

“A Way of Revealing”: Technology and Utopianism in Contemporary Culture

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Abstract

Although technology was once viewed literally as a means of bringing about utopian society, its means to that end was exhausted in the minds of many when it fostered the nuclear attacks on Japan in 1945. Since then, not only has technology lost its utopian verve, but it also has been viewed by some quite pessimistically. Nevertheless, technology does provide an avenue for utopian cultural production, whose utopian energy must often be rescued by readers and scholars using the Blochian utopian hermeneutic. In this way technology is as Heidegger described it—“a way of revealing,” that is, the tool that brings the carving out from within the rock. This article argues that although technology has come to be viewed by some pessimistically in the years since Hiroshima and Nagasaki, it is now experiencing a utopian renaissance in that it allows for utopian cultural production to be widespread as never before. This is occurring thanks to new technology-facilitated genres such as the Alternate Reality Game, the mass audiences tuned in to Internet avenues for utopian production, and the continued improvement of older technologies such as film and television. Technology cannot be the impetus for ideal change by itself, no matter how embraced such a concept might have been upon the introduction of the telegraph or the Internet, but it has brought about new methods of injecting new energy into culture, which can only serve to benefit society as a whole.

“A Way of Revealing”: Technology and Utopianism in Contemporary Culture

“Technology is a way of revealing. If we give heed to this, then another whole realm for the essence of technology will open itself up to us. It is the realm of revealing, i.e., of truth.”

—Martin Heidegger

Despite the many views of technology associated with utopian thinking, one important role that technology plays is its facilitation of idealistic cultural production—literature, music, visual arts, media. This role can be as simple as the tools that allowed prehistoric man to create cave paintings, or as advanced as contemporary

cultural production platforms (e.g., the Internet and film technologies). If the hermeneutic employed by subscribers to the philosophy of Ernst Bloch is accepted, then utopian potential can be found in any cultural product. Since most cultural production is dependent upon technology in one way or another, then it hardly seems a stretch to grant technology some credit in the area of utopian potential, despite what it leaves to be desired in others. Still, the history of technology’s relationship with utopianism is quite complicated, especially with regard to technology as a means to a socially utopian end.

Enlightenment thinkers saw technology as one of several means of bringing about a perfect world, but they also recognized its inherent negative possibilities. Technological utopian visions flourished; however, technology remained an object of considerable debate, especially in the wake of the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan in 1945, and throughout the Cold War. At this point, technology all but entirely ceased to be the means to utopia it had once been credited as, and in fact became quite the opposite in the minds of many, among them Herbert Marcuse. Nevertheless, technology resulted in significant gains in the areas of cultural production, which allowed for utopian visions to be explored, even if an application of an interpretation of a perfect world was necessary for them to be recognized. Today, technology remains that which allows for cultural production to communicate messages of hope, which exemplifies Martin Heidegger’s (1977) idea of technology as “a way of revealing” (p. 12), but technology cannot be the locus for utopian change by itself. In spite of this, new technological innovations might be evidence of a kind of technological utopian renaissance within cultural studies, as new technology-facilitated genres (e.g., Alternate Reality Games, mass audiences tuned into Internet avenues for utopian production), and the continued improvement of older technologies, (e.g., film and television) build on technology’s arsenal of cultural production outlets.

Technology and Utopianism: A Brief History

A look at attitudes toward technology and

utopianism from Thomas More to the Enlightenment (and, indeed, beyond) shows the complicated correlation between the two in history. M. Keith Booker (1994) credited More with including in *Utopia* “‘natural science’ among the pursuits that bring moral and cultural improvement to the citizens of his ideal society,” and noted that “science has been linked to utopian thinking since the very beginnings of modern science in the seventeenth century” (p. 5). If science and technology are “interdependent,” as Walter L. Fogg (1975, p. 61) pointed out, then Booker’s observation holds true for the relationship between technology and utopianism as well.

Though More’s *Utopia* appeared in the sixteenth century, it defined a literary genre, of which Francis Bacon’s *New Atlantis* is a part. Booker (1994) called *New Atlantis* “one of the most optimistic imaginative projections of the beneficial impacts that science and technology might have on human society” (p. 5), whereas Fogg (1975) considered Bacon a “thinker who saw the potentialities of modern science” and “the growth of scientific knowledge as an historical moment, a collective, incremental enterprise, a revolution in which man would control nature, reform his fundamental conception of things, and bring about peace and plenty on earth,” calling him “the prime example of a utopian who firmly believed that the practical application of the new science and technology meant the progress of mankind” (pp. 61-62). It is worth noting that Nell Eurich (1967), in her *Science in Utopia*, saw Robert Burton’s “pragmatic approach to a better state” as presented in the “Preface of Democritus Junior” in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* as that which “prepared the stage for the entrance of the new scientific utopia” (pp. 91-92)—even if Burton (1948) saw utopia as something “to be wished for, rather than effected,” and the literary scientific utopia *New Atlantis*, among other literary utopias¹, as “witty fictions, but mere chimeras” (p. 101). Still, according to William Rawley’s (1982) introduction to *New Atlantis*, “most things therein are within men’s power to effect” (p. 418).

Howard P. Segal (2005) agreed that these works position technology as a means to a utopian end, but pointed out that “their authors remain sufficiently wary of mankind to propose establishing limits within utopia,” and so “envision a fixed, unchanging society without further technological progress” (p. 59), which is consistent with Booker’s (1994) observation that “even

during the triumphant rise of science to cultural hegemony in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, writers . . . were already warning of the potential dangers (especially spiritual) of an overreliance on scientific and technological methods of thought and problem solving” (p. 6). Even so, Segal (2005) pointed to the Marquis de Condorcet’s anticipation of “scientific and technological advances surpassing those imagined by Bacon” (p. 59) as evidence of the evolution of technology’s relationship with utopianism.

Condorcet, near the end of the eighteenth century, and according to Segal (2005), “evinces an unprecedented optimism about the prospects for realizing utopia: its realization, [Condorcet] believes, is virtually at hand . . . and he grants technology an unprecedented role in establishing utopia” (p. 60). However, Condorcet’s hope for humanity’s ability to reach utopia is not entirely based in the evolution of technology. Segal (2005) pointed out that “increasing secularization, education, and equality” were the variables to which Condorcet credited “mankind’s advances,” and that “the technological advances he so carefully and lovingly [delineated] are only indications of the way society is moving generally, not blueprints for a specific future society” (p. 60).

Following Condorcet, Henri de Saint-Simon and his student Auguste Comte recognized the importance of technology in utopian thought. Saint-Simon, according to Segal (2005), argues that the intellectual, social, and cultural unity that Europe once enjoyed has collapsed under assault by Protestantism, Deism, empiricism, nationalism, and commercialism. A new unity must be forged, and its basis must be ideological. The ideology that is to forge this unity is science, which will replace the divisive and shaky world views currently presented by religion. Science is to be applied in the practical form of “industry,” which includes both manufacture and distribution and which amounts to technology. (p. 61)

Although he eventually abandoned his absolute technological position, he agreed with Comte, whom he also separated himself from intellectually near this time, on what Segal (2005) termed “the need for science and technology to solve major social as well as technical problems” (p. 61).

Following the intellectual trend of viewing technology as an integral part of utopian realization, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels too saw the potential of technology for social liberation. According to Segal (2005), “[Marx and Engels] repeatedly hinted at a society radically superior to the existing capitalist one, which would utilize modern, especially automated, technology as a principal means of freeing the proletariat. The proletariat would be liberated not simply from their long-standing alienated labor but also for other, more varied and fulfilling activities” (pp. 69-70). Despite this view, Jacques Ellul (1967) later questioned why technology failed to achieve this liberation and, instead, threatened to overwhelm society (p. 44). This viewpoint seems to question why technology had achieved quite the opposite of what Marx hinted at, and in effect engulfed any hope of his vision coming to fruition. This is because “[Marx] preached that technique can be liberating,” and so “the masses went over to the side of technique; society was liberated,” but “those who exploited [technique] enslaved the workers” (Ellul, 1967, p. 54-55). It was the exploiters that thwarted Marx’s vision through said domination, leaving the workers only with consumer capitalism, rather than a “superior” society fueled by technological advance. According to Booker (2002), “such changes necessarily left a certain emptiness in the American soul, an emptiness that the flood of commodities produced by this new consumer capitalist system was not likely to be able to fill,” and “the system was, in short, fundamentally anti-utopian, and even more so than nineteenth-century industrial capitalism, which drew upon the legacy of the Enlightenment to produce at least the notion that a stable happiness could be achieved” (p. 22). A large part of technological utopian potential that remained under consumer capitalism existed in cultural production.

Having been instituted as that which oppressed rather than liberated, technology lost whatever tangible value it once had as a means toward the perfect world. Many people’s attitudes toward technology became increasingly pessimistic, as did attitudes toward the possibility of ever reaching utopia, which was a key achievement of the consumer capitalist system. But one positive aspect of technology remained: its facilitation of cultural production, which was bolstered, in fact, by consumer capitalism. According to Booker (2002), the consumerist revolution of the first three decades of the twentieth century did help to create new and different

kinds of culture. In particular, the new consumerist ethos, combined with certain technological advances (such as the development of commercially viable film technologies), helped to trigger an explosive growth in the production and distribution of popular culture . . . The film industry was born. Increases in print technology made it feasible to produce large numbers of books to be sold at low prices; rapidly rising literacy rates ensured that the masses, now able to afford books, could also read them. (p. 23)

Booker (2002) also stated that “the strongest utopian energies in American Culture of this period were to be found not in high culture but in popular culture,” citing the work of authors such as Edgar Rice Burroughs as having offered “fantasy escapes from the humdrum routine of everyday capitalism, assuring Americans that it was still possible to experience some sense of adventure while living in the workaday world” (p. 23). What is clear from all this is that technology is that which made it possible to inject utopian energy into culture. Since culture is where much utopian potential is located, and technology is that which facilitates culture, then it is fair to say that Heidegger’s (1977) assertion about technology as “a way of revealing” (p. 12) holds true, which is to say that technology is a way of revealing utopian longing/potential in/through culture.

Heidegger and Technology as “A Way of Revealing”

Heidegger’s discussion in “The Question Concerning Technology” fundamentally deconstructed the very idea of technology, and did so in a way that serves thinking about it as that which reveals utopian energy in culture. One of the first points that Heidegger (1977) made about technology is that it is at the same time “a means to an end” and “a human activity”—this is what he termed the “instrumental and anthropological definition of technology” (pp. 4-5). It may be useful at this point to think of culture as both a human activity and an end, while positioning technology as the means, but the instrumentality involved in making this so, according to Heidegger (1977), makes it a cause, because “the end in keeping with which the kind of means to be used is determined is also considered a cause” (p. 6). To illustrate this point, Heidegger (1977) used a silver chalice as an analogy, and placed it within the philosophic model of causality—the silver used to craft the chalice is the *causa materialis*, the form of the chalice that the silver takes is the *causa*

formalis, the purpose of the chalice is the *causa finalis*, and the silversmith that brings the chalice out from within the silver ore is the *causa efficiens* (p. 6). Heidegger (1977) continued by offering that “what technology is, when represented as a means, discloses itself when we trace instrumentality back to fourfold causality” (p. 6), but he did not yet reveal what was meant by that “what.” Still, it is useful at this point to look at (utopian) cultural production through the scope of this “fourfold causality.”

Within the philosophical model of causality, it can be inferred that the *causa materialis* of utopian cultural production is the cultural technique itself, its utopian dimension or form the *causa formalis*, its message of hope or resistance to the oppressive nature of consumer capitalism the *causa finalis*, and the person responsible for the product—an author or filmmaker, for instance—the *causa efficiens*. The raw material of the utopian cultural product is the cultural technique used to produce it, which, according to Heidegger’s (1977) logic, makes it “co-responsible” for the product along with its “aspect” (p. 7) of utopianness—that is, it does not take an anti-utopian or other contradictory form. These two *causae* combine to equal not the purpose of the utopian cultural product, but rather, by Heidegger’s (1977) logic, the result of it—resistance to the current system and anticipation of a better one. The author “gathers together” these “ways of being responsible and indebted” (p. 8) to “bring” the utopian cultural product “into appearance” (p. 9). This “bringing-forth” (p. 11) as Heidegger (1977) eventually termed it, is equivalent to “revealing” (p. 11), leaving him with the question “what has the essence of technology to do with revealing?” to which he answered “everything” (p. 12). Revealing, then, is the “what” that Heidegger leaves unexplained earlier in his discussion. This revealing is important to a utopian hermeneutic.

Technology’s Role in a Utopian Hermeneutic

A utopian hermeneutic allows for the locating of utopian potential in any cultural product. As articulated by Fredric Jameson (1976), utopian hermeneutics “offer an analytical tool for detecting the presence of some Utopian content even within the most degraded and degrading type of commercial product” (p. 58). It is technology that reveals this utopian content in cultural production—as if making it tangible from the ether (upper air or sky)—but it is the theory of idealism that allows critics and scholars to

tease it out. Utopian energy is manifested in several ways, however, and given the dystopian nature of life under consumer and late capitalism, what is often recognized by critics and scholars as utopian energy in the cultural products produced under these systems is a utopian longing. Jameson’s ideas regarding utopia and cultural production were informed by Ernst Bloch, who, according to Jameson (1976) “sees [the Utopian principle’s] in-forming presence at work everywhere, in all the objects of culture as well as in all social activities and individual values or more properly psychological phenomena” (p. 56). According to Heidegger (1977), the “bringing-forth” (p. 12) that is involved with technology is also involved with “the arts of the mind and the fine arts,” and it is in this “realm” that “revealing and unconcealment take place” (p. 13). In this sense, it is through technology that a revealing of utopian potential can take place—technology facilitates the cultural product to begin with, and the utopian hermeneutic (i.e. the method or theory of idealism) uncovers its utopian potential.

Heidegger’s interpretation of what technology is, however, did not discount the negative implications of technology. According to Booker (2002), “the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was not an entirely new departure as much as it was a final straw that that finally broke the back of the American national narrative, leading it to collapse beneath its own weight” (p. 12). This turn of events also served to bring about a perceived pessimism toward technology. Leo Marx (1994) explained that “in the aftermath of World War II . . . what had been a dissident minority’s disenchantment with this overreaching hero [technology] spread to large segments of the population” (p. 22). The way in which Heidegger’s deconstruction of technology treated cultural production has its root in the Greek *poi_sis*, which Heidegger (1977) defined as “a bringing-forth” or “artistic and poetical bringing into appearance and concrete imagery” (p. 10), but his view of what he called “modern technology” is quite different, and this is where that he touched upon the negative implications of technology. He wrote that “the revealing that holds sway throughout modern technology does not unfold into a bringing-forth in the sense of *poi_sis*. The revealing that rules in modern technology is a challenging, which puts to nature the unreasonable demand that it supply energy that can be extracted and stored as such” (p. 14). The example Heidegger (1977) gives is a challenging

of nature: “Air is now set upon to yield nitrogen, the earth to yield ore, ore to yield uranium, for example; uranium is set upon to yield atomic energy, which can be released either for destruction or for peaceful use” (p. 15). Although Heidegger does leave room for the peaceful possibility of harnessing atomic energy, Langdon Winner (2004) pointed out that “following accidents at Three Mile Island and Chernobyl as well as the economic meltdown of the U.S. Nuclear power industry, the atomic dreams of the 1950s were heard as mere clicks on the Geiger counters of historical background radiation” (p. 36). This negative result of the implementation of atomic energy superseded whatever peaceful implications there had been for it, which, coupled with Heidegger’s delineation of technology’s ability to transform nature into both capital and destructive power, fostered the onset of the technological pessimism that followed the second World War.

Technology and Pessimism

Technological pessimism might well be considered a dystopian view of technology. In fact, this is precisely how Bernard Gendron (1977) referred to it when he characterized it as “the exact opposite of the Utopian view,” which, he explained, holds that “all or most of our social progress is due primarily or exclusively to the growth of technology” (p. 3). Subscribers to the so-called dystopian view, however, “believe that technological growth in the long run generates or intensifies many more social evils than it reduces or eliminates” (Gendron, 1977, p. 3). To anticipate the inevitable criticism of this binary division between the utopian and dystopian views, it might be more useful to think of what Gendron calls the dystopian view as the anti-utopian view of technology. One example of an anti-utopian view might be that of Herbert Marcuse (1964), who granted that on the exterior “the ‘end’ of technological rationality” seems to be “a goal within the capabilities of advanced industrial society,” but ultimately found that

the contrary trend operates: the apparatus imposes its economic and political requirements for defense and expansion on labor time and free time, on the material and intellectual culture. By virtue of the way it has organized its technological base, contemporary industrial society tends to be totalitarian. For “totalitarian” is not only a terroristic political coordination of society, but also a non-terroristic economic-technical coordination which operates through

the manipulation of needs by vested interests. (p. 3)

Marcuse’s view of technology as a controlling force is a concrete example of an anti-utopian (and therefore a pessimistic) view of technology. Early examples of pessimism toward technology e.g., Heidegger’s (1977) and Marcuse’s technologically pessimistic attitude put forth in 1964 are evidence of the onset of technological pessimism in critical theory. A culmination of this mode of thought toward technology can be found in the Spring 1980 issue of *Alternative Futures*—a special issue appropriately entitled “Technology and Pessimism.” The preface to that issue regarded technological pessimism as “a fundamental problem in much thinking about the future and indeed . . . a major intellectual current in the past century and a half: fear of technology” (Barton & Stevenson, 1980, p. 3). The essays in this issue varied according to critical perspective, but often were interested in stripping pessimism away from technology² in order to move beyond pessimistic attitudes and embrace a future made *better* through technology. (Segal [1980] himself saw this perspective as evidence of “considerable faith in technology’s ability to solve problems and to improve society” [p. 139].) Other essays in the collection, however, exemplified the continuing pessimistic attitude toward technology that is characterized by pessimism.³ This binary divide between the views of technology, however, still does not account for the ability of technology to provide an avenue for utopian cultural production. Nonetheless, one author whose work appeared on the more utopian side of the debate was Leo Marx (1980), who considered the prophetic nature of technology and pessimism in American literary culture, and saw the tendency of some people to maintain a pessimistic view as those who “are better able to identify with residual than emergent elements of the culture” (p. 69). Despite these utopian leanings in the face of the rise of technological pessimism in the twentieth century, both Segal and Marx would go on to identify a continuing thread of the anti-utopian view of technology within post-modernism.

Under postmodernism, this anti-utopian view of technology has continued. According to Segal’s (1994) introduction to the *Sociology of the Sciences 1993 Yearbook, Technology, Pessimism, and Postmodernism*, “technological pessimism has become an integral part of the

emerging culture of postmodernism. Within that cultural hierarchy, technology itself may be assuming a declining status amid a growing disenchantment with material success and with all forms of social and political engineering” (p. 3). Marx’s (1994) contribution to this volume suggested that the pessimism associated with postmodernism is a “vision of a postmodern society dominated by immense, overlapping, quasi-autonomous technological systems” (p. 25). Following Jameson’s (1991) conception of postmodernism “as an attempt to think the present historically in an age that has forgotten how to think historically in the first place” (p. ix), then, Segal (1994) noted that “high tech is lacking in the very historical consciousness that would in turn temper its optimism and thereby, most ironically of all, perhaps strengthen its appeal” (p. 211). At this point the binary opposition of the utopian and anti-utopian views of technology converge between the two poles of anti-utopia and utopia to become a truly dystopian mode of thought regarding technology that is akin to Tom Moylan’s (2000) discussion of dystopian narrative as that which “enters the fray between Utopia and Anti-Utopia” (p. 139). This can be understood via the description by editors Marita Sturken and Douglas Thomas (2004) of the essays in *Technological Visions: The Hopes and Fears that Shape New Technologies* as making clear “that society’s capacity to project concerns and desires on technology operates as a primary form of social denial; the belief that a new technology can solve existing social problems reveals a refusal to confront fully the deeper causes of those problems” (p. 3, emphasis added). Such a dystopian attitude toward technology in critical theory leaves space for a seemingly as yet unexplored consideration of technology’s facilitation of utopian cultural production.

The dystopian nature of the technology debate—that perspectives tend to fall between the utopian and anti-utopian—necessitates a conception of culture as a production of technology (insofar as technology facilitates the production of culture, not that technology possesses the agency of cultural production in general). Technology allows for the production of culture, and utopian potential can always be found in culture—here lies a notion of technology that leans toward the utopian pole of the dystopian mode of thought surrounding technology in critical theory. In fact, Walter Benjamin’s (2001) ideas about the role of technology in the produc-

tion of culture hinted at this notion when he wrote that “around 1900 technical reproduction had reached a standard that . . . permitted it to reproduce all transmitted works of art and thus to cause the most profound change in their impact upon the public” (p. 1168). This impact seems to be the change from a mere enjoyment of a cultural product to critical analysis of it, which, again, is precisely the energy that is needed to employ a utopian interpretation to the product, and thereby tease out its utopian potential. Though Benjamin principally discussed how this is so for film, it is certainly true for the technological facilitation of culture in general, now that new media has entered the debate. An example of how new media politicizes the reception of cultural products is shown next in the Alternate Reality Game (ARG) that is offered for analysis.

The Utopian Potential of Technology Exemplified: The Alternate Reality Game

The Alternate Reality Game (sometimes referred to as ubiquitous or immersive gaming) is an example of an immersive cultural product that can be broadcast across multiple types of media. Players of ARGs might make or receive phone calls, send or receive packages via the United States Postal Service, find hidden messages (in films, television shows, websites, musical recordings, and more), and receive e-mails—all pertaining to the game. Through these avenues, a fragmented narrative turns up that gamers then set out to collectively piece together or solve by participating in the game on message boards. A utopian dimension of the very existence of such a medium is inherent in the fact that, as notable game scholar Jane McGonigal (2003) points out, “immersive gaming is actually one of the first applications poised to harness the increasingly widespread penetration and convergence of network technologies for social and political action.” This logic, however, engages in the either-or fallacy of the technological debate that the present analysis is attempting to undermine. Better to espouse the cultural impact of games in general (including ARGs) as outlined by Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman (2003) in their keynote address from the 2003 Digital Games Research Conference; as they put it, blurring the boundaries of a game’s “magic circle” (pp. 14-15)—the frame or context—and designing a game “as a cultural environment is an effective way to mount a powerful cultural critique” (p. 28). Technology remains the platform for the design

of the game, which contains utopian potential in its cultural critique, and it is in this way that technology reveals utopian potential in the ARG. An exemplary ARG viewed through the scope of this analysis is *Year Zero*, an ARG that mounts its cultural critique via the generic conventions of the critical dystopia.

Year Zero's ARG is an extension of a narrative vision of history conceived by Trent Reznor—a musician whose “industrial” rock band *Nine Inch Nails* is his creative outlet, and for which he produces all of the material. The narrative influenced the production of this band’s album of the same title (released in 2007), but it became much more in the ARG. A concert tour T-shirt sold at *Nine Inch Nails* performances in Europe before the official release of the album component of *Year Zero* had certain letters highlighted in the tour schedule to spell out the words “I am trying to believe,” which fans soon discovered was actually a website address. The website showed *Year Zero's* narrative to be set in the near future_2022, or “year zero”_during which time Americans are being exposed to a drug supposed to strengthen the immune system against biological attacks. One such attack is said to have taken place, but the author of *I Am Trying to Believe* assumes it was a staged attack that allowed the conservative Christian, totalitarian government in power to put the drug, “Parepin,” into the water. There are some side effects to the drug, which people who stop drinking the water notice they no longer have—these include an inability to think clearly and a loss of sex drive. Readers are encouraged to contact the site’s author via an e-mail address provided on the web page (<http://www.iamtryingtobelieve.com>), but the reply suggests that the author has been compromised, as it dispels the original warnings in a way that is consistent with the ideology of the government in power, even suggesting that the author has been re-subjugated, allowing the government to perpetrate the “auto response” (water@iamtryingtobelieve.com, personal communication, September 28, 2007) itself. Using song titles from the album, gamers found upwards of thirty additional websites, marking a complexity of the ARG that they eventually set up a wiki to keep track of in addition to Internet message boards. Many of these additional websites were revealed through technological means such as a color change finish to the *Year Zero* compact disc and spectrographs of songs leaked on USB flash

drives planted at concerts. Other components of the ARG were discovered by calling a number on the back of the digipak the album was packaged in, and by meeting with actors portraying characters in the game. Some gamers were even given cellular phones and sent text messages directing them to locations where still other clues were revealed. Many aspects of the game’s alternative reality are linked to aspects of the gamer’s empirical world (one example is an explicit charge that the USA PATRIOT Act could lead to much of what is wrong with the future world of the game in reality), which encourages the kind of historical thinking associated with the conventions of the critical dystopia. Lyman Tower Sargent (2001) defines the critical dystopia as “a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as worse than contemporary society but that normally includes at least one eutopian enclave or holds that the dystopia can be overcome and replaced with a eutopia” (p. 222). In *Year Zero*, historical thinking comes into play in that the present exists as the “eutopian enclave” that can overcome the narrative’s imagined future through prevention. This manifestation of historical authenticity in *Year Zero* is consistent with the inherent emergence of the utopian imagination in the critical dystopia explained as follows by Tom Moylan:

as the critical utopias of the 1960s and 1970s revived and transformed utopian writing (by negating the anti-utopian tendency through a dialectical combination of dystopia and eutopia to produce texts that looked not only at what was and what was to be done but also at how the textual work self reflexively articulated that political imaginary), the critical dystopias of the 1980s and 1990s carry out a similar intertextual intervention as they negate the negation of the critical utopian moment and thus make room for another manifestation of the utopian imagination within the dystopias form. (pp. 194-195)

As a critical dystopia, *Year Zero* brings about the utopian imagination on the part of the gamer. As a cultural product housed within new media, it uses technology to put forth its narrative. Because there is utopian potential within *Year Zero*, and because it is facilitated by technology, it demonstrates how technology

facilitates utopian cultural production, and thus it undermines the binary opposition between the two poles of the technology debate in critical theory, tending instead to find utopian potential in technology within a more cultural theory.

Conclusion

Scholars and philosophers have long recognized that technology played an important role in utopian thinking during the Enlightenment as a means to the realization of utopia. This is evident in the scientific utopias and in the works of utopian thinkers that appeared during this time. What is also evident, however, is that there was a perceived understanding of the inherent dangers of technology. This last became paradigmatic as time passed, especially with the rise of consumer capitalism. Nevertheless, consumer capitalism did usher in new means of cultural production, much of which were facilitated by technology. Because utopian potential can always be located in cultural production through the application of a utopian method or theory of interpretation à la Bloch, technology itself was able to retain at least one utopian quality through this facilitation. Heidegger's (1977) concept of technology as "a way of revealing" (p. 12) supports this claim to the extent that technology reveals utopian energy in culture because it acts as an outlet for culture. Still, Heidegger

recognized the dangers of technology, which is exemplary of the strengthening of the technological pessimism paradigm after World War II. Yet, a strong critical framework opposed this pessimistic attitude in years to come, marking a polarization between utopian and anti-utopian views of technology and leading to a dystopian view of technology in general. But the dystopian view of technology is too narrow in its focus on what technology will or will not do. As Langdon Winner (2004) suggested, "perhaps it is time to affirm that we have heard the false promises and hyperbolic speculations too often, that it is time for this strange alchemy to cease" (p. 46). By accepting technology as a tool for cultural production, the emphasis can be placed not on the technology itself, but on the utopian potential of the cultural production it facilitates.⁴ In this way, a critically dystopian ARG such as *Year Zero* can perhaps be viewed as what Heidegger (1977) called a "poetic revealing" (p. 35), thereby allowing technology to "expressly foster the growth of the saving power" of culture, and "awaken and found anew" (p. 35) our conception of the power of technology.

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Notes

1. Andreae’s Christianopolis and Campanella’s City of the Sun, for instance.
2. The essays by Melvin Kranzberg and Samuel C. Florman are examples.
3. John H. Broomfield’s “Technology and the Tragic View” for instance.
4. Consider the recent trend of some artists in the music industry to give their work away for free on the Internet—Nine Inch Nails among them. This allows the artists to avoid the filter of record executives interested solely in the proverbial bottom line. The visual arts have also long embraced the Internet as such a forum. Additionally, novelists and graphic novelists have used this platform for their works. Once again, technology facilitates the cultural product, which can be found to contain utopian potential.