

Beyond the Blueprint: Rethinking Utopia (nism) with Angelika Bammer and Lucy Sargisson

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ABSTRACT

At the hub of feminist theory is the steadfast pursuance of a happier future. Angelika Bammer and Lucy Sargisson are two feminist theorists who bring a shared commitment to the critical appraisal of utopian thinking to rail against systems of exclusion and dream up radical alternatives. Although both theorists have been covered extensively, their theoretical formulations have yet to be looked over together. The purpose of this paper is to establish the link between their take on the feminist utopian project. In examining the utopian impulse through a feminist lens, they deploy the utopian vision as a critical method aiming at contravening the established pecking order. Bammer and Sargisson approach utopia as an act of transgression and an ever-unfolding movement of becoming. Specifically, I argue that, in their emphasis on the transformative potential of the utopian, both theorists reconceptualize utopia(nism) as an open-ended process and a transgressive tool that pushes utopian blueprints and end-state utopia to the periphery. Their work constitutes a complementary approach to utopia as a reflexive tool for critique and an inquisitive tool for transformation. By banding them together, this paper illustrates how their perception of utopia as non-totalizing and loosely bound transforms the way(s) we relate to the world and others.

Keywords: Angelika Bammer, Utopia(nism), Lucy Sargisson, Transgression, Process, Blueprint, Critique

1. INTRODUCTION

In a world bedevilled by ecological, political, and humanitarian crises, having recourse to utopian thinking has always given us a glimmer of hope. So far, feminist theorists have given their blood, sweat, and tears to proffering new, nay alternative insights into the utopian thought. Feminist scholars, most prominently, Lucy Sargisson and Angelika Bammer have made the consanguinity between the feminist ethos and utopian impulse possible. These two major theorists have laid the groundwork for a new understanding of utopia(nism). Although much ink has been shed on their remarkable contributions to the feminist-utopian nexus in feminist cultural and political theories, a synthetic reading of them has often been muted. In drawing parallels between Bammer's and Sargisson's theoretical stance on feminism's contribution to the utopian spirit, this study certainly proposes a new conceptual framework, which I term 'partial transgressive utopianism.'

In "Utopia Revisited," Ruth Levitas argues that the 1970s was a period of seismic changes in utopian literature and utopian theories, revolutionizing the ways theorists cogitated about the interplay between feminism and utopia. Commenting on Bammer, Levitas states that Bammer's writings were influential during the 1970s, particularly for the game-changing effect offeminism on utopian thought and how vital utopia had become to feminist politics (108). In a similar vein, in a

recent study on how relevant and useful Bammer's 1970s theoretical reflection is to some topical issues of feminism, Joe P. L. Davidson opines that Bammer's forte lies in her assessment of feminist thought through a utopian lens, construing it as an open-ended process. On a par with Bammer's thinking about the feminist utopian impulse, Davidson argues that feminist utopia is less about achieving perfection and more about holding onto hope. For his part, Davidson holds that deep introspection of the feminist utopian tradition requires retrospective reflections for "the detritus of the past contains the power to reshape present and future" (15). As the article draws to a close, Davidson ends on a curious note, maintaining that the unstable coming together of past, present and future reforms feminist memory, forcing it beyond progress and nostalgia towards a feminism that is never at home. The homelessness of the feminist 1970s, the fact that it belongs to nowhere in particular, means that it has an awkward and unsettling presence in the world, representing a dream that can neither be absorbed into the present nor left behind. (15-16)

Davidson's final remark on the lasting legacy of Bammer's theorization gives food for thought for my analysis of the common ground Bammer and Sargisson share as regards the feminist utopian project. In resonance with Davidson's take is Jennifer A. Wagner Lawlor who, in a prefatory note to her informative *Postmodern Utopias and Feminist Fictions*, postulates that her reading of utopia is very much after the fashion of Bammer in that it conceptualizes the utopian thought as a lived social experience (2). A similar idea reverberates through Darko Suvin's insightful "Utopia or Bust" in which he leads off with a quote from Bammer's reprint to highlight how significant and transformative her feminist utopian vision is.

Likewise, Sargisson's treatise on feminist utopianism continues to titillate theorists. In their ruminative *Utopia Method Vision: The Use Value of Social Dreaming*, Tom Moylan and Rafaella Baccolini allocate an entire chapter for Sargisson's analytical insights on the dynamic synergy between politics and utopia. As the appellation of her chapter denotes, "The Curious Relationship Between Politics and Utopia" explores how inextricably linked utopia and politics are and how fundamental the utopian thought is to political imagination. Indeed, kicking off the volume with Sargisson's perception is of great import to the book's main arguments. Sargisson's bearing on their writings had become even more evident when they published in 2021 their *Transgressive Utopianism: Essays in Honor of Lucy Sargisson*, an edited volume in commemoration of her academic imprint. Sargisson's influence extends far and wide, finding a warm welcome in the scholarly works of Rhiannon Firth, MG Kelly, Ruth Houghton, and D. M. Bell, to name but a few. Take, for instance, Ruth Houghton who, in her "'Our World: A Feminist Approach to Global Constitution,'" borrows heavily from Sargisson's feminist utopian thinking in her analytical approach to global constitutionalism.

As is shown, although Bammer's and Sargisson's theoretical studies have been thoroughly searched separately, there is a dearth of research that has brought them together. Building on these theoretical insights, I offer a new starting point: to establish the link between them and highlight the pertinence of both theorists to today's discussions of feminist utopianism and other hot-button issues. We cannot probe into Bammer's and Sargisson's theoretical frameworks without alluding, albeit briefly, to the way utopian thinking has evolved. A brief account of utopia is apropos as it will pave the way for a discussion about the emergence of new feminist utopian models that breathe a new life into an endangered field.

2. TRADITIONAL UTOPIAN THINKING

In layman's terms, the word 'utopia' is very often equated with a hankering for perfection and an ideal society unstained by injustice and cunning deceit. When we talk about utopia, the first person to spring to mind is the English social philosopher Thomas More. Celebrated for his much-hyped book *Utopia* (1516), More was the first to coin the term 'utopia', which simultaneously, though contradictorily, denotes 'the good place' and 'no place.' Indeed, the etymological equivocation of the term never fails to befuddle theorists. More's electrifying and trailblazing work spurred a burgeoning development of other penetrating, howbeit conflicting, insights into the concept of utopia. If we get down to the different ways through which utopia is approached, we can distinguish between some accounts which sang the praises of utopia, other modes of writings that poured scorn on it, and other far more accurate interpretations which renewed interest in it. A partisan reading of utopia suggests that a utopian world is an ideal place where people live in wedded bliss and perfect harmony. An assessment of utopia in terms of its form and content conceptualizes utopia, quite reductively, as a literary genre which sets a blueprint for an ideal society. As for function, the utopian world serves as a powerful critique of the present and a fresh impetus for change. That said, in the wake of the heinous events that took place in the early twentieth century, the utopian thinking took a hammering as many critics turned against its auspicious prospects, demystifying its imminent perils. We find, for instance, Krishan Kumar, who contends that on the threshold of the first decade of the 1990s the utopian initiative was greeted by howls of derision and looked upon with deep contempt due to the negative fallouts of the wicked occurrences which cropped up at that time. Arguing that utopia has grown effete, he makes a pointed comment:

For literary intellectuals and humanists in particular, World War I, the rise of Fascism, the descent of Soviet Communism into Stalinism, the failure of Western capitalism in the 1930s: all these were mocking commentaries on utopian hopes. (5)

Another writer who espouses Kumar's viewpoint is Andrea L. Kross who, in her *The A to Z of Utopianism*, propounds that off the back of the political and social turmoil which occurred during the twentieth century theorists started to cast doubt on the unrealistic and false promises of the utopian mindset, levelling wide allegations against its practicality. A similar note is struck in Mark R. Levin's account. In "The Tyranny of Utopia," he lambasts the utopian vision for falling short of expectations, casting aspersions on its chimerical threats (22). For his part, R. Levin ventures to say that the utopian dream ends up being a hideous nightmare, a tyrannical system which takes a grim toll on personal creativity and freedom.

Though decried by some writers and chided for being non-viable and, worse still, chimerical, the utopian spirit has been held in high regard by others. An eminent figure who allies himself with this standpoint is the esteemed utopian theorist Lyman Tower Sargent. In his "Three faces of Utopianism Revisited", Sargent defines the utopian vision as "social dreaming," a project that defies completion and through which we are involved in a relentless quest for social and communal betterment. Elsewhere, in his "In Defense of Utopianism," he draws a parallel between a utopian thought that runs the risk of being dangerous and a more ambitious utopian model that prioritizes continual change over dogmatic finality and creative transformation over perfect stasis. Though awake to the serious threat some utopian projects might pose, he readily acknowledges our strong and growing need for the utopian spirit. Another critic who comes down in favour of Sargent's stand is Stephen Duncombe who, in his *Open Utopia*, delineates utopianism as "the act of

imagining what is new” (7). For Duncombe, the loss of faith in the utopian urge is ascribable to a poor implementation of infeasible plans which would inevitably lead to tyranny, conceit, and collective illusion. To restore faith in the utopian vision, Duncombe maintains, we must embrace an alternative vision which is predicated, as it is, on constructive criticism and positive change (2). Speaking of the very fulcrum around which the utopian thinking revolves, Duncombe writes:

By asking ‘what if?’ we can simultaneously criticize and imagine, imagine and criticize, and thereby begin to escape the binary politics of impotent critique on the one hand and closed imagination on the other. (47)

The abovementioned suggests that the utopian vision must function as a thoughtful commentary on the present and a forward-looking outlook for constant improvement. That is, the utopian dream is more about the imagination of alternative, nay boundless possibilities and less about a yen for an ideal end-state. This idea is corroborated by the Polish philosopher Leszek Kolakowski who, in his “The Death of Utopia Reconsidered,” limns utopia as a revolutionary mentality, thereby taking a stand against a utopian perspective that would result in “a perpetual deadly stagnation” (229). Kolakowski, therefore, opines that a “sceptical spirit” (232) is part and parcel of utopian thinking, immunizing utopia against death. In a remarkably similar fashion, in “The Concept of Utopia,” Fatima Vieira rekindles interest in utopia, holding that utopia, for better or worse, is still in vogue. Laying emphasis on the protean nature of utopia, Vieira construes the utopian standpoint as an “attitude” (6) and “a strategy of creativity, clearing the way for the only path that man can possibly follow: the path of creation” (23). In essence, it is the transformative and creative aspect of utopia that keeps the utopian spirit alive. In resonance with Vieira’s stand is Nicolas Burden who, in “Functions of Utopia: How Utopian Thinking Motivates Societal Engagement,” and in a way which rehashes Vieira’s argument, defines the utopian thought as “a positive attitude” (783) and a powerful tool aiming at catalysing change and promoting social engagement. In the same fashion, in her *The Task of Utopia: A Pragmatist and Feminist Perspective*, Erin McKenna offers an incisive analysis of utopia, arguing for a new model that keeps the utopian project running. Proposing a process model of utopia, McKenna underscores its importance in rooting out the “idle and dangerous dreaming about perfection” (5) and clearing the way for constant change. On this note, she aptly writes:

Utopian visions can avoid the problems of static totalitarian visions only when we no longer seek a final, static goal, but realize that it is the process of transformation itself that is our task; what is needed is to introduce the notion of evolution and process into utopian visions (8-9).

I find McKenna’s argument quite pertinent to my reading of Bammer’s and Sargisson’s take on the utopian thought as she places “evolution” and “process” at the heart of the utopian vision.

3. UTOPIA(NISM) AS PROCESS: FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF THE BLUEPRINT MODEL

A utopian impulse has always been embedded within the fabric of feminist writings. Feminist literature, for the most part, levels charges against the patriarchal edict and rampant misogyny. To make inroads into spaces in which they have been relegated to a second status and depart from the subordinate role that has been allocated to them, feminist writers take issue with repressive apparatuses and pervasive androcentrism. Having the same esprit de corps, they jolt feminist writers

into new ways of political and ideological militancy. This is evident in the subversive gambits they have recourse to with a view to contravening authoritative and authoritarian dicta. While some feminist writers express an eagerness to use the same tools to destabilize and destruct the ‘master’s house’, others vent their bitter gall by throwing the system wholesale. Having no qualms about going against the dominant logic, the latter avows restless discontent with the here and now, making a dash for the ‘then and there.’ Having said that, feminist theorists argue that such a plan might boomerang as it runs the risk of being counterproductive. For instance, the creation of female-led communities in some feminist utopian writings is denounced for walking right into what feminist writers have initially railed against: social and racial exclusion. Given this, feminist theorists have been attentive to the danger a pestilent hankering after perfection might pose, proposing a more effective model. At the hub of such a defensive move is an impetuous eagerness to have a more propitious future. Indeed, it is the overpowering desire to make revolutionary changes and gradual headway into an even-handed future that marks the utopian aspect of the feminist mindset. This feminist utopian vision has been advanced by Bammer and cemented by Sargisson. I choose to start with Bammer as she starts writing earlier than her successor, Sargisson, and sets the tone for an alternative form of utopian thinking through a feminist lens. In order not to fall into the trap of redundancy, I will make a point-by-point analysis of Bammer’s and Sargisson’s treatise.

In a precursory note to her seminal *Partial Visions: Feminism and Utopianism in the 1970s*, American theorist Angelika Bammer argues that the utopian spirit has always been a fundamental cornerstone of the western cultural tradition. Though vilified as dead and obsolete, the utopian thought, Bammer holds, continues to carry considerable weight in the feminist accounts of western European and American women’s movements. She argues along another line that those who unanimously issue a severe verdict on the utopian plan are very often oblivious to the revolutionary and evolutionary nature of the utopian impulse (2). Bammer, therefore, maintains that the utopian vision should be reconsidered, as it poses as many conundrums as insights. Reconceptualizing utopia as more than a literary genre whose sole aim is the attainment of full perfection and absolute idealism would save it from falling into desuetude, as Bammer asserts. The following lines encapsulate the fulcrum of her argument, as she pithily comments:

My goal is to replace the idea of “a utopia” as something fixed, a form to be fleshed out, with the idea of “the utopian” as an approach toward, a movement beyond set limits into the realm of the not-yet-set. At the same time, I want to counter the notion of the utopian as unreal with the proposition that the utopian is powerfully real in the sense that hope and desire (and even fantasies) are real, never “merely” fantasy. It is a force that moves and shapes history. (7)

Re-envisioning utopianism as an “approach” that opens up exciting vistas of interpretation and evades closed-off readings is what keeps the death of the utopian dream at bay. More so, the act of envisioning the utopian vision as partial prompts speculation that Bammer’s postulation is premised on the idea that the utopian thought is evolutionary, as she puts it bluntly:

I question whether a form and concept, such as “utopia,” that forecloses change can provide a sufficiently open space into which to project the possibility of as yet uncharted change. In particular, I argue, it is often the partial vision, rather than the supposedly comprehensive one, that is most able to see clearly. In the sense that the gaze that encompasses less is often able to grasp more, the partial vision is the more utopian. This book, therefore, is about partial visions, not full-blown utopias. (4)

Intervening utopia as a “partial vision” and a locus of “unchartable change,” Bammer demonstrates how this spawns the cultivation of a fuller and better understanding of utopia as an ever-ending process. This cogent argument is fleshed out with Bammer’s thoughtful reflection on the deft interplay between feminism and utopianism. For her part, Bammer opines that the utopian thought draws sustenance from the feminist logic and, likewise, a feminist mindset can be gleaned from utopian writings. Underscoring the ways in which these two neighbouring forces interwind and dovetail, Bammer reveals how the feminist-utopian nexus, if implemented, provides greater impetus to the continued relevance of the two genres. The execution of this plan, however, as Bammer puts forward, is no easy task: the erratic schemes and rash speculations of having an ideal and perfect state might jeopardize realistic prospects. Too much emphasis on perfection, it is feared, might lead to some pre-emptive measures against change. Having predetermined assumptions about what the future holds and how the future might be betoken the premature death of the utopian vision. In a manner redolent of philosopher Ernst Bloch, Bammer redefines the utopian mindset as the one driven by hope, “situated between that which can no longer be and that which cannot yet be” (50). She, too, argues for a concept of the utopian that welcomes change with open arms. In her discussion of 1970s feminism, Bammer establishes the link between feminism and utopianism, expounding that the two visions have the desire for change as their driving force. They have an affinity insofar that they are both centrally concerned with the stupendous task of having a more sustainable and desirable world. On the deft interplay between the feminist mindset and the utopian spirit, Bammer avers that feminist utopianism is deeply rooted in women’s experience. The lamentable and widening chasm between feminist writers on issues appertaining to race, class, and sexuality, Bammer postulates, can only be bridged when writing through a utopian lens, that is, to veer attention away from what breaks them apart into imagining and reconstructing the future in ways that outgrow differences.

In a manner which seems to rehash the same arguments formulated by Bammer, American theorist Lucy Sargisson goes a decisive step further by overtly stating the ever-changing nature of the utopian thought. In her thought-provoking *Contemporary Feminist Utopianism*, Lucy Sargisson, in the fashion of Lyman Tower Sargent, defines utopianism as a “way of seeing and approaching the world” (1) and dreaming about alternative ways of being and relating to the world. A utopian project, Sargisson reckons, casts aside “the stability and certainty” (5) of the frantic search for perfection and finality in favour of a more nuanced position that is resistive to “closure” (5) and completion. Though arguing that a form-based and a content-oriented approach to utopia answer specific purposes, she speaks out in favour of a new model that runs counter to these supposedly myopic, “flawed and mistaken” (10) visions. Reprimanded for being “restrictive” and “narrow,” (12) these approaches, as Sargisson asseverates, are oblivious to the multi-dimensional nature of utopian studies. Indeed, the recourse to exclusivity and hegemonic pervasiveness might eventually lead to a complete vanquishing of critique and opposition, a practice that Sargisson finds fault with. This idea is given a good airing in her full-fledged *Fool’s Gold: Utopianism in the Twenty-first Century*, in which she strongly argues for a function-based approach to utopia(nism), elucidating it as anything but a blueprint for “perfect worlds and total visions of ideal societies” (20). For her part, at the core of utopian thinking is constructive critique. That is, the discontent with the here and now is very often verbalized into a call to action that is at once critical and transformative: it is critical as it levels accusation against the status quo and transformative insofar as it prompts revolutionary change.

I find Bammer's and Sargisson's reading of the utopian spirit to be persuasive and appropriate to understanding contemporary utopianism as a significant gesture that promotes improvement, not perfection, change, not stasis, and practicality, not infeasibility. Both theorists take a dim view of the mainstream understanding of utopia as static and fixed. Their appeal to a vision far removed from the one anchored in chimerical thinking and impractical schemes sets the stage for new, nay alternative ways of being and becoming, thus reshaping and revolutionizing the ways in which the present is arranged, the past perceived, and the future imagined. In reconceiving and reconceptualizing the utopian spirit as a critical method and revolutionary strategy, Bammer and Sargisson not only decry a disused model of utopian thinking, but they actively regenerate utopia as a useful gimmick, a powerful incentive, and a sobering reminder that the world is teeming with numerous, creative possibilities. The utopian vision, as limned by Bammer and Sargisson, is critical, transformative, and transgressive into the bargain. Both are openly contemptuous of the mere rehash of the utopian thinking as a process of envisioning an ideal, non-existent society, putting forward an alternative model which is transgressive of defined borders and traditional boundaries.

4. SUBVERSIVE HORIZONS: UTOPIA(NISM) AS TRANSGRESSION IN BAMMER AND SARGISSON

In putting a different gloss on the utopian thinking as a never-ending process, Bammer affirms that progress is at the heart of utopian imaginings. However, this onward march of progress, Bammer argues, might be hindered by the mistaken belief that there are no fundamental differences between women. For Bammer, our awareness of women's situatedness is key to stem the rising tide of having a closed off vision of the world. 'One woman's utopia is another woman's dystopia' suggests that racial, ethnic, sexual, and cultural differences between women shape their experiences, understanding, and future visions. This results in having various, very often incommensurable plans as to how the present is grasped and the future imagined, thus underscoring not only the revolutionary nature of the utopian thinking but also its transgression of universalized assumptions. Reconceptualizing the utopian from this vantage point substantiates Bammer's argument that "utopia is not to be found in a particular place or form, but rather that it is a movement towards possibilities" (56).

In her discussion of the intricate interplay between feminism and utopianism, Bammer argues that there is a marked cleavage between feminist theorists in respect of utopian planning. While some take a firm stand against the existing patriarchal order, others stress the need to work within the same system. Having some political axes to grind, those who quibble over mechanisms of oppression staunchly advocate the establishment of a new feminist utopian project that would shake the hegemonic apparatus to its foundations. Viewing this defensive stratagem as mere escapism, Bammer, in the same breath, stresses the importance of transforming these ideological constructs in lieu of opposing them. Reconceptualizing long-drawn-out beliefs and addressing the leading cause of oppression head on, Bammer suggests, is an effective tool to understand, reorganize and transform reality. Here, Bammer is transgressive of the view that the discontent with the here and now might catalyse positive change, for, when not handled constructively, it would lead to delusion. Nowhere is Bammer's transgressive vision more clearly expressed than in her take on the exclusionary nature of some utopian models. Her stand is two-fold: first, she holds out against man-

made utopias, and second, she levels criticism against feminist utopias that marginalize, and worse still, expel women of colour from the theoretical equation. This type of utopia, Bammer expostulates, runs the risk of consolidating what it initially tries to root out and betraying the promises it pledges to deliver on. In shutting women out from the envisioned world and reducing them to mere ciphers, the utopian dream might turn into a totalitarian mindset that freezes people out on account of their gender or race. To solve this perplexing conundrum, Bammer presses for an inclusive plan which celebrates diversity and tolerates differences.

In a bold move, Bammer ventures to say that the utopian vision is concretized when we move beyond differences. To bring this point home, she touches on two influential French feminist theorists whose divergent course of action forecloses happy compromise yet proffers new insights into interpreting the utopian vision from a feminist standpoint. In their endeavour to contravene the male-dominated logic and re-inscribe themselves into the patriarchal discourse, feminist theorists felt the urge to depart assertively from the 'kingdom of the fathers' and a world marred by misogynistic ideology, resorting to some counter-hegemonic strategies. The desperate outcry against rigid patriarchal structures and straitjacket beliefs blossoms into an increasing body of feminist literature that stems the surging tide of androcentric principles. In their articulation of new forms of subjectivity, Helene Cixous and Monique Wittig propose new models that set the tone for a radically new world. While Cixous introduces the concept of "écriture féminine" as a distinctively feminine writing style which serves as a buffer against male theories, Wittig expands the sphere of action into envisioning a female-led community dwelling in a festivity space where gender stereotypes are breached and gender binary deconstructed. Though Cixous and Wittig deploy different strategies, they seem to agree on the importance of idiosyncratic feminine style as an effective tool for change. In bringing Cixous and Wittig into the conversation, Bammer introduces two different, yet equally informative, insights into imagining a utopian world. Unlike Cixous who puts a good deal of effort into proclaiming sexual difference, using feminine writing as a catalyst for change, Wittig goes beyond the limits of sexual dimorphism, denouncing internalized sexism. Bammer, on balance, argues that a feminist utopian project must be transgressive of both visions. That is, a balanced and partial vision, Bammer avouches, is the one that moves beyond the grudging acknowledgment or the erasure of differences into a realm where these differences, whether racial, cultural, or sexual, do not serve as an insuperable hurdle to the realization of the utopian dream.

Having no quarrel with the arguments advanced by Bammer, Lucy Sargisson strikes similar notes in her *Contemporary Feminist Utopianism*. Construing the difference versus equality dispute as a moot point when discussing contemporary feminist utopianism, Sargisson espouses a new model which is transgressive of the dominant dyad and rigid conceptual boundaries which intermittently delimit, circumscribe, and hold down. This new approach or what Sargisson deftly terms "transgressive utopianism" is mainly about the transgression of "binary oppositional thought" (5). Pushing the dualistic framework of equality vs. difference towards a more nuanced approach, as Sargisson avers, gives considerable leeway as to how we (re)conceive the utopian vision. Envisaging the utopian thinking as "transgressive" and "transformational" (76) provides the opportunity to not only overstep prescribed limits but also create a rich portal to new and unforeseen possibilities. The reconceptualization of difference, Sargisson believes, makes way for a "utopian speculative space" (72) where "new and different paradigms can be imagined and established" (73). In prompting the speculation that new ways of imagining and living are brought into the fold, the utopian vision

serves as a dynamic and disruptive mode of thought that fuels the desire for change by taking to task traditional compartmentalisation.

Elsewhere, in her comprehensive *Utopian Bodies and the Politics of Transgression*, Sargisson devotes much space for the notion of transgressive utopianism, building on Bammer's earlier remarks. Contending that definitions of utopia cast in terms of having the perfect polity must be cast out, Sargisson approaches utopianism, otherwise called utopian impulse, in terms of its "transgressive function" (10). Far from being mired in perennial torpidity and foolish hankering after perfection, transgressive utopianism, Sargisson declares, is open to change, re-adjustment, and evolution. She explains thus:

- It (transgressive utopianism) is internally subversive, which is to say that it challenges from within the aims and assumptions of the ground whence it comes (political theory, utopian philosophy, academic study, etc.).
- It is flexible and resistant to permanence and order and even while it constructs an account (of, e.g., 'politics') it accepts its own imminent dissolution. Nothing lasts forever in a changing environment.
- It is intentionally and deliberately utopian. The book asserts, contra popular assumptions, that a certain utopianism is essential to process and dynamism. (2)

In its subversion of the dyed-in-the-wool convictions, resistance to "permanence and order," and mapping of alternative and better future possibilities, the utopian thinking continues to be alive and well. Even more so, to safeguard the utopian dream against growing effete, Sargisson emphasizes the need to submit to critical scrutiny Manichean visions. For Sargisson, the either/or logic inevitably leads to closure and exclusion, placing the utopian initiative in jeopardy. She argues along another line that these exclusionary measures spark off a "politicized activity" (69) which tends every now and then to 'other' those who do not fit into the mould. To guard against this danger, Sargisson assumes a stance that makes more room for negotiating "multiple," "shifting," and "strategic" (151) identities. "Greater openness to the Other," (151) as Sargisson proposes, in diverting attention away from what disassembles us into what mobilises us around a common cause, greases the wheels for the creation of a transgressive space where the impulse towards transformation and growth outpaces the forces of division and discord.

5. CONCLUSION

With the benefit of hindsight, Sargisson and Bammer engage in what I have termed 'partial transgressive utopianism' as they conceive utopia(nism) as a partially fulfilled vision and a critical and transgressive mechanism. In mapping out alternative worlds, they contribute, each in her own way, to guarding the utopian ethos against falling into abeyance. Alongside Bammer's conceptual ideas is Sargisson's practical move. Sargisson's theorization is more grounded in lived experience, while Bammer's view of utopia is more theoretical and contemplative. Together, they make uneasy bedfellows in their crusade for a feminist utopian venture that keeps the feminist spirit and utopian dream firmly yoked to each other. Their shared vision lays the groundwork for a view of the utopian as a project that sidesteps closure and completion. Having a bit of a political axe to grind, they devise the utopian thinking as a dynamic process and a critical method that holds excessive idealism at bay. Though theoretical, Bammer's and Sargisson's insights give much food for thought

to how to handle some present-day issues. In a world beset by environmental destruction and political backsliding, their treatises proffer alternative possibilities to make up for past mistakes and atone for past misdeeds in holding out hope for a better, more equitable future.

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