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THE CHILD IN THE CELLAR

The conventional image of Utopia is of uniformly beautiful men and women in vaguely classical draperies perambulating across the Edenic landscape of green grass and shiny white buildings. In William Morris’s News from Nowhere (1890), the protagonist realizes he has entered Utopia when he notices the clean-limbed, perfectly shaped bodies of its inhabitants. His exile back into the fallen world of history, however, is marked by the sight of the aging, filthy, and deformed body of a tramp. The utopian body is a body purified of all signs of sickness, mortality, and above all, violence. The latter is seen as a social malady, to be cured by the utopian medicine: “We are a healthy people generally,” says an inhabitant of Morris’s utopia, “so we are not likely to be much troubled with this disease,” the disease of violence and criminality (71).

But despite its disclaimers, utopia is dogged by violence. Dystopia, utopia’s mirror image, is obsessed with the violated body. A famous dystopian scene presents torture as the hidden truth of a supposedly utopian society: “If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face—forever,” says O’Brien to Smith in Orwell’s 1984 (215). The connection between utopia and violence has been explained away as an accident of history, the result of the perversions of Nazism and Stalinism. But is it?
Ursula Le Guin's short story “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” (1976) implies that the connection between the marmoreal physique of the utopian “men like gods” and the jackboot-smashed face of a torture victim may be necessary and not accidental. The story pictures a utopian community blessed with health, happiness, freedom, and prosperity. But “in a basement under one of the beautiful public buildings of Omelas, or perhaps in the cellar of one of its spacious private homes, there is a room. It has one locked door and no windows.” In this room sits a child: filthy, starved, sick, all but mindless from its continuing abuse. And all the good citizens of Omelas know of the child’s existence, but they do nothing:

They all know it is there, all the people of Omelas. . . . They all know that it has to be there. Some of them understand why, and some do not, but they all understand that their happiness, the beauty of their city, the tenderness of their friendships, the health of their children, the wisdom of their scholars, the skill of their makers, even the abundance of their harvest and the kindly weather of their skies, depend wholly on this child’s abominable misery. (257)

Le Guin’s parable is reminiscent of the conversation between Ivan and Alyosha in Dostoevskii’s The Brothers Karamazov, in which Ivan claims that no universal salvation justifies a child’s tear. But Le Guin, in the foreword to the story, denies the Dostoevskii connection and attributes her inspiration to a passage from William James’s “The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life,” which she quotes in full:

Of the hypotheses that were offered to us of a world in which Messrs. Fourier’s and Bellamy’s and Morris’s utopias should all be outdone, and millions kept permanently happy on the one single condition that a certain lost soul on the far-off edge of things should lead a life of lonely torment, what except a special and independent sort of emotion can it be which would make us immediately feel, even though an impulse arise within us to clutch at the happiness so offered, how hideous a thing would be its enjoyment when deliberately accepted as the fruit of such a bargain? (251)

The difference between the Karamazov brothers’ conversation and James’s ruminations is the difference between theodicy and utopia. Ivan frames his graphic description of child abuse in the traditional Christian problematic of evil, forcing his devout brother to admit that Christ’s sacrifice cannot redeem the abusers. But James’s passage, with his explicit references to the utopian tradition of “Messrs. Fourier and Bellamy and Morris,” situates victimization in the secular context of an ideal society, in which “millions [are]
kept permanently happy" by the violence done to the few. And as opposed to theodicy, it is not the source of evil but rather its function that constitutes the hideous enigma of utopia. Alyosha, in a recasting of the ancient lament of Job, cannot stand the thought that the all-merciful God allows children to be tortured. But in Le Guin's secular parable, it is the free will of the citizens of Omelas that keeps the child in its cellar. Enlightened by the historical experience James did not have, she knows that most of them will in fact eagerly "clutch at the happiness so offered." But she also believes that some will reject the bargain ("the ones who walk away" are those few who, having seen the child, leave Omelas and do not come back to its tainted happiness). But why should the child, or some other "certain lost soul," be tortured for the utopia to exist? What is the secret of Omelas? Or, in the light of the twentieth-century experiments in utopian politics, what is the secret of Auschwitz, the Gulag, or Cambodia's killing fields, where millions of children had to suffer in order to cure the body politic of its imperfections? It is not Alyosha Karamazov, desperately clinging to his dwindling faith in a world beset by violence, but rather Raskolnikov, with his violence-nurtured Idea, who can answer this question.

Raskolnikov knows very well that the New Man is baptized in blood. To produce a new utopian subject, one needs the power of the sublime. It is as a source of the sublime that the child's "abominable misery" becomes necessary for the happy citizens of Omelas. But their reactions vary: what is a sacrifice for a majority is a crime for a minority. There are two kinds of subjects in Omelas, the subjects of ideology, who thrive on torture, and the subjects of discipline, who are appalled by it. The texts I analyze in this chapter dramatize the clash between the two within the heterogeneous narrative field, in which utopia blends with crime fiction.

Beginning with the crime of utopian violence, the chapter proceeds with its investigation. Thus, the trajectory of my argument follows the plot of the investigative dystopia. This subgenre of crime fiction, as represented by four contemporary novels—Robert Harris's *Fatherland* (1992) and *Archangel* (1999), Donald James's *Monstrum* (1998), and Paul Johnston's *Body Politic* (1998)—will be the focus of the second half of the chapter. But before we join the private eye on his venture into the dark City of the Sun, we have to understand the background of his quest. The first half of the chapter deals with the classic utopias of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, the narrative incubator of the sublime subject of ideology.

THE PRIMAL SCENE

Utopia and dystopia, argues Krishan Kumar, can be considered a single generic entity, for dystopia is "largely the creation of men for whom it represented
the dark obverse of their own profound and passionate utopian temperament" (1987, 104). Dystopia is predicated "on the very terms of the modern utopia" (ibid. 110). The golden age of utopias, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, is followed by the backlash of dystopias, the age of Zamyatin’s *We* and Orwell’s *1984*, in which precisely the "terms of the modern utopia" are charged with responsibility for the social disasters of modernity.

Today, after the collapse of Communism and the spread of globalization, utopia seems both old-fashioned and somewhat embarrassing. The only way in which it manages to eke out a precarious existence is in the shape of what Jameson calls the “utopian impulse” as opposed to any concrete utopian vision: “the deepest vocation [of the utopian genre] is to bring home, in local and determinate ways . . . our constitutional inability to imagine Utopia itself, and this not owing to any individual failure of the imagination but as the result of the systemic, cultural, and ideological closure of which we are all in one way or another prisoners” (1982, 153).

We—postmodern culture, in other words—are prisoners in a disciplinary jail, atoning for . . . what? What is the crime, which has led to the incarceration of the imagination itself in the dismal cage of “here” and “now”? Jameson does not spell it out, but it is implicit both in his analysis and in Tom Moylan’s more recent focus on the “critical utopia” that at least part of the blame for the crisis of utopia should be attributed to the failure of the twentieth-century utopian ideologies, Nazism and Communism. And this failure is not merely a military defeat or economic insufficiency but the revelation of the mass murder and genocide that accompanied both regimes, as it did the disastrous utopian venture in Cambodia. However, the present eclipse of utopian ideologies does not mean utopias or dystopias are no longer written. What it means, rather, is that in many cases such texts become past—rather than future—oriented. Instead of offering a glimpse of paradise beyond the prison’s walls of globalization, they attempt to solve the mystery of the crime that has led to the incarceration in the first place. Memories of violence-tainted utopias haunt the postmodern subject whose genealogy is intertwined with the aborted birth of the New Man.

The trauma of violence may lead to either evasion or logorrhea, both gesturing at the ellipse of the violent sublime I discussed in the introduction. Twentieth-century ideological genocide, especially the Holocaust, has generated both. In chapter 6 I will analyze the dialectic of silence and speech with regard to the Holocaust in greater detail. For now, it is sufficient to note how narratives of the postmodern subject both evade, and engage with, the crime of utopia. As I have argued above, the most influential account of the genealogy of the violent subject, Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*, turns a blind eye to the death camp. Foucault’s nightmare of state violence seems to end with
the nineteenth-century panopticon, a reassuringly low-tech apparatus of surveillance. In his other explorations of what he calls “bio-power,” that is, the power that directly affects the human body, Foucault is primarily interested in sexuality and the management of population dynamics.

But Foucault also locates the impetus for his project precisely in that which is missing from his narrative. The main question, he notes, is why the concept of power is so central today. The answer is that power “is not only a theoretical question but a part of our experience,” the experience that is shaped by the turbulent events of World War II and its aftermath. Foucault’s examples of the historical events, responsible for the upsurge of the contemporary interest in the issues of subjectivity and domination, are what he calls the “two ‘pathological forms’—those two ‘diseases of power’—fascism and Stalinism” (quoted in Dreyfus and Rabinow 209).

The metaphor of pathology is revealing: “fascism and Stalinism” appear to occupy the same place in Foucault’s own discourse that madness and disease occupy, according to him, in the discourse of the Enlightenment, the place of the excluded but necessary Other. There is no explanation for ideological mass murder in the disciplinary model of violence. Yet at the same time discipline is positioned in a covert but necessary relation to genocide. Foucault argues himself into a paradox when he attempts to make fascism and Stalinism both normal and exceptional. On the one hand, Auschwitz and the Gulag are a morbid exaggeration of the normal power relations: “in spite of their own internal madness, they used to a large extent the ideas and the devices of our political rationality” (ibid.). On the other hand, Foucault proceeds to argue that physical violence is essentially self-defeating as a strategy of power because it cannot produce new subjects; all it can do is to “pile up the dead” (ibid.). In a gloss on Foucault, Francis Barker claims that physical violence “acts directly upon the body or on things—it closes or minimizes the possibility of resistance . . . [and therefore] it limits the possibility of the self-creation for both self and other” (81).

However, Nazism and Stalinism were explicitly and consciously attempts at “self-creation.” Foucault’s and Barker’s arguments are structured by disavowal rather than by logical consistency. Foucault’s avoidance of the subject of genocide, paradoxically coupled with his recognition of the centrality of this subject in the postmodern experience of power, indicates the first stage in the West’s coming to terms with the trauma of Nazism and Stalinism. The second stage, beginning roughly in the early eighties and continuing till today, is marked not by avoidance but by insatiable interest. In particular, this is true with regard to the Holocaust.

“The Holocaust,” argues James Berger, “is the paradigmatic instance of an apocalypse in history” (59). He assembles an impressive array of quotes from
Theodor Adorno, Elie Wiesel, Jean-François Lyotard, and others that describe the Holocaust as the pivotal event of postmodernity, a catastrophic rupture, an event that "cannot be grasped or recovered, yet cannot be escaped" (61). There is, in fact, hardly any need to argue for this paradigmatic status of the Holocaust in the postmodern cultural imaginary, the status it has assumed after years of evasion and silence. Historian Michael Burleigh describes this as "the curious, super-nova like capacity of this subject [the Holocaust] to gain energy as the events themselves recede in time" (1997, 6). Whether expressed in silence or in a flood of words, the trauma of genocide shapes postmodern narratives of violence and evil. The unquiet past of mass murder invades the contemporary dreams and nightmares like a message from the stars in the science fiction film Contact, which reveals, in a blur of pixels, a swastika and then an image of the Fuhrer speaking.

Even the often-voiced claim that in Baudrillard’s “society of simulacra” the physical body disappears can be related to the queasy sense of too many dead bodies cluttering the vistas of history. Francis Barker points out in his discussion of Shakespeare’s Titus Andronicus that the lavish extravaganza of Elizabethan stage violence served “to divert attention away from . . . the [routine] elimination of huge numbers of population” (190). Simulacra of violence, in other words, might hide rather than supplant the real thing. The fact that postmodernism obsessively recycles images of genocide, turning them into part of the entertainment industry, does not make the genocide any less real. Rather, those images are a testimony to a huge historical trauma that fractures the development of the liberal disciplinary subject. For a time, this subject was challenged and seemingly overshadowed by a utopian subject of ideology, the New Man. And if discipline uses violence to mortify the body and train the soul, utopia destroys both bodies and souls in pursuit of their impossible unification.

THE BIRTH OF SUPERMAN

The centerpiece of both Nazism and Communism was the creation of a new kind of human being. Both aimed for an anthropological revolution, or what the French fascist thinker Drieu La Rochelle called “the revolution of the body.” Spurred by late-nineteenth-century evolutionary thought, the desire for a perfect society was transmuted into the longing for perfected man. The early-twentieth-century radical ideologies, whether left or right, shared the utopian dream of the New Man that Slavoj Zizek called “man as harmonious being . . . a New Man without antagonistic tension” (5).

Perhaps the best way to introduce the New Man is through the utopian and science-fictional writings of the 1930s. Such texts, especially those
published in England and the United States, escape the opprobrium of the ideologically tainted Zukunftseroman of the German radical right or of the socialist realism of the Soviet Union. At the same time, they display a number of features that unmistakably point to a common structure underlying the radical utopian longings across the political spectrum.

Olaf Stapledon’s novel *Odd John* (1936) is particularly striking in view of its author’s record as a pacifist and a liberal. Nevertheless, *Odd John*, for all his oddness, is a fitting introduction to the armies of the New Men that were soon to overrun Europe. John is a “mutation,” one of the coming race of the *Homo superior* who are to dominate the “vast herd of cattle” that have the temerity to call themselves *Homo sapiens* (86; 187). He is endowed with a soaring IQ and some paranormal abilities, but what makes him a Superman is the unity of his being. He is not a prey to conflicting impulses, clashing desires, rebellious bodily processes, ceaseless prodding of the libido, and the subterranean subversion of the unconscious. His mind controls his body and his will controls his mind. He can not only squash unwanted emotions but also produce any emotional response he desires. He guides the motor development of his body in infancy and learns to swim, run, drive, make love, and work heavy machinery by sheer effort of will. Unlike old humans, whose psychological makeup is “a terribly unstable compound,” John has managed to integrate his “whole being into a new and harmonious order” (83). His control over members of the inferior species is merely an extension of his absolute self-control. Other minds are as transparent to him as he is transparent to himself.

And this aspiring demigod is a ruthless killer. He attains his full spiritual maturity at the moment he commits his first (but not last) murder, killing the friendly policeman who interrupts the robbery John carries out in order to amass the fortune necessary to free himself from the hateful yoke of the “cattle.” The murder is not done in a flash of anger or desperation but with a complete clearheadedness, with a liberating realization that “what must be, must be.” The newly awakened, expanded self is free of atavistic guilt: “of remorse or shame it felt—nothing” (41). And this is only the beginning, for later John kills again, in cold blood and with the full approval of the implied author. These murders do not breed guilt because John sees himself and his fellow superiors as the only human beings on the planet. Morality does not carry across the interspecies gulf; as he explains to the narrator, “and just because I was really human, and had in me the possibility of some new and transcendent spiritual achievement, I was more important than all the rest of the sixteen hundred million put together” (86). This sense of biological difference explains John’s perception of sex with humans as something inherently disgusting, poisoned “by the sense that this contact was with a brute, with something that could never satisfy his deeper needs, and might debase
him” (63). His unconsummated affair with a beautiful woman suitably named Europa bears an uncanny resemblance to the scene in Schindler’s List in which the commandant of Plazow concentration camp, Goetz, refrains from raping his Jewish maid because she is not “a human being in the full sense of the word.”

John’s spiritual superiority involves an experience of the sublime, an opening-up of the soul to Nature’s infinity and might and a full identification with its irresistible power. It is “a sense of being the chosen instrument of Fate, of the Dialectic, of what might almost as well be called God” (75). He tries to explain this sense to his human slave (and the narrator of the tale) by comparing it to the mass movements that agitate the world at the time of the writing of the novel: the “hate that smashed the Tsar, and turned creative, and made Russia” (76) or the “revulsion from . . . rationality” in Germany and Italy, which, despite its numerous faults, is still a worthy expression of the “bewildered hunger of the soul” (77).

It is almost impossible to read this chilling portrayal of the New Man today without seeing its author as a fascist. But he was not; and neither were many other radical intellectuals who, in the period between the two world wars, longed for an apocalyptic transformation of human subjectivity, whose goal was sketched by Martin Heidegger: “What Nietzsche already knew metaphysically now becomes clear: that in its absolute form the modern ‘machine economy’ … demands a new kind of man who surpasses man as he has been hitherto” (quoted in Ashheim 268). Still unborn, the New Man is an object of worship, a new baby in the manger, but also the focus of narcissistic self-identification for those who see themselves as his forefathers: “Framed by swastika flags … is a statue. It is a man eight feet high, powerful, muscular, saluting with raised right arm; his left hand is clenched against his thigh. He is the typical ‘Aryan.’ ‘Homo Germanicus’—the new god in whose image the German admires and loves himself” (from “Führers of the Future,” an eyewitness report published in the Manchester Guardian in November 1937, quoted in Burleigh and Whippermann 236).

The New Man is an alternative to the other selves of Western culture: the Cartesian self, the nineteenth-century psychological self, and the Freudian self. All these selves are marked by inner division, the duality, multiplicity, or ambiguity of subjectivity. Dorian Gray wonders at “the shallow psychology of those who conceive the Ego in man as a thing simple, permanent, reliable, and of one essence” (Wilde 457). The soldier comes to enlighten the aesthete. The psychology of the people Klaus Theweleit called “the soldier males” is marked precisely by being “of one essence.” The New Man is a dangerous dream of healing the wound of separation between body and mind, public and private, individual and collective, consciousness and desire. He discards
Cartesian duality in favor of impossible unity, “the perfect seamlessness between the natural body and the individual self . . . [the] denial of castration, loss, division” (Boscaglia 5). He rejects fragmentation and loss as the necessary foundation of selfhood. Such phantasmagoric unification of subjectivity is achieved by identification with what Des Pres calls “terror’s own power.” The New Man sees himself as a reflection of the suprahuman force of Nature (in Nazism) or history (in Stalinism). Their violence that sweeps aside all merely human obstacles becomes a model for the sublime self that transcends the law of “loss and division.”

I will briefly examine the role of violence in relation to three aspects of the New Man: the connection between the individual body and the body politic; the politics of disgust; and self-worship. In all three aspects the New Man asserts himself in opposition to the liberal subject of democracy. Their clash becomes, therefore, the necessary conflict between two modalities of the self, two images of humanity, two species.

New Bodies for Old

Book Five of Plato’s The Republic opens with this statement: “Such is the good and true city-state, and the good and true man is of the same pattern; and if this is right every other is wrong; and the evil is one which affects not only the ordering of the State, but also the regulation of the individual soul . . .” (167).

What is suggested here is the equivalence of individual and community: the harmonious order of the subject can be transposed, with no structural change, onto the body politic and vice versa. The “good and true man” is a hologram of the State and the State is “the good and true man” writ large. In terms of utopia’s self-consciousness, if not actual social policies, Plato is indeed the forefather of the modern ideal state. H. G. Wells, in A Modern Utopia (1905), acknowledges “Plato’s profound intuitions” as the foundation for the contemporary radical projects of social regeneration (259). And what modern utopias, both left- and right-wing, inherit from Plato is, above all, the metaphor of the organic body politic, which Paul Johnston in his novel Body Politic reduces to its simplest form: “The ordinary citizens were the body of the city-state, while the guardians were its heart and brain and the auxiliaries its eyes and ears” (29).

In Wells’s A Modern Utopia the living body politic is composed of four classes whose functions are described in terms of organic differentiation rather than division of labor: “The former two [classes] are supposed to constitute the living tissue of the State; the latter are the fulcra and resistances, the bone and cover of its body” (265–66). In Wells’s later utopia, The Shape of
Things to Come (1932), the body politic becomes a monstrous superorganism, a polyplike entity subsuming the lives of its individual members:

The body of mankind is now one single organism of nearly two thousand five hundred million persons, and the individual differences of every one of these persons is like an exploring tentacle thrust out to test and learn, to savour life in its fullness and bring in new experiences for the common stock. We are all members of the same body . . . more and more plain does it become to us that it is not our little selves but Man the Undying that achieves these things through us. (445–46)

The utopian minisociety of Odd John is not an association of individuals but an organic body, whose components are linked together by telepathy. The idea of an almost mystical unity between the individual and the collective is a common thread in all discourses of the New Man. In science fiction it takes the form of telepathic communion that, as Stapledon imagines in another work, Star Maker, will lead to the creation of a galactic supermind. The connection between the New Man and telepathy is fully elaborated in a later text, Theodore Sturgeon's More Than Human (1953), which depicts the advent of Homo gestalt, a telepathic entity with a single personality composed of several independent individuals.

The potent metaphor of social gestalt is ancient and deeply ingrained in Western culture. But it was given a new lease on life by the development of the fin de siècle bio-ideologies: Social Darwinism, eugenics, and scientific racism. Already in 1872 Winwood Reade coined the notion of the “One Man,” the immortal subject of history, whose deathless body subsumes pain and suffering of individual cells in its ceaseless ascent to perfection: “As the atoms are to the human unit, so the human units are to the human whole. There is only One Man upon the earth; what we call men are not individuals, but components; what we call death is merely the bursting of a cell; wars and epidemics are merely inflammatory phenomena incident to certain stages of growth” (521).

This organic metaphor becomes central to the utopian socialism of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Here, for example, is Sidney Webb's contribution to Fabian Essays: “though the social organism has itself evolved from the union of individual men, the individual is now created of the social organism of which it forms a part: his life is born of the larger life; his attributes are moulded by the social pressure; his activities, inextricably interwoven with others, belong to the activity of the whole” (in Shaw 1889, 89).

Hitler in Mein Kampf offers his own version of the organic body politic: “the state is a national organism and not an economic organization. . . . [It is] the organization of a community of physically and psychologically similar
living beings for the better facilitation of the maintenance of their species and the achievement of the aim which has been allotted to this species by Providence" (150–51). Webb, Wells, and Hitler make strange bedfellows. And yet the three of them articulate their disparate political visions in terms of the same organic metaphor: society as a vast living body and individuals as subordinate cells. As a Nazi ideologue, E. Gunter Grundel, succinctly put it, the New Man “does not live for himself but as an integral part of a living whole” (in Griffin 128).

This imaginary body is more than a fanciful way to describe social interdependence. The organic metaphor presupposes that the value and viability of a part derives from the greater life of the whole. The importance of the individual is purely functional, depending only on his or her “cellular” contribution to the political physiology of the “common stock.” Within the stupendous body of “Man the Undying,” individual differences are as unimportant as minute distinctions in the composition of single cells within the body of a human being.

But when a cell turns cancerous, it may endanger the whole organism. A malignant growth in the body politic has to be destroyed, and so the legal discourse of rights and obligations becomes supplanted by the medical discourse of health and sickness. The history of the uses to which the organic metaphor was put in justifying political persecution and genocide would make grim reading. Hitler’s endless references to Jewish “vermin,” “pestilence,” and “parasites” express a coherent bio-ideological weltanschauung, deeply entrenched in Western culture and couched in the language of science. Hitler is quite unoriginal in his views; his only distinguishing characteristic is extreme literal mindedness, for what others see as quivering on the border of the figurative, Hitler straightforwardly translates into practical solutions. Webb may vaguely talk about ensuring “the sound health” of the social body, but Hitler and his cohort of health providers know exactly what it involved in such surgical intervention. Asked how he, a doctor, could participate in mass murder, Auschwitz physician Fritz Klein replied: “I am a doctor and I want to preserve life. And out of respect for human life, I would remove a gangrenous appendix from a diseased body. The Jew is a gangrenous appendix in the body of mankind” (quoted in Lifton 16).

Medicalization of politics not only justifies political violence but also protects the New Man from empathy. No matter how many die, the true subject of ideology is immune to the horror of self-identification with the victim’s suffering body that destroys the subject of torture because he (the subject of ideology) possesses the sublime body modeled on the “national organism” itself. As each cell contains the DNA blueprint of the entire organism, each New Man mirrors the collective entity. Being immortal, he cannot see his own
death in the deaths of others. O’Brien in 1984 succinctly describes how identification with the body politic becomes a shield against mortality: “‘You are thinking,’ he said [to Smith], ‘that my face is old and tired. You are thinking that I talk of power, and yet I am not even able to prevent the decay of my own body. Can you not understand, Winston, that the individual is only a cell? The weariness of the cell is the vigour of the organism. Do you die when you cut your fingernails?’” (212).

But this does not explain why he tortures Smith instead of dispassionately cutting this infected hangnail of the social organism. On the face of it, the medical idiom does not encompass the gratuitous cruelty that was such an integral part of killing disguised as social healing. But it is precisely in this cruelty that the ideological narrative of the organic body politic reveals its covert reliance on the aesthetics of the violent sublime. No amount of verbiage can fully convince a murderer that the child he injects with phenol is “a gangrenous appendix in the body of mankind.” The victim’s book of blood speaks louder than the little red book of the leader. In order to defuse this residual emotional impact of the violent spectacle, the New Man has to incorporate this spectacle into his self-narrative as “toughening” (Hoess’s favorite term) or inoculation. The sight of the enemy’s unregenerate body in the state of utter abjection functions as a controlled experience of individual mortality, which is subsumed into the perpetrator’s self-aggrandized identification with the collective. Le Guin’s abused child has to be seen by all the citizens of Omelas, so that the visual shock will be redirected into strengthening the immortal “we” against this degraded, filthy, individual “I.” The organic body politic can only exist through periodic infusions of violence, whose emotional energy reconstructs the phantasmagoric ties that keep this imaginary entity together.

The Politics of Disgust

The organic body politic constitutes a meeting point of different political utopias. Fascists, Nazis, Communists, right- and left-wing radicals of all stripes lay claim to “Man the Undying.” This is not to collapse all political distinctions but to indicate the diffusion of a particular cultural construct whose attraction was felt across the political spectrum. Another common feature of all New Man ideologies is a profound disgust with democracy.

Disgust is different from hate. Hate is felt for an equal; and, of course, New Men of different political persuasions heartily hated each other. But their disgust was reserved for democracy, which was consistently perceived in terms of a stable set of metaphors: disease, femininity, chaos, swamp, and rot. The “femininity” of the crowd is a staple of the right-wing political discourse since Le Bon. For Hitler, social democracy is a “pestilential whore” (39), the
free press is “scum,” and the elected parliament is a “monstrosity of excrement and ‘fire,’ in which . . . the ‘fire’ seems to me at the moment to be burned out” (78). This scatological imagery is perfectly complemented by the notion of the crowd as a “woman” who has to be wooed by the strong-willed and clean-bodied suitor. Thus, the crowd becomes the antithesis of the organic body politic, a woman to its man. Theweleit describes the equation of the proletarian mass and woman in the right-wing Freikorps political vocabulary: “the mass may be variously encoded—with femininity, with the bestial, with dissipating contagious lust . . .” (Theweleit 2, 27).

However, precisely the same configuration is at work in some left-wing radical discourses. In *Man and Superman* (1903) George Bernard Shaw unleashes the full force of his contempt on what he calls “our political experiment of democracy, the last refuge of cheap misgovernment, [that] will ruin us if our citizens are ill-bred” (22). Democracy is a chaotic magma of inferior individuals, the “promiscuously bred masses” (23) that threaten to engulf the proudly erect New Man. As the only bulwark against this uncontrollable chaos, Shaw offers “a democracy of Supermen” (228). As late as 1947, in his last postscript to *Fabian Essays*, first published in 1889, Shaw repeats the same sentiments: “Fabianism thus becomes Democratic Aristocracy in strong opposition to Underdog Authority or Government by the Unfittest, which is the bugbear of the cultured classes today” (304). Shaw’s explicit sexual agenda in *Man and Superman* seems very different from the Nazis’ brutal misogyny. However, his vision of woman’s social role is framed by eugenicist discourse, whose underlying assumptions echo the bio-ideologies of Nazism and its precursors. The politics of the metaphor are more insidious—and I would argue, more decisive—than the politics of the content.3

In H. G. Wells’s 1927 Sorbonne speech “Democracy under Revision,” democracy is represented as enfeebling: “Our modern democratic governments reveal as clearly that the onset of Modern Democracy did not mean a transfer of power from the few to the many, but a disappearance of power from the world” (36). In *The Shape of Things to Come* (1932), that many-headed hydra, the “Voter, the Mass, which was neither educated nor led” (130), is blamed for the collapse of European civilization, and even the future emasculation of the Soviet Union is confidently predicted due to the “ineradicable democratic taint of the Soviet system” (141). Democracy is seen not merely as an inadequate or outdated political system but as a symbolic threat. Democracy is multiplicity to the New Man’s hard-won unity; randomness to his control; pliancy to his hardness; indecision to his will. The femininity of democracy links the chaos of desire with the chaos of history.

In *The Shape of Things to Come* women are excluded from history. The one time when a woman plays a significant role in Wells’s headlong rush into
utopia, it is only to spoil it. When women appear to meddle in history, “we find the threads of human destiny running askew about a story of passionate love and passionate misbehaviour” (351). “Human destiny,” which is supposed to progress inexorably toward the advent of the New Man, is derailed, loosened up, hopelessly tangled by women and desire. Like women, democracy is a thread “running askew,” prey to chance, contingency, multiplicity, random choice. Democracy is the loss of control, which the New Man fears above all. Democracy by definition is the rule of Many, while the New Man is One. And in a complex chaotic system all clear-cut goals and definitions are blurred, approximate, adventitious. For the New Man control means absolute certainty. After all, is it not clear “that there can be only one right way of looking at the world for a normal human being and only one conception of a proper scheme of social reactions, and that all others must be wrong and misleading and involve destructive distortions of conduct?” (364)? Women and other democrats, however, seem unable to grasp this simple truth: they insist on dredging up uncertainties, qualifications, unexpected complications, last-minute surprises.

The New Man’s disgust with democracy is his disguised fear of history. For the Nazi New Man, as opposed to his Soviet counterpart, the contingency of history is epitomized by one single enemy, the Jew. In Mein Kampf the Jew is a universal solvent of all certainties, a shape-shifter, “a jelly-like slime which [is] divided up and poured through your fingers, but in the next moment collected again” (62). Jews are nowhere and everywhere, they are an annoying exception, a rebellious Particular that resists being assimilated to the truth of the General. Even for Wells who abhors Hitler’s crude racism, Jews play the same role. When all ethnic particularity disappears in the “one body” of the Modern State, it is the disappearance of the Jews that is dwelled upon in great detail for the Jewish difference is Difference as such, a “willful separation from the main body of mankind” (1932, 398). The Jews stand for the stubbornness of variation and its disobedience to uniformity. The Jews become what Lyotard calls “the Jews” to distinguish them from the real people: “‘the Jews’ are within the ‘spirit’ of the Occident that is so preoccupied with foundational thinking, what resists this spirit; within its will, the will to want, what gets in the way of its will; within its accomplishments, projects, and progress, what never ceases to reopen the wound of the unaccomplished” (1988, 22).

Women, Jews, and democracy are different faces of the New Man’s greatest enemy: contingency. In Odd John’s contempt for the human “cattle” there is a hidden fear: what if he and the other superhumans are nothing more than a chance freak of development and not an inexorable advance of evolution?
What if there are no inexorable advances anywhere? What, in fact, if evolution is what Darwin says it is: a stochastic process of local adaptations, ruled by no overarching Law, and going in no particular direction? What if the narrative of history has no closure? The contempt for democracy is the New Man’s horror at his own shaky ideological foundation, constantly threatened by the specter of chance, variability, and historical indeterminacy, just as his precariously unified psyche is threatened by the desire within and the femininity without.

To ward off the filth of democracy, one needs to be always clean. Dr. Mengele, whom I shall discuss in detail in the next chapter, was nicknamed “Mr. Clean” by Auschwitz inmates. Unlike other doctors and guards, often sloppily drunk and cracking up under the strain of killing, this model New Man was always immaculately dressed and aftershave-scented as he went to perform selections for the gas chambers. Purity is the New Man’s obsession: purity in all its meanings, from the most innocuously literal (cold showers and “rational” clothing) to the most ominously metaphorical (cleansing the collective body from human vermin and parasites). The sliding from personal to racial hygiene is perfectly outlined in The Shape of Things to Come. First the New Puritans (the Air Control, the technocratic dictatorship of the future) “disinfect” all dwellings, get rid of those architectural excesses and ornaments Alfred Loos called “excrement” and leave behind “white bare streets” (376). Then they declare physical unfitness to be a crime. Then they institute a far reaching censorship over all books of the past, those “fever rags” (375), which spread the contagion of romance and critical thought. Then they outlaw all hedonism, all unconventional sexuality, all pleasure. And thus they achieve their goal: “to cleanse the human mind for good and all” (376).

The rhetoric of cleanliness reaches its peak in Nazism. Nazi portrayal of heroism is obsessed by “purity faced with putrefaction” (Friedlander 1986, 7). Putrefaction is caused by the presence of the Jewish infection within the national body. The infamous shot of plague-bearing rats interspersed with Jewish faces in the propaganda film The Eternal Jew clearly demonstrates the implosion of personal, social, and racial hygiene into a single lethal complex. Genocide, then, becomes a medical procedure, slaughter is equated with delousing and fumigation, and Auschwitz is nicknamed “Anus mundi” through which the emergent body of the “One Man” is purged.

What distinguishes the New Man’s drive for purity is its total character. Everything must be scoured into transparency: minds (brainwashing), dwellings, bodies, and nations. There is no difference between dusty floors, polluted water, wrong thinking, miscegenation, and social turmoil. All are symptoms of the one underlying cause. For the New Man dirt is the foundational category of his metaphysics. Cristoph Steding, the author of The Reich
and the Sickness of Europe, a book much admired by Heydrich and Himmler, talks about the “decay” of Europe and the infection of Jewry which leads to corruption of the body politic. And then he adds: “Thus the enemy today stands right in the heart of Europe, as he threatens to arise in the heart of every European” (in Griffin 153). The sickness of the collective body is identical to the sickness of the individual; the pollution of the community is the pollution of the body and vice versa. Theweleit compellingly analyzes how, for the “soldier male,” the foul enemy stands for his own abhorred bodily and psychic interior, the streams of semen and blood, the flow of desire. The New Man is at war with the materiality of his own body that challenges his control, with everything unclear, ambiguous, untidy, secretive, and unique. Dirt, after all, is simply matter out of place. The New Man attempts to subdue his body, tidy up his psyche, regulate society. As a result, the quantity of waste grows at an alarming rate, for everything that does not fit into the scheme—both within and without—is relegated to what Stalin was fond of calling “the garbage-heap of history.” The more one strives to keep clean, the greater is the pile of filth to dispose of. Finally, history itself becomes excrement.

However, in his quest for purity, the New Man is bound to splatter himself with gore. And the attraction of physical violence lies precisely in this: in the process of cleansing, one is allowed to wallow in filth. The soldier’s fantasy of the immaculate fighting-machine corporeality results, as Theweleit demonstrates, in the orgasmic addiction to bloodshed. The grotesquerie of violence is the obverse side of the minimalist aesthetic of purification and control. But the self-narrative of the utopian subject cannot admit this grotesquerie without metamorphosing into horror. And thus the ellipsis of the violent sublime, so prominent in Hoess’s and Linde’s stories, comes into being on the grander scale of universal utopia. In The Shape of Things to Come, as the Air Control begins its drive to “cleanse the human mind” by killing a Catholic priest, the narrative abruptly breaks off, to resume after “seventy or eighty years,” when the resistance is subdued. The textual gap swallows up the human litter, which must be swept out of the way if purity is to be achieved.

Worship of the Self

The anonymous newspaper report, quoted above, on the “Fuhrers of the future,” describes the New Man as “the typical ‘Aryan,’ ‘Homo germanicus’—the new god in whose image the German admires and loves himself.” The object of the New Man’s worship is that ideal—and unattainable—sublime self, which he glimpses only in the ecstasy of slaughter. Theweleit’s soldier males of the Freikorps perceived themselves as the Superman cast in the Nietzschean mold (see Ashheim 159). And their counterparts, scientists and
physicians who run concentration camp laboratories and eugenicist programs, "saw themselves as 'children of the gods,' empowered to destroy and kill on behalf of their higher calling, as men who claimed 'spurious attributes of divinity'" (Lifton 449).

Violence is sublime, and sublimity holds the key to that ecstatic disintegration that T. W. E. L. Y. (1977) describes as the libidinal goal of the fascist New Man: "Only in the act of killing or dying—penetration or explosion—can he [the soldier male] burst his boundaries. . . . There must be a rush of blood, either within him or out of the other" (Theweleit 2, 185).

However, this disintegration is only the first step toward the final goal, which—however unattainable—is a total integration of the psyche. The sublime experience of violence explodes the old, self-divided, liberal democratic subject. And then ideology is used as the glue to assemble out of its shreds the "man of steel." This is what Himmler demands from the SS in his infamous Posen speech: to have seen "100 corpses together, or 500, or 1000" and yet to come out of this self-shattering experience with "no harm in our essence, in our soul, in our character" (Remak 159–60).

The unification of the New Man's sublime subjectivity is assured by his identification with either Nature or History. For the Nazi New Man, spirituality consists in being what Lifton calls "nature's engine." And since Nature, for reasons that will be discussed in the next chapter, is perceived as cruel, the New Man's violence is part of the natural order itself. Shaw in Superman articulates the desire to become the sublime, absolute, and irrevocable Power, which is above mere human contrivances: "This is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; the being a force of Nature instead of a feverish selfish little clod of ailments and grievances" (32).

This "being a force of Nature" is what the New Man's spirituality is all about. The god he worships is his ideal self, whether called Homo germanicus, Homo sovieticus, or simply Homo superior. And this worship allows him to indulge in radical transgression, while having all his sins not just forgiven but magically transmuted into virtues. The New Man's spirituality offers him the ecstasy of self-annihilation and at the same time enables him to reclaim a unified, restored selfhood. He can flow with rivers of blood and remain firm as steel. This phallic plenitude, or what H. G. Wells calls, without a trace of irony, the "happy turgidity" of life, can only be attained by dedicating himself completely, body and soul, to the Idea, for anything else would "leave a man in the end 'deflated, collapsed into an aimless self'" (1932, 268). But dedication alone is not enough; it must be kept up by a constant current of violent excess that engorges the "aimless self." The New Man worships his own sublime body as if it were the Lacanian Phallus made palpable. And this all-body erec-
tion requires a steady flow of blood—somebody else's blood. The sublime subject fully exists only in confrontation with the lesser breeds on whom he can practice his technology of violent self-creation. Left in solitude, he is deflated, exposed for the unsteady phantasm that he is. Only by torturing others can “children of the gods” convince themselves of their own divinity.

The New Man was not unopposed. While many science fiction and utopian novels, from Odd John to More Than Human, depicted the beleaguered Homo superior tragically succumbing to the assaults of the lesser breeds, in the immediate aftermath of World War II the popular-culture mutant was likely to become an implacable and dangerous enemy. Philip Dick’s story “The Golden Man” (1954), representing the Superman as a cunning beast, was, by the author’s own admission, inspired by the “buildings marked SHOWERS but which really weren’t” (332). But the text that most forcefully interprets the bloodshed of the mid-twentieth century in terms of the confrontation between two kinds of humanity is George Orwell’s 1984. The subject of heated controversy, appropriated (or rather, misappropriated) by opposite political camps, extolled as prophecy and dismissed as crude propaganda, 1984 is a classic dystopia analyzing the nature of utopian subjectivity. The torture scenes in 1984 represent the defeat of the “last man,” Winston Smith, by the New Man, O’Brien. The issue that is being settled between Smith and O’Brien is not political compliance but the nature of humanity. For Smith, humanity resides in the body, in its modest pleasures—sex, a comfortable bed, the taste of good coffee—and its painful vulnerabilities. For O’Brien, however, it is precisely Smith’s “human, all too human” body that constitutes the locus of his ideological corruption. Stinking, filthy, diseased, the failing body is a self-evident proof of the failure of the mind: “You are rotting away... What are you? A bag of filth. Now turn round and look into this mirror again. Do you see the thing facing you? That is the last man. If you are human, that is humanity” (219).

Winston Smith is the “last man” not because of his political views—that are an implant of the Party, which still needs a fig leaf of ideological deviance to justify its purges. It is his body that rebels, stubbornly refusing to be incorporated into the “national organism.” His dissidence is an organic defect. He is persecuted for what he is, not for what he thinks or does. And in the womb of the Ministry of Love he is truly reborn as a subject of ideology. He is not made to adopt a new ideology; he is given a new selfhood. The motto of the utopian transformation of subjectivity is, as O’Brien says, “Thou art” (205). Smith’s degradation fills him with profound disgust for his own sick flesh. But his renunciation of his own physicality is not enough: regeneration comes at the moment when he is made to commit—or at least to envision—an act of violence. When he begs for his lover Julia to be subjected to the rat torture
instead of him, the betrayal lies not in his inability to resist the torturer but in his ability to identify with him. At least for a moment, he tastes the intoxication of the New Man’s power. And this is the moment of transformation: the last man is no more.

The torture scene in 1984 recurs in contemporary investigative dystopias as a submerged site of trauma, revisited and revised over and over again. But in these texts, written after the collapse of the violent utopia, the outcome is different: the defeat of the subject of ideology by the refurbished subject of discipline, of the New Man by the last man.

PRIVATE INVESTIGATION

While the classic utopias and dystopias contain investigative moments, they are submerged in the preoccupations with the politics of the New Man. 1984, despite its frame-up of Smith, is not really interested in the minutiae of the police work in Oceania. But in contemporary texts dealing with real or imaginary dystopias, the detective aspect is consistently emphasized. Since the end of the Cold War, the police investigation has become a chief modality of dealing with violence in popular culture. As the subject of discipline emerges from the trauma of the detective’s protracted confrontation with the subject of ideology, he applies his criminological tools to the defeated and yet still formidable and poorly understood enemy.

Robert Harris’s Fatherland and Archangel, Donald James’s Monstrum, and Paul Johnston’s Body Politic are not the only or even the best investigative dystopias written in the last twenty years. However, they are fairly representative, and their joint analysis is facilitated by the fact that they share the same plot structure. The four novels depict the investigation of a series of murders against the background of a dystopian society broadly modeled upon 1984. The milieu of Johnston’s novel is a future Edinburgh turned into an approximation of Plato’s The Republic by a movement calling itself “the Enlightenment.” Inherited from Adorno, the notion that the Enlightenment is to blame for totalitarianism has been simplified here into a vision of the Enlightenment as a dangerously ambitious project of social engineering, culminating in an oppressive and corrupt society. Monstrum, Archangel, and Fatherland focus on the two twentieth-century “gods that failed”: Stalinist Russia and Nazi Germany. Archangel takes place in contemporary Russia, occasionally flashbacking into the heyday of Stalinism; Monstrum depicts Russia in the near future, devastated by a civil war and poised on the brink of a new round of totalitarian dictatorship; while Fatherland—the most famous investigative dystopia of the 1990s—takes place in an alternative history in which the Third Reich has won World War II.
The obvious difference between these novels and 1984 is their choice of targets. Whether Orwell’s specific bête noire was Nazism, the Soviet Union, or even postwar England itself, the enemy was immediate and present (even the resurrection of the Third Reich was not beyond imagination in 1948). The situation is radically different today: both Nazism and Communism are dead, while the Enlightenment was never alive in the first place. As opposed to the classic dystopias, which criticized contemporary ideological trends, investigative dystopias are obsessed with the past and with “what might have been” (the last words of Fatherland). While incorporating elements of science fiction, they make no serious attempt at extrapolation. Even the ostensible future of Monstrum is a thinly disguised allegory of the past, of the turbulent Russia of the 1920s and 1930s. The name of the nascent dictator, Leonid Koba, gives it away. Koba was the Party alias of Stalin.

The analepsis of the detective story uncovers the violent trauma of the past. By transposing dystopia’s preoccupation with ideological violence into a detective story format, the investigative dystopia exposes the traumatic foundation of the postmodern self. The downfall of utopia is made to underwrite a resounding triumph of the mythos of liberal democracy. But precisely this need to repeat the story of the New Man’s crime and punishment testifies to the anxiety this story still provokes. As Freud points out, repetition is a neurotic symptom of an unhealed trauma, and the trauma of genocide, reawakened by the events in Bosnia and Rwanda, still haunts the resurrected disciplinary subject.

But as we have seen in the last chapter, the narrative strictures of the classic detective story are incapable of fully containing the delirium of ordinary violence. Still less are they capable of taming the sublime violence of ideological slaughter. The failure of the disciplinary plot to come to terms with the subject of ideology leads to some strange twists and deformations in the narrative shape of the investigative dystopia. But it is precisely through these twists and deformations that the true nature of ideological genocide and its perpetrators may be glimpsed. The investigative dystopia is founded on a paradox: it tries apprehending the history of mass murder with the help of patently inadequate narrative tools, whose very inadequacy is a means to grasp the scope and meaning of the atrocity.

The incongruity between the disciplinary narrative model and the history of genocide begins with the figure of the detective. The detective in the investigative dystopia often seems to have wandered into the wrong book. He is a character out of a Raymond Chandler or Dashiell Hammett novel, a Philip Marlowe lost in the belly of the totalitarian Behemoth. Despite their diverse ethnic origins and ideological commitments, Quintilian Dalrymple of Body Politic, Constantin Vadim of Monstrum, and Fluke Kelso of Archangel are
uncannily similar, sharing general moodiness, occasional alcoholic haze, and a sort of untidy sexiness. Xavier March of Fatherland, despite strong resemblance to his generic brethren, has an additional dimension I will discuss separately. But in all four novels, the detective explicitly flaunts his generic extraterritoriality. In Body Politic a friend reproaches Dalrymple with “doing your Philip Marlowe impersonation” (77), and in Monstrum, Vadim, on a date with an American woman, chooses a single malt rather than a familiar vodka for a drink because “who ever heard of Humphrey Bogart drinking vodka?” (252).

Philip Marlowe and Humphrey Bogart are not quite Sherlock Holmes and Miss Marple. They belong to the hard-boiled thriller and film noir. Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett infuse the detective story formula with the bleak urban atmosphere of American between the two world wars and exaggerate the classic detective’s loneliness into existential alienation. Philip Marlowe wanders the dark crime-infested streets of his hometown like a stranger in a strange land. His psychic dislocation allows him, as Fredric Jameson argues in his essay on Raymond Chandler, to fulfill “the demands of the function of knowledge rather than of the lived experience: through him we are able to see, to know, the society as a whole” (128). And it is precisely the function of the detective in dystopia. Since he is up against “society as a whole,” through his cynical, disillusioned but still reliable eyes we can see and know the nature of the criminal regime.

Despite his weaknesses, the detective is fundamentally honest. As Geoffrey Hartman puts it, the hard-boiled sleuth is “the heir to a popular American myth—he is the latest of the uncooptable heroes” (in Most 227). But in dystopia this American myth becomes the focus of political dissidence. The clash between honesty and corruption is rewritten as the confrontation between the subject of discipline and the subject of ideology. The moody private eye, smoking, drunk, or in bed with a woman, resists the pull of the sublime body. His shabby corporeality is so patently at odds with the purity of the New Man that his cooperation with the system is simply out of the question. He is a creature of a different species, acting as the locus of the implied reader’s relieved identification with a familiar, less-than-perfect subject in the kingdom of murderous supermen. The detective’s petty cynicism acts as a counterweight to the sublimity of mass violence. Instead of being disturbing, his alienation becomes comforting, almost cozy.

But the enhanced role of the detective in the investigative dystopia involves a strange reversal of his generic role. In the classic detective story the detective represents order struggling against the chaos of violence and criminality. In the investigative dystopia he is chaos contesting deadly order. In the classic detective story, as Michael Holquist points out, the detective himself is “the
essential metaphor for order" (156). But utopia is order—the order of perfection opposing the flux and contingency of history. Confronting it, the subject of discipline paradoxically has to defend disorder. Reluctantly and somewhat uneasily, he takes upon himself the unfamiliar role of representing the contingency of history as opposed to the static perfection of utopia. As Morson puts it: “Whereas utopias describe an escape from history, these anti-utopias describe an escape, or attempted escape, to history, which is to say, to the world of contingency, conflict and uncertainty” (qtd. in Booker 4).

The initial crime in the investigative dystopia appears as an accident or aberration. The state demands that this inexplicable glitch of violence be mopped up as quickly and as discreetly as possible. In Body Politic a guardian haughtily comments that Dalrymple’s detective skills are unnecessary: “There has been little call for [forensic] expertise recently” (27). The utopian state promises more than just “law and order”; the security it offers is a shield against chance, randomness, and accident. Utopia’s claim to eliminate chance involves what might be called “planned contingency.” The Third Reich was simultaneously an efficient bureaucratic machine and a mess of conflicting authorities; paradoxically, it united “a chaos, a rule of lawlessness and anarchy” with striving for perfect order (Neumann xi). Similarly, under Stalin, the very same state that protected its citizens from the vicissitudes of market economy also subjected them to random persecution, so that nobody, no matter how ideologically orthodox, could be assured of escaping the Gulag. Since chance cannot be gotten rid of altogether, it has to be incorporated into the system as one of its elements. Utopia, as Wells points out, is to take shape “in a world of uncertain seasons, sudden catastrophes, antagonistic diseases” (1905, 7). It cannot eradicate contingency, but it can make it part of a quasi-divine—because incomprehensible—overall design. As O’Brien explains in 1984, the state masters nature by insisting that whatever is, must be.

The detective’s function is to uncouple chance and necessity. And thus the investigative dystopia’s private eye blindly stumbles through improbable coincidences, tangles in the plot’s tortuous twists and turns, and reaches his conclusions by pure luck rather than by logic. In Archangel the name of the historian turned detective, Fluke Kelso, is a giveaway of his role. He is the lucky chance that upsets the deadly order of the once and future totalitarian society he investigates.

However, by taking upon himself the narrative function alien to his generic origin, the detective already registers the uneasy combination of the disciplinary frame with the ideological subject matter. And the strain becomes even more severe as it gradually turns out that the secret he laboriously uncovers is in no need of investigation at all.
In all investigative dystopias the initial violence seems to be a private criminal act. In Body Politic and Monstrum it is a series of atrocious but seemingly motiveless slayings; in Fatherland and in Archangel it is the murder of an “old fighter.” But it quickly becomes clear that what the detective really confronts is the criminal nature of the regime itself. And since he is aware that the state is guilty of mass violence (though he may underestimate its true scope), the detective discovers not only that the perpetrator is known to him but that he himself is an accessory to the crime he investigates.

The circular nature of the investigation that loops upon itself somewhat resembles the structure of Oedipus Rex, which has been called “the first detective story” by David Grossvogel. In his book Mystery and Its Fictions: From Oedipus to Agatha Christie, Grossvogel suggests that Oedipus Rex is different from the standard detective story because it investigates not a shallow secret but a metaphysical mystery: the mystery of Oedipus’s own identity, founded on transgressive violence.

But disregarding the obvious difference of artistic merit, the situation of Xavier March in Fatherland is not unlike Oedipus’s: he too comes to realize—and to admit—his own culpability. By doubling back upon itself, the cognitive dynamics of the detective story is short circuited. Knowledge can no longer neutralize the horror of murder, since all it discloses is the identity of the regulator and the perpetrator.

After a long and laborious investigation, March comes up with the documentary evidence of the extermination of eleven million European Jews (in Harris’s alternative history, triumphant Hitler, still alive in 1964, has had sufficient time to carry out his program). But this evidence, for the preservation of which he eventually sacrifices his own life, tells him nothing he has not known before. During his interrogation by a Gestapo officer, who claims, “I did not know any of this!” March says: “Of course you knew! You knew every time someone made a joke about ‘going East,’ every time you heard a mother tell her children to behave or they’d go up the chimney. We knew when we moved into their houses, when we took over their property, their jobs. We knew but we did not have the facts.... These [the notes] put flesh on the bones. Put bones where there was just clear air” (311).

The shift from “you” to “we” is significant: March, an SS officer, who spent the war in a U-boat, wearing socks made of the hair of death camp inmates, acknowledges his own guilt. The question is why he has participated in, or at least silently condoned, the genocide. And the answer to this question lies in the “we,” of which he is a part; in the repression, evasions, and traumas of the utopian body politic, collectively responsible for the crime of the century.
In discussing the "secret" of the Holocaust, historian Walter Laqueur analyzes a peculiar combination of knowledge and denial that structured public discourse—and not only in Germany—during the war. As Himmler famously put it in his Posen speech: "Among ourselves, we can openly talk about it [the extermination], though we will never speak a word of it in public. . . . This is a page of glory in our history that never has been and never will be written" (in Remak 159). The accumulation of oxymorons—talk/silence, page of glory/blank page—outlines the structure of the open secret: knowledge that is held in suspension between acceptance and denial, never quite repressed, but never quite integrated into consciousness either. Himmler enjoined absolute secrecy but, as Laqueur points out, "while he was talking the tape recorders were running" (17).

Open secret is a splinter of memory lodged in the collective psyche but so overgrown with the tissue of lies and evasions that it infiltrates the consciousness only as an occasional phantom pain. In 1984, Orwell's famous description of doublethink—"to know and not to know, to be conscious of complete truthfulness while telling carefully constructed lies" (31)—perfectly captures its irreducible ambiguity. The secret is open because violence has to be simultaneously hidden and displayed. Himmler's speech, with its lingering relish over the growing number of corpses, tacitly assumes that genocide is both ideologically justified and pleasurable, but while the first could be acknowledged, the second could not, if the Nazi New Man was to retain his self-image as a decent human being. And yet without the dreadful aura of large-scale violence, the New Man would be nothing but a decent—that is, feeble and degenerate—human being. Open secret was a way to have one's cake and to eat it, to indulge in ultimate transgression, while clinging to the ordinary mores of middle-class existence.

Both in the Third Reich and Stalinist Soviet Union, the body in pain was simultaneously displayed and denied. Even those who lived in the vicinity of concentration camps and killing grounds could talk about what they saw only through euphemisms, circumlocutions, and indirect hints. The suffering body was forced into the cultural Imaginary, broken into mute and disjointed flashes of vision, retained as a source of sadistic pleasure and occasional nightmare, but denied the voice that could connect it with the values of morality and ethics that the regime still professed.

Daniel Goldhagen in Hitler's Willing Executioners claims that the vast majority of the Germans essentially agreed with what was done during the Final Solution and therefore were not overtly perturbed by the information about the death camps. But this is a simplification, for it disregards the numerous witness accounts of the visceral shock pictures and stories of atrocities could induce. Even the executioners themselves were not immune to
nervous breakdowns, while the SS tried to prevent dissemination of too graphic descriptions among the general public. SS-Untersturmführer Max Taubner was tried by a disciplinary court in 1943 for taking “shameless and utterly revolting” pictures of massacres and showing them around (qtd. in Klee 199). And yet at the same time such pictures were routinely taken and carefully preserved. Much of the iconography of the Holocaust derives from the perpetrators’ own documentary evidence. A peculiar double desire seems to be at work here: to hide what is being done under the veneer of stale euphemisms and at the same time to proudly display it in all its gory nakedness.

The issue of the bystanders in Russia is even more controversial, for while the Germans, at least, were assured that they could never be among the victims, the Russians were not. Stalin’s Terror was random and contingent, choosing a new group of victims almost every day, fluctuating with the exigencies of internal and external policy, a power struggle within the NKVD (the secret police) or merely the leader’s whim. In 1937 nobody in the Soviet Union could feel immune from arrest, torture, deportation, or execution, since anybody could be declared “an enemy of the people” overnight. It seems that such a situation should have provoked a much greater empathy with the victims but, in fact, apart from sporadic acts of human kindness, there was none. Trying to puzzle out the mystery of a people acquiescing in autogencide, historian Alan Bullock suggests that “a dual consciousness,” generated by the “secrecy” of the camps, was partially responsible (503).

This “dual consciousness” is the double structure of the New Man’s self. Drunk on the violent sublime, he nevertheless must preserve the rigid structure of his subjectivity through scrupulous adherence to social codes. Wallowing in blood, he must still be “pure”; and the more blood he spills, the more urgent the need for purity becomes. The atrocity may be seen, but it must not be named. The split between sight and story exemplifies the irreducible schizophrenia of the New Man who, in pursuit of sublime unity, becomes like Oedipus a self-deceiver, divided between the deep knowledge of the “terrible secret” and its superficial denial.

In all investigative dystopias the detective’s solution of the murders is merely the articulation of the open secret. The detective’s culpability as an accomplice is indicated either directly, as in March’s musings on his own military past, or symbolically. Quintilian Dalrymple, the detective of Body Politic, uncovers the involvement of the utopian state itself in organ trade and sex slavery. The head of the state’s council is his own mother. In this quasi-feminist version of Oedipus, the hidden sin is not incest but familial complicity in genocide. In Monstrum and Archangel the detective’s guilt is more confused and indirect. Constantin Vadim, the hero of Monstrum, is a decent and upright policeman, but he is tainted by his past association with
the Soviet system. Fluke Kelso of Archangel is a British historian, eventually forced to acknowledge the Western media’s involvement in a plot to “resurrect” Stalin.

In the ordinary whodunit the closure is provided by the discovery of the murderer’s identity. But in the investigative dystopia the cognitive satisfaction of the whodunit no longer suffices: there is no cognitive satisfaction in having one’s prior knowledge confirmed. Instead the genre offers two potential resolutions, both inadequate and each incompatible with the other. In this very confusion is inscribed the unrepresentable historical trauma of genocide.

The first closure is predicated on the liberal value of openness: the belief that silence breeds monsters and that mere airing of secrets, whether personal or collective, will result in therapeutic catharsis. If “glasnost” may be seen as a social equivalent of “talking cure,” all investigative dystopias end with the society on the couch. Body Politic and Monstrum are fairly optimistic that a cure may be effected: Dalrymple actually decides to stay in The Enlightenment’s Edinburgh in order to reform the corrupt community in the name of its original dream. But in Fatherland and Archangel a far darker view predominates: glasnost is seen as part of the problem rather than the solution.

Once March in Fatherland discovers the evidence of the Holocaust, his first impulse is to convey it to the West. With the help of Charlie, his American lover, he arranges for the documents to cross the border, risking his own life in the process. Charlie believes that the facts “change everything. Without them you have nothing, a void. But produce facts—provide names, dates, orders, numbers, times, locations, maps, references, schedules, photographs, diagrams, descriptions— and suddenly that void has geometry, is susceptible to measurement, becomes a solid thing” (292). Once people know what has been done in their name, they will rebel and “this society will fall apart” (ibid.). Charlie articulates the view of the classic detective story, the faith in the omnipotence of reason. Like Sherlock Holmes or Augustus Dupin, she believes violence can be adequately dealt with by logic and language. But when she rhetorically asks whether a society can be built on mass graves, March does not answer, perhaps because he knows it can.

The novel is ambiguous not only about the success of March’s scheme—we do not know whether Charlie will indeed cross the border—but also about the value of the information itself. After all, the point of an open secret is not that the people do not know the truth, but that they do not want to know it. When March, tortured in the Gestapo, attempts to tell his interrogator—an erstwhile colleague—about his findings, the interrogator says, “I’m not so sure I want to know about it” (314). There is no guarantee that the German people as a whole—or the Americans, with vested interests in détente with the Third Reich—will feel any different.
In Archangel the view is even grimmer. Fluke Kelso, an historian following the trail of Stalin’s diaries and finding instead the dictator’s reincarnation, eventually discovers that the Western media are complicit in the “red-brown” plot to bring about the restoration of Stalinism in Russia. Instead of risking his life to preserve the historical evidence, as March does, Kelso risks his life to destroy it. He attempts—unsuccessfully—to get rid of Stalin’s diary, realizing that the disclosure of the dictator’s murderous madness will only serve to attract new disciples to his banner.

The classic detective story could pretend that violence held no attraction, that condemnation followed murder as inevitably as day follows night. The genre banked on its readers’ solid bourgeois morality with the assurance that was perhaps slightly tinged with anxiety. Still, the disclosure of the murderer’s secret identity was deemed sufficient to rectify the evil of the crime. At some point, March attempts to retreat back into the protective rigidity of the parental genre, to be a detective and nothing more than that: “Was history changed so easily? He wondered. Certainly, it was his experience that secrets were an acid—once spilled, they could eat their way through anything: if a marriage, why not a presidency, why not a state? But talk of history—he shook his head at his own reflection—history was beyond him. Investigators turned suspicion into evidence. He had done that” (294).

March tries to pretend that he is dealing with an ordinary crime and ordinary criminals. Scale should make no difference: “if a marriage . . . why not a state?” If one corpse provokes righteous bourgeois indignation, why not millions? But there is a profound difference between ordinary “rational” murder and genocide, and an even greater difference between the disciplinary criminal and the ideological New Man. Identified with the immortal corporeality of the state, the latter cannot be simply hauled off to jail, because jails—and slaughterhouses—are incorporated into his sublime body. To defeat him, to turn intractable history into a comprehensible and disciplined story, private investigation is not enough. And thus Fatherland proposes a more radical closure in the detective’s self-sacrifice.

The closure of Oedipus Rex is not the revelation of the truth but Oedipus’s self-blinding. In this terrible gesture of atonement, transgressive violence is turned back onto the perpetrator. And even though Xavier March is hardly the King of Thebes, in Fatherland the same logic of atonement dictates a melodramatic ending. In order to divert his pursuers from Charlie, March drives on the autobahn all the way to Poland, to the site of Auschwitz. There is nothing there anymore: the bodies burnt, the buildings blown up, nothing to show that this is the scene of the greatest crime in history. And this is where March takes his last suicidal stand against the pursuing helicopters of the SS.

March’s anagnorisis involves the acknowledgement of his own complicity.
in genocide as a member of the murderous body politic. But by doing so, he decisively removes Fatherland from the terrain of the detective story, still inhabited by Monstrum and Archangel. The failure of discipline in coming to terms with ideological violence is inscribed in the failure of the detective plot. An altogether different narrative modality, that of sacrifice and atonement, concludes the story of a genocidal utopia. Like the ones who walk away from Omelas, March has to repudiate the violent sublime through action rather than ratiocination.

March's complicity is inscribed not through his psychology, which is shallow to the point of nonexistence, but through his corporeality. A war hero with an unblemished war record, March is, above all, a perfect Aryan. The book stresses his racially pure appearance and his snappy black SS uniform. But the giveaway is his unmanly propensity for studying himself in the mirror. This Imaginary self-identification with the regime's corporeal ideal betrays the secret of March's subjectivity: what seems psychic blankness is in fact the utopian purity of the self, cleansed of memory, conscience, and desire.

But all these things surge back, despite Harris's inability to portray as convincingly as Orwell or Zamayatin does, the rebellion of the fallible human body against the inhuman perfection of utopia. March's transformation begins with a vague sense of unease that eventually returns him not so much to true individuality as to the generic mold of the private eye, a hard-boiled knight of justice. The impetus of his Holocaust investigation is the sense of some mystery buried in his own past, "a vague and growing uneasiness that had happened to coincide with his birthday," prompting him "to seek an answer" (33).

March's crime scene is memory: he knows how easy it is "to live your life in ignorance of the past, of your world, yourself" (187). Like Oedipus, he digs into the past to find out what he has known all along, the secret of his origin. But if Oedipus discovers the secret in the particular drama of parricide and incest, March's origin lies in the realm of the general. He has no family, almost no human connections of any kind. Stripping away his Philip Marlowe act, one sees a generic "decent" Nazi, with no distinguishing characteristics, one cell in the organic body politic, which is repudiated by this body when it turns unruly. March is not an individual marked by unique fate but a part sharing the fate—and the guilt—of the whole. He is a New Man investigating himself.

In this aporia of subjectivity, the investigative dystopia confronts its own limits. The crime of ideology is supposed to be exposed and punished by the subject of discipline. But in a truly successful ideological state, where would such a subject come from? Winston Smith, the "last man," is fed by memories of his pre-utopian past, but what happens when such memories are gone? Why would a New Man rebel against his own body politic? The generically mixed nature of the investigative dystopia points precisely to its inability to
imagine a successful revolt from within utopia's own narrative structure. Xavier March, a savior in the SS uniform, is such a strange and unsatisfactory character precisely because he is a living ideological paradox. Unlike Smith, he successfully withstands torture; his body is as invulnerable to pain as Himmler wanted his paladins to be. But why would such a sublime body—or a sublimely empty mind—experience any empathy with the subhuman victims, sacrificed on the altars of its own divinity? The novel provides no answer because there is none and quickly dispatches March to die a martyr's death before it becomes necessary for him to arrest himself.

THE SALVATION OF HORROR

But, of course, people did rebel, utopias did fall or were never built in the first place, and the self-narrative of the subject of ideology fizzled out in a rush of consumer goods. With the benefit of historical hindsight, we can see that the violent sublime failed to deliver the promised transfiguration of subjectivity. This has led to the resurfacing of a belief in “human nature,” so that all too often the liberal subject of discipline appears as the original Man. Despite all the efforts of postmodernist theory, popular culture is serenely confident that capitalist democracy is the rule and everything else—an aberration. However, in delineating the paradox of sublime violence, popular narratives unwittingly betray the shakiness of this assumption. In their generic twists and inconsistencies, postmodern dystopias disclose the origin of the New Man's fall not in the inherent middle-class morality of all human beings but rather in the inevitable and unresolvable clash between the ideological narrative and the experience of violent excess.

Utopian ideologies thrive on violence and yet cannot totally contain it. The irreducible element of horror creeps in, spoiling the brave new subject, rusting his steely purity, undermining the impossible unity of his self. In chapter 1 I discussed the connection between utopia and horror. But this connection, the lure of the violent sublime, is double-edged: while it accounts for the attraction of such ideologies as Nazism, it simultaneously corrodes the rational and scientific underpinnings of these ideologies, preventing them from stabilizing into a self-sustaining body politic. Once released, the sublime cannot be totally controlled by the secret police or reduced to bureaucratic procedures. The excess of horror unleashed by utopia finally destroys it.

Scenes of torture, mutilation, graphic violence are present in most dystopias. In Monstrum a new victim of a serial killer is discovered in the middle of Moscow: “I looked back quickly . . . to the concrete block on which the girl was splayed, her bloodied legs wide. It was a statueless plinth. On the side, in bronze letters of running blood I read the name: JOSEPH STALIN” (104).
In this not overly subtle tableau, the mutilated body is displayed as evidence of the regime's criminality. The cut-up corpses in Body Politic serve the same function: to demonstrate the hidden violence seething under the surface of a would-be happy society.

But there is a strange displacement in the scene quoted above, since the girl, lying on the plinth of Stalin's memorial, seems to represent not so much the victims of the regime as the missing body of the dictator himself. The same conflation of the victim's and perpetrator's corporeality is evident in Fatherland, in the scene of the autopsy of Josef Buhler, one of the architects of the Final Solution, now an overweight and flabby old man, gutted by the medical examiner's knife. And it reaches its peak in Archangel, where the body of Stalin becomes the focus of the plot. The novel opens with a description of Stalin's death, in which the omnipotent General Secretary is reduced to a mass of "rotting," smelly, paralyzed flesh (16). The convolutions of the plot eventually lead K else to discover, in the frozen wastes of Siberia, Stalin's posthumous son and heir, his father's reincarnation, a savage, stinking, mad killer. Looking at the "careless self-mutilation" with which he hacks off his hair, K else realizes he is face to face with "Homo Sovieticus, the Soviet Man" (335, 345).

The dynamics of the open secret buries the bodies of the victims under the pall of euphemisms and understatements. But equally central to utopia is the denial of the stubbornly mortal and imperfect bodies of the perpetrators. Le Guin's filthy suffering child represents not just the hidden victims of utopia but also the obverse side of the Omelas citizens' impossible corporeal perfection. Purity is achieved when death, sickness, and suffering of the perpetrators are projected upon the victims and eliminated together with them.

The crime that founds utopia is not just murder but rather the "disappearing" of the body, in the same sense as political dissidents have been "disappeared" in totalitarian and authoritarian regimes. Immured in the foundations of the utopian state, repressed and ritually sacrificed, the individual body of pain guarantees the collective health of the New Man. The investigative dystopia excavates this missing corpus, in all the ugliness of its putrefaction. The bodies of the victim and the perpetrator are fused into one monstrous whole, and this "monstrum" haunts utopia's antiseptic palace, transforming it into the house of horror.

Murder in utopia is the return of the corporeal repressed. The function of the detective is not to identify the perpetrator but to name the crime. In the kingdom of ideological simulacra, he sees the truth of the naked, vulnerable flesh underneath the New Man's utopian clothes. Even nausea becomes a political gesture: March is too squeamish to watch Buhler's autopsy and Vadim flaunts his sensitive stomach like a badge of decency.
It is in relation to the victim’s and the perpetrator’s bodies that the investigative dystopia becomes an inverted image of the classic detective story. If the latter hides the body under the layers of narrative, the former strips them away. March’s investigation begins with the yellowed photograph—of a Jewish family—that he finds in his apartment. The family name is Weiss—"White. A blank" (33). The rest of the book is March’s attempt to fill in this blank with the bodies of the victims. He has to “put flesh on the bones, put bones where there was just clear air” (317). Odilo Globocnik, one of the perpetrators of the Final Solution, boasts: “There’s nothing there anymore, not even a brick” (317). March (who eventually finds some bricks on the site of Auschwitz) is out to disprove him by providing material evidence. He has to show that what lies behind the euphemism of “evacuation to the East” is murder. As long as the terrible sublimity of genocide resides in the ellipsis of the open secret, the “sublime body” of the New Man is invincible. Once shown for what it is, the horror of the slaughter will corrode the utopian body politic. Disgust at the mounds of rotting corpses will overcome ideological indoctrination; the utopian story will be vanquished by terrible spectacle. At least, this is what March—along with Le Guin—hopes for.

If the ordinary detective begins the investigation with the victim’s body, March has to end with it. The novel’s ending—with March dying on the site of Auschwitz—can be seen as a symbolic self-sacrifice, in which the detective, unable to unearth the obliterated bodies of the victims, offers his own in their stead. But while his gesture is seen as heroic, in Harris’s next novel the idea of “substitute” bodies becomes far more ambiguous. In Archangel, when Kelso realizes he has been the dupe of a Stalinist conspiracy, he feels completely impotent to prevent the dictator’s resurrection. Western logic is irrelevant to Russia, and the revelation of the atrocities is yesterday’s news. The only possibility of resolution is offered by the daughter of Stalin’s bodyguard, who is about to shoot the dictator’s reincarnation in order to revenge her murdered father. His body—and presumably her own, for she is not likely to survive a public assassination—will be a sacrifice preventing the rebirth of the totalitarian monster. But in the light of the fact that Stalin’s Terror was unleashed by the public assassination of Kirov, Archangel wisely abstains from a happy ending or any ending whatsoever.

If the body of the victim becomes the focus of the repressed horror of the violent sublime, so does the body of the murderer. The merging of the corporeal identities of victim and violator that I noted in horror occurs in dystopia as well, but in a different way. Since both violence and victimization are collective processes, the body of an individual murderer becomes a scaled-down version of the body politic. Its monstrosity represents the monstrosity of a society built on mass graves.
In Body Politic the killer is a young female auxiliary who attempts to end the city-state’s involvement in sex slavery and organ trade. The detective Dalrymple at the beginning is tempted to interpret her actions as a romantic rebellion: “In the perfect city, the only way to express free will was to commit murder” (332). However, when he finally meets the beautiful and accomplished Amanda, he recognizes her for a New Woman, a member of what he calls “the superior race” that has conquered Edinburgh (341). Amanda sees herself as fulfilling, rather than undermining, the ideology sustaining “the body politic”: “I’m a good auxiliary. I wanted to purge the city of the disease that was afflicting it” (327). She is one of the “ten thousand trained killers” who serve the system (60). Her own body is a symbol of the outwardly beautiful but in fact monstrous body politic created by the Enlightenment. She is attractive but freakish, with six fingers and flexible bones.

Unlike Body Politic, whose utopia is imaginary, Monstrum, Fatherland, and Archangel investigate the historical utopian bodies whose monstrosity requires a postmortem rather than remedial surgery. But there is an interesting difference between Fatherland and the other two novels, the difference that reflects the disparate attitudes of the West to the Holocaust and the Gulag. Monstrum and Archangel, dealing with “exotic” Russian history, vacillate between nature and nurture in explaining the utopian monstrosity. Totalitarianism is intermittently perceived as either a Russian national trait or as the result of a common Western tendency, with the decisive slant to the former. This attitude accounts for a peculiarly smug tone, especially evident in Monstrum, for the horrors of an alien culture can only imbue one with a pleasant feeling of one’s own superiority. Monstrum delivers a scathing critique of the Russian failure to develop a democratic society and to come to terms with the crimes of the past. But its historical analysis is intertwined with the clichés of the “darkness in the Russian personality” and “Russian Gothic” (483). Insofar as the totalitarian state is regarded as a specifically Russian perversion, the central image of the book—that of the “Monstrum”—comes to signify a crippled national, rather than social, body. “Monstrum” is the nickname of the serial killer, who cuts out women’s uteri. The word itself is linked to the old peasant practice of killing deformed and brain-damaged babies at birth. “In the good old days,” says Vadim’s informant, “Mother Russia regularly gave birth to a monstrum in every village in the land” (74). The killer, then, is a Russian native son who savagely turns against the Motherland, and as the convoluted plot develops, the Russian state itself—whether Communist or nationalist—becomes a collective Monstrum, a mutated body politic tearing itself apart. If democracy is “founded deep in human nature” (497), then, perhaps, the Russian inability to have a democratic government is related to some natural deficiency.

However, all such speculations about Russia’s “special path,” all too common
in Russia itself, are undermined by the unexpected denouement. The killer, it turns out, is neither Russian nor a son but an American female physician, ostensibly an observer for the UN, actually a dealer in stolen organs and a violent sociopath. As in Johnston’s novel, a trade in body parts comes to signify the cannibalistic nature of the body politic, which acquires a spurious corporeality through the violence done to individual bodies. But unlike Body Politic, the violence here is due to an outside influence: while Imogen Shepherd is protected by highly placed Russian officials, she herself is not merely a Western import but a Western caricature, an over-the-top femme fatale. If she symbolizes what many Russian nationalists claim is the true cause of Communist violence, the pernicious influence of Western ideas, it is difficult to reconcile her presence with the image of the Russian monstrum. An attempt to please everybody, to intimate that the monstrous body politic of Stalinism is both a Russian mutation and a Western bastard, leads the novel into incoherence.

Archangel, a far more serious and knowledgeable exploration of Stalinism, eventually falls into the same trap of the “mysterious Russian soul.” The final explanation of the genocide is, disappointingly, Stalin’s madness. His son is a deranged serial killer, trapping and torturing stray tourists for his private satisfaction. But since the son also exemplifies the Homo sovieticus, the novel leaves the reader with the obvious conclusion that the USSR was populated exclusively by violent psychopaths and that the “new” Russia, about to welcome another dictator, is no better.

There are, however, no intimations of madness in Fatherland. Surprisingly—and this is an issue I will discuss in greater detail in chapter 6—the Holocaust, despite a flood of pieties regarding its ineffable character, is regarded by popular culture as more easily narrativized than the Gulag. There are many reasons for such different attitudes to Nazi and Soviet genocide. But everything else aside, the Holocaust is a better story than the Gulag. Nazi ideology, with its uncompromising racial division of humanity, follows the familiar plot of science fiction and monster movies. Deeply embedded in the bio-ideologies of the nineteenth century, it is “scientific,” logical, and self-consistent. Its image of racial utopia resonates with the long Western tradition of the purified and homogeneous body politic. Its New Man is both Nietzschean Übermensch and comic book Superman. Its sublimity is all the more terrifying—and tempting—because it is framed in a compelling plot.

On the contrary, the ideological narrative which governed Stalinist utopia was ad hoc, provisional, incomplete, glued together only by the personality of the Leader. Revised and rewritten many times, the Communist utopia turned into a hybrid body, in which elements of a homegrown national socialism were incongruously coupled with original Marxism. Barely comprehensible
even to the Russians themselves, the story of the Gulag cannot be properly
told. The sublimity of genocide is lost in a narrative muddle.

This is why popular narratives fare so much better when confronted with
"the Enlightenment" or the Third Reich than with the chimera of Stalinism.
This is why Hitler and not Stalin becomes the subject of endless novels, films,
scholarly treatises, trying to solve the mystery of his "radical evil." In his
mammoth book Explaining Hitler, Ron Rosenbaum summarizes more than
half a century of grappling with the enigma of the man who has come to rep-
resent the evil "that places him beyond even the extreme end of the contin-
umum of human nature" (xvi). Hitler is not an ordinary perpetrator of violence
but "something else again entirely" (ibid.). This "something else" is the sub-
lime subject of ideology, the purest (perhaps only?) incarnation of the utopi-
an self, entirely constructed by the logic of its own narrative. What makes
Mein Kampf such a terrible book to read is that there is no sense of humanity,
however twisted, beyond the text. What you see is what you get. In the after-
math of the Holocaust, Hitler has become the eidolon of the aborted New
Man, while Stalin is perceived as a magnified serial killer, an omnipotent psy-
chopath.

In Fatherland Hitler is precisely that "defining absence" that the Holocaust
becomes in narratives of history and posthistory. Alive, but unseen, spoken
about in whispers, euphemism, circumlocution, the Fuhrer is the black hole
whose gravity warps the narrative space. He is as sublime as the ultimate
crime he has perpetrated. The final subject of ideology, he has remade him-
self in the image of the annihilation he has unleashed.

The novel cannot tackle the Fuhrer. The final defeat of the investigative
dystopia is that it ultimately backs off from the confrontation with its mur-
derer. All Fatherland offers is the unsatisfactory substitute of March himself,
a self-contradictory subject, a hero and a criminal, a New Man and a law-
abiding citizen, atoning for his own halfheartedness by a bathetic death.

But not all popular narratives are that cowardly. In the next chapter I will
look at another New Man who is second in notoriety only to Hitler himself,
Dr. Josef Mengele. As we shall see, he has a whole genre to himself. And
within its boundaries, he builds his own utopia of torture and mutilation.