DYSTOPIA OR DISCHTOPIA:

AN ANALYSIS OF THE SF PARADIGMS

IN THOMAS M. DISCH

PETER SWIRSKI

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

MCGILL UNIVERSITY, MONTREAL

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ABSTRACT

On the basis of an ontological analogy between the worlds of myth and dystopia, the present thesis argues the latter's inherently "metaphysical" character. As such, dystopia is regarded as categorically different from Science Fiction which, however grim in its surface presentation, always remains paradigmatically "non-metaphysical," i.e., neutral. This generic distinction is then applied to the analysis of the three most important SF works of Thomas M. Disch, one of the most interesting and accomplished contemporary SF writers. The generic, as well as socio-aesthetic discussion of <u>Camp Concentration</u>, <u>334</u>, and <u>On Wings of Song</u>, traces Disch's development of a characteristically "Dischtopian" paradigm of social SF.

RESUME

Par suite d'une aralogie ontologique entre le monde
du mythe et celui de la dystopie, cette thèse propose que
ce dernier monde ait une caractère fondamentalement
"métaphysique." Ainsi, la dystopie est considérée comme
étant catégoriquement différente de la science fiction
qui, même si elle présente un aspect sinistre, reste tou-
jours paradigmatiquement non-métaphysique, c'est-à-dire
neutre. Cette distinction générique est ensuite ap-
pliquée à une analyse de trois oeuvres les plus
importantes de Thomas M. Disch, un des écrivains les plus
intéressants et les plus doués de la science fiction à
caractère sociale d'aujourd'hui. La discussion géné-
rique, ainsi que socio-esthétique, de Camp Concentration,
334, et On Wings of Song, suivent le développement d'un
paradigme typiquement "Dischtopique" de la science
fiction sociale.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

The present study examines selected major works from the Science Fiction opus of one of the genre's "finest stylists with one of its darkest visions,"[1] Thomas M. Disch. The analysis traces Disch's development of a novel paradigm in the social Science Fiction of the latter part of the twentieth century, formally and semantically distinct from its formerly predominant dystopian model.

Disch, born in 1940 in Des Moines, Iowa, published his first SF story "Double-Timer" in 1962, and his first SF "alien-invasion" novel, The Genocides, in 1965.[2] In 1968, the bleakly allegorical, highly acclaimed and even more highly controversial Camp Concentration appeared in Britain (no American publisher seemed eager to market it in the U.S.A.), becoming a landmark in Disch's SF career. Since 1974, when he published possibly his best dystopian SF work, the integrated short-story collection entitled 334, his SF output has subsided somewhat, although 1979 saw another SF masterpiece (this time with an element of fantasy), On Wings of Song.

During the nineteen-seventies Disch's creative endeavours increasingly branched out of Science Fiction and

into mainstream literature. A veritable literary chameleon, in the course of his writing career he has published Science Fiction, horror and Gothic fiction, historical romances, mysteries, adventure thrillers, poetry, children's literature and movie scripts. In 1985, he once again extended his creative range, this time into the realm of computer-interactive fiction (Amnesia). For all that, Disch's extraordinary versatility does not at all bespeak facile and repetitive adoption of extant genres and conventions; on the contrary, whatever part of the literary universe he might have explored, in each field "he has made himself at home, never ill-at-ease or out-of-place, writing with the same implacable control and elegant manners."[3]

He remains a kind of atypical phenomenon--a curiosum almost--as a SF writer inasmuch as his non-SF oeuvre has garnered a fair amount of critical acclaim from the mainstream literary circles.[4] A Newsweek article from 1988 speculates freely that Disch "may be the most formidably gifted unfamous American writer," besides remarking that "genre classification of science fiction"[5] does not accurately reflect the variety and depth of Disch's literary interests. Whether in mainstream or science fiction, however, Disch, an artist sui generis, with unvarying

consistency demonstrates his outstanding talent and origi-
nality.

With such uncommon originality, in his three best and
most important SF novels, Camp Concentration, 334 and On
Wings of Song, Disch has developed a type of social SF
readily distinguishable in its tone and structure from the
repetitious model of the dystopian classics. The follow-
ing pages examine the three novels, published in 1968,
1972 and 1979 respectively, in an effort to describe,
analyze and appraise the significance and the novelty of
the paradigms which Disch cultivates in his SF.

The opening section of the analysis discusses those
aspects of SF and dystopia's generic make-up which have a
direct bearing upon the central argument. Thus it com-
pares the immanent characteristics of the worlds presented
in mainstream and fantastic fiction, discusses the respec-
tive ontological differences between the three main sub-
classes of the literature of the fantastic (myth, fairy
tale and Science Fiction), and transposes the findings to
utopian and dystopian fiction in order to highlight their
inherently non-empirical character. The concluding sec-
tion of this chapter includes a brief analysis (but also,
for comparative purposes, synthesis) of the traditional
dystopia developed along the Zamyatin-Huxley-Orwell axis.

This classical dystopian model "which, though differing in numerous features, is much the same each time it has appeared,"[*] is subsequently employed as a comparative matrix in an analysis of the SF paradigms developed by Disch.

The subsequent chapters are devoted to the analysis proper of Disch's three major SF novels. Each chapter commences with a plot synopsis, followed by a semantic and socio-aesthetic discussion of each work in question, as well as an extensive chronotopic and generic analysis of each novel. Originating from and paralleling the formal analysis, each chapter contains a comparative recapitulation of the paradigmatic and generic characteristics of a particular novel.

The final chapter furnishes an abstraction of the most salient nova in the previously discussed novels, as well as their comparative synthesis, in order to trace in them the emergence of a (paronomastically) "Dischtopian" paradigm in Disch's SF corpus.

As Thomas Wymer correctly remarks, "the richness and complexity of Disch's work. . . precludes any adequate study of the whole of his work, even the whole of his major works, except in a book-length study."[7] The delicate task of narrowing the scope of the present analysis

to <u>Camp Concentration</u>, <u>334</u> and <u>On Wings of Song</u> was deter-
mined in an equal share by a number of factors. In my
personal opinion these three novels constitute the abso-
lute core of Disch's Science Fiction <u>oeuvre</u>, being not
only its most valuable, but also the most representative
sample. As all relevant sources indicate, the critical
opinion itself seems to be unanimous in bestowing distinc-
tion upon <u>Camp Concentration</u>, <u>334</u> and <u>On Wings of Song</u>
within Disch's corpus. My decision seems to be further
vindicated by David Pringle's inclusion of all three works
in his <u>Science Fiction: the 100 Best Novels</u> which, <u>nota
bene</u>, carries on its front cover a laudatory appreciation
from Disch himself. In view of the author's own commenda-
tion of the selection as a pedestal upon which his SF
eminence should rest, I feel confident in not doing his SF
oeuvre critical injustice by limiting the analysis to
these three novels.

Chapter 1

Dystopia or Science Fiction?

One of the most fundamental interpretive strategies employed during an encounter with a work of literature is an effort to understand its contents as a unified and coherent whole. No matter how disjointed or fragmentary the text might appear, the reader will a.most automatically seek to impose semantic and interprutive coherence upon it. Such an intuitive assumption of a teleological factor in literary (or, generally, artistic) creation stipulates that the informational and aesthetic experience can be maximized by the reception of a work as a cogent whole. Any empirical study would probably confirm that the reader's interest can be measured as a non-linear (i.e., not simply arithmetical) function of the aesthetic experience formed in the process of textual integration. The value of the total experience thus exceeds the straight sum of the text's semantic components. The integration is non-linear in character since it is not necessarily the simplest, and thus most transparently open to integration, texts that offer a maximum of aesthetic experience. The distributional curve would probably approach zero at both

ends, reflecting what we know from pragmatic experience,
i.e., that neither the primitive simplicity, nor the
chaos-approaching complexity, are highly conduc.ve to the
optimal reader response.

No matter how simplistic or complicated a literary
text, however, both the narrative strategy and the stylis-
tics of literary fiction necessitate, although not neces-
sarily directly facilitate[8], a creation of an interpretive
framework (Gestalt) which enables the reader to cope with
the novelty of the text. In other words, works of fiction
determine in their syntagmatic surface structures[7] such
temporal and causal ordering which, updated and upgraded
during the reading process, results in the creation of a
paradigmatic[10] deep structure which helps the reader to
"de-alienate" and contextualize the novel aspects of the
text. The organization principle of the deep structure--
traditionally referred to as the "reconstructed" or
"represented" world of a work of fiction--is logical and
a-temporal, "based on static logical relations among the
[syntagmatic] elements" (Rimmon-Kenan 10).

Within fictional narratives, the syntagmatic data-
points are inevitably condensed and displaced (stylized),
together with a textual dispersal of narrative agents who
exist only in--to extrapolate from Barthes--a "pre-nomina-

tive" state. Only through the abstraction and synthesis of a sequentially ordered text does the reader recreate a paradigmatically intelligible structure of a fictional world. The narrative events, understood both as events proper as well as those spheres of action which define narrative agents ("it may be possible to consider the two as interdependent," Rimmon-Kenan 35), enable the "reconstruction"[11] of the world depicted in the novel from the narrative clues at the reader's disposal. This synthesized imaginary construct is the deep (i.e., paradigmatic) structure of a literary work, viz., a fictional reality "in which the characters of the story are supposed to be living and in which its events are supposed to take place" (Rimmon-Kenan 6).

The questions concerning the role, function, generative principles, or even the ontological status of such fictional "realities" have surged to the forefront of critical debates particularly since the advent of modernism and its rapidly mutating progeny, post-modernism. The critical focus reflects the fact that one of the most characteristic attributes of contemporary fiction is the persistence with which it foregrounds its own immanent character as a generator of new fictional "realities." This cybernetic (i.e., feedback-oriented) awareness is

signalled to the reader through a plethora of increasingly self-conscious modes of expression (e.g., textual fragmentation, generic hybridization, rhetorical narrativity, direct reader-engagement, dissolution of plot, erasure of distinction between "fiction" and "non-fiction," etc.).

Such modern self-reflexivity, however, is merely a product of a global shift in cultural sensibilities and literary vogues, and not a _sine qua non_ condition immanent in the character of mainstream[12] literature. The absence of any inherent mechanisms in mainstream fiction's generic make-up which would compel it to self-reflection may be borne out by the fact that, prior to the postmodernist consciousness, the mainstream praxis traditionally fostered the development in the diametrically opposite direction, i.e., towards the evocation and sustainment, rather than exposition and deposition, of the Coleridgian "suspension of disbelief."

Within the realm of modern literature, Science Fiction is by definition more susceptible to this kind of self-awareness (or self-examination). The self-awareness which interest us here is not, of course, formal in nature since, in that respect, a SF novel can be as self-reflexive as a mainstream one. The difference between them consists rather in the _degree_ of estrangement—syntagmatic

in mainstream fiction, paradigmatic in science fiction--
which constitutes, at the same time, the difference in
kind. Science Fiction harbours this particular generic
sensitivity to self-awareness due to its modus operandi,
i.e., paradigmatic estrangement. In simple terms, such
estrangement denotes a development of a novel, intrinsic-
ally and extrinsically consistent literary paradigm on the
basis of a working (i.e., as yet scientifically and/or
empirically unverified) hypothesis. Estrangement signi-
fies "confronting a set normative system [of the 'reality'
of our world as developed in mainstream literature]. . .
with a point of view or look implying a new set of
norms."[13]

The generic difference between Science Fiction and
mainstream literature is, thus, of a categorical nature,
inasmuch as the world that SF alludes to must be paradig-
matically estranged from the world we know. The presence
of such a generic imperative sets it apart from mainstream
fiction where, inescapably, all fictional constructs must
be modelled after, and be contiguous with, the referential
paradigm of our empirical reality (otherwise they would no
longer be classifiable as mainstream fiction).

The term "paradigmatic estrangement" is of fundamen-
tal importance here, since it opens the way for a distinc-

tion between the two types of fiction on the basis of the degree of estrangement employed.[14] It is a truism to assert that every work of literature, therefore of mainstream literature as well, must be at the same time familiar and estranged in order to be, at once, comprehensible and informationally non—neutral (cognitively meaningful). In the case of mainstream fiction, however, the fictional world created purports to exist on the same part of the spatio-temporal axis as the empirical reality from which it originates, implying a _socially_ recognizable paradigmatic historicity.[15] The Gestalts actualized by the readers remain within the same familiar, "realistic" world modelled upon the readers' empirical ambiance.

In a pronounced contrast, the problem of a "world created" assumes a new dimension when transposed from mainstream to science fiction due to the absence, in the latter's case, of a socially internalized, extrinsic comparative paradigm to the described events. Estrangement as SF's _differentia generica_, entails the creation of an entire novel paradigm, incompatible with the referential matrix offered by the familiar empirical reality of the world around us.

In semiotic terms, a science-fictional estranged world is signified by novel lexico-semantic cognitive

relationships embedded in the narrative. Due to SF's generic identity, these neologisms, novel psychosocial and/or politico-economic relationships, epistemological or even ontological redescriptions of human cognition, do not--indeed, cannot--correspond in a straightforward manner to the empirical world of the reader. Science Fiction must, therefore, be classified as a "conjectural" (Angenot 10) genre, i.e., one devoid of an extraneous referent by the nature of its shift on the spatio-temporal axis (the world it conjures up has, by definition, never existed).

Through the cognition of the reader, Science Fiction generates the illusion of possible worlds which, abstracted and reconstructed from the text, shift his consciousness to an "elsewhere" or "elsewhen." The net consequence of delimiting SF as literature of paradigmatic cognitive estrangement is, therefore, the presupposition of a necessary element of novum realized as "either a new locus, or an agent (character) with new powers transforming the old locus, or a blend of both" (Suvin 79). Realizing the generic master program, SF's estranged paradigms can be conceived of as chronotopes, where a chronotope defines "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in litera-

ture."[14]   Due to such a pronounced mutual spatio-temporal covariance, "[t]he chronotope in literature has an intrinsic *generic* significance" (Bakhtin 250).   Viewing SF novels in terms of their chronotopes, "functioning as the primary means for materializing time in space" (Bakhtin 250), enables their reconstitution and examination in terms of the inherently global, i.e., paradigmatic nature of their cognitive transformations.

If we cross over from the particularities of SF to the generalities of the genres of the fantastic, it transpires that, implicitly, they are all eminently suited to analysis in terms of the type of estrangement sought, and achieved in them.   The particular type of estrangement will parallel the ontological qualities of the world within which the estranged parameters are introduced and developed.   The denotation of the "world" of a particular genre must be here understood as discrete from the concept of the "paradigm," or the "world created."   The potential infinity of new paradigms which can be created using the generative semantic rules of specific types of literary genres will always be constructed within the confines of fictional worlds whose non-local generic properties set them categorically apart from one another, as well as, in some cases, from the world of our empirical experience.

Such distinction can, therefore, become a base for a study of the comparative ontologies[17] of the respective worlds created by different types of fantastic literature.

During an act of reading, every reader <u>volens nolens</u> participates in a conventionalized communication process whose integral part involves the definition of the rules of the literary game that is enacted during his contact with the novel. The reader maps out such rules for himself quite pragmatically by way of a mostly unconscious effort to generate a consistent set of rules governing the world depicted in a given work. Just because "the main types of literary creation imply different ontologies,"[18] the reader's normative effort will, in fact, result in a stabilization of a certain ontological perspective which governs the events and existents (i.e., the world) of a given work of literature.

If, at the beginning of the narrative, the protagonist affects his escape by means of an enchanted ring which, rubbed vigorously, teleports him instantaneously to far-off locations, the local fantasticity of the lexical ("enchanted") and semantic ("instant transportation") elements will have already delimited the realm of the narrative as para-empirical, i.e., fantastic. Such local fantastic parameters do not suffice, however, to determine

the global ontological character of the world in question. After all, the world in which the ring exists could ultimately be instrumental in either bringing about the hero's victory (fairy tale), calamity (myth), or remain quite neutral (Science Fiction; divested of its magic aura, the ring is explicated as a futuristic device in the range of a "miniaturized superluminal matter-teleporter"). In order to properly ascertain the character of the world's relation to its inhabitants, it is necessary to consider the deep structure of the novel, i.e., the sum total of the interactions occurring within its paradigmatic entirety.

The world of mainstream fiction enjoys an ontologically (but not formally) direct, non-transformational relationship with the "zero world" of our empirical reality which authenticates it as a referential matrix. Both worlds manifest the same ontological properties familiar to the reader from his everyday experience. After all, we do not perceive objects around us as intentionally inclined towards us (either positively or negatively), and we fully admit of the world's inherently indeterministic (i.e., stochastic) character. In other words, in the empirical world, as well as the fictional paradigms model-

led upon it, "physics stands in no significant relation to ethics" (Suvin 18).

As soon as literature abandons the verisimilar modality, however, and crosses over to the realm of the fantastic, the coincidence between the empirical world and the fictional paradigm loses its imperative character. Although the presence "of a world without intention. . . consisting of a variety of objects and processes that. . . have no meaning, no message, that wish us neither well nor ill" (Lem, Microworlds 33) is necessary for us to perceive the differentia specifica of the new worlds, the rules governing the development of fantastic fiction's semantic functions no longer oblige it to coincide with the axis of verisimilar modality. In fact the fantastic genres diverge from it on both sides of neutrality, creating for their fictional purposes para-empirical ontologies. In the literature thus created, all events are subservient to the fate decreed by the particular (amicable/positive or inimical/negative) ontological bias of the world towards the narrative agents that operate within its confines.

The positively oriented world is, of course, the domain of the fairy tale. As a fictional construct, the world of the fairy tale "has such secret regulators built into it that it [becomes] an ideal homeostat which aspires

to the best of all possible equilibriums" (Lem, _Fantastyka_ 66). If we agree that the genres that "deny the autonomy of physics. . . can properly be called _metaphysical_" (Suvin 19), then the fairy tale is definitely a "metaphysical" genre. Despite built-in retardative devices (conventionalized as dragons, witches, human and superhuman contenders, etc.), the immanent partiality of a fairy tale never allows any sustained doubt as to the auspicious result of the protagonist's transitory misfortunes.

The opposite, negative side of the "metaphysical" spectrum has always been occupied by the world of myth with its tragically deterministic character. The mythical universe, a homeostat "determined like of the fairy tale, but pursuing unknown, trans- or anti-human goals" (Lem, _Fantastyka_ 70), is no less "metaphysical" than that of the fairy tale, only this time negatively oriented towards its inhabitants, precipitating their ineluctable downfall. Even though the _fatum_ might apparently seem avoidable-- after all Oedipus' struggle to elude the impending doom is inspired by his cognizance of the oracle--such mythic homologues of the fairy tale's retardation serve only to underscore the inexorability of the decree's eternal context.

The ontologies generated by both types of fiction are thus equally "metaphysical," distributed symmetrically on both sides of the neutral, i.e., realistic ontology. In the world of neutral (i.e., indifferent to the fate of its inhabitants) ontology the universe is not in any significant relation towards the narrative agents, being governed by physical rather than ethical laws. This impartial "zero" ontology is, in fact, the basis of the paradigms created in Science Fiction. Despite the incumbencies of its generic make-up which estrange it from mainstream fiction, SF shares with it a common ontology. In other words, Science Fiction can be defined as mainstream literature shifted outside the empirically known values of the continuum by virtue of its paradigmatic estrangement. Although the world it tries to render is paradigmatically different from the world of mainstream fiction, both partake of the same neutral, indeterministic (i.e., stochastic), ontology.

In light of the above observations there emerges a striking symmetrical analogy between the comparative ontological properties of the fairy tale and utopia on the one hand, and myth and dystopia on the other. Whether we are prepared, at this point, to classify the utopian and dystopian genres as mere subclasses of Science Fiction, or

rather perceive them as autonomous types of literary creation,[19] there can be no disagreement over their membership in the literature of the fantastic. Both of them are, by definition, para-empirical, depicting socio-political paradigms which are inherently estranged in a positive (utopian) or negative (dystopian) way. As such, however, their nature can be either physical, as in SF, or "metaphysical," as in fairy tale or myth, paralleling their implicit non-neutrality. In other words, their ontology can be modelled on the ontology of SF, following the dictates of physical rather than other laws as their universal correlatives, or else it can deviate in the direction of the "metaphysical," familiar from the generically circumscribed world of fairy tale and myth with their respective "positive" and "negative" amplitude with respect to SF's "zero state."

Herein, however, lies the essence of the argument, because the generic identity of utopia and dystopia (which determines their literary praxis) reveals both genres' "metaphysical" slant. The ontological bias is encoded into their respective etymologies. The taxonomical label of utopia denotes a location that is always--comparative to what in the contemporary social consciousness is the empirical norm--good (eu-topia). In the case of dystopia,

this comparative semantics, under a symmetrical negative transformation, refers to a place at all times bad (<u>dys-topia</u>).[20] Whether we content ourselves with the etymological distinction between a "good" or "bad" place, or whether, following the modern trend[21], we shift from a static to a dynamic model and speak of places simply "better" and "worse," utopia and dystopia still disengage themselves from Science Fiction by virtue of their prerogative of creating a world which carries with itself the guarantee of a happy or calamitous end.

One of Yevgeny Zamyatin's "two generic and invariable features that characterize utopia"[22] is that "utopias paint what they consider to be ideal societies; translating this into the language of mathematics, we might say that utopias bear a + sign." A sudden nullification of the plus sign (or minus, in the case of dystopia) would be tantamount to an act of generic incest (hybridization) through stepping outside the boundaries of utopia or dystopia. After all, a last minute prole revolution which, besides abolishing the dystopian tyranny, liberates Winston Smith from O'Brien's sadistic clutches, is, within <u>1984</u>'s generic contract, as preposterous as undesirable. Analogically and equally incongruous would be an outbreak of a super-virulent epidemic (whose unwitting carrier

would be William the Guest), which would shatter the
utopian idyll by wiping out the helpless population of
Morris' medievalesque Nowhere.

A commonsensical impression could intimate that,
since utopia and dystopia appear narratively realistic,
the worlds they create should be no less realistic--i.e.,
comparable to those of SF--in their form. In fact, the
situation is made much more complex by the ontologically
non-empirical bias of the utopian and dystopian world.
Although the verisimility of singular, or even sets
(groups, series) of syntagms, may warrant their analysis
as signifiers "in themselves," modelled directly and non-
transformationally upon the empirical world, the overall
analytical strategy must, nonetheless, remain referential
(symbolical) in view of the "Metaphysical" bias of the
utopian and dystopian world.

If interpreted non-transformationally, i.e, literal-
ly, the utopian Scylla could only imply that a transition
into a better eutopian state could only be accomplished by
revolutionary, not evolutionary means. With the dystopian
Charybdis equally incapable of a less monochromatic pic-
ture of humanity (inexorably spiralling into greater
social tyranny), the paradigmatic interpretation of the
works of either genre must remain symbolical, since their

respective universes/ontologies depart from the "zero
state" neutrality in the direction of the universes/on-
tologies of the fairy tale and myth.

That is not to say, however, that utopia and dystopia
are otherwise comparable to their ontological analogues.
The list of differentiating, categorical as well as merely
stochastic, features opens with the predominantly realis-
tic (verisimilar) narrative mode common to utopia and
dystopia which, unlike in myth and fairy tale, is mostly
devoid of local fantasticities.[23] Utopia and dystopia are
written from a rational and cognitive perspective, rather
than the ludic and/or transcendental perspective dominant
in the fairy tale and myth. Unlike their counterparts,
utopia and dystopia entail an implied or explicit referen-
tiality to the "zero paradigm" of the reader which presup-
poses the physical (spatial and/or temporal) separation of
their paradigms from it. The implied presence of the
contemporary paradigm to which the deep structures of
utopia and dystopia allude is markedly absent from myth
and fairy tale, inasmuch as both of these genres create
fictionally non-referential, i.e., semantically and inter-
pretively autonomous, paradigms. Last but not least, the
panoramic depiction of a utopian or dystopian socio-polit-
ical paradigm presupposes an outline of a "formal hierar-

chic system" (Suvin 50), a condition which does not extend to the generic configuration of either fairy tale or myth.

All the same, out of surface elements of verisimilar ("non-metaphysical") modality, utopia and dystopia construct "metaphysical" universes characterized by their ontological partiality. In this sense, some of the structural devices written into the genres can be homologically re-interpreted in the light of their ontological character. If at the basis of the utopian paradigm lies a new socio-political contract, the depiction of the struggle for, or merely transition into, this desired state parallels the role of a retardative device in fairy tale which postpones the achievement of the optimal homeostasis. In a dystopia, the marginal presence of a heterodox community—usually on the fringes of the dominant socio-political system (although sometimes presented in the form of a pre-dystopian retrospect)—resembles the mythical oracle. in its role of amplifying and magnifying the deterministic order.

In light of the argument it seems reasonable to conclude that the genres of utopia and dystopia ought to be regarded as discrete from Science Fiction by virtue of the ontological shift which they exhibit in their generic identity and historical praxis. A similar conclusion,

identity and historical praxis. A similar conclusion, although reached by way of an entirely different methodology, is advanced by Alexandra Aldridge[24] who disproves that faction of SF criticism which endeavours to subsume under its mantle the genres which do not inherently belong to it (i.e., utopia and dystopia).[25] In fact, as Samuel Delany observes, "[a]cademic SF criticism, fixed in the historical approach, wastes a great deal of time trying to approach modern SF works in utopian/dystopian terms—works whose value is precisely in that they are a reaction to such thinking."[26]

The above arguments demonstrate the inherent analytical mistake in conjoining the genres of Science Fiction and utopia or dystopia. Nevertheless, literary creativity rarely adheres to theoretical demarcation lines—the case amply illustrated by the SF of Thomas Disch. From the very beginning of his SF career, his work manifested an overall quality which could only be described as quasi-dystopian. The dark tonality of Disch's vision found its reflection in the number of critical essays trying to encapsulate the distinctness of Disch's voice. While almost never explicitly bringing up the term "dystopia," the critical opinion is consistently unanimous in singling

out the ubiquitous "dark" or "pessimistic" quality of Disch's SF work.

And so, Brian Stableford describes Disch as a "pessimistic writer," who from the very beginning depicted the "darker aspects" of life in his "scathing social satires."[27] Referring to the general mode of Disch's SF output, Erich S. Rupprecht speaks of his science fiction which "tends to be dark, disturbing and skeptical."[28] He also states that "[i]n Disch's fiction. . . hell is just around the next corner," which is congruent with his perception of Disch as a writer who depicts the "world which grows increasingly hostile, irrational, inhuman" (Rupprecht 149). David Wingrove, after asserting that Disch's "images of the future are generally pessimistic,"[29] goes as far as to hint at a certain Schadenfreude in Disch's SF, while Joseph Francavilla sees behind his work "a demonic grin of mordant satire."[30] In his interview with Disch, Charles Platt discusses with him the matter of Disch being often accused "of being a pessimistic author" (185), while John Clute, the author of an entry on Disch in Peter Nicholls' standard reference source, The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction, speaks of the "fine cruelty of his wit."[31] Not to put too fine a finger on it, Alexei and Cory Panshin go even further, stating

simply that "Disch's novels. . . [are] bleak and nihilis-
tic,"[32] while George Barlow, admitting again of a "level
of nihilism" in Disch's _oeuvre_, tops it all by summarizing
his first SF phase as "at worst utter pessimism, at best
grim horror"—in one word, a "wholesale destruction of
social, moral, and logical tenets."[33]

The charge of nihilism seems not only excessive but,
quite simply, misapplied in Disch's case, in view of his
profound and probing engagement of a complex network of
socio-political, moral and technological issues in his
work. Although his purpose ought not to be construed as
unremittingly didactic, Disch's novels are quintessential
examples of—in his much quoted words—the kind of fiction
that "lifts the mirror, tilts it this way or that. . . [so
that] our actions, whether on the barricades or in the
voting booth, will be better, saner, more humane for
having stopped a moment and studied what that mirror has
made visible."[34] Disch himself, aware of the charges,
does not take them seriously, reflecting that "nihilism is
a pejorative that people throw out by way of dismissing an
outlook" (Platt 186).

And yet, considered on the macro-scale, all three of
Disch's most significant SF novels reveal the quintessen-
tial pessimistic modality associated with dystopian fic-

tion. A question which needs to be examined, then, is if
Disch's books are, indeed, examples of science or rather
dystopian fiction, or perhaps a particular synthesis of
both. The distinction between the dystopian and SF worlds
can be perceived on the basis of their ontological charac-
teristics. If the fictional world is "personifiable,"
i.e., acts in the capacity of an (inanimate) opponent who
stands to gain or lose from the protagonist's fate, it is
obviously the "metaphysical" world of dystopia. In a
dystopia the defeat of the (individual or communal) prota-
gonist denotes a victory for the system, which symbolizes
the negative ontology of the dystopian world. The con-
trast between the opposing sides (protagonist versus sys-
tem/world) resembles thus a zero-sum relation, where the
gain of one side is tantamount to the loss experienced by
the other. The brainwashing of Winston Smith (1984) and
lobotomy of D-503 (We) which turn them into smilingly
docile automata, denote, as much as Savage's suicide
(Brave New World), a triumph and tangible gain for the
respective dystopian tyrannies. No such zero-sum symmetry
can be observed in the ontologically empirical world of
SF, where the protagonist's eventual success or failure
fails to affect the system/world in any way. It is preci-
sely the "no gain" relationship between the world and its

inhabitants which differentiates SF from the genre of dystopia.

The generic analysis outlined above forms the subject of the following three chapters devoted to its specific application to Camp Concentration, 334 and On Wings of Song. Before passing over to their detailed scrutiny, however, we need to synthesize the formal aspects of the traditional dystopia in order to arrive at a comparative structural model against which we can ascertain the degree and character of Disch's innovativeness.

According to Chad Walsh, in the dystopia developed in We, Brave New World and 1984,

> [e]ach society is ruled by a small elite, which alone escapes the grosser kinds of psychological conditioning and brainwashing. . . Each society has decided that social stability and freedom cannot be combined, and has opted for stability. Each makes careful use of applied psychology.[35]

On the pages of The Future as Nightmare Mark Hillegas enumerates:

> the cataclysmic war which precedes the new state, the rule of the omniscient dictator, the guardian elite, the standardization of men and women, including artificial faces and numbers for names,

the substitution of the manufactured (plastic

flowers and trees) for the natural, and the fami-

liar revolt against the regime (150)

as the common elements of the traditional dystopia. In
general, its most salient schemata can be synthesized as
follows[34]:

1\ The dystopian world is likely to disparage Nature
and, sometimes almost puritanically, the human body.

2\ Dystopias are mostly urban and highly regimented
in their daily routine, segregating themselves from the
"wild and untame" nature.

3\ Reality, as fed to the inhabitants through the
information channels, is deliberately controlled and
falsified.

4\ Personal identity is often abolished for the sake
of (mechanical) uniformity.

5\ Traditional social and familial collectivity is
subjugated or replaced by the overriding duty to the
State.

6\ The religious impulse is perverted into an idol-
atrous deification of the state or its leader(s), often
expressed in a formally ceremonious fashion.

7\ Euthanasia is a recurrent phenomenon in view of the absolute subordination of one's life to the social good.

8\ The spirit of rebellion in the protagonist is kindled through his falling in love.

9\ Heterodoxy is punished either by "vaporization" or brainwashing into orthodoxy. [37]

In keeping with the theoretical groundwork developed in this chapter, the distinction between Science Fiction and dystopia ultimately influences not only generic taxonomy, but also the scope and content of critical analysis proper. These conclusions, therefore, delineate formal and semantic guidelines for a critical approach to the subject proper of the study, viz., the SF work of Thomas Disch. The following three chapters, devoted respectively to Camp Concentration, 334 and On Wings of Song, analyze the novels with a focus on Disch's SF paradigms in the search for the idiosyncratic, "Dischtopian" qualities which are the hallmark of his Science Fiction.

Chapter 2
Camp Concentration

Camp Concentration takes its narrative model from "that sublime record of prison existence,"[38] The House of the Dead, in order to (again in the manner of Dostoyevski) look at society from underground. The story takes place in 1975 and is narrated through the journal of Louis Sacchetti, a poet incarcerated for his refusal to fight in the ongoing war. Sacchetti, the novel's sole focalizer[39], is transferred from a federal penitentiary to the mysterious Camp Archimedes, where, after an encounter with other inmates, he learns that all of them have been injected with Palladine (from Pallas, wisdom or learning), a lethal intelligence-catalyzing strain of super-syphilis. In the following weeks, Mordecai Washington, the leader of the prisoners, dies in an alchemic experiment also involving Humphrey Haast, the director of the compound. In the meantime, Dr. Aimee Busk, the camp psychologist, absconds after having been infected with the virus, which she sets rampaging through the outside world. In Book II the novel develops its leading theme, an allegorical conflict between Sacchetti and Skilliman, a scientist of fascist

leanings who commands a new, voluntary group of inmates at the Camp. Despising Sacchetti's moral rectitude, Skilliman attempts to kill him. Instead, he is shot by Washington who has in fact been acting as Haast since the experiment where the "alchemic" contraption electronically transmogrified their minds. With the aid of the same mind-reciprocator, Sacchetti acquires the body of one of the guards, and the novel closes with a new-found hope for isolating a vaccine which will curtail the Palladine epidemic in the world above.

Camp Concentration "with its literariness, its ironies, its setting in the near future, and its emphasis on the parallels between inner (psychological) space and external, scientific reality,"[40] reveals all aspects of a New Wave novel. Besides microbiology (virusology), examined mostly from the point of view of the latent consequences of its misuse and not for the scientific or technological issues inherent in it, the novel has only two passing references to "hard" sciences (the Second Law of Thermodynamics and NASA's Gemini project). Instead, literature and history on the one hand, and sciences humaines on the other, are the book's major referential frameworks. Camp Concentration is a veritable compendium of Western culture, a tour de force with literary, musical

and philosophical allusions in abundance. In the first and only full-length study of <u>Camp Concentration</u>. Thomas L. Wymer painstakingly ferrets out and explicates most of Disch's allusions to the Bible. Aquinas, Dante, Goethe, Marlowe, Mann, Camus, Dostoyevski, Shakespeare, Rilke, Kafka, Wagner, Strauss, and many others, bringing out the book's full literary and aesthetic complexity, both traditional and innovative[41].

In spatio-temporal terms <u>Camp Concentration</u> is dominated by the "here and now": the U.S.A., some years ahead from the time of the novel's publication[42]. Unlike the paradigmatically symbolical dystopias, Disch's novel is as compelling metaphorically as it is pertinent. In Wymer's analysis

> revelations since the novel was published lend considerable credence to Disch's political, scientific and moral premises: the war would get far worse, the Ellsberg leak of the Pentagon papers would reveal systematic campaigns of misinformation about the war at the highest governmental levels, we would learn of fatal CIA experiments with hallucinogens on unknowing subjects, of cover-ups of gross negligence in experiments with nerve gases, of callous indifference to whole

regiments of subjects in experiments with nuclear fallout, of a forty-year-long U.S. Public Health Service experiment with syphilitics, during the last twenty of which a cure for syphilis was available and not administered. (206)

With the ongoing war, as well as the name of President McNamara (alluding to Lyndon Johnson's former Secretary of Defense), as clear pointers to the Vietnam engagement,[43] Camp Concentration's direct topicality makes it first and foremost an antiwar novel. The paradigm of wartime U.S. is reconstituted from the scarce glimpses of the global situation: scant war reports in the opening pages, and Sacchetti's newspaper clipping Museum of Facts (fashioned after Ripley's Odditorium) describing an epidemic of unprecedentedly brilliant, if sometimes deviant, behaviour plaguing the life outside. The central theme of the novel, the moral temptation and redemption of Louis Sacchetti, is thus enacted against the background of nuclear and biological warfare, a corrupt political system, and the totalitarian concentration camp metaphor provided by Camp Archimedes.

The Camp's perverse appellation paints it in its true light, i.e., as a colony for breeding artificially tailored geniuses. Since the guinea-pig inmates are doomed to

death after excruciating physical torments, the administ-
ration grants them privileges to the point of frivolity,
from gourmet cuisine and Congress-quality library to
choice of interior decor. The "research" conducted on the
premises demands a hermetic veil of secrecy which seals
the subterranean microcosm off from the world above, to
the point of rigging up a special closed-circuit obser-
vatory for the inmates.

Humphrey Haast, Camp Archimedes's director, is an
inept and authoritarian army figure, typecast as a dogged
but unenlightened buffoon administrator. Mordecai Wash-
ington is a chameleon-like type with three distinct alter
egos. His first (analeptic) reincarnation is in the role
of Sacchetti's anonymous Negro highschool classmate (later
turned soldier). Infected with Palladine, Washington
metamorphoses into the brilliant ringleader of Camp in-
mates and Sacchetti's Mephistophelean tempter, only to
resurface as Haast with a difference after the conscious-
ness exchange. Dr. Aimee Busk, a WAC officer, is a "Big
Nurse" figure in her fierce efficiency at work as well as
her cold and sexless attitude, starkly ironic in view of
her name (suggesting love) and the sodomy by means of
which Washington impregnates her with the virus.

Schipansky, one of Skilliman's twelve "quats," is a
type of a malleable and morally naive young scientist.
Although himself of little characterological significance,
he serves, however, as the fulcrum in a crucial debate
between Skilliman and Sacchetti concerning ethics and
morality as applicable to science and research. Through-
out Book II, Schipansky shuttles between the two principal
opponents, reconstituting and delineating the polarity of
their views, as well as symbolically embodying the bat-
tlefield on which Skilliman and Sacchetti's moral "philo-
sophies" confront each other.

Skilliman, Sacchetti's literal and symbolical an-
tagonist, is "a nuclear physicist of the sort that liber-
als like myself [Sacchetti] would like to suppose essen-
tially German" (124). This particular trait is of telling
importance in the novel whose paronomastic title evokes
the spectre of concentration camps of the Third Reich,
criticising the U.S. of the 1960s for similar tendencies.
Skilliman represents the figure of an evil/mad scientist
endemic to SF since Mary Shelley's Victor Frankenstein,
epitomizing the whole totalitarian, amoral, fascist
stratum in the U.S. of Camp Concentration. In a moment of
unmitigated irony, Sacchetti meiotically calls him a "bad
person" (129), setting Skilliman at the polar opposite of

what Sacchetti, a prisoner of conscience and avowed pacif-
ist, suffers for.

In twice fallen Skilliman--humanly as Faust, and
superhumanly as Satan--the figure of a scientist prepared
to sacrifice even his moral and spiritual self for the
sake of knowledge is pushed to the extreme. The countless
allusions and references to Marlowe's, Goethe's, Valery's
and Mann's versions of the Faustian legend, one of the
novel's pivotal symbols, converge in Skilliman as a "char-
ismatic figure in demonic perversion of Christ. . . . with
Satanic qualities" (Wymer 210). Gradually losing ground
to Sacchetti in the course of their allegorical confronta-
tion (symbolized by the number of scientists deserting his
retinue), Skilliman attempts to tip the scales by trying
to murder Sacchetti in cold blood. His own death at the
hands of Haast/Washington, whom he has erroneously believ-
ed to be his ally, constitutes a symbolic triumph of Sac-
chetti's modern existentialism and the endorsement of his
pacifist, morally responsible stance.

Sacchetti himself--balding, overweight, with an IQ of
160, and a bona fide poet--is the only fully developed
character in the novel. He has a congenital proclivity
for introspection and flippant self-criticism, and a pen-
chant for brooding over his own exemplary moral standards.

Through his name, a portmanteau fusion of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, two anarchists executed in 1927 for their radical, anti-government views, Disch suggests a man of conscience and principle, inequitably suffering for a cause he believes in.

Sacchetti is a Dantean poet in Hell, searching for ultimate, irrelative values and discovering (creating) them only through a tangible contact with death, pain, and infernal suffering. His allegorical journey, preceded by an interpretation-challenging epigraph from The Pilgrim's Progress, opens with "Nel mezzo del camin di nostra vita indeed"[44] (14), at the time when Sacchetti still thinks of himself as a mere visitor to the Inferno. His quest is terminated only when, as one of the death-bound inmates, he arrives at a clear comprehension of the horrific price exacted by enhancing their intelligence, paid in alienation and disintegration of both their spiritual and bodily selves. Sacchetti is an advocate of the quest for the "inner," moral development as opposed to the "outer," instrumental expansion, in clear defiance of the facile technocratic belief (typified in Haast) that all problems are essentially of instrumental nature, and that science can solve them all.

"Does every grad student have a clear right to be initiated into the mysteries of cataclysm?" (142), is Sacchetti's paraphrase of that fundamental concern. Indeed, his inquiry seems to strike a chord reminiscent of a perennial dystopian concern which assumes that human creativity and morality are in potential danger of being displaced or nullified by automata superior to humans merely in computing power ("artificial intelligence"). In its own ironic way, Camp Concentration investigates the social humanity (maturity, responsibility) of the suddenly hyper-intelligent human beings, whose moral and ethical standards remain qualitatively unaltered by the artificially induced quantum leap of their cognitive faculties.

The segment of the novel which highlights these questions resembles in form the medieval psychomachia, a battle for the soul of the allegorical Everyman. At this point the entire SF set-up is ironically transmuted into a mock-allegorical morality pageant, with twelve quats reminiscent of twelve disciples, and the Manichean forces of good and evil (Sacchetti and Skilliman) locked in a duel for Schipansky's allegiance. In spite of such open symbolism, the young scientist's eventual "conversion" and acceptance of the moral responsibility implicit in Sacchetti's value system, is neither presented, nor meant to

be understood, in traditional Christian terms. It rather intimates Sacchetti's own redemptive catharsis during the Dostoyevski-type mock execution, an important catalyst on the way to his existentialist self-description. Both men find a sense of value in the simple affirmation of existence ("I am alive" repeats Sacchetti, 172), and discover that complex questions of a moral and ethical nature ultimately "boil down to the affirmation or denial of life and that all value is based on the experience of loving life itself" (Wymer 214).

Although Camp Concentration is not simply an anti-utopia, its paradigmatic structure yields a genius loci containing numerous quasi-dystopian characteristics. The Earth is ravaged by a military conflict conducted with nuclear and bacteriological arsenals, while Skilliman's research even angles towards the feasibility of geological warfare. Freedom is sacrificed for (political) stability, various human and civic rights are suppressed under the martial law provisions, and civil disobedience movements as well as prisoners of conscience (conchies) are brutally persecuted. Heterodoxy (here: apostasy) is punished by "vaporization," this time by spiriting Sacchetti away from his "lawful" confinement without his knowledge or consent (his mail is returned with CANCELLED stamped on it).

These elements of syntagmatic similarity are limited in number, however, and the novel fails to adhere to the dystopian formula[45] consistently and insistently enough to forge any sustained formal kinship.

The paradigmatic analysis of Camp Concentration is complicated to the extent that the (realistic) vehicle of Disch's social metaphor is so tightly interwoven with its (symbolical) tenor. The prisoners' daily routine is under constant surveillance, and even indirect contacts with the outside world are kept down to the barest minimum. Deception and falsehood reign unbridled; "Do let's be candid" (31), says Dr. Busk, while lying smugly to Sacchetti's face.

Were such tendencies confined to the prison, Camp Archimedes—reduced then to an isolated microcosm—would cease to speak metonymically of the world outside. That the novel's intention is quite opposite, however, can be observed on the formal level, viz., from its narrative structure. No critical study to date seems to have remarked that, far from being a straightforward narrative, Camp Concentration is punctuated by the "editorial" intrusions from the publisher of Sacchetti's manuscript. Although infrequent, these breaks in narrative continuity are immensely important as touchstones to the novel's

global paradigm. The "two lines. . . defaced from the manuscript of Louis Sacchetti's journal" (59) which identified the corporation running Camp Archimedes prove that, far from being exposed after the journal's publication, the corporation wields sufficient power to preserve its anonymity. Similarly, the slow erosion of the novel's narrative model—dated journal entries give way to disjointed and fragmentary notes—formally dissolves the traditional art form and its ability to stand face to face with a totalitarian system. The very fact that the news of the intelligence epidemic is rigidly suppressed proves that the world of Camp Concentration is in the grip of the parties who dominate and control it to the same degree as Camp Archimedes. And the ghosts of Auschwitz, Dachau, Ravensbruck, Buchenwald, as well as Nazism and Hitler himself, underscore the book's underlying premise that the depicted socio-political trends, if unchecked, are liable to spiral into the nightmare of a global concentration camp.

Washington, one of the chief tempters along Sacchetti's allegorical journey, exclaims in a stark moment of despair, "The whole goddamn universe is a fucking concentration camp" (72). This essential cry of warning, constituting the symbolical core of the novel's grim vision,

is the key to Washington's concentration camp philosophy.
On the surface the denunciation implies the existence of
the "metaphysical" world which, directed contrarily to-
wards humans, is responsible for the atrocities which, at
one point, culminated in the rise of Nazi Germany, and
which are re-enacted in the U.S. of Camp Concentration.
Moreover, Washington animates and personifies what he
perceives to be the world's antagonistic bias, symbolical-
ly conferring on it the mien of the "Catholic Gaud, the
warden of this prison-universe" (78).

All the same the macrocosm of the entire novel is
firmly embedded in the empirical, physical universe of SF,
and not in the "metaphysically" counter-human world of
dystopia. After his passionate outburst, Washington
himself provides an argument as to why a concentration
camp philosophy is inherently unsupportable. The fun-
damental principle of the camp—or, for Washington, the
universe—is that there is "no relationship between the
prisoners' behaviour and their rewards or punishments"
(79). Although, like an old-time heresiarch, Washington
declares, "I'm not interested in a universe in which I
have to die" (78), he knows that there is no transcendence
out there to propitiate or scorn. The "magic" which
enables him to avert demise is of a physical (scientific)

nature and, as such, "acquiesces, fatally, to the second law of thermodynamics" (78). Unable to escape from the pain and agony of dying, Washington discovers that the world is not a reprostat for the genesis of either happiness or misery; values are created by its inhabitants, and the wardens of this universe are people themselves: the Skillimans, the Sacchettis and, most commonly, the Schipanskys of this world.

Skilliman himself believes in Hell because it "is the second law of thermodynamics. . . it is something we can make" (150-51). In its existentialist overtones it reminds us that "each of us is both a victim and tormenter" (Barlow 202) in our common responsibility for the values and the world we create. Skilliman's rejection of heaven (at which he fires in an impotent rage) is not just an expression of his ideology, however fascist and genocidal it might be. Heaven, as a symbol of the metaphysical, is simply incompatible with the conception of the physical world where values are of cultural (i.e., man-made) and not of transcendently teleological nature.

No paradigmatic analysis of Camp Concentration can be complete without taking into account the novel's controversial ending. The various reactions to it cover the entire length of the critical spectrum, from John Clute's

reference to "an sf ending which has been sharply critici-
zed as a begging of the issues raised" (173); through
Erich Rupprecht's conviction that Disch "juggles reality
in order to manufacture a happy ending" to an effect that
is "deliberate and quite complicated. . . . [even though]
one cannot help but feel its optimism has been purchased
at some novelistic expense" (151); to Thomas Wymer who,
with unmitigated gusto, argues that "it is a brilliant
ending that works on multiple levels" (215).

Viewed in consistently tragic (dystopian) terms, the
novel's abruptly optimistic ending indeed appears poorly
managed—a deus ex machina solution where, logically, the
protagonist and most of the population should have suc-
cumbed to the super-lethal spirochaetae virus. This
impression is augmented by the fact that Camp Concentra-
tion makes so much of the Faustian legend—itself rooted
in the Promethean myth**—thus increasing the apparent
disparity between the novel's harrowing core and its
optimistic ending.

It is impossible, however, to overlook the fact that
Disch's treatment of the legend is modelled after (and
indebted to) not so much the medieval original as its
subsequent literary reincarnations. In Camp Concentration
Disch fuses Marlowe's The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus

(1588), Goethe's Faust (1832) and Mann's Doctor Faustus (1947) into a distinct tonality of his own which, nonetheless, "is not tragic" (Nicholls 280). Naturally, it is possible to read Camp Concentration in the manner of Mann's work, i.e., as an unremittingly serious moral allegory, or as a novel of social symbolism, alluding to the moral decay of 1960s' America through references to Hitler's Germany. But both Goethe's and Marlowe's opera magna are lighter in tone: Faust in its propitious ending, with the hero triumphantly saved from the Devil's claim, and The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus in its robust intermingling of tragic and comic (sometimes even farcical) elements[47]. Seen in terms of its thematic symbolism, Camp Concentration's ending is quite appropriate, then, for a novel which is "structurally comic, in the medieval or Dantean sense," although its bias makes it "a modern, a secular, not a divine comedy" (Wymer 216).

The factor which holds the book together is Disch's "unremittingly ironic" (Francavilla 244) narrative voice, manifesting its witty and mordant presence at all points in the novel. After all, the main premise of Camp Concentration is a portrait of a genius as a syphilitic; the inmates stage Doctor Faustus, of all plays; their death lasts the equivalent of a gestation period; Mann's prota-

gonist returns as Adrienne Leverkuhn, an East German composer of "hard" music; the Christian virgin is a sodomized lesbian; the mock-Christ is a satanic scientist; the "saintly" pacifist survives thanks to a guard's murder--the list is endless.

Even the novel's last words, "Let's sail till we come to the edge" (175) ironically echo the proud words of the Dantean Odysseus, another secular knowledge-seeker, tempted and fallen into the Inferno. The defiant re-invocation of the quest in the novel's ending saves it from the tragic determinism of dystopia, extending the hope beyond the Fall, even despite "the price all good men must pay for knowledge. . . com[ing] of eating magic apples" (54). Camp Concentration's ironic and ambivalent blend of earnestness and humour, tragedy and comedy as well as tradition and innovation, enables it to pay homage to the myth's literary tradition without resorting to a facile "happy end." After all, the book's controversial ending implies that survival is a measure of complicity in the system. Although it would have been easy for Disch to "make the novel a political parable in the tradition of 1984 and Brave New World" (Rupprecht 151), Camp Concentration chooses rather to develop its themes in the paradigmatically realistic world of Science Fiction.

Chapter 3

334

Due to the intricate organization of its narrative
material, an abundance of analepses, and a division into
six nearly autonomous segments,[48] 334 almost defies synop-
sis. The novel follows a group of inhabitants of an apar-
tment block at 334 East 11th Street in New York between
the years 2021-25. Although the narrative centres on the
Hanson family living at 334, each segment is rendered
through a different focalizer, examining the interfaces
and interferences between that narrative agent and socie-
ty.

Despite the divisions, the ramified nature of 334's
narrative can be fully accounted for only when combined
into a global network, ordering the stories according to
certain parameters (e.g., chronologically, narratively,
thematically, compositionally)[49]. This approach is sug-
gested not only by the book's ambitious formal structure,
but especially by a three-dimensional grid system of
spatial, temporal and narrative interrelations between its
major characters, which precedes the last section. Devis-
ed as a narrative clue for the reader, the grid system

draws attention to the intricate relationship between the micro-and macro-structures in the novel. Each millicosmic moment in every narrative agent's life, multiplied a thousandfold adds up to a specific milieu, which, in turn, adds up to a microcosm of New York, which finally adds up to the macrocosm of the U.S. and the world at large. Disch's manipulation of the syntagmatic building blocks is so elaborate and sophisticated that he deliberately inserts the grid as "a Friday's footprint on the sand" (Francavilla 243). This strategy is meant to dispel the reader's "illusion"[30] and make him aesthetically aware of how he is, in Disch's own words, "being controlled by this incredible, intellectual apparatus that is totally artificial" (Francavilla 243).

334 is an exemplary social SF novel, with "realistically-drawn characters in an invented setting which has all the stubbornness of actuality" (Pringle 151). Its extrapolative range moves in successive chapters from a genetics-based system of legal discrimination, to the pathology of urban laissez-faire indifference, legalization of drugs and hallucinogens and its latent social and cultural effects, emancipation as a factor of technological advancement, youth gangs, and, in the final, emblem-

atic section, to the existential inability to counteract
the void of a spiritually destitute life.

Most of 334's topical emphases duplicate the issues
emblematic to modern utopian literature since H. G. Wells'
A Modern Utopia. Whether deliberate or incidental, the
thematic parallels between Disch's and Wells' novels are
unmistakable. The Utopian World State is an archetypal
welfare state and a global bureaucracy, holding all sour-
ces of power and keeping track of every inhabitant's vital
information (location, marital or criminal status, etc.),
while looking after its citizens' housing, health care and
education, as well as eugenically regulating their paren-
thood—all duplicated in 334, down to the unforgettable
image of a supercity.[31] Unlike Wells, however, through
his engagement with these perennial utopian issues, Disch
illustrates the inherently "metaphysical" nature of all
utopian ideals. 334 takes A Modern Utopia to task by
demonstrating how, inevitably, a utopian blueprint is
necessarily latently dystopian. Disch's permutations of
the utopian themes bring out the inherently relative
nature of all ideas and ideals, whether utopian or dys-
topian. The novel's demonstration that no single phenome-
non is, in and of itself, inherently good or bad, illustr-
ates—despite its quasi-dystopian syntagmatic elements—

its ultimate affinity with the neutral, physical world of Science Fiction.

The first story of the 334 cycle, "The Death of Socrates,"[52] focuses on Birdie Ludd, a young, motherless black who attends college with precarious results (this part cursorily introduces Nora Hanson, head of the Hanson family, and an old wino who will reappear in "Angouleme"). Birdie, unhappily in love with Milly Holt, a tenant at 334, takes up residence with a young prostitute, Frances Schaap. Painfully low on intelligence and initiative, at the obligatory Regents (from the Revised Genetics Testing Act of 2011) re-evaluation Birdie's IQ score sinks lower than ever before, and on the creativity scale he drops to moron-level. After an only partially successful attempt to better his scores, feeling victimized by the system, he joins the Marines and goes abroad to fight in another American war. Birdie's "roblems of creativeness," traced against the background of rife ill-education and genetic discrimination, are a chilling subversion and commentary on the twin utopian ideals: equality of race (Regents) and opportunity (education).

"Bodies," Part II, zeroes in on the peripeties of Ab Holt, Milly's father, also a resident of 334. Holt, a Bellevue morgue employee, instigates the death of the

terminally ill Frances Schaap in a mix-up with an insurance company and a caterer for necrophiles, with whom he is trafficking in bodies. Holt, with his overbearing indifference and cynicism, summed up in his _chacun à son goût_ motto, is a quintessential metropolitan urbanite. He embodies the worst traits of his type, a pathological callousness combined with an egoistic preoccupation with his own affairs, to the point of utter disregard for others.

Holt's colleagues at work are Juan Martinez (later identified as Lottie Hanson's husband), and Chapel, a black, ex-convict moron, for whom life holds only as much as the soaps which he watches with the avidity of a chronic addict, physically suffering from withdrawal symptoms when a favourite show is cancelled. Television which "instructed the very muscles of his face how to express pain, fear, anger and joy,"[33] is the pseudo-religious centre of his inner life—a genuinely self-contained and self-sufficient universe without which he could not manage "all the confusing circumstances of his other, external life" (60). It is natural at this point to think of Jerzy Kosinski's _Being There_, published only two years before _334_, and notice how much Chance's and Chapel's mesmerized absorption with TV resembles each other, the mordant irony

of this connection driving Disch's message home even
further.

There is a shift in the third section, "Everyday Life
in the Later Roman Empire," inasmuch as its focalizer,
Alexa Miller, is not a 334 tenant but a Welfare Department
(MODICUM) officer. In this capacity, she has the welfare
programs to which 334 belongs under her jurisdiction. The
section takes under its microscope the pregnant issue of
drugs and hallucinogens as means of escape from banal
existence, alluding to the social symptoms and consequen-
ces of such escapist desertion. Morbehanine, a novel,
licitly available synthetic narcotic, offers each frustra-
ted and embittered person a chance to "fix" for himself a
phantasmagoric world into which he can repeatedly "Fade-
out." Alexa, overwhelmed like everybody else around her
by an "exquisite sense of loss" (88), trips off to the
Roman Empire period to the point of blurring the narrative
distinction between reality and illusion.

The section's symbolism is of extreme significance,
evoked by the parallels drawn between the ancient Roman
and the contemporary American Empires, and amplified by
the symbolical collapse of reality and fantasy. Through
references to the Italy of antiquity where "the free
citizens were gradually reduced to serfdom. . . the upper

classes had arranged the tax laws to their own conven-
ience. . . the poor grew poorer. . . [having] to accept
the terms of the rich _potentiores_" (100), the segment
delivers a withering social commentary. The twice-removed
allusions to the economic and social decay of the U.S.
from the 1970s--"the birth rate declined. . . Italy became
a wasteland. . . the cities existed, if at all, in ruins"
(100-01)--are also recognizably pertinent.

Through such unambiguous symbolism as well as overt
references to Spengler's _The Decline of the West_, the
chapter diagnoses the syndrome as the result of an in-
evitable cultural collapse. Spengler's work, subtitled
Outlines of a Morphology of World History, propounded that
cultural history was governed by definite laws which,
therefore, made it, in principle, predictable. The Emper-
or Marcus Aurelius' _nihil novi sub sole_ philosophy: "One
may foresee as well the things which will be. For they
will certainly take the same form [as the past]" (97), is
fundamentally principled on the idea of a cyclical, veget-
ative (spring-based) historicity. However, the only kind
of universe in which history always repeats itself is,
ultimately, a deterministic one, and if the terminal stage
of each cycle is always an ineluctable decline, then this
world is also negatively biased. In view of Disch's

undoubtable awareness of the scandalous methodology and factual errors which mar Spengler's theses[54], these seemingly "metaphysical" conclusions indicate that his use of The Decline of the West is symbolical, rather than a serious historical or ontological proposition. The chapter can thus indulge in an incisive social analysis, formulated by means of a pessimistic portrayal of the social structure, without compromising the book's overall generic premise.

Part four, "Emancipation," is the only section grounded more thoroughly in the implications of an extrapolated technological advancement. It explores the entire gamut of new developments in the realm of sex, contraception, and parenthood in the aftermath of a sweeping progress in biomedical sciences. Boz Hanson, "strictly the husband," and Milly Holt, "the breadwinner" (138), are a married couple at a crossroads, each desiring to exchange places with the other. The chapter alludes to its leading theme, the complete reversal of marital roles, through Boz's favourite authors: Norman Mailer, an existential anti-feminist, and Gene Stratton Porter, a proto-feminist who often dealt with the question of family.

Although equal in creativity and intelligence to the point that "brain surgery aside, they could not have been

more compatible" (122), Boz and Milly are still tied to their respective biological functions. When they are granted permission to have a child, however, emancipation and egalitarianism à la 334 are pushed to the extreme. Aided by high-tech plastic surgery and hormonal treatment to fulfil his new role of a mother, Boz acquires Milly's breasts to feed the artificially gestated baby, while she is liberated to further her union career. Following the birth of a girl, given a genderless name Peanut, they confront the rancour and monotony surrounding them in 2025 as a family.

"Angouleme" is the shortest segment, describing a summer in the life of the Alexandrians, a gang of young highschoolers (Tancred Miller and Amparo Martinez among them), marshalled by Bill Harper a.k.a. Little Mister Kissy Lips. Trying to channel their summer tedium and frustration, they embark on a half-baked design to kill an old wino whom they nickname Alyona Ivanovna, "after an old pawnbroker woman that Raskalnikov [sic] kills with an ax" (154). Their scheme fails miserably as, one by one, the gang members pull out, and solitary Bill cannot muster up the nerve to carry out his plan during the confrontation with the old man.

"Angouleme" presents "an intensely vivid image of a society saturated with death" (Delany 229) implicit in Bill's fascination with Dostoyevski, Gide and Mailer, i.e., <u>Crime and Punishment</u>, <u>Les Caves du Vatican</u> and <u>An American Dream</u> (Delany 61). The novels' common denominator, wanton murder, ties them, through the gang's name, to the memory of the Alexandrian library of antiquity and its gratuitous destruction. The "ordinary" and "idealistic" murders which the Alexandrians study in "A History of Crime in Urban America," themselves reflect the ambiguity of Raskolnikov's motives. After all, Raskolnikov can kill without "the irrational forces of [his] conscience" interfering with the execution because Utilitarianist "reason had persuaded him. . . that his so-called crime was not a crime."[55] Only the failure to execute the contemplated murder elevates it to the rank of a crime, and such is the case with the young gang.

But perhaps the most pertinent allusion is concealed behind the grotesque image of the children making jokes "about what the M <u>really</u> stood for in M-Day" (161), the day of the planned murder. It cannot but bring to mind the classic of world cinematography, Fritz Lang's <u>M</u> (which stands for <u>Morder Unter Uns</u>--<u>Murderers Amongst Us</u>), and its agonizing portrayal of murder and its effect upon

society. What lends substantial credit to the validity of exploring the connection between "Angouleme" and M̲ is that Disch's scene containing the allusion to Lang's work mirrors almost exactly the opening scene of the film, where a group of children perversely amuse themselves with a nursery rhyme about murder. Ironically, in Lang's masterpiece a child-murderer terrorizes the city; a century later, in Disch's masterpiece, the roles are reversed. The macabre tone of the allusion seems to fit the overall tonality of the book better than the overtly invoked Crime and Punishment, because of Lang's masterly interpretation of the murderer as an inconspicuous, uninspired, and quite ordinary kind of person. Bereft of Hollywood's theatrical incongruity, Lang's criminal is truly one amongst us, extending the unmitigated horror to Disch's gang of wannabees, and through them, back to our present.

The final, title section of the novel, "334," consists of a mosaic of short, mostly analeptic, vignettes. In this piece de resistance of the entire book, the negative aspects of life in 2025, perpetually present in the preceding sections, are finally brought to bear on all members of the Hanson family. Shrimp, groping for direction after the disillusionment of her third childbirth,

tries to fill up a vacuum in her life by joining a con-
vent. Following Juan's death, Lottie becomes a prosti-
tute, gorging on food and cheap movies until she turns
into an obese, indolent, and bitter woman. Boz and Milly
live in relative harmony, but their days, spent on watch-
ing "teevee" and playing Monopoly, seem bereft of any
significant spiritual content. The young generation,
Amparo and Mickey, rebel against and break away from the
stupefying mini-world of 334, Amparo going to a school of
her choice, and Mickey fleeing from home in a bid to
become a major-league baseball player.

It is Nora Hanson, the boring, garrulous, emotional
grandmother who emerges as the central character in "334,"
with unconscious determination trying to keep the entire
family together through their various ups and downs. Her
ultimate inability to counteract life's entropy in the
wake of the family's gradual dispersal, is confirmed by
her voluntary application to terminate her life in the old
people's dorm, where she vegetates after the eviction from
334. Despite her abject failure, her instinctive, even if
pitifully inadequate efforts are one of the few positive
actions in the novel, even if never more than a quixoti-
cally foredoomed battle in the dreary, drab world of 334.
Ironically, the family, however loosely conceived, appears

to play the role of one of the last bulwarks against the tide of bureaucratic facelessness and emotional savagery.

The only other course of action suggested in the novel is an escape into the creation of Art, which can liberate from the stultifying confines of the valueless world and bring at least partial fulfilment in self-expression. There is no shortage of narrative agents in the story (Birdie, Boz, Shrimp, Amparo) who, despite their shortcomings and, sometimes obviously painful, failures, do not desist from attempts at artistic creation. These loom all the more heroic when considered against the backdrop of encroaching educational analphabetism and "teevee" idolatry.

In chronotopic terms, although "estranged" half a century into the future, 334 presents a city-scape ingeniously modelled on the network of contemporary psychosocial and economic interactions. The book is clearly divisible into the microcosm of the 334 apartment block, and the macrocosm of the surrounding world, for which the former is a synecdoche. The 334 block is a plain building with a "population of three thousand. . . which was not much more than the Agency's original optimum of 2,250" (15). The Agency is MODICUM, under whose mystifying acronym (evoking the ghost of Orwellian Miniplenty) re-

sides the omnipresent Welfare Department. Other elements are culled gradually throughout the novel, from the permanently non-functional elevators and unreliable hot water supply, through the army of cats and "temps" (legally lodging in MODICUM sleeping bags right on the staircase), down to the muck and stink permeating the whole building.

In the macrocosm of the world in 2025 the technocratic State has stamped out major economic ills via a gargantuan welfare system, but the lives of average citizens—the 21st-century urban, post-industrial proletariat—have degenerated into a dismal cultural and spiritual void. In a pseudo-utopian fashion, unemployment is curbed, computer technology is immensely advanced, and a comprehensive welfare system caters to citizens' needs in housing, health care and education, offering various (seldom effective) incentives and benefits. Food is cheap and plentiful, owing to the huge food farms constructed and maintained in the oceans.

Because 334 is not a utopia, however, every silver lining has its cloud. The oceans are dying from overproduction, while the synthetic food's quality and nutritive value is derisory, so that not only a black market for food exists and flourishes, but special supermarket museums are open as a memento of a better past. Dogs are

banned from New York in a move to relieve congestion, and children raised in slums on hydroponically-grown food are said to be of a meagre physical constitution.

All of these phenomena owe their existence to the U.S. population exploding to 600 million within half a century. In a totalitarian manner, genetic testers issue warrants to have a child to those who qualify, or not as the case may be. Contraception is compulsory and aliens must submit to sterilization before being allowed to enter the country. There is no slackening of demand for soldiers, this time in Burma where the American troops offer a steel shoulder to the local "democracy." The "Big Brother is watching you" undercurrent is continuously augmented by the pervasive ubiquity of the Welfare Department's computerized antennae. And, spiritually and culturally, the world in 334 wallows in a gaping chasm of inertia and philistine mediocrity where, at last, the commercials are better than the programs.

The single most transparent paradigmatic signifier of any novel is, of course, its title. In the case of 334 and its spatial locus, through a simple symmetrical inversion its title connotes it to 1984, and its titular temporal denomination. Such a manifest allusion to one of the classics of dystopian literature cannot but draw

attention to the fact that, in the manner of 1984, 334 is a quintessential social novel. The semiotic analogy is, however, offset by Disch's refusal to thematically engage the dystopian paradigm; while Disch "could probably have targeted MODICUM as the villain. . . the triumph of the novel is that it refuses to blame anyone for this hellish existence" (Rupprecht 153). Instead, the book chooses to work with the themes conventionally associated with utopia and, in such a deliberate way engaging both types of fiction, enters in a polemic with their basic generic premises.

It would be comforting to assume that the utopian ideals are invariable and invulnerable; likewise, it would ease the burden of responsibility to know that "someone or something were responsible for the emptiness of . . . lives [in 334], if there were a Big Brother maliciously exercising power for its own sake (Rupprecht 153). But there is no such trivial solace in Disch's world. The novel's conspicuous but sophisticated balancing act between the dialectics of utopia and dystopia, and its consistent refusal to forsake its realistic equilibrium for the sake of either one, constitutes one of its greatest triumphs as a work of Science Fiction. "This respect for complexity," eschewing the equally "metaphysical" poles of naive op-

timism or implacable pessimism, is what "makes <u>334</u> dazzlingly variegated, complex and inconclusive" (Rupprecht 153), in the best sense of the word. This inconclusiveness best conveys the book's implicit assertion that <u>plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose</u>; the connection between Disch's world and our own is only as real as the everyday life in <u>334</u>'s American Empire is.

Chapter 4

On Wings of Song

Both within, and outside the delimitations of this study, Disch's SF opus appears to progress steadily from one end of the SF spectrum to another--and beyond. Whether Camp Concentration can, indeed, be regarded as "genuine, hard-core science fiction," as Peter Nicholls rather extravagantly dubs it (278), or rather as a typical example of the 1960s' New Wave, there can hardly be any doubt about classifying 334 as quintessential social SF. Disch's third major SF novel, On Wings of Song is, in the manner of 334, an eminent example of social SF, and just like its predecessor, its spatio-temporal locus is the familiar "here and now": the U.S.A., a few years into the twenty-first century. Unlike the other two of Disch's novels, On Wings of Song incorporates an apparently fantastic novum of non-instrumental "flight." In the novel, with the aid of a proper "flying" apparatus some people can "sing their conscious selves clear out of their bodies, free to soar away from Earth toward a new and apparently ecstatic mode of existence" (Stableford 354). A subsequent analysis of the "flight" will demonstrate the

inherent ambiguity of the novel's paradigm which, creating a state of generic "virtuality," leaves to the reader the decision to collapse it into a work of SF or Fantasy.

Narratively, On Wings of Song is a sophisticated hybrid of a Bildungsroman and a Schlüsselroman[36], spanning a quarter of a century in the life of Daniel Weinreb, alias Bosola. Daniel, growing up in the ultra-puritan Midwest, serves eight months in prison at the age of fourteen, where he acquires his reserved, preternaturally mature mien.[37] In Book II he marries Boadicea, the daughter of Grandison Whiting, the richest man in the state. The newlyweds leave for New York, ostensibly to begin their honeymoon, but not before they have attempted "flying," still banned in Iowa. Boa subsequently departs for the next fifteen years, while Daniel, on the run after her father's attempt at his life, changes his name to Bosola and decides to eke out a living in New York. Book III picks up on Daniel's thirtieth birthday, and in Disch's exemplary setting of urban squalor, follows him through life's ups and downs. Eventually, after years of poverty and misery, Daniel makes good in the opera world, only to be gunned down in cold blood by a diehard neo-puritan while performing in his home town of Amesville.

The novel's chronotope is subtly evoked through a reference to Drs. Pole and Williams. winners of the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize for the invention of the P-W security system: a lozenge releasing nauseating toxins in a prisoner's stomach in the event of a breakaway. Later, however, consistently with the totalitarian tendencies of On Wings of Song's society, the nauseating agents are replaced with lethal explosives and the system is employed indiscriminately on a global scale to control the potentially hostile dissident populations--the Basques in Spain, Jews in Russia, the Irish in England, and others. The horror of a "global concentration camp" is no longer a metaphor; the lives of the P-W lozenge carriers (civilian POW's, in effect) are at the mercy of soulless camp managers and chance computer errors.

Despite such relentless repressions, the novel's paradigm does not reflect any "metaphysical" bias; its quasi-dystopian elements are not presented as a product of any negative immanence, but rather of the society's own (un)doing. The P-W system, for example, is a genuine revolution in a more humane treatment of prisoners, and its subsequently totalitarian (mis-) use is rooted in social pathology rather than transcendent malevolence. The novel's paradigm is never one-sidedly negative or

optimistic; although, in a spirit of liberalism, a black woman General can run for President on the ticket from the Republican party, elsewhere, in the reactionary manner, the use of the explosive P-W lozenge spreads throughout the American penitentiary system. Even the novel's macrocosm conforms to the picture. The U.S. is balkanized: the Eastern cities are extravagantly permissive but corrupt and bankrupt, while the affluence of the Farm Belt states comes with their State Police (a telling reversal, like that of Camp Concentration) and the rule of religious and political extremists. Despite its apparently grim, quasi-dystopian tone, the novel's effort to suggest a tonal equilibrium, preventing it from dystopian paradigmatic symbolism, lends its paradigm science-fictional pertinence and credibility.

In its social, satirical and characteral tonality, On Wings of Song can be described as a novel of manners: "every character is beautifully realized, the dialogue rings true, the ironies are exquisite" (Pringle 193). Next to Daniel, the single most significant narrative agent is Grandison Whiting, his father-in-law, a man for whom money and social status are the foundation of good character. Whiting, "one of those Caesars. . . who rule the world and unto whom there must be renderings, despite

that they are savage, corrupt and conscienceless."[59] is a man of immense wealth and extensive political power. He is the embodiment of the forces at the helm of the society, all-powerful and indifferent to the plight of those below, who camouflages his despotic cruelty under the Puritan "God helps those who help themselves." Whiting does not stop at anything to help himself; he orchestrates his daughter's marriage to a parvenu (whom he plans to "eliminate" later) to steal the limelight from a political scandal involving his brother, a politician at the House of Representatives. One of the novel's key metaphors likens Whiting to a fox hunter, asserting his autocracy in a hunt for the insignificant animal. In the traumatic moment, when his consternation reaches a hysterical peak after he learns of his own "death" in an aeroplane explosion, Daniel realizes "from the look he ha[s] seen so often in his father-in-law's eyes that _he_ was the fox" (198).

Daniel himself is one of Disch's most engaging characters, just like Louis Sacchetti (though perhaps with lesser awareness), fighting a quixotic battle with the iniquities of the system. Doing time in prison, he learns the unwritten rules of the "machinery" of the entire social structure while working for Consolidated Foods, a

company which breeds a "specially mutated form of termite
. . . used as a supplement in various extended meat and
cheese products" (64). Just like the blind and flightless
bugs, Daniel, an insignificant Everyman in the ruthless
cogs of the social "machine" reflects that "the same thing
ha[s] happened to him" (65).

Analogously to Camp Concentration, the prison is a
microcosm of "the bigger democracy outside" in that almost
everyone is "cheated, held ransom and victimized except
for the little self-appointed army that [runs] the place"
(44). Just like another expert on social "machinery,"
Chief Bromden from One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, Daniel
unexpectedly crosses paths with someone who offers a
glimmer of hope. The stimulus is The Product is God, a
book by Jack Van Dyke, the "sinister minister" from New
York City, which provides most of the novel's symbolic
impetus.

In the book, echoing Mordecai Washington's concentra-
tion camp philosophy, Van Dyke states unequivocally that
in God's world, "[h]owever He may concern himself with
human fate, He is surely indifferent to human controversy"
(55). On the other hand, there is the human world, less
cruel because of, and in the absence of, transcendence,
but more corrupt for the same reasons. Van Dyke's theory

that "people live in two completely unrelated worlds" (83) reiterates the fundamentals of On Wings of Song's paradigmatic contract, drastically separating the religiously metaphysical world from the physical world in which people actually live.

On the other hand, Van Dyke offers a tongue-in-cheek way out of the mundane, and into God's world, by proposing that everything, beginning with existence and ending with religion, is just an elaborate make-believe. By pretending to believe, and choosing a single minimalistic goal to follow, as long as it is not of material advantage, one can enter (create) the world where saying it makes it so. In Van Dyke's lapsarian "doctrine," the freedom of choice coming from the repudiation of any "metaphysical" (negative or positive) bias, equates each human being in his right to forge his own values. Uniting all make-believers in the face of their common responsibility for the values which they create for themselves through the very act of believing, Van Dyke's pop-theology, in its own zany way, parallels the existentialist creed embraced by Sacchetti in Camp Concentration. In a consciously ironic contrast, Van Dyke's liberal and hilariously consumerist tenets, with their irreverent Christian allusions and Warhol-type hamburger chain symbolism, are at the farthest

remove from the rigidity and suppression of Whiting's money and power-centred new Puritanism, staking out the claims of the only kind of faith that still holds for the faithless twenty-first century.

The parallels between On Wings of Song and John Webster's The Duchess of Malfi are unmistakable. from the overall mood of tragic melancholy (though punctured in Disch with irony and grotesque), to the dramatis personae: the Whitings as the angry tyrant and his brother. Boa as the innocent Duchess marrying below her state to be released only by death, and Daniel who, during the twelve seamy years spent in New York, hides behind the name of Bosola. Just like his namesake in the Jacobean play, Daniel's is the focalizing consciousness which provides a savage social commentary on the circumstances of life in the corrupt and corrupting East. Although his anguish and pity are genuine, however, he is banished to the role of an outsider, in the face of systematic abuse powerless to help anyone, including himself. "[C]ynical, yet furious against hypocrisy; his insight avails to show him only his own and the world's degradation; too proud to flatter, he stoops to be a tool."[59] like Webster's Bosola, Daniel runs afoul of his ideals. ending up as a gigolo to Ernesto Rey,

a castrato opera singer. The time for Messianic saviours is past; human ills are of this, and not of God's world.

In the midst of a calamitous hunger crisis sweeping across the U.S., Daniel, stubbornly striving for faith and redemption, pursues his single Van Dykean goal of voice-training, eventually hoping to master it enough to "fly." And, in the world rent asunder by riots and violence, when, in the manner of the Jacobean tragedy, the melancholy gloom appears to reach unredeemable proportions, a miracle indeed happens in a denouement that could scarcely be less iconoclastic. In the children's parody of a mystery play, the novel's sustained "tension between transcendence and mundanity" (Stableford 355) is resolved in the death of Mrs. Schiff's ailing pet spaniel, implicitly redeeming the world. In an analogy to Reverend Van Dyke's irreverent spiritualism, the mock-Christian death of Dog the Saviour symbolizes the death of God the Saviour, dissociating metaphysics from the responsibility for the human world.

Till the very end, however, Daniel remains a Horatio Alger innocent at heart, parading as a "phoney" black, and commencing his first national tour, featuring songs glorifying "flight," in Iowa, still the centre of the Christian fundamentalist sentiment. With his spectacular rise to

fame and fortune. black skin colour, liberal views. and a performance which apotheosizes the power and glory of music and flight. Daniel is devil incarnate to the religious zealots in Amesville. His death, however, is a tragic substantiation of the redemptive powers of Van Dyke's new faith for, when the first bullet lodges in his brain. he is actually "flying," having achieved his life's goal and ascended to fairyland.

Daniel's assassin is Mrs. Norberg, an ex-deputy to the House of Representatives on the ticket of the American Spiritual Renewal Party, the rallying point of the Farm Belt's most radical "undergoders." In court. Mrs. Norberg declares the murder to be a "defence of the system of free enterprise." declaiming the Pledge of Allegiance with its "liberty and justice for all" (359). Uttered by a member of a party built on intolerance and persecution. in the police state of Iowa. in the murderous because poor and starving U.S.A., these words. in an instantaneous time-warp, teleport the reader to the bleak. undernourished. quasi-dystopian world of 334.

In the manner of its predecessors, On Wings of Song's paradigm contains the usual terrifying number of sinister elements. Radios picking up forbidden frequencies are confiscated by the State Customs. cities abound with

slums, and hordes of itinerant migrant workers roam the U.S. in a desperate search for work and food. Draft to the army is compulsory, top novelists work for airlines penning cute little articles on the subject of trout fishing, and a luxury tax on meat is a perennial threat. In fact, repressions mount to the point of bowdlerizing such innocuous texts as Wells' The War of the Worlds or Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. In a rare moment of self-reflexivity, Disch's allusion seems to imply that, contrary to its frequently futuristically escapist character, SF as serious literature can play a significant cultural and social role, mirroring the concerns of the present; something that On Wings of Song's ultra-conservatives try to preempt by censorship and excision.

The U.S.A. and the world at large teeter on the brink of a global calamity in the grip of chronic food and water shortage. Food riots break the flimsy tissue of social order across the country, precipitating thefts, killings, and widespread social unrest. The Product is God diagnoses the disease as "the end of Western Civilization--or . . . 'the Civilization of the Business Man'" (84), a syndrome reminiscent of 334, where the decline of the Western Empire has been given so much prominence. This time, however, an accusing finger seems to point at the

system of the Biz. Civ.'s consumptive business mentality as culpable for the crisis.

Just as in 334, however, where Morbehanine offers a chance of flight from the drab and penurious existence, the inhabitants of On Wings of Song's post-1991 America have their own escape-capsule—"flying." The inherent ambiguity of this element is responsible for the corresponding ambiguity of the entire paradigm. Taken literally, the non-instrumental human "flight" is obviously incompatible with the novel's overall SF status, since it relegates it to the genre of Fantasy—an view professed by David Pringle, despite his discussion of On Wings of Song in his Science Fiction The Best 100 Novels. It seems, however, that "flying" was intended to be assimilated on both levels: symbolically, in the manner of Science-Fiction, or literally, in the mode of Fantasy. Such a textual equivocalness creates a state of generic "virtuality," which deliberately allows for the reader's participation in the interpretive process.

After all, the comatose bodies of those airborne spirits remain palpable, physical artifacts, requiring nutrition, and betraying all signs of physical ageing. Boa, who returns from a fifteen-year long "trip," shows, in fact, symptoms similar to those of prolonged drug

addiction; she is a "gaunt, hollow-eyed object. . . in-
finitely old and wasted" (327), intent only on continuing
the experience. On the other hand, the fairies travelling
"on wings of song," not only retain their full mental
faculties, but cover actual physical distances, being able
to observe, listen and watch real-life events, although
remaining totally invisible and undetectable in any em-
pirical sense. The interpretive strategy adopted by the
reader will be ultimately responsible for deciding upon
the "correct" interpretation. On the one hand, if he is
to credit these extra-physical phenomena with a mien of
"truth," paradoxically, the novel in its entirety must be
perceived as Fantastic. On the other hand, in order to be
rendered compatible with Science Fiction, the phenomena
may be read as cerebral traces of the cybernetic interface
with the "flying" machine (of which, in the manner of
Wells' time vehicle, pointedly little is revealed). The
machine, a sort of "cold-pac" synthetic environment, would
continuously modify the fairies' experience with the input
of updated "real-world" information.

Irrespective of the decision, however, if the mysti-
que surrounding "flying" can be measured in Van Dyke's
terms of "pretending is believing," "flying" can be under-
stood as a perennial symbol ubiquitous in all Western

literature. Its interpretation can be suggested by another work with ostensible totalitarian overtones, Terry Gilliam's quasi-dystopian film **Brazil**, in which people who fly liberate themselves from the ills and evils of the ambient world. It is the questing flight of Prometheus for the benefit of the whole humankind; it is the flight of medieval artificers striving to break bonds with the mundane and transcend it into the loftier, freer existence; it is the inspired flight of the wings of the Muse which liberates Art and the artist from the fetters of the quasi-dystopian grimness of On Wings of Song: it is the non-instrumental flight into the "inner space" where the laws of economics or gravity no longer apply.

The grimness of its quasi-dystopian social structure is what makes On Wings of Song a melancholy book--even, in the Elizabethan sense, world-weary, with the Pandora's box of afflictions bottomless and endlessly inventive. And yet it is not a despairing, rigid dystopia, despite the presence of an abusive, totalitarian system where the tyrants at the top do their utmost to control the other nation languishing at the bottom. It is, typically of Disch, a world much like our own, so that "it takes a while before peculiar details make us aware we're in a 21st-century Iowa" (Clemons 66). It is a Van Dykean

world. "the world people think they can control" (83).

separate from the world of God and its metaphysics. Last

of all, it is a world of SF, where people and societies

must fend for themselves, for better or for worse, in the

absence of any, dystopian or utopian, determinacy.

Conclusion

Despite their obvious differences, all three of Thomas Disch's SF novels betray a conspicuous paradigmatic similarity. The resemblance does not manifest itself on the syntagmatic or aesthetic level, as each novel is uniquely distinct from the others. All the same, the paradigmatic correspondence among all three novels is so consistent that it warrants the discussion of a trans-novelistic deep structure in Disch's SF.

In fact, the allusions within Disch's books themselves furnish further evidence to prove that the similarity is a matter of calculated choice, rather than coincidence. 334's opening section, "Problems of Creativeness," makes explicit references to Dante, Goethe and Faust, the three crucial symbols which form the entire interpretive core of Camp Concentration. Furthermore, an even more remarkable link is smuggled in through Lottie Hanson who watches, among dozen of others, a moving picture entitled "Hills of Switzerland" (334 236). Since this is the exact title of the volume of verse brought out by Louis Sacchetti in Camp Concentration (13), the allusion focuses attention to the degree of overlapping between both novels' paradigms. The

distinct thematic link between <u>Camp Concentration</u> and <u>On Wings of Song</u> is provided by the transcendental element underlying their structures. On the other hand, the censure of the Business Civilization in <u>On Wings of Song</u> openly echoes the critique of American cultural and civilizational decline, featured so prominently in the symbolical key to <u>334</u>, "Everyday Life in the Late Roman Empire." These subtle, though unmistakable links and parallels between Disch's works indicate conclusively that Disch describes social developments of kindred worlds, paradigmatically allied with one another. Such deliberate conjunctions between the novels, together with their pronounced chronotopic and paradigmatic affinity, necessitates an attempt to reconstitute their common paradigm.

What are then the synthetic ᴌeatures of the "Disch-topian" paradigm?

Disch's chronotope is always ominously familiar to the reader, both in the immediacy of its spatio-temporal location, as well as his interest in the typical and ordinary, rather than fantastic and unique. Even though it is common knowledge that people who read SF "like to be scared, but they don't like to be <u>really</u> scared" (Panshin 14), Disch's books never fail to pierce the protective shell of complacency induced by the escapist fantasticity

common to the genre. In strict accordance with Disch's opinion that it is "the daytime, suburban side of existence that has become our nightmare"[40], his novels relentlessly mirror the strangely familiar aspects of everyday urban and suburban life. The terror which they induce is no more than a shock of recognition, directly proportional to their chronotopic proximity and familiarity.

Disch's works, despite what is often construed as their pessimistic, quasi-dystopian tonality, are works of SF in the sense that their world is always empirically neutral with respect to its inhabitants. Despite his frequent use of dystopian themes and conventions, Disch's "pessimism" is, in fact, only harsh and unsentimental realism. In his novels, often constructed along the lines of a typically naturalistic social experiment, the depicted terrors are never limited to merely symbolical signification, never meant to be taken as mere dystopian dire warnings. All misfortunes, whether individual, communal, or societal, are determined by the realistic network of complex psychosocial interactions within the confines of a realistic (neutral) world—never rooted in dystopian "metaphysicality." The realistic character of Disch's paradigms owes, in fact, to his rejection of

both the melioristic and apocalyptic tendencies of science fiction. Not only do his stories imply that there will be little, if any, progress in the human condition, but they also brilliantly suggest that science fiction's darker visions of the future—with Big Brothers and sinister technologies—are equally fanciful. (Rupprecht 149)

Disch's SF is always quintessentially social, studying the social dynamics in a multi-faceted form: people, their relations with and within the society, and the political, social, and economic tomorrow that is being shaped today. It is not science, its role and effect on people's lives, but the socio-political reality and the psychology of living on the verge of tomorrow that is at issue here. The books contain few direct references to scientific issues—microbiology in <u>Camp Concentration</u> is the sole prominent exception.

Thematically, the novels display a preoccupation with the price for existence, which is the responsibility for its moral, spiritual and ethical quality. In the world whose immanent neutrality precludes an appeal to "metaphysical" authority, the full responsibility for all values and actions must be borne by its inhabitants. Disch is one of the very few writers who

have attacked the preoccupation not just of SF but of Western man with solutions," demonstrating through his art how "all ultimate solutions to the problem of being human are reducible to the same result, extermination, the ultimate case of murdering to dissect"[41]

Implicit in the unremittingly grim tone of Disch's narratives is the realization that the grimness is always man-made, and that only people themselves can be held accountable for it.

Disch, ever the modern, self-reflexive writer, delights in fiction which self-reflexively draws the reader's attention to the artificial status of the textual paradigm. Such moments of "dis-illusionment" occur in every novel, and their importance far surpasses their limited frequency. Camp Concentration disrupts its narrative flow with its "editorial" insertions, 334 deliberately forefronts the formal aspect of its narrative structure, while On Wings of Song shatters the suspended disbelief through three strategically-placed analeptic intrusions. Evidently at home with Brechtian Verfremdungs-effekt, Disch fosters a state of critical and aesthetic detachment from his work and its effect. Even though his work is always charged with pregnant social moral content,

the impression is usually of a more intellectual involve-
ment than emotional. In fact, Disch narrative strategy
seems to "alienate the reader from too close an emotional
identification with the action and force him to keep
thinking" (Nicholls 281). Although it would be a mistake,
as the author himself is quick to point out, to assume
"some constant homiletic purpose" on his part, when his
aim "was often esthetic or simply playful,"[42] the two,
however, need not be irreconcilable, as evident in the
self-conscious nature of his works.

The "metaphysical" social model presents, on the
whole, only a one-dimensional picture. On the one hand,
the world is imagined as a kind of utopia, where both the
society and its culture (art, technology) are envisioned
in a uniformly positive light. On the other hand, dys-
topian fiction reverses the picture, focusing only on the
bleak and catastrophic side of life. Society and its
principles, progress and technology, are, however, neither
inherently good, nor bad, but contingent entirely on the
way they are put to use. As Disch himself maintains, in
their simplicity utopias (and dystopias) are

> silly--in real life as much as in literature. The
> same dolts who expect Babylon to go sliding into
> the Pacific tomorrow morning are also expecting

their messiah, what's-his-name, to lead them to the Promised Land by tomorrow night. Utopia is the reciprocal of Armageddon, and neither locality can survive long in the cruel world of reality.[43]

As a contrast Disch develops his own Dischtopian SF, which allows for a much more credible reflection of his concerns. Disch, although presenting so grim a picture of the future that it seems almost dystopian at times, points clearly to the fact that no immanent qualities are at work--it is all of men's own (un)doing. In his social SF he magnifies and dissects, rather than soothes today anxieties which, if unchecked, might result in a tomorrow of an extremely depressing kind. Still, his viewpoint is never one-sidedly negative. Leaving his options open, and avoiding the schematic patterns of utopian idealism or dystopian negation, Disch opts for a more complex and realistically plausible presentation of the world we live in. Through his Dischtopian SF he is able to give expression to a more complex and more pertinent reflection of what the present does, and what the future might, have in store for us.

Endnotes

[1] Stephen H. Goldman, "Disch, Thomas M[ichael]," The New Encyclopedia of Science Fiction, ed. James Gunn (New York: Viking, 1988) 133.

[2] Since this study does not attempt a biographical analysis of Disch's oeuvre, any references to such data will be made only insofar as they relate directly to the topic under discussion. For a more extensive biographical treatment of Disch's life and works see Nicholls' Encyclopedia of Science Fiction (173-74), Gunn's The New Encyclopedia of Science Fiction (133-34), as well as Smith's Twentieth Century Science-Fiction Writers (201-03), Bleiler's Science Fiction Writers (351-56) and Cowart and Wymer's Twentieth-Century American Science Fiction Writers, Part I (148-54). Also of interest could be Delany's The American Shore (211-17).

[3] Charles Platt, Dream Makers: SF and Fantasy Writers ar Work (New York: Ungar, 1987) 185. Hereafter cited as Platt.

[4] Disch is the recipient of the O'Henry Prize (1975) and the Locus award (1981). He also received the John W.

Campbell Memorial Award for <u>On Wings of Song</u> in 1980, as well as the Rhysling Award for SF Poetry in 1981.

[5] Walter Clemons, "The Joyously Versatile Thomas Disch," <u>Newsweek</u> 11 July: 66.

[6] Mark R. Hillegas, <u>The Future As Nightmare: H. G. Wells and the Anti-Utopians</u> (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974) 133.

[7] Thomas L. Wymer, "Naturalism, Aestheticism and Beyond: Tradition and Innovation in the Work of Thomas M. Disch," <u>Voices for the Future: Volume Three</u>, ed. Thomas D. Clareson and Thomas L. Wymer (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1984) 187.

[8] Such seems to be the general strategy of postmodern "experimental" prose, probably best epitomized by the <u>Nouveau Roman</u>.

[9] For further discussion of "surface structure" and "deep structure" see Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, <u>Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics</u> (London: Methuen, 1983) 11-16.

[10]   See Marc Angenot, "The Absent Paradigm: An Introduction to the Semiotics of Science Fiction." Science-Fiction Studies 6 (1979): 10.

[11] Properly speaking, "reconstruction" is a misnomer for two reasons. Not only does it imply a previous existence of the complete paradigm (an informational impossibility) in the mind of an author; it also implies that it is completely accessible to the reader who, animating the textual gaps left by the inevitable incompleteness the syntagmatic data, becomes a creative component in the act of reading. Even Ingarden's textual schemata cannot save the day, since their relative stability does not render them invariant to the intrusion of such an interpretively indeterministic factor as the reader. Quite clearly, any mention of "reconstruction" is merely a convenient method of conventional signalling since These far-reaching implications extend, however, well beyond the scope of this analysis. The subject of epistemological relationship between any informational data and its generator (observer, compiler) is well documented in a number of books by Prof. Paul Davies, especially in the sections on poliverses or the dilemma of Wigner's friend. In a more literary vein, all reception theorists, however

divergent in emphasis, by definition uphold the reader as an immanent creator of the work he reads. Similar conclusions are also advanced by modern philosophy, especially in the works of Donald Davidson and Richard Rorty.

[12] In order to avoid a potential confusion of terms in the discussion of the empirical and fictional realities, I use the term "mainstream" to denote what is probably most commonly known as "realistic" literature.

[13] Darko Suvin, Metamorphoses of Science Fiction (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979) 6.

[14] One can speak also of a difference in the kind of estrangement employed, since the science-allied estrangement predominant in SF is only very infrequently present in mainstream fiction. The difference might, nevertheless, appear not as unequivocal if, in the contemporary spirit, one includes in the body of science the less instrumental sciences humaines. It may also be partially invalidated by the recent cognitive osmosis, resulting in the literary practice of engaging science at least conceptually (e.g., Bioy-Casares, Pynchon, Calvino).

[15] Since no individual consciousness can rival that of an entire society (not everyone is a medievalist [The Name of the Rose] or has been in a psychiatric ward [One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest]), it is therefore the sum total of the societal experience acts as a framework for a novel's verification and authentication.

[16] Mikhail Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press) 84.

[17] The comparative ontology of the three major sub-classes of fantastic literature was originally developed by Stanislaw Lem in Fantastyka i Futurologia [Science Fiction and Futurology] (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1970). Unfortunately this landmark of SF theory has not yet been translated into English; as a consequence all subsequent quotations, are rendered in my own translation from the Polish.

On the pages of Fantastyka i Futurologia Lem actually discusses not three, but five sub-types of the literature of the fantastic; his study considers the Fairy Tale (Lem ill-matches bajka ludowa [lit. folk tale] with Weird

Tale), Fantasy, Horror Story, Myth and Science Fiction. Nevertheless, since the ontological properties of Fantasy and Horror Story are not only tangential to the subject proper of the thesis, but also secondary to the other genres in question (they can be derived from them by a few simple transformations), I shall confine my analysis only to the three extrema: the world of the Fairy Tale, Myth and Science Fiction. Such is precisely Lem's own strategy in "On the Structural Analysis of Science Fiction, published in Science-Fiction Studies in 1973, later reprinted in Microworlds: Writings on Science Fiction and Fantasy. In a similar approach, Darko Suvin in Metamorphoses of Science Fiction (1979; orig. essay 1973) concentrates on the distinctions between three major sub-types: folktale (fairy tale), myth and fantasy, and SF and pastoral.

[18] Stanislaw Lem, Microworlds, ed. Franz Rottensteiner (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1984) 32.

[19] For the exposition of these differing opinions see Darko Suvin, "Literary Genre of Utopia: Some Historical Semantics, Some Genology, a Proposal, and a Plea" in Metamorphoses of Science Fiction (pro), and Alexandra

Aldridge, "The Emergence of the Dystopian Novel" in <u>The Scientific World View in Dystopia</u> (against). Naturally, the argument developed in this study argues that the genres of utopia and dystopia <u>are</u> categorically distinct from Science Fiction.

[20] All examples of dystopian taxonomy (see Arthur C. Lewis, "The Anti-Utopian Novel: Preliminary Notes and Checklist," <u>Extrapolation</u> 2 [1961]: 27)--reverse utopia, negative utopia, inverted utopia, regressive utopia, cacotopia, dystopia, non-utopia, anti-utopia, satiric utopia, nasty utopia--through its essential inversion (negation) of the parameters of the utopian typology, point out to its inherent "badness."

[21] Initiated by H.G. Wells in <u>A Modern Utopia</u> (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967): "Utopia must be not static but kinetic, must shape not as a permanent state but as a hopeful stage, leading to a long ascent of stages" (5).

[22] Yevgeny Zamyatin, "Herbert Wells," <u>A Soviet Heretic: Essays by Yevgeny Zamyatin</u>, trans., ed. Mirra Ginsburg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970) 286.

[23] This rule applies mostly (though not only) to the narrative proper or to the fictional framework, but not to the transition between them which, often enough, is accomplished through non-verisimilar means (e.g., dream vision). Some works, e.g., Edward Bulwer-Lytton's The Coming Race, employ elements of the fantastic even within the narrative itself (the physico-magico-occultist force called 'Vril'); these initial non-empirical parameters are, nevertheless, subsequently developed with a rational logic and sustained verisimility which differentiates it from ad hoc supernaturalities of myth and fairy tale.

[24] Alexandra Aldridge, The Scientific World View in Dystopia (Ann Arbour, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1984) 15-17.

[25] That this procedure is not, by any means, new or limited, we can glean from an amusing but rather informative excerpt of C.M. Kornbluth's critical essay "The Failure of the Science Fiction Novel as Social Criticism," The Science Fiction Novel; Imagination and Social Criticism, ed. Basil Davenport (Chicago: Advent, 1959)

> Some of the amateur scholars of science fiction are veritable Hitlers for aggrandizing their

field. If they perceive in, say, sixteenth cen-
tury satire some vaguely speculative element they
see in it a trembling and persecuted minority,
demand _Anschluss_, and proceed to annex the satire
to science fiction. This kind of empire building
has resulted in an impressive list of titles
allegedly science-fictional going back to classic
times or for all I know earlier. (51)

In Aldridge's own words

[w]hen generic distinctions _are_ made, critics
sometimes claim too much for their field of spec-
ialization (this is particularly true of science
fiction critics), thereby obscuring questions that
need to be explored. (16)

[26] Samuel R. Delany, "Critical Methods," _Many Futures_
Many Worlds, ed. Thomas D. Clareson (Kent, Ohio: Kent
State University Press, 1977) 290.

[27] "Thomas M. Disch," _Science Fiction Writers:_
Critical Studies of the Major Authors From the Early
Nineteenth Century to the Present Day, ed. E. F. Bleiler
(New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1982) 356, 351.

[28] "Thomas M. Disch," Twentieth-Century American Science-Fiction Writers, ed. David Cowart and Thomas L. Wymer (Detroit: Book Tower, 1981) 149.

[29] The Science Fiction Source Book (New York: Van Rostrand Reinhold, 1984) 137.

[30] "Disching It Out: An Interview with Thomas Disch," Science-Fiction Studies 12 (1985): 241.

[31] "Disch, Thomas M(ichael)," The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction, ed. Peter Nicholls (London: Granada, 1979) 174.

[32] SF in Dimension (Chicago: Advent, 1976) 301.

[33] "Disch, Thomas M(ichael)," Twentieth-Century Science-Fiction Writers, ed. Curtis C. Smith (Chicago: St. James Press, 1986) 202-3.

[34] Thomas M. Disch, introduction, Bad Moon Rising, ed. Thomas M. Disch (New York: Harper & Row, 1973) 9.

[35] Chad Walsh, From Utopia to Nightmare (Westport: Harper & Row, 1972) 112.

[36] George Woodcock traces the literary sources of some of the basic elements of a dystopian (in his case: Zamyatin's) society in his "Utopias in Negative," Sewanee Review 64 (1956): 89.

[37] Cf. Chad Walsh, From Utopia to Nightmare (Westport: Harper & Row, 1972) 139-147.

[38] Thomas Disch, Camp Concentration (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1988) 11. All subsequent citations within this chapter refer to Camp Concentration unless otherwise specified.

[39] See Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics (London: Methuen, 1983) 71-72.

[40] Peter Nicholls, "Camp Concentration," Survey of Science Fiction Literature, ed. Frank Magill (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Salem Press, 1979) 278.

[41] Wymer's article also includes an extensive discussion of an earlier Disch novel, The ꟼuppies of Terra, as well as passing references to The Genocides and Echo Round His Bones.

[42] Since the novel itself does not provide any clues as to the specific date of its action, the critical opinion has variously placed it from "1975, only eight years removed from the time the book was written" (Nicholls 277) to "some decades on from the 1960s" (David Pringle, Science Fiction 100 Best Novels [New York: Carroll & Graf, 1985] 131).

[43] The seriousness and deliberateness of Disch's intent can be inferred from the fact that the 1972 Avon edition of Camp Concentration is copyrighted in the name of the American Civil Liberties Union, an apparent transfer of Disch's copyright since the 1971 edition.

[44] This opening line from Dante's "Inferno" has been translated as "When I had journeyed half of our life's way" (Dante Aligheri, The Divine Comedy of Dante Aligheri, A Verse Translation, trans. Allen Mandelbaum [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980-82]).

[45] See last section of Chapter 1.

[46] On page 160 Disch makes a specific connection between them: "Surely there was some element of the Faustian in her [Dr. Busk] submission. Was it part of her plan even then to escape Camp Archimedes with her Promethean gifts?"

[47] It is widely assumed today that Marlowe's play is a product of collaborative effort which would thus account for the sometimes incongruous disparity of the play's tone. Although the version bequeathed to us does not end optimistically, Faust is offered the last moment's grace with the hope of eventual salvation.

[48] The segments are autonomous enough for five of them to have been originally published as separate short stories or novellas. Moreover, even after having been compiled as 334, some of them continue to be published on their own, e.g., "Everyday Life in the Later Roman Empire" in Bad Moon Rising, or "Angouleme" and "Bodies" in Fundamental Disch.

[49] In _The American Shore: Meditations on a Tale of Science Fiction by Thomas M. Disch_ (Elizabethtown, N. Y.: Dragon, 1978), Samuel Delany, critically aware of _334_'s narrative richness, makes a case, for example, for the compositional ordering principle, saying that,

> any reader whose interests and energies extend to retrieving a set of contemporary enthusiasms, excitements, and insights, logical structures and dialectical progressions, that reader would do well. . . to undertake a second reading that moves through the stories in their order of composition. (229)

[50] Cf. Wolfgang Iser, _The Act of Reading; A Theory of Aesthetic Response_ (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978) 124.

[51] Cf. Mark Hillegas' thematic analysis of _A Modern Utopia_ in _The Future As Nightmare: H. G.   Wells and the Anti-Utopians_ 63-76.

[52] The various parts of the book were written over an extended period of time; for example, the first part of the cycle, "The Death of Socrates," antedates the book by

at least five years (it is an extensively revised version
of a 1967 short story "Problems of Creativeness"). For
more details on the genesis of <u>334</u>'s respective sections
see Samuel Delany's "A Privileged Chronicity" in <u>The
American Shore</u> 223-29.

[53] Thomas Disch, <u>334</u> (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1987)
60. All subsequent citations within this chapter refer to
<u>334</u> unless otherwise specified.

[54] Disch's familiarity with history in general dates
back to his studies for a (not completed) degree in his-
tory at New York University.

[55] Joseph Frank, "The World of Raskolnikov,"
<u>Encounter</u> 26.6 (1966): 32.

[56] Otherwise known as <u>roman à clef</u> or <u>livre à clef</u>,
it presents (more or less overtly) actual persons under
fictitious names. In the words of David Pringle from
<u>Science Fiction The Best 100 Novels</u> (New York: Carrol &
Graf, 1985)

> rooted. . . in the author's own biography, it [<u>On
> Wings of Song</u>] deals with the vicissitudes of the

artist and the homosexual in relation both to the downhome attitudes of small-town USA and the exhilarating but rather squalid liberties of New York. (193)

[37] Bosola, Daniel's namesake from Book III, "has served in the galleys. . . and has become an isolated man." John Russel Brown, introduction, _The Duchess of Malfi_ (London: Methuen, 1964) 51.

[38] Thomas Disch, _On Wings of Song_ (New York: Bantam, 1980) 229. All subsequent citations within this chapter refer to _On Wings of Song_ unless otherwise specified.

[39] F. L. Lucas, introduction, _The Duchess of Malfi_ (London: Chatto & Windus, 1958) 33.

[40] Thomas Disch, introduction, _The Ruins of Earth: An Anthology of Stories of the Immediate Future_ (New York: Putnam, 1971) 9.

[41] Thomas Wymer, "Perception and Value," _Many Futures Many Worlds_, ed. Thomas Clareson (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1970) 11.

[62] Thomas Disch, letter to the author, 1 January 1990.

[63] Thomas Disch, introduction, <u>The New Improved Sun: An Anthology of Utopian SF</u> (New York: Harper & Row, 1975) 2.

Thomas Michael Disch

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