

## Editorial

### ***Matthew Ryan & Simon Sellars***

This special issue of *Colloquy* contains seven papers from the “Demanding the Impossible: Utopia, Dystopia and Science Fiction” conference held at Monash University in December 2007. A companion publication, *Demanding the Impossible: Utopia and Dystopia*, previously published as a special issue of *Arena Journal*, also brought together papers from the conference. The *Colloquy* papers engage with the figures of utopia and dystopia as they appear both in literary forms and in political activity. A variety of theoretical approaches are deployed, including concepts from the field of Utopian Studies associated with the work of Fredric Jameson, Tom Moylan, Lyman Tower Sargent and Ernst Bloch. However, other names also appear that are not so readily associated with utopia or dystopia: Jacques Derrida, Mikhail Bakhtin, Jacques Lacan, Pierre Macherey, Slavoj Žižek, Giorgio Agamben. The scope of these theoretical sources is an index of the contributors’ innovative analyses and also an indication of just how productive a field of investigation is provided by the topoi of utopia and dystopia.

In this issue, Sarah Curtis offers an analysis of Sarah Palin’s vice-presidential campaign, considering the Pentecostal-utopian context which set Palin as the figure of the “imaginary real” of US patriotism against Obama’s “symbolic real” of the global market. Michal Kulbicki considers the critical neglect of the work of Iain M. Banks, speculating that this may be due to the latter utopian novels appearing amidst the rise of “critical dystopian” science fiction. Simon Sellars counters readings of J.G. Ballard’s writ-

ing as simply dystopian with the view that the writing instead comprises a series of “affirmative dystopias” that compel us to “think the break.” Amy Crawford provides a historical periodisation of the literary-discursive uses of utopia and dystopia in parallel readings of Thomas More, Aphra Behn and Sarah Scott. Alec Charles sees the various incarnations of *Dr Who* as a continuation of H.G. Wells’s aspiration toward “dialogue, reconciliation and compromise,” a position shared with Bakhtin and Derrida. Darren Jorgensen, reading Ursula Le Guin, argues that utopian figures are always “dialogical and critical” and thereby provide the “generative contradiction” of the utopian novel. David Jack moves through the familiarity of George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to consider the liberated subject and question the too-certain distinction between totalitarianism and liberal democracy.

These papers point to the diversity of approach and energy of engagement that was typical of the “Demanding the Impossible” conference. We hope to repeat that success in 2010 with “Changing the Climate: Utopia, Dystopia and Catastrophe”, the Fourth Australian Conference on Utopia, Dystopia and Science Fiction. Some of the critical insights from this issue of *Colloquy* will no doubt contribute to next year’s discussions of the catastrophic tendencies in and of the present. They will also hopefully call out to the latent figures of utopian transition rather than perpetuate mere mitigation.

*Matthew Ryan & Simon Sellars*

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