of literary dystopias and identify those dystopias emerging from the neo-conservative 1980s as critical dystopias. Lyman Tower Sargent, a renowned scholar of utopian and dystopian studies, defines "critical dystopia" as a

> non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as worse than contemporary society but that normally includes at least one eutopian

> enclave or holds out hope that the dystopia can be overcome and be replaced with a eutopia. ("US Eutopias" 222)

The term "eutopia", as used by Sargent, means a "good place" that is able to exist ("Utopia Problem of Definition" 138). Baccolini and Moylan suggest that a critical dystopia can also include at least one "utopian" enclave (Baccolini and Moylan 7). The central difference between "utopia" and "eutopia" being that the former is a positive "no place", whereas "eutopia" is a "good place" that exists (Vieira 5). In this sense "utopia" is used more as an emotive term referring to a "gesture, a feeling, or a motivation that awakens a longing" (Nadir 25) than as a detailed description of a perfect world. The important point here, then, is that the critical dystopia as developed by prominent dystopian theorists can evoke either a eutopian or utopian desire for social change (Jameson, *Archaeologies* 233). This utopian vision of the critical dystopia is confined to the Left because it is seen as a genre that arose as a reaction to proclamations of free market utopias and right-wing economic restructuring. That is, left-wing utopian politics becomes a formal property of the critical dystopia, not allowing for the possibility of a right-wing variant.

The role and functioning of a utopian vision within a narrative is central to the critical dystopia as a literary sub-genre. Fredric Jameson and Moylan both argue that the intent of the dystopia is essentially utopian since it warns people to take action in the present to achieve a better future world (Jameson, *Archaeologies* 198; Moylan, *Scraps* 133, 198-199). But classic dystopias and critical dystopias warn differently. Classic dystopias such as *Nineteen Eighty-Four* or *Brave New World* negotiate between a cynical and despairing anti-utopia and a "resigned pessimism" (Baccolini, "Persistence," 520; Moylan, *Scraps* 157) where the characters, unable to escape the imaginary nightmare world, are typically crushed by a totalitarian society and have to accept the status quo. In the classic dystopia, the individual is subjugated at the end of the novel to the dominant power, and hope and utopia are maintained "only *outside* the story" through a warning to readers (Baccolini, "Persistence," 520). Critical dystopias, in contrast, criticise both the society in which the author writes and the temptation to pessimistically accept the status quo or give in to a sense of anti-utopianism. Critical dystopias are seen in this sense as "militantly pessimistic" (Moylan, *Scraps* 157) and, unlike classic dystopias, "maintain the utopian impulse *within* the work" (Baccolini and Moylan 7; Levitas and Sargisson 13). Ambiguous open endings that resist closure, where protagonists are ultimately left with forms of freedom, such as choices and responsibilities to potentially oppose hegemonic discourse, show this utopian impulse (Baccolini, "Persistence," 520-1). There is no proof that such examples of freedom

within novels have an impact on real-world structures; however, the critical dystopia aims to inspire readers with the utopian impulse.

Critical readings of literary dystopias suggest five other important differences between classic and critical dystopias. *First*, unlike the classic dystopia, the critical dystopia discusses how the dystopia arose (Fitting 156), suggesting the specific causes and events that created it, rather than merely describing dystopian symptoms (Penley 68). *Second*, the critical dystopia blends different genre conventions creating an "impure genre" with "permeable borders" suggesting of itself "resistance to a hegemonic ideology" and renovation (Baccolini, "Persistence," 520). *Third*, a classic dystopian text constructs characters from the perspective of the traditional Western rational subject understood as the central reference point in the world. The critical dystopia, on the other hand, offers a postmodern critique of this view, proposing instead a decentred idea of subjectivity and allows for difference and otherness to be understood or at least conceptualised (Jacobs 93, 94). *Fourth*, the major target of critique in classic dystopias is the state, whereas in critical dystopias it is more corporation, capitalism and neo-conservative hegemony that arose in the late 1980s and 1990s (Moylan, "The Moment," 135-140). *Fifth*, in dystopias, generally, the ruling, dominant force shapes how history and language have been created, and an individual recovering a different narrative that serves as a foundation for collective action is an instrumental tool of resistance (Baccolini, "Persistence," 520-1). In classical dystopias the recovery of memory is located only in the individual, and trapped in the subject's nostalgia, whereas in critical dystopias it lies in the collective (Baccolini, "Persistence," 520-1).

Some critics, such as Andrew Milner, have argued that the distinction between classical and critical dystopias might be useful from a purely formal point of view but this is substantially unhelpful, since utopian impulses can be seen *within* a number of classical dystopias (833). He suggests that a more basic division between anti-utopia and dystopia might be sufficient (833). However, differentiating between classic and critical dystopias is worthwhile because the level of pessimism involved differs markedly between earlier dystopias and the later ones. Also, Milner focuses only on what utopian impulses might reside in a work, failing to take into account other critical dystopian elements such as genre blurring and the recovery of memory, both of which are important in specifying how notions of utopia and dystopia function dialectically within certain texts. In contending that select HGTP novels of twenty-first century terrorist fiction are a development of this dystopian tradition this exegesis therefore makes use of Moylan's precise taxonomy as it allows a more detailed analysis of the dystopian concepts employed in terrorist fiction.

Terrorism, itself, the subject matter of HGTP novels, is intricately bound to ideas of utopia and dystopia, since terrorist protagonists attempt to bring about a better world, one that more closely resembles their utopian vision (Sageman 224). As Sargent has argued in the context of both Islamic radicals and George W. Bush, the extremists' believe in an "exclusive utopia" that does not tolerate difference ("In Defense of Utopia" 12), and paradoxically creates "dystopia in the name of utopia" (Sargent, "In Defense of Utopia" 12). Similarly, Ruth Levitas (Levitas and Sargisson 25), Vincent Geoghegan (151), and Efraim Sicher and Natalia Skradol (156) have variously observed how September 11 was a dystopian moment. From the terrorists' perspective, the occasion of the terrorist attack, of course, is not necessarily ominous. Terrorism thus conceived often involves a clash between irreconcilable perceptions of utopia and experiences of dystopian incidents. Certain HGTP novels of the twenty-first century, as discussed in subsequent chapters, represent this dialectical relationship between utopia and dystopia, as they rework and reconfigure elements of the critical dystopia.

This exegesis presupposes two caveats. The first is that HGTP novels engage in a "cognitive estrangement" strategy that is slightly different from that used in conventional literary utopias and dystopias. HGTP texts offer the assumed law-abiding reader a significantly different character, namely the "terrorist monster", a quasi form of alien, under the guise of factual or realist reporting. The narrative seeks to confront readers by offering fictional terrorist protagonists who are at once strange and familiar and, as we saw in the discussion of utopian fiction above, which are "perceived as *not impossible*" (Suvin, *Metamorphoses* viii). This kind of representation draws on a reader's common understanding of terrorists and terrorism to *negate* and critique the mobilised stereotype and creates an opening for utopian possibility. If this is understood, the paradox in Gray's criticism becomes evident in that readers relate to the "strange" by making it familiar, that is, understanding it through their own life experiences and education. This strategy of cognitive estrangement significantly enhances the critical capacity of HGTP dystopias by making the critical perspective accessible to the reader.

The second caveat is that, while traditional dystopian fiction imagines a future world much worse than our own, as is typical of science fiction dystopias (Moylan, *Scraps* xi, 5), the selected post-September 11 HGTP novels diagnose the present world within which terrorists live as dystopia. In the twenty-first century there has been an increase in fiction representing a "dystopian" present. Sicher and Skradol, for instance, have noted how works of terrorist fiction, such as McEwan's *Saturday* and Foer's

Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close, capture the real terrorist violence of a present day dystopia (175).

Nonetheless, scholarship to date has largely underappreciated how terrorist fiction, and HGTP novels in particular, can be seen to fall within the dystopian tradition. A partial exception is Phillip E. Wegner's analysis of the film *Fight Club*, based on Chuck Palahniuk's twentieth century HGTP novel with the same name. Wegner argues that the film is closer to a proto-dystopia because it resorts to a "resigned pessimism" and has firm roots in a naturalist narrative (182). Critiques of Irish fiction (Kelly), superhero comic books (Murphy), postcolonial texts (Visagie), and children's fiction (Bradford et al.) have also suggested that such narratives, when dealing with terrorism themes, have crossed over into the dystopian genre. Mary Manjikian recognises that many current dystopian novels focus on the impossibility of a victory in the war on terror (114). Twenty-first century HGTP novels that deal with terrorism in a non-separatist context, such as the selected novels in this study, have not yet been examined in terms of dystopia.

Literary critics, such as Margaret Scanlan, Bili Melman, Christine DeVine, Arthur Bradley and Andrew Tate, have in their analyses of various works of terrorist fiction, suggested that some of these works contain utopian qualities. Scanlan, for instance, has argued that twenty-first century terrorist novels such as *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* include a utopian element that indicts the neoliberal rhetoric of the war on terror, and holds the current state of the world accountable ("Migrating from Terror", 277). Bradley and Tate argue that the neuroscientist protagonist in McEwan's *Saturday*, although suspicious of utopian blueprints, nonetheless believes in a politically uncontroversial musical utopia (Bradley and Tate 28). Melman in a 1980 article examined *The Princess Casamassima* and *The Secret Agent* among other works of early terrorist fiction and argued that in those works the terrorist is doomed to fail in his confrontation with reality because of a belief in an impossible, timeless, and ahistorical terrorist utopia (573). Christine DeVine claimed that the teleology of Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1855), a novel that deals with proletarian unrest, strives towards a utopian vision of a harmonious society (68). But these critics do not assess the texts they consider specifically in terms of the dystopian tradition or critical dystopias.

What is significant about this study is that it bridges the gap between terrorist fiction and literary dystopias by demonstrating how the novels under analysis negotiate and rework dystopian writing. The evocation of the dystopian and utopian vision in these novels reveals how they interrogate a stereotyping discourse about terrorists and

evoke potential for future social change. The important questions to ask relate to the ways in which these novels build on literary dystopias. For instance, how do the novels depict the present as being in a state of dystopia? What is the nature of the utopian enclave? How can the novels be seen to negotiate between classical and critical dystopias and an open militant pessimism versus a closed, resigned or anti-utopian pessimism? How does genre-blurring function within the text? How is memory recovered in the novels? What impact does viewing the HGTP novels as an offshoot of the dystopian tradition have on a reading of the narrative as interrogations of a detrimental rhetoric about terrorists? The following chapters discuss such issues in the context of Updike's *Terrorist*, Goodwillie's *American Subversive* and "Cutting the Cord".

Chapter 1

John Updike's *Terrorist* as Critical Dystopian Narrative

> I think we [America] were founded as a utopia, and that's always in our minds – that we're falling short of being a utopia… it controls the tone of American fiction, to a degree… – this feeling that we should be better, that there should be paradise of a kind…
>
> — John Updike (qtd. in Plath, *Conversations* 227)

The protagonist in John Updike's *Terrorist* (2006) is Ahmad Ashmawy Mulloy, an eighteen-year-old American-Muslim intent on realising paradise as "a real place" (*Terrorist* 107). The novel traces Ahmad's journey to fulfil his "thirst for Paradise" (106) exploring his earnest but ultimately unsuccessful attempt to create a utopia. Terrorism expert, Marc Sageman speaking at a symposium on terrorism has argued that Westerners "tend to look at Islamic fundamentalists as full of hate and as being evil" but that the terrorists "do not perceive themselves that way" (Banks 675). He went on to suggest that to understand them we "have to come to grips with their point of view" where "they really want to establish a utopia" (Banks 675). In telling Ahmad's story, Updike's penultimate and bestselling novel articulates a dystopian vision of America as a "bad place" that incites Ahmad's utopian quest. Drawing on his social and political intolerances of American society, Updike problematised the oscillation and incongruity between dystopian and utopian beliefs to compel an understanding of home-grown Islamic terrorism. In an interview regarding the novel, Updike stated: "I think I felt I could understand the animosity and hatred which an Islamic believer would have for our [the American] system" (McGrath Interview, par. 10). He maintained he wanted to lead "reader's sympathies into places they wouldn't ordinarily go," and that he "did not see Ahmad as the embodiment of Islamic evil" but as a "good kid" (Ashbrook Interview).

Critics have not explored just how central notions of a better life – a utopia – amid dystopian sentiments are in the novel. Instead, literary critics and scholars have debated the extent to which *Terrorist*, contributes to the neo-conservative rhetoric used to justify the war on terror, propagating a stereotyped image of Islam as a violent religion and helping to foster reader prejudice and fear against Muslims that has led to

various post-September 11 hate crimes (see, for example Scanlan, "Migrating", 266-267; Wood, "Jihad," par. 4; Al-Leithy 206; Banerjee; Manqoush et. al. 57, 66). Margaret Scanlan, for instance, argues that the novel reinforces a view of Islam as a violent religion, and despite Updike being careful in proposing a view that even Islamic terrorists are human beings deserving of some sympathy, he does not "create a context large enough to include ordinary Muslims, people with differing political and religious perspectives" ("Migrating," 266-267). Similarly, Anne Hartnell argues that Updike participates in a long tradition proclaiming that Islam is a violent religion (488). It has also been argued that Updike utterly failed to comprehend and create a believable protagonist beyond a stereotype (Hamid Interview with Jennifer Reese, par. 9; Raban par. 30; Kakutani par. 4) and that the novel presents "an obsessive, fetishistic preoccupation with racial physiognomy", resulting in it "reinscribing many of the ideological patterns" it sought to interrogate (Thomas 442; 444). Such analyses suggest that Updike plays on readers' fears that Islamic fundamentalists are everywhere in America, even lurking in school corridors. These accord with Richard Gray's critique, mentioned earlier in the Introduction, that Updike's fictional terrorist is representative of an "imaginative paralysis" ("Open Doors," 135).

In sharp contrast, critics such as Kristiaan Versluys, Malreddy Kumar and Gail Caldwell contend that the novel successfully explores the ultimate terrorist Other offering a critique of Orientalism (Versluys 182; M. Kumar 237; Caldwell par. 2). Christopher Hitchens, while critical of *Terrorist*'s plot, praises Updike for casting Ahmad against stereotype, as an engaging young man (114). Others contend that *Terrorist* offers a harsh rebuke of American society, undermining the Western liberal, consumerist project (Batchelor 176; Jones and Smith 945). For Bob Batchelor, Updike offers new American heroes that hold onto belief and "focus on societal advancement and preservation" (Batchelor 182).

It is perhaps axiomatic that Ahmad is a character developed as a response to twenty-first century American anxieties over an increase in domestic jihadis. Following the tragic events of September, 11, 2001 (which Updike witnessed from his son's apartment window), the London and Madrid bombings and the war on terror, Americans dreaded being targeted by a fellow citizen (Johnson par. 1; Gartenstein-Ross and Grossman 11). Themes of being overrun and destroyed by "evil", "hateful" Islamic militants (Banks 675) are at the core of creative exploration in *Terrorist*. The novel does not provide any non-jihadi American Muslim characters and depicts the mastermind of the terrorist plot, a radical Muslim cleric Shaikh Rashid, as an evil manipulating bigot. The narrative, however, interrogates the stereotype of the Islamic terrorist by showing

how Ahmad's radicalisation is motivated by a dystopian world and how he ultimately disengages from terrorism seeking a nonviolent utopia – a less destructive way of creating a better place. Consequently, the narrative's capacity to address terrorism, religion and America's positioning in the twenty-first century is compromised by criticisms of the novel to date that have been based on studying the text within a wholly realist framework. In fact, *Terrorist* explores ideas, themes and narrative devices found in critical dystopias as particularly apt for examining whether there is a utopian horizon in America beyond the fear of terrorism.

The dystopian narrative plays out through pivotal characters including Shaikh Rashid, and Lebanese immigrants, including Charlie, who recruit Ahmad to be a suicide-bomber; his mission is to drive a truck full of explosives into the Lincoln Tunnel. The teenaged Ahmad struggles with his sexual feelings for fellow high-school student, Joryleen, a black girl, who sings in a Christian church. Also, Jack Levy, Ahmad's school counsellor, a depressed Jew in his sixties, tries to help Ahmad apply for university entrance. Tired of his mundane life and marriage to his obese wife, Beth, Levy ends up sleeping with Ahmad's mother, Terry. Vitally for the plot, Beth's sister, Hermione works for "a born again right-wing stooge", the Secretary for Homeland Security (32). In the novel's final climactic scene, Ahmad, driving the truck, has an epiphany that God is about life not death and subsequently abandons the mission.

The novel projects a central concern: the dystopian view of the West held by the characters and represented by America. Resonating a critical dystopia where a misfit hero resists a dominant force (Moylan, *Scraps* xiii), Ahmad, the terrorist, is the narrative's site of defiance, the central hero, whose actions attract Levy's gallantry. As a second-generation immigrant teenager of mixed cultural heritage who converts to Islam, the religion of his estranged father, Ahmad is an outsider. He feels he does not belong in an America still divided by racial lines and haunted by indifference and a lack of belief. A loner at Central High School he is out of place with his overly serious, judgmental temperament, his lack of humour, and his religious fervour, virginal status and starched white shirts (*Terrorist* 9). His stilted, highly moral, rigid way of being in the world, may deter reader sympathy and certainly encompasses a view of Ahmad as a stereotypical home-grown terrorist, a "static and one-dimensional" character, more "robot than human being" (Kakutani par. 4), a figure who stands for "nothing other than his religion", a "Muslim metonymy" (Abell 21).

And yet such a view disregards Ahmad's vulnerability and hence his multi-dimensionality. Ahmad emerges from a position of weakness in society as part of an ethnic minority fighting against adversity for utopia. He is emblematic of Zulaika and

Douglass's contention that terrorism is a "weapon of the weak" ("The Terrorist Subject," 33). He is not depicted as a cold-hearted monster; nor is he a psychopath. Updike presents him as a caring, good and intelligent person who, though harsh and inflexible at times, always tries to act with good moral intentions. Levy tells Ahmad he is a "smart, responsible" kid (40). He cares about insects, his mother, his absent father, Joryleen, and children in a car.

In representing Ahmad's psychology and reasons for becoming a suicide bomber, Updike creates a dystopian American landscape. Typically in critical dystopias the oppressive force that the hero resists is the tyranny of corporations and neoliberal hegemonies (Moylan, "The Moment," 135-140). In *Terrorist*, there is no identifiable corporation controlling the lives of characters, no central power that can be attacked. Rather, the controlling source of oppression, which Updike clearly criticises, is a paralysing, fluid and ubiquitous consumerism. Characters are constantly compelled to buy and consume products they do not need because of the consumer culture they inhabit. Ahmad tells Joryleen, "All America wants of its citizens, your President has said, is for us to buy – to spend money we cannot afford and thus propel the economy forward for himself and other rich men" (*Terrorist* 72). He explains that all Democrat and Republican American presidents "want Americans to be selfish and materialistic, to play their part in consumerism" (72). Even sex, as Charlie says, "means consumption" (213). Further, the need for instant gratification has become so rampant that it has even come to define conceptualisations of human happiness and values of liberty. Updike surmises, from the Secretary's point of view, that "democracy and consumerism" are "an outgrowth of each individual's instinctive optimism and desire for freedom" (47-48).

Updike highlights, in Žižek's terms, the systemic violence and the conditions of suffering at the root of terrorist motivation. For Žižek contemporary acts of terrorism must be understood as "the outcome of modern socio-political conditions" rather than "a feature inscribed into Islam 'as such'" (Žižek, *Welcome* 41). Updike articulates this sentiment, by providing examples of the symptoms of a sick dystopian society. Echoing Huxley's classic dystopia *Brave New World*, this pervasive consumerism creates the dystopia for Updike's central characters because it changes human nature, producing a vast array of individual and social problems.

Hyper-individualism, laziness, apathy and disbelief become accentuated. Throughout the novel a pervasive symbol of Western degeneration and its partiality for consumer excess is Levy's obese wife, Beth (Blessington 123). Despite her excessive comforts, Beth is not a happy person. She "can hardly move" (122) and feels that her

life is out of reach (125). Even Levy finds himself eating twice the amount of food at restaurants only because they serve it, not out of genuine desire (20). Updike employs the obesity trope as a symbol of individual and social decline in a way that is reminiscent of Conrad's terrorist fiction, *The Secret Agent*, at the beginning of the twentieth century (in relation to Michaelis and Verloc), suggesting a recurring criticism of modern Western culture in HGTP novels (Thomas 446) where people are driven to consume even what they do not want, resulting in stultification. Levy thinks to himself: "America is paved solid with fat and tar, coast-to-coast tarbaby where we are all stuck" (27). But Ahmad, the terrorist resistor, is portrayed as lean, fit and able to act against this culture.

Sexism and aggressive assertions of masculinity are also key dystopian symptoms in the narrative. Tylenol Jones, an African-American teenager and Joryleen's boyfriend, feels the need to abusively defend her, as his "turf". Later in the novel he turns Joryleen into a prostitute and he, as her pimp, reaps the financial benefits. Updike warns of the failings of liberal multiculturalism and racism through the central dismal repercussions of a society driven by consumerism.

Characters throughout the novel speak in racist terms (see for instance 131) and ethnic minorities persecute each other out of feelings of inherent inadequacy. Ahmad becomes the victim of racial abuse by Tylenol Jones (15-16). Ahmad's inward experiences of racism along with his feelings of exclusion (because of his different moral values), cause his frustration and anger at others, such as Joryleen, as well as himself (11). Here we see Updike adumbrating the effects of racism as internalised trauma and offering, to borrow a phrase from Archer-Lean used in a different context, an "exposé of racist realities in the dystopian present, rather than reinforcement of such prejudice" (Archer-Lean 6). Just as research by Dutch Intelligence has shown racial or ethnic division and feelings of exclusion make individuals more receptive to the process of radicalisation (AIVD 57-58), this novel depicts a developing polarisation between Ahmad as a Muslim and his non-Muslim fellow students as a major cause of Ahmad's sense of alienation, and finally as a trigger for his radicalisation. Ahmad, too, is not immune from thinking racially abusive slurs, referring to black Christians as "kinky-haired kafirs, the singe of Hellfire on them like the brown skin on barbequed drumsticks" (17). These are examples of what Updike describes as "the dozing giant of American racism" (*Terrorist* 46).

Updike's dystopia also warns of paternal absence and inadequate masculine role models for American youth as decisive psychological hazards in the development of young males. Ahmad, abandoned by his father when he was a baby, witnesses a

succession of his mother's boyfriends. This creates in Ahmad – along with his mixed-race origins, a nonreligious mother and a father who was not a devout Muslim – a sense of uncertain identity; he is divided between a perceived image of his father, his own cultural heritage and a secular multi-cultural American society. The emotional disruption causes him to seek out a more concrete sense of self through surrogate father figures: God, Sheikh Rashid and eventually Levy. Ahmad's mother tells Levy: "a boy needs a father, and if he doesn't have one he'll invent one. How's that for cut-rate Freud?" (117). The novel thus positions American society in a state of dystopia where the fatherless, unsupported by America, are prone to masculinity crises and radicalisation. In this way, the narrative participates in a wider cultural fatherhood debate, suggesting that father-absence can result in psychological trauma and a propensity for violence. Updike stresses the importance of fathers in a way that accords with commentators, including those on America's New Right, who mourn the decline of fatherhood and warn of lawlessness as one of its detrimental social consequences (Cain 10).

Dystopian psychological desolation extends beyond youth into middle-age where the "American dream" is stained by shallow consumerism. For instance, Levy cannot sleep because of the "misery of the world" (19), as well as his own unfulfilling consumerist life and empty daily routines (20). For him, as with Ahmad, there is no deep sense of personal belonging and social cohesion. The middle-aged bourgeoisie cannot evade ennui where the fabric of society is held together by consumerism. Jones and Smith come to a similar conclusion, arguing that the characters in *Terrorist* "who inhabit the fragmented modern *urbs*" are lost souls (934 – emphasis in orig.). This alienation of individuals contributes to the sense of urban decay in Updike's novel.

The setting is New Prospect, a largely run-down, dilapidated, industrial town, "drug-plagued", full of "mixed-income housing" (77-78), and populated by the mostly "brown" in "its many shades" (12). The city has failed to meet expectation to be a great, prosperous city (178). Mita Banerjee criticises Updike's "inner-city ghetto" scene (23) as an "alleged sympathy for the brave new world of multi-ethnic America" (24). She argues that "the racial sympathies on which the narrative relies reveal this very detachment as false" and attributes the state of New Prospect to "a decline of whiteness" (24). Updike constructs the inner-city ghetto, however, not as a valorisation of multi-ethnic America or as something attributable to white population decline, but as a motif of urban decay rife in a consumer-based "fragile, misbegotten" nation (*Terrorist* 177). Updike identifies the cause of deterioration: "sops from the lords of Western capitalism" (*Terrorist* 13). The point he makes is that capitalism's claim to progress is

mere pretence, since it is ineffective at creating prosperous lives or constructing a harmonious cultural milieu. Not only the brown citizens are implicated in this dilapidation but the whites are also: "White faces downtown look furtive and dingy" (12). Whole towns fall through the cracks, and people lose their own sense of identity and do anything they can – including defacing property with graffiti (13) – to reclaim it. It was prescient that Updike wrote his novel before the Global Financial Crisis took hold and openly pitted the plight of the inner-city ghettos against the multi-national corporations at the heart of modern American capitalism.

Terrorist is thus not simply a warning about what might go wrong in the future but an indictment of twenty-first century America. There is a fundamental discrepancy in the values of Western liberalism, including freedom from human suffering, and the character's experiences of alienation, emptiness and racism. In this way, *Terrorist* depicts the New World of the third millennium as being in a state of cataclysmic dystopia: consumerism, faithlessness, apathy, racism, discrimination and depression flourish, becoming a time bomb awaiting detonation. In this landscape of despair, characters feel powerless to affect change: even worse, they no longer desire change. Ahmad becomes a terrorist willing to die violently to disrupt this dystopian environment.

In this way the novel explores the systemic issues that underlie terrorist violence and at the same time also choreographs claims made, for example, by Jean Baudrillard in *The Spirit of Terrorism*, that, the global monopolisation of the West and capitalism together act oppressively, so that alternative ways of being and thinking in the world are disallowed (9). The Western system itself creates the very "conditions for…brutal [terrorist] retaliation" where terrorist violence is the only language by which a dissenter can be heard (9). Further, he argues that Western society recognised its own potential for self-destructiveness, and feared that an event like 9/11 would take place. Countless disaster scenes in movies, literature and art show this fear, and also "the impulse to reject any system growing all the stronger as it approaches perfection or omnipotence" (7). Similarly, Fritz Breithaupt argues that America cannot "be absolved from possible involvement" in the root cause of the September 11 attacks (70). Updike's novel addresses this "involvement" by constructing a dystopian America that echoes Baudrillard's and Breithaupt's readings of post-9/11 American society. Global capitalism, because it "has been so open" with its production of porous borders, enables terrorist activity, particularly the shipment of bomb-making materials (*Terrorist* 131-132).

The novel's beginning also invites the reader to consider America's complicity in the making of Ahmad as a terrorist. The narrative, like other literary dystopias, commences *in medias res* (Moylan, *Scraps* 148) and in the resistor's point of view. When Ahmad attacks Westerners as "devils" who seek to take away his God (3) this sets in play Suvin's notion of cognitive estrangement, offering Western readers a confronting perspective different from their own. The effect is to interrogate, position and provoke readers to consider America's and their own involvement in the construction of Ahmad as a monster, and his and *their own* ethical status. Ahmad believes that America seeks to prohibit his God, an action contrary to the United States constitutional First Amendment of freedom of religion. In this way the narrative conjures what is beyond the simple textual parameters, in a space of political and social contestation, where undisclosed asymmetries between American ideals and practices are challenged.

Terrorist is not simply about representing twenty-first century America as a "bad place"; it is also a critical dystopian narrative that posits utopian potential beyond terrorism and consumer paralysis. Several events and characters act as catalysts for Ahmad's decision to disengage from terrorism. When he gains a sense of critical judgment and thinks outside his closed world-view, his underlying compassion for others comes to the fore. Ahmad discovers that the terrorists had killed Charlie for being a CIA operative working undercover, and his feelings for his mother, Joryleen and innocent American children travelling in a car trigger his sense of humanity, creating a desire for utopia beyond violence. Levy, on information leaked from Hermione and Beth, also joins Ahmad in the truck and the open dialogue between the two diverse men gives both a sense of community belonging.

As in other of Updike's novels, sex plays a crucial role. A sexual encounter with Joryleen is an experience Ahmad describes as "a convulsive transformation" like "that, perhaps, which occurs when the soul passes at death into Paradise" (226). This is a concupiscent vision of individual transformation, and simultaneously, a shared moment of inclusive connectedness with the opposite sex. It causes Ahmad to see life through a "new lens" that helps to form part of his deradicalisation process (230). Like Octavia Butler's critical dystopian *Xenogenesis* Trilogy, *Terrorist* emphasises the power of the erotic to suggest that individual transformation is possible. In this sense, the novel, as David Lodge has argued in the context of Updike's *Couples* (1968), is concerned with creating "a clandestine erotic utopia" (511). James Wood, in his analysis of *Terrorist*, echoes this claim arguing that sex for Updike, in novels such as *Terrorist* and *Roger's Version*, is a "mother of all theologies" ("Jihad," par. 25), an earthly activity "touched

by divinity" ("Jihad," par. 27). This leads him to the conclusion that "sex saved the innocent drivers of the Lincoln Tunnel!" ("Jihad," par. 25). While Ahmad's sexual encounter with Joryleen certainly provides a turning point in Ahmad's disengagement from terrorism, it is not the only cause of his change in focus.

A "progressive nostalgia" and the recovery of memory – so central to dystopias (Baccolini, "Finding Utopia," 174; Baccolini, "Persistence," 521) – also operate to open up a space for utopian possibility, or what Fredric Jameson articulates as "revolutionary stimulus" (*Marxism and Form* 82). Characters in the novel regularly look back to a better time in the past. In some cases, such as Beth's, the memory, or the illusion of the past, incites a pessimism that life cannot improve (121-122). Her sister Hermione remembers when they were children life "seemed a paradise" and she laments the disappearance of freedom now that Americans live in fear of terrorists: "We can never be happy again – we Americans" (132). This defeatist attitude suggests a "dystopia of resignation" (Moylan, *Scraps* 181). Yet, for Ahmad and Levy, nostalgia creates utopian conceivability. Ahmad, longing for his absent father, creates a loving illusion that urges him to become a Muslim. Then, later in the narrative, memories of times with his mother and Joryleen help him to disengage from terrorism. Levy's memories of better times and his desire to prevent disaster propel him to communicate with Ahmad. Updike thus demonstrates that conceptions of self *can* be changed when nostalgia operates actively to evoke what Moylan calls a "utopian enclave of resistance" ("Realizing Better," 212). What we see here is that even the deployment of individual nostalgia can become a covert coming together of collective memories that breaks through the consumerist illusion, offering, as Baccolini has argued of critical dystopias, an acceptance of responsibility, and desire to change, and to act ("Memory and Historical Reconciliation" 114).

The utopian also registers when Updike explores the dialectical alignment of different religions, ideologies and their proponents throughout the novel, frustrating clear binaries. Similarities between the beliefs of Islamic extremists and Western religions, such as Christianity and Judaism, and between Islamic and Western actors are made. For instance, Charlie relates George Washington to jihadist revolutionaries, Ahmad notes similarities between Joryleen's Christian church and his mosque, and Levy criticises certain passages of the Koran just as he does with similar sections in the Torah (295). But Levy also perceives the benefits of selected Islamic teachings and intends to incorporate these into his classes (302). The sentiment is that there is optimism that boundaries can be traversed and common meaning discerned, stimulating genuine interpersonal relationships. Catherine Morley supports this view when she

argues: “This alignment seems deliberately designed to highlight the comparative elements of the American and the Muslim ‘other’, to show us how closely aligned both really are” (90).

The defining utopian moment in the novel occurs when Levy risks his life to join Ahmad in the truck prior to bomb detonation and the two men engage in compassionate negotiation. The dialectical linking and unification of two diametrically opposed characters is central to Updike’s vision of a hope beyond terrorism. Ahmad, the young, faithful Arab, and Levy, the middle-aged, faithless and spiritless Jew, join together in an act of intercultural camaraderie. They share a similar distaste for the degeneration of American culture despite their different backgrounds, and also a persevering sense of hope that life can be better. This reveals the utopian potential by showing a way in which very different people can be united through, in Žižek’s terms, “shared intolerance” (*Violence* 133-4). Updike’s narrative follows the strange irony Žižek observes where the September 11 “attacks gave rise to a new sense of solidarity” in American society, evidenced by “scenes of young African-Americans helping an old Jewish gentleman to cross the street, scenes unimaginable a couple of days previously” (Žižek, “Welcome 2001,” 279). The novel raises the central concern of making amends and ultimately upholds the idea that political violence can be overcome not just through some Habermasian dialogue, but through being prepared to collectively stand together. Jameson has described such solidarity as “the spiritual property of the Utopian Tradition proper” (Seeds 66). This is the positive evocation of Updike’s utopian vision at its purest, and what the novel suggests is that insurmountable bridges can be crossed, and the hope for an idealised world of reconciliation based on compassionate values that can motivate a collectivity, despite its faithlessness, can come into being. The idea of unification for Ahmad is particularly powerful since Levy stands in as a surrogate paternal figure. At the novel’s end, Levy becomes a flawed father-figure fulfilling, at least in part, Ahmad’s desire for a father.

What appears to be a victory for the hegemonic power – Ahmad’s violent resistance being restrained – is actually a victory for the people: a subjective act of terrorism is thwarted by negotiating with terrorists in a way that defies neo-conservative policy. This alliance between the antinomies of terrorist dissident and law-abiding citizen identifies a free people who are *not* controlled by consumerism, global capitalism or neo-conservative ideology. That is, Updike establishes a reassertion of individuals who are capable of rising above the dystopian world and exerting free human agency. It represents a dialect that sublimates a post-Enlightenment humanist subjectivity that defines a human as a self-determining being with the “capacity to

choose for oneself and the capacity to act upon one's choices" (Jacobs 92) by bringing such subjectivity into collective thesis and antithesis.

When Updike draws on the common moral values that lie in diverse men he undermines the hyper-individualism of consumer culture portrayed in the novel and simultaneously reduces cultural and ethnic differences into an inclusive rhetoric that challenges neo-conservative "us" versus "them" discourse. Such a reduction can be dangerous because there is a potential to ignore ways in which difference can be a socially liberating marker of identity. Kimberle Crenshaw, for instance, argues that difference can "be the source of social empowerment and reconstruction" and, consequently that intragroup difference should not be conflated or ignored (1242).

But Updike's humanism is one, I suggest, that does not advocate essentialism, conflating difference. Ahmad has the power to create himself as a jihadi, and as the narrative proceeds and he encounters other characters, he recreates his identity once again. His self-determining (re)creations are informed by his relation to others. While Updike undoubtedly relies on transcending universal values, he shows through the relationship between Levy and Ahmad that access to these can only be achieved when identity is reconfigured through confrontation and engagement with Otherness. Thus the human subject for Updike is one where difference and the social allow individual transcendence and vice-versa. Free agency, the ability to act, and political resistance, comes from this relational conception of self. In Judith Butler's terms, an individual is "in power even as one opposes it, formed by it as one reworks it, and it is this simultaneity that is at once the condition of our partiality, the measure of our political unknowingness, and also the condition of actions itself" (241). For Updike "boundaries of the self are permeable" (Jacobs 94) as we see in Ahmad a subject "always constituting discourse as well as [being] constituted by it, [who] can only act out of this dialectic process" (Jacobs 95). Ahmad, the self-determining individual, thus continually remakes himself "in response to relationships that are seldom static" where "the self exists fundamentally in relation to others" (Donchin 239). Such a conception of self, as Naomi Jacobs contends when commenting on other novels, "opens spaces for transformative encounters with difference" in the narrative (94). *Terrorist* employs this relational self to, I suggest, articulate a more complex representation of Ahmad that undercuts criticisms that the novel participates in divisive "homogenized depictions of Arab Americans" (Fadda-Conrey 533). The narrative draws on this concept of identity to suggest social amity is attainable.

In spite of this challenge to demonising Arab American discourse, however, the novel, even through disavowal, risks perpetuating the ideology that espouses racial

division and equates Islam with terrorism. As Carol Fadda-Conrey has argued in the context of Arab American fictional texts, "by virtue of engaging with the polemical narratives of us and them, good and bad Arab in order to refute them" a text can "indirectly end up affirming them" (Fadda-Conrey 547). Indeed, Scanlan and Samuel Thomas have both argued that despite Updike's intentions and the apparent sympathetic portrayal of Ahmad, *Terrorist* relies on divisive discourse to rebuke it (Scanlan, "Migrating Terror," 266-267; Thomas 442). To be sure, the novel does not frustrate hegemonic binaries by offering rich, multiple and varying views of Arab Americans or Muslims. Nonetheless, the destabilising interrogation of dominant hegemonic constructions comes from an entirely different textual space: the development of a relational conception of identity promulgated with utopian imagining. By providing Ahmad with a fluid, open and continuously developing conception of self, Updike provokes a counter-narrative that reconceptualises prevailing discursive depictions "of Arab Americans as homogenous Others" (Fadda-Conrey 548).

The limitation of such a view of identity is that Ahmad and Levy cannot ignore or be placed outside of the dystopian world. They must wrestle with their identities amid society and the status quo. At the end of the novel, Updike thrusts the two male characters back into their afflicted consumerist world, where once again they must renegotiate their identities. Despite the sense of realised compassion and empowerment to act and change the course of world events, the narrative, in the final passage, never relinquishes its dystopian quality. Hence Ahmad feels that the devils have taken away his God (310), although the narrative suggests otherwise that it was actually his self-determination and his relationship with other characters that caused him to disbelieve in militant fundamentalism.

> Ahmad and Levy return to the quotidian dystopia where people are:
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> reduced by the towering structures around them to the size of insects...intent [on a]…hope they are hugging to themselves, their reason for living another day…fixed upon self-advancement and self-preservation...[that], and only that. (310)

This passage is doubly revealing of Updike's dystopia. First, the reference to the "towering structures" evokes a cityscape where corporate skyscrapers are symbolically the controllers of human destiny and preside over the lives below. Such a picture after the collapse of the World Trade Centre buildings represents, according to Jerrilyn McGregory arguing in the context of speculative fiction, and cultural geographer Mona Domosh, discussing the architectural development of New York, a "symbolic association of height with the new economic order" (Domosh 84; McGregory 7).

Second, this engulfing economic order, as Updike has signalled throughout the narrative and reiterates here, leads to a society focused on hyper-emphasising the individual, eliminating the social. In 1987 Margaret Thatcher memorably stated that "[t]here is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families" (10). *Terrorist* unveils how such aggrandised individualism in fact destroys the socially reliant individual. For Updike, as we have seen, this also means limiting the individual's access to the transcendental.

This dystopian moment in the novel, where the larger social reality that conjures up terrorists remains unaltered, arguably canvasses a perceived inability to change those social conditions. On this basis one might argue that *Terrorist* is an example of the "resigned, closed, anticritical, pseudo-dystopian sensibility associated with the anti-utopian persuasion" (Moylan, *Scraps* 194). Indeed Moylan argues that another of Updike's novels, *Toward the End of Time* (1997), is an example of such a pseudo-dystopian text, as it perceptively opens up "the social only to suture it right back up" (*Scraps* 196).

Yet such a reading in the context of *Terrorist* seems overly reductive and does not give sufficient weight to the story's denouement and the transformation of Ahmad and Levy and the solidarity forged between them. Both men draw on values of life and unification to collectively overcome the divides of religion and race, and even, for the briefest of moments, before Updike submerges them back into everyday reality, each has found his own power, through his relationship with the other, to chose his path. It is this taste of power that Updike offers to readers as a utopian aesthetic that preserves hope and speaks beyond the pessimistic, resigned form, and the neo-conservative racial stereotyping that enables the text to function as a critical dystopia of the twenty-first century. The bond between Ahmad and Levy, Updike implies, can be replicated on a grand scale to redeem both terrorists and America. If Updike is correct, that the feeling that Americans "should be better, that there should be paradise of a kind", and that this "controls the tone of American fiction, to a degree" (qtd. in Plath, *Conversations* 227), then *Terrorist* as a critical dystopian narrative, suggests redemption through persistent negotiation. David Goodwillie's *American Subversive* (2010) also explores this idea that people have the power to change the world, particularly in the way they respond to environmental challenges caused by Western capitalism. While Goodwillie's narrative picks up the utopian desire for a better world evident in Updike's novel, it differs in being ambivalent as to whether eco-terrorism is a justified response to a sense of dystopia.

Chapter 2

Eco-terrorism and Justified Resistance in David Goodwillie's *American Subversive*

By 2010 American terrorist fiction began to represent non-religiously inspired HGTPs searching for a utopia within their dystopian world, breaking free from Gray's "imaginative paralysis" ("Open Doors," 135). David Goodwillie's *American Subversive* (2010), for instance, in its construction of an American eco-terrorist, Paige Roderick, recognises the problem of eco-terrorism and dissolves the prevailing demonising discourse through drawing on the critical dystopian form. The novel considers the morality and nature of violence in our historical moment, and addresses the home-grown terrorist phenomenon in contemporary America by formulating tensions between utopian and dystopian impulses.

American Subversive, a bestseller, which received favourable reviews (see for instance Beason; Householder; Howorth; Watrous), has yet to receive critical attention from the academy. The novel merits closer scrutiny because it chronicles the internal workings of American ecological terrorist groups in an age preoccupied with fears of environmental meltdown and the rise of terrorism in the West. Modern industrial development is seen to have caused man-made natural disasters, which range from oil spills, acid rain, a thinning ozone layer, rainforest depletion, the dumping of toxic materials, the wide-scale mass production of crops and meat, to the endangerment of animal species and global warming through carbon dioxide emissions. Indeed, some critics of capitalism in the twenty-first century, including Žižek, argue that an ecological crisis is contributing to the global capitalist system's approaching an "apocalyptic zero-point" (*Living in the End of Times* x). Responding to these and other ecological problems, social activist groups, such as Greenpeace, and "eco-terrorist groups", such as the Earth Liberation Front (ELF) and the Animal Liberation Front (ALF), have emerged in a utopian attempt to prevent irreversible damage to the ecosystem. By the turn of the century, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) regarded such groups as constituting some of the most significant domestic terrorist threats within the United States because of their radical activities (Cunningham, "Countering," 121; Jarboe par. 4).

The FBI defines eco-terrorism as "the use or threatened use of violence of a criminal nature against innocent victims or property by an environmentally oriented,

subnational group for environmental-political reasons, or aimed at an audience beyond the target, often of a symbolic nature" (Jarboe par. 6). Eco-terrorists tend to target those who derive a commercial benefit from the destruction of the environment (Christiansen 89; see also Vanderheiden "Radical Environmentalism," 433), including research organisations, farms, building and construction firms, the forest industry, car dealerships and fast-food restaurants (Liddick 1). Such extremists believe that decisive action is necessary to stop the present dangers created by the exploitation of natural resources (Christiansen 89). Eco-terrorist groups are generally part of leaderless, decentralized movements that operate through distributed cells of environmental activists (Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Centre par. 1). They seek to avoid human or animal casualties, instead seeking to cause substantial economic damage (Christiansen 90). In 2002 FBI officials claimed that since 1996 the ELF/ALF were responsible for more than six hundred criminal acts, which generated in excess of 43 million dollars of damage (Jarboe par. 4). In 2003 the ELF claimed an arson attack in California that caused damages in excess of USD50million, and in March 2008, more property attacks caused an estimated USD7million in damage (Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Centre par. 16). Such acts are often labelled "ecotage", referring to an act of sabotage informed by ecological concerns.

American Subversive captures the eco-terrorist dilemma in its portrait of Paige. She belongs to a militant splinter group that advocates property damage to influence corporations and governments to alter environmentally harmful business practices. The novel mirrors a concern for the future of the planet found in ecotopian texts (that is, ecological utopias), such as those written by Morris, Huxley, Ernest Callenbach and Ursula Le Guin, and dystopias that deal with ecological disasters, such as more recent fiction by Margaret Atwood.[2] What is noticeable in *American Subversive*, and absent from these ecotopias and dystopias, is a realist imagining of, in Brian Stableford's terms, a "dystopia now" (276), which motivates eco-terrorist aspirations and behaviour.

In a bildungsroman narrative, *American Subversive* presents Paige's gradual radicalisation. From her incipient frustration at the political inertia regarding the protection of the environment, Paige moves through a brother's death and subsequent personal crisis, to her inevitable involvement in an eco-terrorist group lead by ELF organiser Keith Sutter. As an eco-terrorist, Paige plans and conducts acts of ecotage until one of the group's bombs explodes, accidentally killing a former member of the Weathermen, Simon Krauss. His death disrupts Paige's commitment to militant action,

[2] See for instance: William Morris' *News From Nowhere* (1891); Aldous Huxley's *Island* (1962); Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia* (1975); Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (1974) and *Always Coming Home* (1985); and Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003) and *The Year of the Flood* (2009), among others.

and compels her to go into hiding. Paige's path collides with her opposite, a shallow gossip blogger and failed New York journalist, Aiden Cole, after an anonymously sent photograph of Paige implicates her in a successful attack on the Barney's Building in New York. Despite Aiden representing Paige's antithesis, he curiously seeks out the eco-terrorist. When he finds her, united in their utopian desire, they begin a relationship that gradually sees them both living underground, only to discover that it was Simon Krauss who sent Aiden the photograph. The narrative is structured as a series of Paige's and Aiden's alternating memoir writings about their experiences with eco-terrorism and provides a social critique of the dystopian present.

Paige is Goodwillie's "misfit hero" (Moylan, *Scraps* xiii) and the story's site of resistance against an oppressive global capitalism. She is a twenty-nine-year-old, white, American woman, an environmental policy analyst, hailing from a patriotic family with a soldier brother who served and died in the war on terror in Iraq. Without the language of violence, Goodwillie imagines her as voiceless, affectless. As an eco-terrorist she becomes passionate about instigating political change against liberal postmodern apathy. Depicted as an intelligent, strong, active terrorist, Goodwillie's HGTP disrupts the conventional supportive role gender stereotype of women in terrorist organisations (Cunningham, "Trends," 173; Graham 205) in line with American terrorism data that suggests the level of female participation in eco-terrorist groups is "high" (Cunningham, "Countering," 121).

As in Updike's *Terrorist,* Goodwillie's dystopia figures global capitalism as the oppressor and the cause of, in Žižek's terms, the systemic violence underlying terrorism. Paige states:

> Who were these targets, these objects of our dangerous affections? They were the people and institutions that pulled America's strings, and played them, too, played them so well we'd been lulled to sleep by their soothing sounds – that soft thrum of capitalism. We wanted to expose the wretched underside of the global energy supersystem. (107)

The issues that her group advocated were "anti-globalist" and "read like a dossier of the downtrodden and left-behind: racism, poverty, prison abuse, nuclear disarmament; the evils of science, energy, religion, property, capitalism, imperialism, free trade; the raping of Africa, Tibet, the earth" (60). The group's motivation is thus broadly consistent with other anti-capitalist movements, but distinctly separate from religiously-based fundamentalist groups. It is secular in its response to capitalism and is similar to the protest organisations of the 1960s, such as the Weather Underground.

The problem with global capitalism, the novel suggests, is that it produces a present dystopia in two key respects. First, global capitalism creates a harmfully pervasive online media, technology and celebrity culture. The novel thus falls within a dystopian tradition of writing that is critical of post-Enlightenment thinking, blindly situating technology as the answer to a better world. The media cycle has now become instant and omnipresent. Media broadcast breaking news live, and anyone with a mobile phone can contribute by taking videos, photos or simply reporting events as they occur. At the same time, social media is the connective fabric of interpersonal relationships and everyone can "broadcast" their own "news" (Oberhelman 5). Philosopher, art critic and media theorist Boris Groys has argued "[a]ll utopian impulses, hopes, etc. were projected onto the internet as the empire of freedom beyond national sovereignties" (77). It is this "internet utopia" that *American Subversive* denounces as a catalyst for dystopia because it prevents "authentic" subjectivity, destroys personal relationships and sucks significance from events.

The way in which online media impedes "authentic" subjectivity is through, Goodwillie suggests, the control of human agency. Admission into the national consciousness, as Aiden's story articulates, to be a subject – a "somebody" (18) – in the twenty-first century, and to avoid "fading into American oblivion" one must have a social media identity (68). As a journalist he must also converse with celebrity. The dark underside of this identity entails personal unfulfilment, contributing to Goodwillie's portrayal of a dystopian society endowed with ennui masked by moments of false significance. At the beginning of the novel Aiden does not register that he is in fact living in a dystopian present. Constantly moving from one short burst of communication to the other, "blogging, texting, speed dial" (103), going to parties attended by models, and media professionals who are "lucky enough to be employed after two long years of recessionary layoffs" (5), and being in a relationship with a girl who preferred "vague open-endedness" (5), Aiden embodies contemporary insouciance. Then, in recognition of the meaninglessness of his existence, he states "I thought of the thousands of blog posts that lay before me, years of momentary significance adding up to nothing in particular" (103). The media machine, Goodwillie suggests, has spun out of control moulding subjectivity with an impossible separation of reality and simulacrum, overloading people beyond the ability to achieve a self-determining existence. Just as in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) Newspeak narrowed and provided orthodoxy for thought, in *American Subversive*, global and social media determines and shapes the unconscious, ontologically transmuting human agency.

Accordingly, Goodwillie's novel reflects Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's argument in 1944 that the culture industry controls individual consciousness (121).

Online media and its corresponding technology are doubly invasive in the novel because they destroy relationships through the dissolution of communication. For example, Aiden's relationship with his girlfriend Cressida is ruined when she uses their lives together as the subject matter of articles in an online *New York Times* relationships column. In this context, abject cynicism and stifled social interaction are fuelled, as boundaries between public/private, real/unreal are increasingly blurred. Instead of making people more in touch with their feelings, emotions and each other, the new media and celebrity culture are construed as the epitome of social dysfunctionality.

Goodwillie thus narrates the finding of psychologists that "...using the internet adversely affects social involvement and psychological well-being" because it increases loneliness, stress and depression (Kraut et al. 1026-28). In particular Robert Kraut et. al. claim that internet use replaces strong social ties with weaker ones, and hence leads to a decline in social involvement and psychological well-being (1029). In Guy Debord's terms the "spectacle" of the ruling order's nonstop postmodern, consumerist, technological discourse "about itself, its laudatory monologue of self-praise" (par. 24) dominates "every aspect of life" (par. 2) so that there is a "loss of quality" (par. 38), a "concrete unfreedom" (par. 72) and a "pseudo-use of life" (par. 49). Similarly, Martin Heidegger argued earlier in the twentieth century that modern technological development endangers the possibility of people living a free "authentic" existence because it threatens the revealing of Being ("Concerning Technology" 339). That is, technology only gives one limited view of existence. When this narrow view dominates, it obstructs other forms or understandings of existence, such as what is revealed though nature.

American Subversive describes a twenty-first century dystopia that echoes Kraut et al., Debord's and Heidegger's views. Aiden's initial lack of registering his unhappiness is due to his dwelling in a kind of Heideggarian inauthentic existence, moving from each moment, without a sense of direction or connectedness with a wider context of being and meaning. The media is critical in "selling" modern capitalism and preventing people from seeing its dystopian reality. One of Heidegger's students, Herbert Marcuse, foreshadowed how technology could become more effective as a form of social control because it is pleasant to use. For Marcuse, technology lost its neutrality and became an ideological tool (Marcuse 4). Goodwillie's Aiden suggests, like Heidegger's and Marcuse's philosophy, how human agency can all too easily become dominated by a technology beyond our control resulting in an inauthentic existence. In

this way, the novel raises questions about actualising a sense of authenticity and meaningfulness beyond a dystopian, online media age. Goodwillie demonstrates that the postmodern, capitalist age of hedonistic living via technological forms, as a "utopia", is in fact, under Suvin's terminology, a "fake" (Suvin, "Orientation," 170-171). Further, the narrative suggests that global capitalism's technology actually has a macrocosmic fragility. Hence Paige and her group use technology to stage their attacks, using the system against itself, to dismantle it (which, as we will see in chapter three, "Cutting the Cord" also builds on).

The second key dystopian feature the novel warns of is that global capitalism immolates the environment for the short-term financial gains of transnational corporations and governments. The narrative assumes that humanity is engaged in environmentally detrimental practices, such as companies clearing first-forest growth to make room for paper mills (Goodwillie, *American Subversive* 33). In Heidegger's terms: "Nature becomes a gigantic gasoline station, an energy source for modern technology and industry…It rules the whole earth" (*Discourse on Thinking* 50).

American Subversive does not provide a detailed examination of the extent of the ecological destruction; more attention is given to how acts of violence and the resulting media spectacle, are required to mobilise the public, governments and companies for better business practices. After 9/11, Iraq and Afghanistan Paige felt that it was even harder for non-national security related messages such as smallpox in Africa and environmental issues to be placed on the national agenda, leading her to believe that acts of eco-terrorism were necessary to attain recognition of those concerns (223). As Paige states, "it was just so hard to be *heard*, through the war and all it bred, the patriotism and cynicism" (223 – emphasis in orig.). Indeed, her belief is confirmed when the eco-terrorist group is successful in getting its message heard through violence (76). She argues: "My former employer – a leading environmental-policy institute – spent tens of thousands of man-hours a year accomplishing not nearly as much. At least in terms of visible progress" (32). The actions of the radical environmental group successfully lead to a public condemnation "of the companies targeted" and "the broader industry as a whole" (305). Tyrone Beason of *The Seattle Times* corroborates this view asserting that the novel "highlights an unsettling lack of faith in institutions and peaceful protest that leads some to believe that harsh tactics are the only way to get noticed" (par. 11).

American Subversive reflects, then, an earlier twentieth century pronouncement by Don DeLillo (after writing *Mao II* in 1991) that "[i]n a repressive society, a writer can be deeply influential, but in a society that's filled with glut and repetition and

endless consumption, the act of terror may be the only meaningful act" (qtd. in Passaro par. 41). Goodwillie echoes DeLillo's sentiment showing how environmental activists are powerless in an age dominated by anomie and inundated with the Iraq war and the war on terror. National security issues have captured the political agenda, and consequently, other policy concerns have sought to gain their recognition through that narrative. Eco-terrorists place environmental issues on a government's national security program, and they also obtain public recognition through locating such concerns within the public's existing terrorism fears.

Hence *American Subversive* extends Jean-Paul Sartre's "boomerang effect" where violence comes back to strike the initial instigators beyond the colonial context to a dystopian environmental crisis (Sartre 17). This effect is also known as "blowback" where the actions of a country or company come back to hurt them through retaliation by those affected (C. Johnson 278). However, while Frantz Fanon argued that violence used by those who had been colonised was a justified response (250), Goodwillie is more ambivalent in the context of eco-terrorism. For instance, Paige praises violence against property as an act that corporations notice, but she simultaneously questions the cost when Simon is killed (Goodwillie, *American Subversive* 305). Also, the values of the eco-terrorist group are diminished, through Goodwillie's psychological buttressing (via the death of Paige's brother); Paige's eco-terrorist goals and beliefs are not *themselves* enough to cause her to commit terrorist acts. This is consistent with terrorism research such as that undertaken by Dutch Intelligence indicating in the preradicalisation phase of the development of a home-grown terrorist there is often a personal crisis that can make a person more receptive to extremism (AIVD 34). However, the personal trauma triggered for Paige was arguably created by systemic problems, that is, the Iraq war. Nonetheless, without the death of her brother the reader is left wondering whether Paige would have taken up the eco-terrorist banner. As in Updike's novel, in *American Subversive* systemic problems create the personal tragedy that leads to inevitable terrorist violence in the name of ideology.

To be sure, Paige's group also justifies its stance on the basis that it takes precautions to ensure there is no risk of human life. Keith states: "The rules are still the same, chief among them being *no human casualties*" (39 – emphasis in orig.). The intention of eco-terrorist groups to inflict only property damage as opposed to threatening the lives of innocent people is used, for instance, by Professor Steve Vanderheiden to argue that acts of ecotage should not be considered the same as acts of "terrorism" ("Eco-Terrorism," 425; "Radical Environmentalism," 299). Goodwillie challenges this ethical perspective on ecotage violence, since Paige's group throughout

the novel gradually escalates the level of attacks and eventually Simon becomes a human causality. Paige states, "But at what price [is the movement politically effective]? Simon is dead." (305). True agents of resistance in the dystopian present, Goodwillie demonstrates, must be prepared for (accidental) violations of their own social ethic. In this way, *American Subversive* is similar to other dystopian narratives such as Le Guin's novella *The Word for World is Forest* and James Tiptree Jr.'s story "We Who Stole the Dream", where as Søren Baggesen has shown, relatively peaceful species are "motivated to transgress their own deeply integrated cultural norms of nonviolence in order to rebel against their oppressors" (Baggesen 34). In the case of Goodwillie's narrative, even those advocating living in peaceful repose with nature, can be motivated to act destructively to achieve their goals.

Despite this bleak picture of the present, *American Subversive* evokes several utopian enclaves that situate it as a critical dystopia. In creating desire for an ecotopia, this narrative, like Updike's *Terrorist*, draws on a "progressive nostalgia" (Baccolini, "Finding Utopia," 174; Baccolini, "Persistence," 521). Goodwillie's nostalgia encompasses familial and natural myths. Close family bonds are framed within happy childhood memories where freedom was playing in mountainous forest, independent of mobile phones, Facebook and Twitter accounts. Nature enhances bonds between siblings and close friends, not technology. Paige's memories of having fun with her brother in nature playing cowboys and Indians or hiking (26) creates in her a profound desire for a partnership with nature, rather than a domination over nature, which Adorno and Horkheimer identify as the Enlightenment's guiding theme (4). This is in stark contrast to global capitalism's overdetermined technological apparata that, in Aiden, produce a detached alienation. In Moylan's terms used in a different context, Aiden lives in "the present reduced to the empirica of daily life" and as a result he has lost not just the ability to think beyond the present but all recollection of how things were *before* (*Scraps* 149).

Goodwillie's narrative thus empowers memory exactly as Moylan points out dystopias typically do. Through his encounter with Paige, Aiden is able to see alternative truths and "'speak back' to hegemonic power" (Moylan, *Scraps* 149). Paige unlocks Aiden's memory in the same way that the death of Paige's brother unlocked her memory of nature. Goodwillie envisions Paige as a modern dystopian actor whose reclaimed memories of humanity's pristine origins induce a yearning for societal change. Walter Benjamin, among others, has argued that rulers tend to define history and it is up to agents of resistance to "brush history against the grain" (256-257). Paige refuses to forget the happiness she can have in nature, which adds fuel to her resistance,

and creates a counter narrative to history. This suggests that nature is a part of history and the present, just as nature and subjectivity are entwined. The interplay between nostalgia, memory, history and subjectivity creates a textual space in which utopian possibilities are considered for a better world and utopian desire is encouraged. This demonstrates that the power of memory also has a significant place in dystopian terrorist fiction such as *American Subversive*.

Goodwillie, like Updike, stages a dialectic of antithetical characters to construct his utopian enclaves. In a 2010 interview Goodwillie states that his intention was to bring two seemingly different characters together, "the girl who cares too much about the world and the guy who lives a shallow life and doesn't care at all" (BrooklynTheBoroughTV). Aiden's encounter with Paige informs his resipiscence of an inauthentic lifestyle: apathy is shaken off and he ultimately emerges as an accomplice, an agent of resistance. In other words, the terrorist Other for Aiden, as for Levy in *Terrorist*, opens up the possibility for a kind of Heideggerian authentic creation and action. Paige breaks Aiden out of his self-induced media fog. To this end "authenticity" is crucial for Aiden's ability to work towards a utopia.

It is also important to recognise the presentation of *American Subversive* as a form of fictional memoir and how this functions within the narrative's dystopian strategy. An alternating dialectical format of memoir/diary, when modulated with terrorist and dystopian themes, bildungsroman genre, plus political quest, all confirm the text's positioning as a critical dystopia. The novel, not limited to the conventions of any one genre, opens up more critical possibilities to challenge the dystopian present. *American Subversive* self-reflexively crosses genre boundaries thereby opposing the dominant ideological paradigm, both in a formal and political sense. Where the existing hegemonic society demands a linear presentation that conforms to standard genre conventions, the critical dystopia derives its critical force by pointing to future utopian signifiers that are absent in the present and its cognitive framework. In addition, the diary form allows for hope through self-conscious reflection warning of what is missing in existing society, while showing the ability of an individual to take control and reappropriate language (Baccolini and Moylan 6). While it is questionable how far the diary form can escape the epistemological framework of its time, it nonetheless is at the precipice between the past and future, revealing the power to act in the present. Moreover, because the diary form is intimately private it remains free from hegemonic control unlike any other form of writing (Gordon 42).

The genre blurring and memoir format put forward in Goodwillie's novel thus has implications for the text as a work of resistance writing. The text appears like the

diary form used to warn and signify a deferred utopian possibility of a future in which the writing will be read, where people will become conscious of the dystopian present and might act to avert it. Both Paige and Aiden write to explain their actions, to warn people "of the world to come", or "enlighten others" if they get killed (Goodwillie, *American Subversive* 2). Despite Aiden wondering whether their words even mattered "beyond their morbid salaciousness" (119) and whether their pages would ever find an audience (3), in a way that resembles Yevgeny Zamyatin's dystopia *We*, in which the protagonist's diary is addressed to "unknown readers", the act of reading itself suggests that the pages have somehow been made public, that the moment of future resistance is close at hand with the present. As Paige states: "I wondered then about the chapters to come, mine and his [Aiden's], the unfolding annals of America, grand proclamations giving way to intimate emotion, loss ceding to love" (308). The diary entries as revelations of authentic character reflection stand in contrast to the superficial commercial media blogs Aiden is employed to write at the beginning of the novel.

American Subversive also incorporates an open-ended, ambiguous narrative that resists closure, a key feature of the critical dystopian form (Baccolini, "Persistence," 521). The present society remains largely unchanged but Paige and Aiden, as dissidents, find a way to live underground, opening up a utopian enclave where resistance remains and might rise up once again to change the world. There is no complete closure over whether Paige is deradicalised and unlikely to commit another act of terrorism. While she laments the loss of Simon and what his death means to those who loved him (such as Aiden and his mother) she nonetheless continues to live underground with the support of eco-terrorists and proclaims the effectiveness of ecotage: "Just look at N3 now, as post-attack sympathy has turned, in the wake of the network's heavy-handed reaction, to a broad-based condemnation of the company – their bias, their tone, their agenda – and the broader industry as a whole" (Goodwillie, *American Subversive* 305).

While Updike's *Terrorist* invited numerous criticisms for featuring a HGTP who was culturally other to its author, Goodwillie's narrative is risky for an entirely different reason: the expression of utopian desire in his work might inspire real-world eco-terrorists. For instance, Martha Lee, Lawrence Buell and Jonathan White argue that Edward Abbey's *The Monkey-Wrench Gang* (1975), about a group of fictional eco-terrorists inspired the Earth First! Movement (Buell 153; Lee 65; J. White 258). Similarly, at the other end of the ideological scale, it has been argued that William Pierce's *The Turner Diaries* (1978) inspired right-wing terrorists such as the Oklahoma City bomber, Timothy McVeigh (Michael 149). There is a chance then that *American Subversive's* open denouement, praise for the effectiveness of eco-terrorist actions in

changing company practice, and Aiden's authentic awakening in light of his engagement with an eco-terrorist, motivates real-world extremists.

While there is an uneasy imbrication of ecotopian impulses within the terrorist framework, the novel, as we have seen, does not advocate the moral justifiability of such violence. Further, Paige and her group's utopian desire is ultimately one where humans are in partnership with nature, and where acts of ecotage are not necessary because governments and companies take sufficient action to protect the environment. The role for governments and companies within this vision is to ensure that "violence" is not the only language they hear. Thus the novel as a dystopia not only criticises existing society but also looks at how to change it. What is notable about this text, however, is its ambivalence about the possibility that human restraint will be exercised so that violence is rendered unnecessary.

American Subversive expresses an antagonistic consciousness caught between the efficacy of terrorist violence in the dystopian present and the possibility of its transgression. The text's open-ended critical dystopian narrative offers a complex heuristic device, allowing the reader to imagine a better world beyond the need for terrorist violence. The dystopian warning is multifaceted: unless governments and companies become more open to listening and acting on environmental issues, acts of eco-terrorism will continue, and eco-terrorists can never fully circumvent endangering human life. Nature has not disappeared in the world of Web 2.0 and global capitalism, and if we recognise its continuing importance for defining emotionally healthy subjectivities, we may avert an unfolding ecological apocalypse. That is, nature is inexplicably involved in constructing authentic identities and visions for utopia. Authenticity also becomes a key concept for utopian imaginings in the next terrorist fiction novel under analysis, "Cutting the Cord".

Chapter 3

Imagining the Dystopian Terrorist Cult in "Cutting the Cord"

"Cutting the Cord", like other works of terrorist fiction, interrogates terrorist violence by engaging with the critical dystopian form. However, unlike *Terrorist* and *American Subversive*, my novel does not strictly inhabit the critical dystopian narrative category because it fails to meet an essential requirement of that genre: to critique global capitalist society. Rather, "Cutting the Cord" emphasises that fanaticism when combined with certain psychological factors can create conditions that are favourable for terrorism. *Terrorist* and *American Subversive* charge, like Žižek and the critical terrorologists discussed in the Introduction, that the inequities of global capitalism foster the terrorist mind-set; that is, individual beliefs are not ultimately responsible for terrorism. "Cutting the Cord" inverts this theory, showing that "utopian" arguments can be misused by fanatics who are in the position to sway others, particularly the young, impressionable, or the insecure. My novel explores what might happen when a terrorist cult forms based on one person's closed mind, and the answer as we shall see, is terrorist violence for broader Western society, and a dystopian outcome for many perpetrators.

Overwhelmingly HGTPs in English-language novels are "first-generation" terrorists who undergo a period of conversion and join a terrorist group. This is consistent with real-life, home-grown terrorists who are often local "alienated youths, who are at a cross road in their lives" (sic) seeking a cause to follow (Precht 87; see also Post, *Mind of the Terrorist* 9). HGTPs in anglophone literature are also predominantly American/English (Appelbaum and Paknadel 409). As considered in the Introduction, the fictional terrorist became a central character in classic fiction in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Dostoevsky's *Demons* (1871), James's *The Princess Casamassima* (1886), and Conrad's *Under Western Eyes* (1910) and *The Secret Agent* (1907) were amongst the first novels to probe the mind of the terrorist. In these works, Dostoevsky, James and Conrad portrayed terrorists as immoral and/or psychologically inept. Both the tactics and the ideology of terrorism, which at the time was seen as a form of anarchism or nihilism, came under criticism. For example, Dostoevsky's terrorists are shown as "demons", often within a theological context fashionable in the day, and Conrad's are, to quote Ian Ward, the "fanatic" and the "deluded" (263).

After World War II serious terrorist fiction (to borrow a term from Scanlan, *Plotting Terror* 11-13) continued to explore the minds of HGTPs, focusing on why characters born and raised in liberal Western cultures become terrorists. However, these portrayals began to diverge from those found in Conrad's, James' or Dostoevsky's texts. The fictional terrorist as a focal character became a lens that could reveal society's flaws. By the 1970s, novelists, sometimes influenced by postmodern tendencies, challenged previous conventions of constructing a terrorist character by deviant behaviour and the new representations tended to delegitimise the dominant social order that was emerging: free market global capitalism. Away from the nineteenth century realms of the individual and culpability, this social structure was seen as creating an environment that produced terrorists. For example, the protagonist in DeLillo's postmodern *Players* (1977) becomes a terrorist because he is bored with American consumer culture. Doris Lessing's *The Good Terrorist* (1985) centres on a woman in the United Kingdom who joins the Communist Centre Union. In Paul Auster's *Leviathan* (1992) a writer living during Ronald Regan's presidency loses faith in the political power of words and retaliates by destroying symbolic American icons such as the Statue of Liberty. Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* (1996) involves a young American male who, discontented with his culture's consumerist materialism, establishes an underground club where men fight each other to gain a sense of their existence. What starts out as passive rebellion becomes the terrorist misfit organization "Project Mayhem" – the very antithesis to the capitalist's ideal of an ordered, consumerist society. The HGTP in Bret Easton Ellis's *Glamorama* (1998) is a rich supermodel and through him the novel questions the idea of terrorism as the desperate violence of Western or Islamic fanatics (Stephenson 279). In these novels, the problems of capitalism produce the individual terrorist psychology, and the fictional terrorist is represented as a partly legitimate response to oppressive power structures.

Post-9/11 HGTP novels, as we have seen with *Terrorist* and *American Subversive*, continued to explore why HGTPs become involved in terrorism, and again, in these texts an oppressive social order of global capitalism and the associated American imperialism initiated the terrorist mind-set. Further, early post-9/11 texts focused more on Islamic extremism, such as in Updike's *Terrorist* discussed previously, or Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown* (2005), which explores the story of Shalimar, an illegitimate child of a former US ambassador to India, who joins a jihadi organisation. *American Taliban* (2010) by Pearl Abraham portrays John Jude Parish, an all-American nineteen-year-old boy, becoming involved in radical Islam when he is drawn into an internet chat room. In an Australian context, Richard Flanagan's *The*

Unknown Terrorist (2006) details the plight of Gina Davies, a pole dancer, who is implicated in Islamic terrorism due to Australian media and government misinformation. Gina, innocent throughout the novel, commits a violent act in the end because she is accused of being a terrorist and is treated as such. Although these earlier post-9/11 novels overtly centred on jihad and religious motivations, as the twenty-first century has progressed other texts have emerged that explore non-sectarian, political forms of terrorism, including *American Subversive* considered earlier.

As discussed in the Introduction, to understand terrorism adequately the most sensible approach brings together a range of factors including systemic, political and economic issues, the terrorist group's social situation, the analysis of the discourse associated with terrorism, individual characteristics and personal responsibility. Yet, whether the twenty-first century HGTP novels deal with jihad or another ideological form of terrorism, they, like their predecessors in the late twentieth century, and in contrast to Dostoevsky's, Conrad's and James' texts, de-emphasise individual fanaticism and psychopathology in favour of illustrating how social malaise generates terrorist psychology. These contemporary HGTP novels treat the corrupting condition of capitalist Western culture as an etiology of terrorist psychological abnormality. This recurring narrative theme could be due to the fact that within terrorism discourse, the emergence of critical terrorism studies, has highlighted societal factors. It could also be partly due to writers cautiously sidestepping an "evil religious terrorist" trope in the post-9/11 environment. Unfortunately, these considerations may have led to the jettisoning of significant radicalisation factors because individual psychopathology and personal responsibility are demonstrably important in the genesis of terrorist acts.

The recent trial of lone wolf terrorist Anders Behring Breivik shows that the question of mental competence is a significant factor in determining the conditions for terrorist violence and moral and legal culpability. An early Norwegian psychological evaluation of Breivik concluded that he was a paranoid schizophrenic with grandiose delusions (Malmö par. 4-5). A later evaluation found that he was of sound mind and therefore capable of being legally responsible for murdering 77 people (Anders par. 1, 8). Breivik opposes any suggestion that he is insane and a Norwegian court found him guilty and sane in August 2012 (Townsend par. 2).

Further, there was significant controversy regarding the psychological state of Ted Kaczynski, otherwise known as the Unabomber. A psychological evaluation found him to be suffering from schizophrenia (Amador and Paul-Odouard 369). However, Kaczynski resisted a mental illness defence (Oleson 640), and some have argued that there is little evidence that Kaczynski is insane (Oleson 646).

Similarly, the issue of mental competence has also been considered in the cases of charismatic leaders of violent terrorist cults from the twentieth century, such as Shoko Asahara, founder of Aum Shinrikyo in Japan. Asahara, although found to be insane was sentenced to death (Akimoto 7). The membership of the cult was drawn from intelligent young members of Japanese societies at vulnerable stages in their lives (Hudson 133). Asahara had controlled Aum Shinrikyo through common cult techniques such as stripping members of their identities and pre-membership property, drugging them, indoctrinating them, depriving them of sleep as well as kidnapping and imprisoning them (Kiyoyasu 378).

Terrorist expert Max Taylor has usefully provided an analysis of the behavioural factors that can influence the development of terrorist violence in his book *The Fanatics* (1991). He argues that abnormal psychopathology and fanaticism is useful for understanding some acts of political violence (256). According to Taylor, there are certain recognisable features of fanaticism that include: an exclusive concern with an ideology "to the exclusion of alternatives" (40); insensitivity to other people and social norms (44); a loss of critical judgment in terms of not being able to make life choices that would benefit the individual (45); inconsistency between values and actions (47); single-minded certainty (48); and simplification of the world, often in black and white terms (50). So while in many instances terrorists may be acting rationally as a result of larger social inequities, in some cases fanaticism and abnormal psychopathology may also play a part in the development of a terrorist, and to dismiss such a possibility fails to appreciate the multifaceted nature of the problem of political violence.

"Cutting the Cord" is written partly as a warning about the dangers of simply attributing the terrorist dilemma to systemic problems with global capitalism. My novel, like *American Subversive*, also suggests a shift away from the previously dominant focus on jihadist terrorism in early post-9/11 terrorist fiction, while simultaneously recapitulating questions of terrorist behaviour as an outcome of individual belief and psychology, as did the earlier terrorist fiction novels of Dostoyevsky, Conrad and James.

In exploring the idea of extreme views, "Cutting the Cord" poses the following questions: "Is it possible to take a fanatical position on an issue that many people would find intrinsically moderate, for example, being against the excesses of global capitalism, to produce an unacceptable social result, such as terrorism? What sort of group dynamics would be needed to produce a terrorist cult based on such an antagonism? In cases of Islamic suicide bombers, there has been some suggestion that, to fight Western values, extremist institutions have indoctrinated children (see for instance Magouirk and

Atran 31, 38). But what if more "left-wing" Western views can be subverted to a similar terrorist purpose? Can we argue that fanaticism, regardless of its genesis and combined with other psychological factors, can create conditions in which an individual might resort to terrorism?

"Cutting the Cord" portrays a charismatic but deranged terrorist cult leader, Henry, who establishes an extreme modern-day organisation, the "Authenticity Movement". The Movement seeks to eliminate capitalists because of its belief in the "evils of global capitalism". The critical dystopian critique is one that horribly prompts excessive violence. But the intention of the novel is not to attack the critique itself in an anti-utopian gesture or in support of neo-conservatism, but is an exposé of the hazards involved in ignoring psychological states that have already been partly realised in violent cults, and arguably terrorists themselves. The purpose is not to suggest that all terrorists have an aberrant psychology, but that some *may* have. The novel pushes at the conventional literary boundaries of the utopia/dystopia continuum as a way of throwing light on contemporary terrorist threats and their contributing factors. This strategy seeks to encourage a less partisan consideration of the origins and ambit of terrorist violence, while simultaneously sharing a feature of the critical utopia: "the awareness of the limitations of the utopian tradition" (Moylan, *Demand* 10).

The Authenticity Movement is a variation on the doomsday cults run by charismatic leaders, which were prevalent in the 1960s through to the 1990s, such as the Manson family, the People's Temple and Branch Davidians. Like Aum Shinrikyo (see above), The Authenticity Movement engages in outward-directed terrorist activities similar to those of jihad operations (excluding suicide bombings). Henry's group claims that the generally accepted notion of economic progress is spread throughout society like an infection, hindering the capacity of people to live "authentically". The Movement preaches that those who lead and profit from the global financial system – the billionaires – are especially inauthentic and, as key vectors of contagion, must be eliminated. According to the Movement, the virus of "inauthenticity" steers the populace into myopic consumption, existential alienation and robotic subjugation. The terrorist agglomeration, using twenty-first century technological innovations (such as mobile phones, computers and the internet), seeks to amplify and diffuse system-created global financial crises via acts of terrorism and economic sabotage, inciting a revolution that will create a more "authentic" way of being. Thus there are parallels between "Cutting the Cord" and *American Subversive*. While the former does not explore environmental issues, the terrorists within both novels seek a more authentic lifestyle, whatever that may entail.

Much of the Authenticity Movement's ideology is derived from a medley of sources including communism, socialism and radical left politics (its theories about anti-capitalism, anti-consumerism and revolution), authenticity philosophy (its beliefs about individuals having the capacity to live authentically or inauthentically) and paranoid conspiracy theory (its unsubstantiated belief in an ideological virus). As in Updike's *Terrorist* and Goodwillie's *American Subversive*, the terrorists in "Cutting the Cord", have an anti-consumerist agenda, although there is no real suggestion of an alternative anti-capitalist system. The deviant group emerging from within modern capitalist society warns that our Western society of "freedom" cannot ignore the possibility of attacks arising in a non-jihadist context. In this way, the text, along with *American Subversive*, resists dominant understandings that the terrorism threat is located only in Islamic extremism; a situation that was only confirmed by Breivik's killings in 2011.

The protagonist in "Cutting the Cord" is Amira Knox, a twenty-two-year-old Australian, prepared by her family since childhood to commit acts of terrorism against the world's capitalist elites. Her family leads the Authenticity Movement and her parents adopt children specifically for the purpose of training warriors. Amira's assignment within the group's larger scheme is to assassinate European billionaires from her base in Germany. But a series of events threaten her tenuous sense of self. She witnesses a ten-year-old girl's pain at the loss of her grandfather, one of Amira's targets. Then one of Amira's brothers disappears. Amelia, a new child is brought into the Movement's fold for training. A major bank collapses and her beloved father, Henry, seems to be keeping secrets from her. At the same time a love affair offers Amira a different perspective on the world. As a result, Amira questions the legitimacy of the Movement and her role in it as a warrior. Her growing desire for freedom and self-expression stimulates a search for her origins and she begins to seek out her birth parents. But Henry would rather kill his daughter and those she loves than tolerate her dissent and risk the failure of the Movement.

The novel, then, uniquely depicts an Australian female second-generation terrorist, anticipating the potential for terrorism within Western countries to become generationally entrenched, and consequently more dangerous and persistent. In 2008 Francis Blessington argued that "[f]ortunately for fiction the terrorist novel has just begun again, and may have a long history and further developments. Unfortunately for us terrorism itself has just begun again and may have a long history and further developments" (124). These further developments suggest different terrorist profiles to the prevalent first-generation HGTP narrative. Indeed, the character of Amira postulates

the ease with which cult-inspired, successive-generation terrorists might emerge from within Western societies, and also, the potential dangers of extremists indoctrinating their children. At a press conference in 2006, the then British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, declared that terrorism would last at least "a generation" (Cowell par. 1). Security agencies of Western societies such as the US (Kaster par. 3), Britain (Cowell par. 2) and Australia (Australian Government 15) have also advanced claims about the persistence of home-grown terrorism. Terrorism experts, such as, Jerrold Post and Todd Helmus have argued that exposure to radicalised parents can be an aid to radicalisation (Post, "When Hatred is Bred in Bone," 633; Helmus 78). This gives rise to potential subsequent-generation terrorists emerging from within Western societies, that is, individuals who have been socialised from a young age by their families and inner social groups to accept terrorism as a legitimate strategy for achieving their particular social, political or religious aims.

Successive-generation terrorism within Western nations is not only a theoretical possibility, however. According to an article by Stewart Bell in the *National Post*, Canada's Integrated National Security Assessment Centre acknowledged that one of the most common factors leading Canadian youths towards terrorism is fathers with extreme beliefs raising extreme believers (par. 30-31). "One example is Ahmed Khadr, the Canadian who sent his sons to training camps in Afghanistan and encouraged one of them to become a suicide bomber" (Bell par. 31). Referring to the classified intelligence report Bell writes: "Having a jihadist father like Ahmed Said Khadr, to cite but one example, often leads to an atmosphere of extremism where the children are raised to see the justification of using violence to attain political goals" (par. 41). This is similar to the case of Mohammed Haydar Zammar, a jihadi terrorist operating out of Hamburg, Germany, who assisted some of the 9/11 hijackers to obtain training. During his childhood and development as a young adult he was exposed to the radical beliefs of his father and religious community (Schurman-Kauflin 65). Such an upbringing normalised an extremist understanding of the world and encouraged him to provide support to those who were taking violent action based on similar beliefs.

Contiguous with such accounts, cultural narratives featuring children groomed for violence began to appear in the twenty-first century. The thirteen-year-old boy in Chuck Palahniuk's epistolary novel *Pygmy* (2009) is a terrorist, from an unspecified country, with socialist underpinnings who is adopted by an American family. The novel's focus is on exploring the potential dangers for society posed by an individual who, as a child, was trained to be a terrorist. Two recent films have featured female characters trained from birth to be skilled assassins: *Salt* (2010) (trained by her KGB

handler) and *Hanna* (2011) (trained by her father in Finland to kill a CIA agent). Both films illustrate the lethal potential of a person trained from birth or early childhood to be an assassin. The increase in narratives centering on children groomed for violence may indicate a social anxiety that the problem of terrorism will worsen. The range of different characters and political ideologies explored also suggests an anxiety that extremists from a wide spectrum of fanatical beliefs may seek to indoctrinate their children.

This fear of a child groomed to be a terrorist also finds expression in "Cutting the Cord's" construction of Amira as an Australian successive-generation terrorist. Set partly in Australia, partly in Europe, reflecting the global nature of terrorism, the novel, a bildungsroman, like Updike's *Terrorist* and Goodwillie's *American Subversive*, offers a critique of a dystopian present seen through the distorting lens of a fanatical cult. Amira is the story's central site of resistance. While she is portrayed as an efficient killer, intelligent and physically fit, she is also prone to melancholy, deeply insecure about herself and unsure of her position within the world – hers is a crisis of identity. Unlike *Terrorist* and *American Subversive*, "Cutting the Cord" destabilises and blurs the standard dystopian categories of a broader oppressive society versus a rebel, as it highlights fanaticism itself as something that creates a dystopian, violent world. The dystopia represented in the novel is Amira's awakening to her life in the cult, a micro closed society, which determines her customs, values and organisation, while simultaneously being her "map of hell" (Amis), the oppression she must rebel against and resist. In order to magnify and compound this sense of a repressive terrorist dystopia, the narrative's form shifts from Amira's first person present tense to past tense, third person limited point of view, focusing on her. This enables the reader to gain an immediate sense of the HGTP's sense of dystopia, while allowing a certain distance for reflection on the nightmare world. The present tense first person is used in moments that Amira finds or remembers as particularly traumatic such as when she was coerced and brainwashed by her father.

The megalomaniac Henry is the ultimate source of violence, and he produces a terrorist dystopia by psychologically manipulating and "brainwashing" passive conduit members, intolerantly enforcing conformity at all costs. The Movement's exploitative subculture disintegrates individual identity, in the same way as many new religious movements and cults practised in the latter half of the twentieth century (Levitas and Sargisson 23). In a useful discussion of inter-generational terrorism, Post argues that where individuals are groomed for terrorism during childhood there is often an early fusing of individual identity with the terrorist group identity (Post, "When Hatred is

Bred in Bone," 628), and this is what we see in "Cutting the Cord". Amira initially finds it impossible to disengage from the Movement, unsure of how to establish a different identity, despite her misery. Her family over-determines her as an element within a dystopia. In this confined universe, language and thought are controlled by the Movement's totalitarian leadership in a way reminiscent of how the state operates in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Language proves itself to be, as Baccolini and Moylan argue, "a key weapon for the reigning dystopian power structure" (5-6). No other outside influences or language is permitted, and members such as Amira, are ordered to murder against their will, or risk being punished, isolated, killed or excommunicated. "Cutting the Cord" employs memory as a key device to evoke this aspect of dystopian terrorist life. Amira's flashbacks of being dragooned into killing animals, her solitary confinement in the basement of the family home and being forced to have sex are pivotal narrative scenes demonstrating the evolution of her dystopia.

The novel accentuates another crucial aspect of terrorist dystopia: family breakdown. Lucy Sargisson in her correspondence with Ruth Levitas points out the detrimental "breakdown of partnerships" that occur in cult-like communities (Levitas and Sargisson 23), and the narrative captures this family dysfunction. The nightmare world is seen in terms of familial violence and coercion, where terrorism, passed down through generations, hinders warm and normal family bonds. Family loyalty is the greatest reason why Amira perseveres as a warrior; but the family is not the idealised unit it may first appear to be. In the party scene where Amira returns home to meet her sister there are antithetical tensions between her mother, Edith, and Henry's mistress and illegal second wife, Serena, and the two women's children. The novel reveals that family secrets are commonplace within the cult. Henry and Kolya (Amira's warrior brother) do not tell Amira they killed Randy (another warrior brother) or that Amelia is Randy's daughter. Henry does not admit that he stole Amelia, Amira, Kolya and perhaps other warrior children. As the narrative progresses, Amira learns more about her family's betrayals. The lies that the terrorist unit is based on destroy the Knox family and eventually result in Kolya's suicide. The family home, ostensibly there to provide a sense of security and belonging, instead undermines Amira's very identity. The novel therefore offers an account of a dystopia in which a utopian movement has turned the domestic life and family duty of the protagonist – the terrorist perpetrator – into a living hell.

The narrative also warns of a key danger of inter-generational resistance movements: the normalisation of violence. In the situation of nationalist-separatist and religious fundamentalist terrorist groups, terrorism expert Cindy Combs, for instance,

argues that terrorists today have been socialised into violence unlike any previous generations or groups. Current terrorists have little or no grasp of the limits on the use of violence, which the rest of the world views as acceptable. Violence has become not just normalised but an enabler of security and life for the terrorists and their families (Combs 69). In the same context Post claims that individuals raised within a subculture of extremism come to attach social value to joining a terrorist group and that terrorist violence becomes normalised (Post, *Mind of the Terrorist* 247). "Cutting the Cord," particularly through its exploration of Kolya as a terrorist and his unfailing obedience to the cause, addresses how killing can become a normal part of a person's psyche and terrorist violence an expression of that identity.

Consequently, a central difference between the "first-generation" HGTPs in *Terrorist* and *American Subversive* compared to the second-generation Amira is that the former turn to terrorism as a panacea while codes of duress and control determine Amira's reluctant acceptance of terrorist agency. This personal dystopia is critical for the development of the narrative, as it allows Amira to begin questioning her upbringing and search for her birth family, providing her with an alternative identity. Yet despite this difference, the three main protagonists from the novels under consideration are unable to reconcile their beliefs with the idea of committing violence against other people.

"Cutting the Cord's" open ending does not suggest whether Amira, Edith, Amelia or the fictional world are free from Henry or the Movement. There is the possibility that the Movement will continue to wreak havoc on the world, and potentially continue to create dystopia for the characters seeking freedom. My novel, however, is not anti-utopia nor does it carry an overt anti-utopian pessimism. In line with the critical dystopian form, and like *Terrorist* and *American Subversive*, my novel contains a utopian enclave within the text. Amira's ultimate rejection of the cult suggests an opposition to its philosophy that there is a virus of inauthenticity spreading across the globe. But the text does not deal with the question of whether she ultimately endorses more moderate pursuits of anti-capitalism and anti-consumerist agendas. Amira is escaping fanaticism and excessively restrictive belief structures: she is not denying anti-capitalism as such. As indicated in previous chapters, the critical dystopia refuses closure, and one of the utopian enclaves of "Cutting the Cord" is its refusal to simply turn Amira into someone advocating capitalist or neo-conservative views, leaving open the possibility that she has not necessarily given up on measured, nonviolent alternative pursuits of utopia.

As in *Terrorist* and *American Subversive*, "Cutting the Cord" vivifies "progressive nostalgia" (Baccolini, "Finding Utopia," 174; Baccolini, "Persistence," 521), releasing memory from negative experiences and treating it like an enabler of collective resistance. Memories of being a toddler before she was in the terrorist group play a key role for mobilising Amira to confront her dystopian reality because they drive her to search for her birth family, and give her hope that a satisfying life exists outside the perverse terrorist world. The recovery of the past does not reside solely in Amira or nostalgia. Edith and Kolya's belated discoveries propel the collective, albeit differently. Kolya, a passionate Movement utopian, commits suicide when forced to confront his shattered belief. Conversely, Amira and Edith utilise memory to transcend the terrorist dystopia, determined to ensure that Amelia does not suffer from the same fate, and the women do not abandon faith in utopia *per se*. In this sense Amira takes the dialectic to its next level in synthesising the dystopian and utopian elements into an open future.

Outside social norms and alternative ways of viewing the world begin to dismantle the fusion of Amira's sense of identity with that of the Movement. She starts to conceive an alternative life, for example, one in which she is permitted to love whom she chooses. This utopian enclave is self-reflexive, as is the case with critical dystopias, because Amira experiences moments of self-doubt, where she questions herself and the role of her organisation within broader society. Amira, the terrorist assassin, abandons the cult's "exclusive utopia" (a term Sargent employs in a different context, "In Defence of Utopia," 14) where utopia excludes infected rich people. She quickly develops an inclusive utopian consciousness, opting for a "realistic" and "relative utopia" (Sargent, "In Defence of Utopia," 15). The novel offers the hope that human qualities of insight and empathy can triumph over indoctrination, at least in some people and that a new, improved life can collectively be built after the current wave of terrorist despair, but only if individuals choose to do so by engaging with others. Thus, "Cutting the Cord", can be read as a work of terrorist fiction that builds upon the critical dystopian form.

Conclusion

Terrorist fiction and nonviolent utopian ambition

A pernicious effect of the September 11, 2001, attacks was the resultant problematic demonising discourse about the terrorist other that confirmed suspicions about East and West polarisation, potentially increasing the terrorist allure. The purpose of this exegesis has been to critically analyse how three works of terrorist fiction, *Terrorist*, *American Subversive* and "Cutting the Cord", challenge such demonising discourse about terrorists through negotiating and reworking dystopian writing. In particular, this study has sought to demonstrate how the selected HGTP novels have interrogated the difficult problem of representing home-grown terrorism by variously exhibiting and revitalising the themes, ideas and formal narrative devices of the critical dystopia. This exegesis has examined how the novels depict the present historical moment as being in a state of dystopia, and the nature of the utopian enclave articulated within the narratives.

Central to this study has been the concept of the critical dystopian literary form as analysed by a number of scholars, including Lyman Tower Sargent, Tom Moylan and Raffaella Baccolini. This concept, already comprehensively applied to a diverse range of science and speculative fiction, is also present in certain HGTP novels. Philosopher Slavjov Žižek's theory of systemic violence along with the insights of terrorist experts that draw attention to the underlying socio-political reasons for individual acts of terrorist violence and individual terrorist psychology have also been instrumental in understanding the terrorist protagonists' sense of dystopia. In addition, terrorist and dystopian fiction, and their associated scholarly and cultural analyses have been integral in situating the three selected novels within their broader literary contexts.

The three HGTP novels all accentuate different aspects of dystopia as the cornerstone for the current terrorist dilemma. Updike's dystopia in *Terrorist* reveals a neo-conservative, consumer-based society that has devolved into racism, sexism, paternal absence, psychological alienation and urban decay. Goodwillie, in contrast, focuses on the environmental degradation caused by the current capitalist system to depict ways in which a disjunction between humans and nature can lead to inauthentic subjectivity. In "Cutting the Cord" a closed cult society run by a delusional fanatic adept at psychological, emotional and physical abuse, induces dystopia for its followers.

In *Terrorist* and *American Subversive*, the source of dystopia is located in the hegemony of capitalism showing continuity with critical dystopias. "Cutting the Cord", however, focuses on terrorist psychological aberration and deploys the trope of the "evil cult leader" as the cause of dystopia, placing the novel outside the true critical dystopia.

Despite highlighting diverse dystopian contours, the three HGTP novels also share – albeit to varying degrees – similar formal critical dystopian features. For instance, the narrative structure is the same where it focuses on an alienated character who refuses the dominant society; the texts begin in the nightmare society; endings are open; cognitive estrangement functions – although slightly differently because it is the protagonist character who estranges rather than the setting as in other dystopias. Realist, political, thriller and dystopian novel combine to blur genres, and memory and language become collective tools for hope. Further, each narrative manifests a similar utopian enclave that suggests a way forward to a more tranquil world: the union of diametrically opposed characters creating common bonds.

Extending a critical dystopian analysis to terrorist fiction has shown that such fiction is more complex and multifaceted than has previously been understood. Subsuming HGTP fiction under the realist fiction or literary thriller framework, which has largely occurred within the academy and in popular responses, prevents a full consideration of the terrorist problematic that is revealed through a dystopian reading. The findings from this study suggest that the HGTP novels create narrative spaces, representative of the real world, that do not succumb to despair, and in which the terrorist protagonists are depicted as human beings who are products of their dystopian moments; such a portrayal challenges the narrow demonising discourse that currently surrounds the terrorist other.

This is particularly pertinent in the case of Updike's *Terrorist*, a text that has been accused of, for instance, demonstrating the triumph of the West and Israel over the Orient because Levy the Jew is able to convince Ahmad the Arab not to detonate a bomb (see for example Salehnia 484). Such a reading, however, does not give significant weight to Ahmad's own utopian reasons for not detonating the bomb, and the power that Updike assigns his protagonist: Ahmad becomes sensitive to others, gains critical judgment and he denies a fanatical "exclusive concern with his own ideological construction of the world" (to borrow a phrase from Taylor in a different context, *The Fanatics* 40). Also, it ignores Levy's unhappiness with what he perceives is a dystopian world.

It may be urged that "Cutting the Cord" portrays Henry as a monster with abnormal psychology, fostering complicity with individualist-libertarian rhetoric. This

is partially true. However, as we saw in chapter four, the question of a stable psychological constitution, can in individual cases – although not all – contribute to terrorism. Moreover, the stronger narrative – that of Amira's story – indicates that not all terrorists are aberrant psychotics.

Sargent, a central scholar in the field of utopian studies, asks whether there are any utopians left in the twenty-first century ("In Defence of Utopia," 14). The HGTP novels in this study have been shown to articulate a desire for an inclusive utopia (to use Sargent's term, "In Defence of Utopia," 12) of social connection, overcoming a terrorist/citizen binary. Several significant contributors to the field of utopian literary scholarship highlight how novels that represent the utopian impulse awaken or stimulate in readers a desire for a better world (Abensour 145; Jameson, *Seeds* 90; Moylan, *Demand* 35; Levitas, *Concept of Utopia* 8). In an age where terrorism, violence and fear have increasingly come to occupy the world stage, the characters in *Terrorist*, *American Subversive* and "Cutting the Cord" demonstrate that the nefarious activities of terrorists can be sublimated into nonviolence, but only where utopian desire promotes sensitivity towards difference. This associates the personal with the social and opposes literary critics and scholars such as Wood and Head who have claimed that post-9/11 terrorist fiction has turned inward to explorations of feeling and domesticity.

The findings from this research also enhance our understanding of how the three HGTP novels diverge from twentieth century works of terrorist fiction. Margaret Scanlan's instructive study of twentieth century novels where "writers and terrorists encounter each other" (*Plotting Terror* 1) demonstrates how selected texts depict "terrorists as powerless as writers" (15). She argues that "serious terrorist fiction develops an increasingly pessimistic account of the novel's social power, a pessimism that some recent novelists extend to the revolutionary impulse itself" (2); in her view, the terrorist novel becomes an account not only of how those without access to power might resort to violence, but also "an acute critique of the power of discourse" to affect the political world (2). Scanlan's analysis is thus one that depicts twentieth century terrorist fiction as despairing, and, extrapolating her argument in terms of dystopian writing, shadowing on the cynical anti-utopian. However, *Terrorist*, *American Subversive* and "Cutting the Cord", as we have seen, have rehabilitated the power of terrorist actions to affect the political world, as 9/11 and its aftermath has also horrifically demonstrated. But the three novels also articulate an emancipatory utopian space, circumventing a disintegrating terrorism, where individuals unite in their "shared intolerances", to use Žižek's term (*Violence* 133-4).

There is an argument that this study has overstepped the discursive terrain of utopia and dystopia. Sociologist and utopian theorist Krishan Kumar for example in "Ends of Utopia" (2010) argues that there has been an "overgenerous embrace of the utopian cause" where "[v]irtually anything to which 'hope' or 'desire' can be connected has been blessed as utopian" (562). He traces the problem to the tradition of Ernst Bloch and his *Principle of Hope* (1955-59), which detected the "utopian 'spirit' in various works of music, poetry, folklore, fairy stories, and other forms of literature" (560). Kumar suggests that the result of such a broad approach regrettably "becomes a recourse for an increasingly desperate attempt to find the signs for the persistence or revival of utopia" (562). He calls for a limit to the use of the concept, before it becomes debased. Further, it could be argued that the three novels under study offer a utopian vision – the reconciliation of dialectical opposites – that conservatively recontextualises a liberal polemic and, thus, falls short of asserting a "radical difference" (in Jameson's terms, *Archaeologies* xv) from the world.

This exegesis has indeed proceeded from the tradition of Ernst Bloch, as Kumar has described it. However, in the novels under study the characters do not devolve into individualistic culture, but form a mediated assemblage despite cultural, religious, class and political differences. These are admittedly only collective beginnings, and not the blueprint utopias that Kumar envisages. The novels nonetheless illustrate how individuals united in a shared understanding can achieve significant results, for example, Ahmad and Levy reaching common ground to save innocent lives. In Goodwillie's narrative the reconciliation extends to a close human relationship with nature where governments and corporations prioritise environmental issues. The desire in all three novels is for a world where people are free to live more authentic lives not subjected to the dominating pulls of either fanaticism ("Cutting the Cord") or consumerism and capitalism (Updike and Goodwillie).

These three HGTP novels do not explore nonviolent methods for achieving, let alone envisioning, viable alternative socio-economic systems. In these times of the ascendency of global capitalism, Jameson has argued that other feasible socio-economic systems have become inconceivable (*Archaeologies* xii). Similarly, Penley Constance and Levitas have argued that utopian imaginings have been limited to individualist, personal and micro-levels not to broader collective societal resistance strategies (Constance, "Time Travel, Primal Scene," 68; Levitas, "Utopia in Dark Times," 23). For Levitas, personal micro-changes are not sufficient to result in macro-level social transformations ("Utopia in Dark Times," 23).

The HGTP novels under study, however, suggest that micro-level resolutions are an integral prerequisite in the metamorphosis of macro structures. The alliance of dialectically opposed characters implies that social concord begins with personal relationships. This does not mean micro-changes adequately enable a better-transformed world, only that they are a necessary prelude. The synthesis and union of terrorist and citizen, as Moylan suggests in a different context, "points to the possibility of a new moment of history" a "zone of un- or not yet-conquered space from which a new society, or at least a mass political movement, *might* emerge" (*Scraps* 158). The real pertinence of the selected HGTP novels resides in how they energise such ideas of dystopia and utopia beyond science and speculative fiction readership markets.

A number of important limitations need to be considered regarding the present research. First, the sample size of the three primary texts has not been large enough to closely determine whether most HGTP novels are rendered in a critical dystopian mode. Accordingly, it is not possible to conclude whether *Terrorist*, *American Subversive* and "Cutting the Cord" are unique HGTP texts that build on critical dystopias or whether they represent a larger trend in terrorist fiction. Secondly, the project was limited by looking only at English language novels, and as a result, has been unable to consider whether the literatures of other cultures invoke similar or different understandings. Thirdly, while Updike's large body of literature and criticism has informed the development of the argument, the specific and significant contribution of *Terrorist* as a critical dystopia to his oeuvre would deserve further analysis.

This study has revealed several other tasks remaining in need of further investigation. For example, further research might explore and identify shared strategies, patterns and variations between other terrorist HGTP novels and critical dystopias as they have evolved over time. Twentieth century HGTP novels, such as DeLillo's *Players* and Easton-Ellis', *Glamorama*, for instance, might be examined in terms of whether and to what extent they fall within the dystopian literary tradition. It would also be interesting to compare and evaluate novels from other cultures that feature fictional terrorist protagonists in terms of dystopian writing, such as, Uwe Tellkamp's *Der Eisvogel* (2005). Future scholarship might also seek to examine other works of terrorist fiction, such as trauma narratives, for the presence of dystopian and utopian themes.

The foregoing overview of the three twenty-first century terrorist fiction novels examined in this exegesis has shown how the authors have made use of much of the critical dystopia's tenacious optimism and formal aesthetics. Even in cases where terrorist resistance is mollified, aborted or sent underground there is no doubt that these

characters have the ability to have an impact on the social and political climate in the worlds of the novels. But the narratives also suggest that either global capitalism's or the fanatic's hegemonic grip can be loosened. In an age of despair haunted by terrorist violence an indefatigable hope remains: the challenge is to how to preserve it through nonviolence.

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