

Sartre, Marcuse, and the Utopian Project Today

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**Robert T. Tally Jr.,**  
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**Abstract:** In his article "Sartre, Marcuse, and the Utopian Project Today," Robert T. Tally Jr. discusses the philosophical legacy of the May 1968 revolution in Paris with respect to the power of the imagination and the possibilities for utopian thought in our own time. Although the rhetoric of the 1968 militants may seem dated, the underlying theoretical and political concepts are surprisingly timely in the twenty-first century. Among these, existential angst or anxiety has perhaps a heightened salience in the era of globalization and of global economic crisis, and the utopian desire for a life without anxiety has become more pressing. Tally revisits the work of Jean-Paul Sartre and Herbert Marcuse, philosophers who inspired a generation of militants in the 1960s, and examines their critical theory in the context of today's concerns. These thinkers asserted the power of the imagination to create alternatives to the seemingly immutable realities of life under advanced industrial capitalism, a life characterized by anxiety. Drawing on Fredric Jameson's notion of cognitive mapping, Tally argues that the utopian impulse behind Sartre's existentialism and Marcuse's critique of one-dimensional society is still a powerful force for exploring our own postmodern condition.

**Robert T. TALLY Jr.**

### **Sartre, Marcuse, and the Utopian Project Today**

The recent celebrations and remembrances occasioned by the fortieth anniversary of the Paris Revolution in May 1968 raised, or perhaps exhumed, ideas that are surprisingly timely for our own postmodern condition in a moment of global cultural and economic crisis. One of the great slogans of May '68, equally forceful when scrawled on the walls or enunciated in philosophical discourse, was *l'imagination au pouvoir* ("power to the imagination"). The revolution, such that it was, seemed to catapult the imaginary into the real, if only for a moment. That which had previously been unthinkable suddenly was not only possible, but actual. This seemed a victory for the imagination in and of itself. This utopian impulse proposed that the imagination might be given free rein to create hitherto unthought social formations, as well as personal relations, creative forms, and so on. May '68 was also a moment when theory and practice seemed to come together in a harmonious intersection, when the promise of existentialism and Marxism found common cause in the liberatory forces of anti-repression in all of its manifestations. In essence, the empowered imagination made possible a glimpse of real freedom (see Katsiaficas).

Today, in the era of globalization and with the extension of the capitalist mode of production and consumption into the remote corners of the globe, the utopian moment of Paris 1968 (or Prague 1968, for that matter) seems quaint. The revolutionary power of the imagination seems more suitable for technical, industrial, and entertainment-based applications than for worldwide revolutions. When Herbert Marcuse could express alarm at the efficiency with which rationalized society could absorb, transform, and redirect forms of revolt into products for consumption, he had barely scratched the surface of the manifestations of such rationality in the era of global capitalism. However, the current worldwide financial crisis, much like the somewhat more limited one in 1857 that drove Karl Marx to work feverishly on his *Grundrisse*, discloses points of rupture in what had seemed a closed system. The very elements of late capitalism that had seemed to ensure its security — instruments of risk management, financial derivatives, banks "too big to fail," widespread availability of credit, deregulation of industries, global markets and workforces — are precisely the causes of the current crisis. Marx had noted the irony of the liberal economists' positions in 1857, when the demand for a *laissez-faire* government became a call for more government regulation in the face of the disruptions caused by the world market (see 8-9). Then, as now, a hypocritical business class asserted its paradoxical call to arms in which thoroughgoing, systemic change must be resisted at all costs ... except when it can benefit the businesses that foundered on the shoals of the existing system. Now, forty years after "the events of May" and amid another crisis, perhaps the time has come to revisit the old ideas, ideas born of the last cataclysm of the Great Depression, World War II, and the spread of Cold War-era advanced, industrial capitalism. Not as an act of nostalgia, but as a sustained effort to generate new ideas.

The ethos of May '68 was imbued with the spirits of Sartre and Marcuse, philosophers who were committed not only to the leftist cause but to an approach to living that inspired the Paris militants. As dated as it seems now, what Sartre and Marcuse offered was less a political program, with strategies and tactics for overthrowing an old order, than a philosophy of life. The question was not how best to organize a government or an economic system *per se*, but how to live a good life, a "life without anxiety," as Marcuse would put it (*Eros and Civilization* 150). The word *Angst* here retains its somewhat technical meaning in Heidegger's or Sartre's philosophical usage, but it also refers to the pervasive mood afflicting those who are but dimly aware of the totality of forces affecting them. In Sartre's existentialism, such anxiety remains an ontological condition, yet the political project to enhance freedom by reducing or eliminating elements of coercion may at least alleviate the most persistent, material conditions of anxiety (poverty, for example). However, Marcuse emphasizes that the apparent freedom of individuals in advanced industrial societies filled them with greater anxiety. As Marcuse wrote of the May '68 rebels in *An Essay on Liberation*, "The young militants know or sense that what is at stake is simply their life, the life of human beings that had become the playthings of politicians and managers and generals. The rebels want to take it out of these hands and make it worth living" (x).

For better or worse, the revolution of May '68 was primarily an existentialist movement to reclaim, or to imagine, a better life.

"Power to the imagination," then, reflects a political agenda, a utopian strategy to achieve a life without anxiety. This is not to say that the existential angst can be entirely dissipated, but that the material conditions of existence are brought in line with a life worth living. The imagination, which Marcuse directly associates with the aesthetic dimension, might offer solace by establishing possible alternatives to the present situation. Perhaps it seems overly optimistic or even naïve, but the idea of imagination as a revolutionary force retains value in a world in which real alternatives to the status quo are taken to be, not just impossible, but unimaginable. In an oft-cited (but not always correctly attributed) phrase, Fredric Jameson noted that "It seems to be easier for us today to imagine the thoroughgoing deterioration of the earth and of nature than the breakdown of late capitalism" (*Seeds of Time* xii). Less well known is Jameson's indispensable follow-up to this remark: "perhaps this is due to some weakness in our imaginations" (*Seeds of Time* xii). In this crucial observation lies the fate of the utopian impulse in the era of globalization, for it must be clear by now that the technological and productive capabilities are already far beyond what the most utopian thinkers of past generations envisioned. In other words, it is not for lack of material or manpower that the vision of some radically alternative social formation seems so remote, even unimaginable; rather, it is the very paucity of imagination that appears to preclude utopian activities. Hence, the imagination itself needs to be empowered, and the utopian impulse of Sartre and Marcuse, among others, offers an example — if not a prescription — of how the imagination may function as a critical tool for praxis in the world today. This is not to return to the conditions of May '68, which are in any event long gone and in some respects thoroughly undesirable. It is to take up the ideas that inspired that generation and see whether they still have value in a different, more globalized situation today. This return does not overlook the insights of the last forty years, such as poststructuralist theory or postindustrial economics, but rather recalls for us concepts that may be mobilized in connection both to the critique of the current situation and to the project of future alternatives. In this study, I focus on the notions of anxiety, imagination, and utopia itself.

The German word *Angst*, translated variously as and used interchangeably with anxiety, dread, or anguish (and sometimes left untranslated, as the term has moved into English), designates a key concept in existential phenomenology, and requires some elaboration in the context of the utopian project of May '68, as well as that of today's world historical situation. In Sartre's elaboration of the concept, which (I argue) ties into the conception of the imagination as a means to achieve a utopian "life without angst," anxiety is the necessary predicate of the basic, existential condition in which "existence precedes essence," as the phrase was popularized by Sartre. Drawing from Heidegger's statement in *Being and Time* that "The 'essence' of Dasein lies in its existence" (67), Sartre maintains that the inescapable characteristic of being-in-the-world is that it exists. In existence, one's being is situated in a world and cannot otherwise be; one cannot seek external, transcendent, or eternal grounds for justifying one's own existence, for finding some essence or meaning apart from the world. It follows that one must have the freedom to create one's own meaningful existence, establishing a sense of place and purpose in the world, via a project in which the individual subject orchestrates the objective world in some meaningful way. Referring to this as the "first principle of existentialism," Sartre explains: "What do we mean here by 'existence precedes essence'? We mean that man first exists: he materializes in the world, encounters himself, and only afterwards defines himself. If man as existentialists conceive of him cannot be defined, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself" (*Existentialism* 22). Such freedom is deduced from a general uneasiness, a mood that Sartre dramatizes as "nausea" in the novel by that name, and which is the bodily manifestation of anguish, fear, or anxiety. In Sartre's assessment, the anxiety one feels derives from the fact that "man is condemned to be free: condemned, because he did not create himself, yet nonetheless free, because once cast into the world, he is responsible for everything he does" (*Existentialism* 29). Anxiety comes from not knowing whether one's actions are correct (indeed, from knowing that no action is essentially right or wrong), thereby acknowledging — albeit negatively — that one must have the freedom to choose the right or wrong path. Hence, the very feeling of anxiety is a visceral acknowledgement of our inescapable freedom. At this point, perhaps, the discussion remains too abstract, since clearly the utopian impulse is not opposed to freedom, yet the hope for a life

without anxiety remains a key feature of any project to overcome the repressive conditions imposed upon us by advanced industrial society and the "reality principle" (in Marcuse's terms). How can the collective project of freedom bring about a life without anxiety?

A partial answer may be found in a correlate to the theory laid out above. The notion of anxiety, born alongside the fundamental (if not always desirable) freedom to act, inevitably collides with a pervasive sense of alienation. That is, one experiences a sensation of the uncanny, a generalized discomfort that may not always be easily described—the sort of nameless dread that Kierkegaard discusses in *Fear and Trembling*, and one which continues to be modeled by filmmakers working in the genre of horror. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger had already asserted that anxiety is always tied to the uncanny, a term that in German retains its sense of the unfamiliar *unheimlich*: "In anxiety one feels 'uncanny' [*unheimlich*]. Here the peculiar indefiniteness of that which Dasein finds itself alongside in anxiety, comes proximally to expression: the 'nothing and nowhere.' But here 'uncanniness' also means 'not-being-at-home' [*das Nicht-zuhause-sein*]" (233; bracketed terms in original). The world in which we are always situated is not of our own making, but our very essence (that is, existence itself) involves shaping the world. The human condition is fundamentally one of "not being at home." Presumably, such an anxious feeling is exacerbated in the modern world (at least, we no longer have the pervasive conception of a *kosmos* that typifies Ancient Greek thought, for example); with no discernible and transcendently allotted place in the world, we are estranged from the world and from ourselves. In *The Theory of the Novel*, for example, György Lukács draws on a Hegelian tradition and contrasts the integrated or closed (*geschlossene*) civilizations of the ancient world with the disintegrated or open civilization that produced the modern novel. Lukács argues that "transcendental homelessness" is the fundamental characteristic of life in the modern world. That is, without some vision of a unity of man and world, one can no longer feel "at home" in the world. But this then invites a discussion of the ways in which the angst-ridden man engages with the defamiliarized or uncanny world in which he finds himself.

From the existentialist slogan "existence precedes essence," we understand that we must create our own meaning via our own projects. In the anxiety with which one feels disoriented, not at home, or lost, one has the freedom to project a kind of schematic representation of the world and one's place in it that becomes a way of making sense of things. Indeed, one has no choice, since this freedom to project or to create a project is very much part of the fallen state of mankind. The project then becomes a kind of figurative cartography (as I discuss below), in which one engages with the condition of disorientation by making sense of, or giving form to, the world. By projecting a sort of imaginary map—a metaphor for constellating the various forces that directly and indirectly affect one's life—one may overcome one's anxious homelessness, and if one does not exactly feel "at home," then at least one develops strategies for navigating the uncanny spaces. One's project then defines, in a rather literal way, one's existence. Sartre makes this clear, again in *Existentialism is a Humanism*, by noting that the project one engages in necessarily interrelates to others' projects, and that the human activity of projecting is the quintessential interaction of the subject and the world. "This should not be taken to mean that a certain project defines man forever, but that it can be reinvented again and again" (43). From the existentialist concepts of the early Sartre, then, we can see the outlines of utopian project. "The fundamental aim of existentialism is to reveal the link between the absolute character of the free commitment, by which every man realizes himself by realizing a type of humanity—a commitment that is always understandable, by anyone in any era—and the relativity of the cultural ensemble that may result from such a choice" (Sartre, *Existentialism* 43). In affirming the freedom to act and the necessity of projects that will alleviate the angst-ridden life, one may attempt to imagine an alternative to the seemingly entrenched and intractable realities of late capitalist society. In other words, the means for revolutionary action lie in the power of the imagination.

Even before completing *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre had already considered the imagination to be the faculty that defined freedom and nothingness, the crucial elements of his philosophy of existentialism. In his 1940 book, *The Imaginary*, Sartre argues that the imagination is not merely an adjunct to (or worse, a perversion of) perception, but that it actually undergirds the consciousness by establishing the world itself. Only in the imagination can one apprehend the world, since the imagination allows one to posit that which is not real, negating the world and, in introducing the nothingness, allowing consciousness to differentiate itself—a prerequisite for freedom. As Hazel Barnes summarizes

Sartre's argument: "When we imagine, we posit a world in which an object is not present in order that we may imagine a world in which our imagined object is present. I do not imagine a tree so long as I am actually looking at one. To accomplish this imagining act, we must first be able to posit the world as a synthetic totality. This is possible only for a consciousness capable of effecting annihilating withdrawal from the world. Then we posit the imagined object as existing somehow apart from the world, thus denying it as being part of the existing world" (xvi). In other words, the imaginative act is itself a way of constituting reality, because it establishes a "real" world to be consciously understood. The early Sartre thus viewed the faculty of the imagination, not as a supplemental or unnecessary mental process compared to reason or perception, but the crucial faculty for understanding the world. In Sartre's own concluding words, "Thus imagination, far from appearing as an accidental characteristic of consciousness, is disclosed as an essential and transcendental condition of consciousness" (*The Imaginary* 188).

The power of the imagination that Marcuse exalts in his aesthetics thus has roots in earlier existential phenomenology. The utopian project that Marcuse will find in the aesthetic dimension is already present, albeit in a different form and with different effects, in Sartre's phenomenology. By establishing the imagination as the means for understanding the world, Sartre invites us to link the existentialist's project with the imaginary projection of an alternate reality. Although the leap from ontology to politics is here over-hastily sketched, I believe that the philosophical grounds for the utopian impulse lie in this view of the imagination. In the course of thinking and acting, one must already mobilize the forces of utopia. Related to this theory of imagination is that power of the negative which Marcuse embraces. The function of critical theory is not only to apprehend and assess the conditions of the actually existing social formation, but to project alternatives. In militating in favor of the power of the negative, Marcuse wanted to combat both the scientific positivism of mid-twentieth-century social theory and the triumphalist mainstream culture typified by advertising and mass culture in the 1950s. Marcuse thus needed to reestablish a utopian discourse, not as an escapist fantasy, but as a diagnostic and critical practice in a society that discouraged even the idea of radical alternatives to the status quo. Utopia for Marcuse is most visibly a rejection or negation of the Actual in favor of the Possible. In its critical function, it offers the possibility of liberation in a civilization that claims liberty has already been achieved. Marcuse was well aware of the negative connotations of the term "utopia," even (if not especially) among the Left. But, as Jameson notes, the term takes on a new urgency in Marcuse's day that would not have been tenable in Marx's era: "For in the older society (as in Marx's classic analysis) Utopian thought represented a diversion of revolutionary energy into idle wish-fulfillments and imaginary satisfactions, in our own time the very nature of the Utopian concept has undergone a dialectical reversal. Now it is practical thinking which everywhere represents a capitulation to the system itself, and stands as a testimony to the power of that system to transform even its adversaries into its own mirror image. The Utopian idea, on the contrary, keeps alive the possibility of a world qualitatively distinct from this one and takes the form of a stubborn negation of all that is" (*Marxism and Form* 110). Hence, the negative power of the imagination serves to undermine the attitude, if not always the substance, of a world that says repeatedly "Everything is fine" or "Nothing to see here." Marcuse's critique of one-dimensional man and of the technological, rationalized society of advanced industrial capitalism finds its counterpoint in the utopian forces of the aesthetic. In *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse enlists philosophy in this battle, noting that the function of a properly "therapeutic" philosophy would be political, which is itself a basic tenet of critical theory. In his critique of positivism and "one-dimensional thought," Marcuse asserts that philosophy needs to serve as a means of clarification of the "ambiguous, vague, and obscure universe" that is the realm of "the struggle for existence": "Philosophy approaches this goal to the degree to which it frees thought from enslavement by the established universe of discourse and behavior, elucidates the negativity of the Establishment (its positive aspects are abundantly publicized anyway) and projects its alternatives" (*One-Dimensional Man* 199). The dated and somewhat embarrassing notion of "the Establishment" notwithstanding, Marcuse's call for an imaginative philosophy seems most apt in our era of a global system in which other formations are difficult to conceive. Indeed, with the advent of new forms of economic and political organization, it is frequently impossible to gain a clear picture of the status quo itself, never mind its putative alternatives. Again, the imagination itself must be empowered in such a system. It is not merely that the imagination can present an alternative reality that serves as a critique of the actually existing order;



moreover, the imagination produces an image that is even better able to grasp reality by conceiving it in its totality. In other words, by virtue of its emancipation from the limits of the reality principle (as Marcuse reads Freud), the imagination can claim a more effective truth value than other, more "realistic" means of understanding the world. As Marcuse puts it, "The truth value of the imagination relates not only to the past but also to the future: the forms of freedom and happiness which it invokes claim to deliver the historical *reality*. In its refusal to accept as final the limitations imposed on freedom and happiness by the reality principle, in its refusal to forget what *can be*, lies the critical function of phantasy ... Art allied itself with the revolution. Uncompromising adherence to the strict truth value of imagination comprehends reality more fully. That the propositions of the artistic imagination are untrue in terms of the actual organization of the facts belongs to the essence of their truth" (*Eros and Civilization* 148-49; emphasis in the original).

Notice that Marcuse's version offers a revision—or better, a dialectical reversal—of the traditional priority of truth and fiction. Whereas the non-imaginative representation of reality (scientific realism) may produce an accurate portrait of a very limited field, the imagination makes possible a more comprehensive, and therefore more "realistic" representation (i.e., from the perspective of one wishing to understand the "big picture," perhaps). An imaginative map may prove more reliable than one that limits itself to mere factual detail, as I discuss below. From this rejection of the factual detail in favor of the more comprehensive overview, the imagination exerts its critical or negative force, inasmuch as it can analyze the drawbacks or limits of the present situation in the process of projecting some alternative. Citing Alfred North Whitehead's observation that "the vital truth" of aesthetic achievement lies in its "refusal" to produce, or reproduce, a factually "true" event or statement, Marcuse elaborates the revolutionary function of imaginative art: "The Great Refusal is the protest against unnecessary repression, the struggle for the ultimate form of freedom — 'to live without anxiety.' But this idea could be formulated without punishment only in the language of art. In the more realistic realm of political theory and even philosophy, it was almost universally defamed as utopia" (*Eros and Civilization* 149-50). Marcuse quotes the phrase that Adorno had used in describing the transformative, utopian power of music ("ohne Angst leben"). Marcuse's circumspection regarding the term "utopia" is perhaps well founded, but even in mentioning that these ideas could be registered in "the more realistic realm of political theory or even philosophy," Marcuse indicates that he views the imagination's critical power to negate the actual and project potential alternatives as a plausible force.

In the revolts of 1968 — not just in Paris, but in Civil Rights marches, anti-war protests, and battles against colonial rule and neo-imperialism — Marcuse saw the theoretical critique of industrial civilization made manifest on the streets, and he noted that the value of such movements lay not in their successful creation of an alternative society (they were generally not successful, in any event), but in the ways in which they exposed the permeable boundaries of that civilization: "None of these forces *is* the alternative. However, they outline, in very different dimensions, the limits of the established societies, of their power of containment. When these limits are reached, the Establishment may initiate a new order of totalitarian suppression. But beyond these limits, there is also the space, both physical and mental, for building a realm of freedom which is not that of the present: liberation ... which necessitates a historical break between the past and the present" (*Essay on Liberation* viii; emphasis in the original). In this (not entirely metaphorical) use of spatial metaphor, Marcuse underscores the critical project of utopian theory and practice: to map the current condition in ways that may be useful for future action. Jameson is perhaps the leading theorist of utopia today, and it is not surprising that he is also the legatee of Sartre's and Marcuse's critical theory. Jameson has linked explicitly his own critical project to those of his precursors, and he has been a tireless proponent of utopian discourse throughout his career, from his earliest work (e.g., *Sartre: The Origins of a Style, Marxism and Form, The Political Unconscious*), although his studies of postmodernism and globalization (*Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, The Seeds of Time, A Singular Modernity*), to his recent books on utopia itself (*Archaeologies of the Future*) and dialectical thought (*Valences of the Dialectic*). Among Jameson's most influential concepts is "cognitive mapping," itself a utopian practice that is also an imaginative process by which one makes sense of one's condition in an attempt to live a life without angst. I have suggested elsewhere that Jameson's entire critical project might be labeled "cognitive mapping" ("Jameson's Project" 406), but here it worth noting that the underlying aspects of cognitive mapping may be found in the Sartrean-Marcusean critical theory of the imagination.

If angst necessarily brings with it the uncanny (or *unheimlich*) experience of homelessness or a sense of being lost, and if the imagination serves as the faculty for projecting a world in which self and others have cognizable place, then the utopian project may be likened to a form of cognitive mapping. Using Jameson's updated version of existential and utopian thought in the postmodern world, I want to suggest that the revolutionary force of the philosophy that animated the effervescent revolts of May '68 still maintains its fundamental critical power in the face of global crises confronting social theory today. In other words, Jameson's concept of cognitive mapping presents another figure for imagining a life without anxiety. Jameson's concept of cognitive mapping is famously a blend of Kevin Lynch's analysis of urban space in *The Image of the City* and Louis Althusser's theory of ideology as "the representation of the subject's *Imaginary* relationship to his or her *Real* conditions of existence" (qtd. in Jameson, *Postmodernism* 51; emphasis in the original). For Lynch, the anxiety one feels in being unable to navigate one's urban terrain easily becomes an apt figure for the existential angst. Contrasting Boston (with its Charles River and distinctive skyscrapers) and Jersey City (which lacks monuments that may serve as clear points of reference), Lynch argues that the inhabitants of cities without clear landmarks experience a pervasive sense of alienation, as they cannot form a clear, usable, mental picture of the landscape. The city-dweller must try to map the city in order to alleviate this anxiety and successfully move about the urban space. As Jameson summarizes it, "Disalienation in the traditional city, then, involves the practical reconquest of a sense of place and the construction or reconstruction of an articulated ensemble which can be retained in memory and which the individual subject can map and remap along the moments of mobile, alternative trajectories" (*Postmodernism* 51). In Jameson's view, this cognitive mapping coincides with Althusser's theory of ideology, in which one may form a "situational representation" of the individual subject in relation to "that vaster and properly unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of society's structures as a whole" (51). This is a useful metaphor for Sartre's and Marcuse's utopian project of disalienation or of creating a "life without anxiety," and it is only partially metaphorical. Yes, the cognitive mapping activity is not literally cartographic, since Jameson uses the term to indicate a form of class consciousness that can encompass the spatial disorientation that accompanies the postmodern condition in the age of globalization (see *Postmodernism* 418). Yet, as noted with the discussion of angst as a form of transcendental homelessness above, this disorientation — the word itself discloses a cartographic unconscious — is a sort of being lost in space. The conceptual tools used to overcome such angst and allow one to live a life without angst surely include the imagination, one that can form "situational representation" of precisely imaginary things (as with mapped spaces). Although Lynch's ideas of "imaging" and "wayfinding" deal more directly with the practical navigation of urban spaces by their inhabitants, Jameson's admixture of Althusser (among others) enables a project of cognitive mapping in a broader sense.

One of the drawbacks of Lynch's model is that it is really "precartographic," describing an itinerary rather than a map. In a brief digression on the history of cartography, Jameson notes that itineraries are merely "diagrams organized around the still subject-centered or existential journey of the traveler, along which various significant key features are marked" (51-52). In contrast, maps would employ artistic and technical features — for instance, using tools such as the compass and the sextant—to introduce a relationship with a non-subjective totality: "cognitive mapping in the broader sense comes to require the coordination of existential data (the empirical position of the subject) with unived, abstract conceptions of the geographic totality" (52). With the technological developments of the globe and the Mercator projection, cartography must engage directly the question of representation itself, since the art and science of mapmaking come to be recognized as figural or utopian, insofar as cartography no longer attempts to simply replicate an actual place (in a scaled-down form, which is already an aesthetic or imaginative consideration). That is, mapmaking abandons its "naively mimetic" aspirations in favor of more complicated meditations on representational form itself. "At this point it becomes clear that there can be no true maps (at the same point it also becomes clear that there can be scientific progress, or better still, a dialectical advance, in the various historical moments of mapmaking)" (52). By recognizing that there can be no "true" maps, no one-to-one correlation between the projected image and the things-in-themselves, cartography establishes itself as a utopian activity in its own right.

In a manner similar to a writer's attempt to create imaginary worlds, however realistic or fantastic those worlds — I have referred to this as "literary cartography" (see my *Melville, Mapping and Globali-*



zation) — the mapmaking subject must project a world in order to make sense of his or her place in relation to others and to the totality, to use a Sartrean term once more. The Mercator projection offers an interesting analogy. Mercator's mathematical projection was first used to produce his influential world map in 1569. Famously or infamously, this projection distorts the geographic spaces it purported to represent; objects appear to be larger the further they were from the equator, thus grotesquely aggrandizing the landmasses near the North Pole (for example, making Greenland appear to be larger than South America, which is actually six times its size). But Mercator's goal was not to create an entirely accurate map, but rather a more useful one. The projection was developed in order to solve the technical, practical problem of transferring curved space to a flat chart, an essential matter for those sailing long distances across the sea. Using charts drawn with the Mercator projection, sailors could set a course using straight lines, thus establishing truer courses. Obviously those navigators would realize that the map was not "true," in the sense of a mimetically accurate depiction of the places figured on its surface. The imaginary map, however, provided a more practical view of the world.

The phenomenological aspect of cognitive mapping unfolds into a utopian project as well. For the maps cannot be "true" in any naively mimetic sense, but must be imaginary representations of an abstract world-space that, in turn, allow one to navigate the world in which one is situated. For Jameson, the urgency of the utopian project is visible in the politically crippling sense of not knowing what is really going on. He notes that the lived experience of the world in the era of globalization is disconnected from the "truth" of that experience, by virtue of the distance and invisibility of forces that make one's lived experience possible. Jameson describes this existential disorientation in the admittedly simpler stage of monopoly capital or imperialism, which is to say also, for Jameson, the era of modernism: "At this point the phenomenological experience of the individual subject — traditionally, the supreme raw material of the work of art—becomes limited to a tiny corner of the social world, a fixed-camera view of a certain section of London or the countryside or whatever. But the truth of that experience no longer coincides with the place in which it takes place. The truth of that limited daily experience of London lies, rather, in India or Jamaica or Hong Kong; it is bound up with the entire colonial system of the British Empire that determines the very quality of the individual's subjective life. Yet those structural coordinates are no longer accessible to immediate lived experience and are often not even conceptualizable for most people" (*Postmodernism* 411).

As politically and existentially crippling as such a vast, unrepresentable world system might be to the individual subject in the early twentieth century, the conditions are far more complicated today. Our global economic crisis in the early twenty-first century has been caused by a thoroughly interconnected system of financial instruments that most people do not know anything about, and even those who do have little idea how systemic the risks are. A Londoner in Virginia Woolf's day may not have given much thought to the Indian tea and Jamaican sugar production that was required for that quintessentially English ritual of tea-time, but she surely would have known that they existed. Today, a few keystrokes in New York or Dublin or Hong Kong (on behalf of corporate entities located, or at least registered, in the Cayman Islands) can affect the value of an entire national currency, and few if any of us know which banks, hedge funds, corporations, nations, or individuals are involved and how. With late capitalism and globalization, the crisis of representation that occasions the advent of the modern world reaches shocking new levels. As Edward LiPuma and Benjamin Lee have put it in *Financial Derivatives and the Culture of Risk*, "How does one [even] know about, or demonstrate against, an unlisted, virtual, offshore corporation that operates in an unregulated electronic space using a secret proprietary trading strategy to buy and sell arcane financial instruments?" (2). The existential condition of man under late capitalism is thus enveloped in a system one can scarcely even imagine, much less map. As I have suggested in another context (see Tally, "Radical Alternatives"), the need for utopian thinking is greater in this, the postmodern world, than even in the era of advanced industrial capitalism that Marcuse and Sartre analyzed.

Hence, existential angst and the utopian desire for liberation are not dated concepts, but remain essential features of our Being in the twenty-first century. This anxiety is reflected not only in a spatial disorientation but a temporal malaise as well. In *Archaeologies of the Future*, Jameson recounts the haunting loss of the past, the instability or unreliability of memory, that is registered throughout George Orwell's *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*. But Jameson argues that a similarly dreadful scenario faces us as we try to understand the world as it is now (which was also Orwell's critical point). As Jameson puts

it, "we need to develop an anxiety about losing the future" (233). One must have a sense of futurity that is neither apocalyptic nor nostalgic, but which offers a true ground for being-in-the-world, an imaginary place "to live without anxiety," which may serve as well as any phrase to define life in "utopia" itself. The knock on utopian discourse has always been that utopia is unrealistic, but as Sartre, Marcuse, and Jameson make clear, the utopian acts of the imagination are in fact realistic. Realism, as a mode of representation that also drives activity in the world, is actually better served by the imagination that can produce a useful, albeit (or rather because) fanciful map of the spaces in which we live. In the language of Sartre, the imagination makes possible the so-called realistic consciousness of the world, and, in the language of Marcuse, the "truth value" of imagination provides a more comprehensive reality than non-imaginative or technical data collecting. This is not to say that utopia is already and always fully realized, only that it cannot be legitimately dismissed as "unreal." The putatively impossible, even unimaginable, quickly yields to new spaces of liberty, new forms of human interaction, and new ways to live life. The principal impediments to such imaginary forms are those that attempt to impede the imagination itself, for one could argue that the material and social barriers continue to crumble.

As Sartre noted in reflecting on "les événements de Mai," "What is important is that the action took place, at a time when everyone judged it to be unthinkable. If it took place, then it can happen again" (Sartre qtd. in Ross 1). Aristotle observed in the *Poetics* that "it is obvious that what has happened is possible" (16), after all, but contrary to Aristotle's caveat, the power of the imagination enables us to project an alternative to the actually existing reality that is no less real. The map of prison may very well be imaginary, but it may serve the purposes of one who wishes to escape. Utopia may be difficult to believe in, but the utopian impulse is no less insistent for being imaginary. Another slogan from '68 that one might well remember in the context of current, and future, crises: "The revolution is incredible because it is real."

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