The Utopian Function of Memory in Lois Lowry's *The Giver*

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■ Lois Lowry's novel *The Giver* (1993) inhabits the discursive space of dystopia, and like most dystopias, *The Giver* begins in an imagined world intended to be worse than the reader's own, although it is initially somewhat inviting. Lowry's world is an engineered Utopia gone wrong due to its extinction of aesthetics and personal choice, and through her protagonist's alienation from his society and resistance to it, the novel offers hope for a better future. Leading scholars of sf and utopian studies, like Lyman Tower Sargent, Tom Moylan and Fredric Jameson, stress that dystopia is ambivalent in nature, situated between the utopian text, which by imagining a better (though not perfect) society allows the historical pre-conditions of Utopia's emergence to be conceptualized, and the anti-utopia, which philosophically rejects "any Utopian effort to create a new society, or even . . . any fantasy of doing so" (Jameson 54), and which "always manages to revert to its baseline project of producing and reproducing the ruling order of things" (Moylan 140).[1]

Central to *The Giver's* dystopian ambiguity between the poles of utopia and anti-utopia is its treatment of memory. Like many definitive dystopias, *The Giver* warns against the dangers of cultural amnesia by depicting the suppression of historical memory as a tool of static totalitarian control and the production of infantile citizens. But Lowry also shows that memory, when not

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brought entirely under state control, is a source of considerable individual and emancipating power. This essay aims to elucidate Lowry's treatment of memory by utilizing the utopian theory of Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch (1885-1977), whose influential thinking about the relationship between memory and the not-yet of Utopia lends analytical clarity to Lowry's provocative but highly figurative and unscientific explanation of how memory works in the novel. I argue that Lowry's method of transmitting memory from Giver to Receiver, the point at which the narrative moves from science fiction into fantasy, can be read as a dramatization of Bloch's utopian concepts of recognition (*anagnorisis*) and the Not-Yet-Conscious, a reading which demonstrates that memory, historical awareness and hope can be harnessed to bring about resistance and significant change. By privileging memory as the novel's one means of anticipating an alternate, better existence, which is the hope embodied in Bloch's Not-Yet-Conscious, Lowry makes memory both the source of potential transformative change and of the novel's final moment of possible utopian realization.

The protagonist of *The Giver*, twelve year-old Jonas, lives in a small, sedate community within a future society where life is governed by extensive rules, rituals and surveillance. Each day, adults, whose spouses and children have been chosen for them, bicycle off to jobs assigned to them before returning to their domiciles to eat the prepared meal delivered to them at a specific time. Family breakfast time includes the obligatory "sharing of dreams" and evening meals the "telling of feelings" to diffuse any unwanted emotional build-up, and each citizen's actions and words are closely monitored for rule violations. The novel's highly regulated society is similar in many respects to the societies depicted in the authoritarian literary utopias published prior to the twentieth century. Chris Ferns writes that such texts portray

> utopian society as something to be imposed on humanity in its own best interests. [. . .] What such utopias offered was stability, security, freedom from hunger, from endless toil, from war. (14)

In 1516, Thomas More's Utopians lived in a highly regimented and disciplinary society, but they enjoyed civil order, were well fed, had good medical care and worked six hour days. R.W. Chambers reminds us that in More's text,

> Utopia is depicted as a sternly righteous and puritanical State, where few of us would feel quite happy; yet we go on using the word 'Utopia' to signify an easy-going paradise, whose only fault is that it is too happy and ideal to be realized. (125)

Lowry's society in *The Giver* certainly does not fit the "easy-going paradise" model of Utopia, as in William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890), but it

can be reasonably examined as utopian in the sense More intended. Like the Utopians, Lowry's citizens enjoy absolute stability, safety and freedom from any material want. In both societies many decisions are made by community elders; in both, wrongdoers are punished through forms of banishment, either slavery or 'release.' Levels of general satisfaction, civic participation and communal responsibility are very high in each society. In narrative terms, *The Giver* also resembles traditional literary utopias in that it is not satirical. While some sf and utopian studies scholars, like Darko Suvin and Tom Moylan, do not specify satire as intrinsic to dystopian narrative, it is, nevertheless, commonly regarded as a formal characteristic of the genre.[2] Ferns, for example, broadly defines dystopia as "combining a parodic inversion of the traditional utopia with satire on contemporary society" (105). However, in keeping with Lowry's assertion, "I don't make political statements" (Hintz 197), *The Giver* has no easily identifiable satiric target, unlike Huxley's critique of capitalist consumption in *Brave New World*, or Orwell's Stalinist totalitarianism in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, or Atwood's world of gene-splicing gone awry in *Oryx and Crake*.

The tendency, then, to consider *The Giver* dystopian instead of utopian in spite of the absence of satire can be attributed to several factors. First, Lowry's narrative tone is far more detached than Raphael Hythloday's enthusiastic account of his visit to Utopia, and both Jonas (once he becomes the new Receiver) and the Giver express severe dissatisfaction with their society. Second, Lowry also takes measures of social control a step further than More. Where Utopians are obligated to work as farmers in two-year shifts, Lowry's citizens have their entire life's work and even marital status decided by the Committee of Elders. Where elderly and infirm Utopians are encouraged, but not forced, to commit suicide, the Old in Jonas's community are euthanized without their knowledge or consent. The most important difference in the perception of these texts, however, is the historical conditions in which they were written. It is not difficult to imagine how appealing More's social vision, in spite of its restrictions, would have been to poor sixteenth-century English peasants struggling to survive under the Enclosure Acts. To Lowry's original audience of young American readers in the 1990s, though, accustomed to relative peace, economic prosperity and personal freedom, and highly sceptical of authority, Jonas's society seems oppressive, lifeless and robotic.

The peaceful orderliness that pervades Jonas's community and which makes its totalitarian structure of Sameness appear somewhat benign, in spite of its dependence on "an elaborate system of discipline and punishment," is largely a function of the absence of memory (Latham 134). The lack of individual and collective memory found in Lowry's novel is a prominent motif in much utopian and dystopian literature. In *Looking Backward* (1888), a utopian

rendering of the United States in the year 2000, Edward Bellamy imagines that America has transcended the turbulence of late-nineteenth century industrialism in part by cutting itself loose from its own history. In this text and others, Bellamy argues that in order for utopian social transformation to occur, societies must jettison the painful psychological fetters of history and forget about the past. The eponymous protagonist of Bellamy's *Dr. Heidenhoff's Process* (1879) exclaims, "Is there not sorrow and wrong enough in the present world without having moralists teach us that it is our duty to perpetuate all our past sins and shames in the multiplying mirror of memory?"[3] Whereas in Bellamy relinquishing the past promotes psychological health and social change, in many dystopian fictions, individual and cultural memory is systematically eradicated or warped by the governing state. Tom Moylan argues that one of the most important features of dystopian writing is its "ability to register the impact of an unseen and unexamined social system on the everyday lives of everyday people" (xiii). Memory is integral to the dystopian project because in many texts it is the repression of memory that keeps the social system "unseen and unexamined," and the recovery of memory (or some connection to the past) that allows the protagonist to recognize his or her "situation for what it really is and thus to trace the relationship between individual experience and the operation of the entire system" (xiii). In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, for instance, Winston Smith is a cog in the Ministry of Truth's vast and constant rewriting of history to serve the current needs of the Party, a process so complete that no written records survive to contradict the Party's truth and no one remembers that Oceania's ally Eurasia was last week the hated enemy. Winston's hatred of the Party stems in part from his fascination with the past, symbolized by the glass paperweight, and the fact that he's found photographic proof that the Party distorts the historical record. In *Brave New World*, World Controller Mustapha Mond explains that the Fordism 'History is bunk' underpins the State's program of producing docile, infantile citizens, who are given stability and 'happiness' in exchange for truth:

> Our Ford himself did a great deal to shift the emphasis from truth and beauty to comfort and happiness. Mass production demanded the shift. Universal happiness keeps the wheels steadily turning; truth and beauty can't. (201)

John "the Savage's" rejection of Mond's World State ideology is rooted in his knowledge and appreciation of the 900 year-old works of William Shakespeare.

Nineteen Eighty-Four and *Brave New World* both posit historical memory as the enemy of the state, and *The Giver* is similar in many respects. In Jonas's

world, there is no art or visual or aural culture. Citizens have no access to books. There are, apparently, no telephones, newspapers, televisions, computers or other electronic media devices in the home. Contact with nearby communities is very limited and with the larger world unknown. Constant surveillance and the medical suppression of adolescent 'Stirrings' discourage inquisitiveness and exploration. History is not taught in schools. The stability and static nature of Sameness—a complex, centuries old system of genetic, social and geographical homogeneity that governs Jonas's society and which inhibits the ability to see colors, forbids monetary currency and distinctions based on wealth, and controls the weather—depends upon a contented populace who ask few questions and perceive little need for change. To this end, the community established the position of Receiver of Memory, (the position for which Jonas is selected and which drives the plot of the novel), where one individual is responsible for holding all memories of the past so that others can live unburdened by the pain, knowledge and guilt of human history (Levy 53-54). Before he becomes the Receiver, Jonas essentially has no concept of history at all, because beyond the omission of history in education, each family unit's genealogy is systematically truncated. Jonas remembers his own past, and asks questions about his parents' childhoods, but since parents whose children have grown up are removed to separate Childless Adults quarters, and then later, to the House of the Old without any family contact, Jonas will never see his parents again once he is an adult and has never even heard of grandparents. Jonas's apprehension of the historical past is limited solely to a few apocryphal rumors, such as "Once, long ago, it was whispered among the children, an Eleven had arrived at the Ceremony of Twelve" and was shamefully given no Assignment because he had not completed his volunteer hours (28).

Jonas is not only cut off from history but also geography. *Brave New World* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* are both set in London, whereas Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Oryx and Crake*, and M.T. Anderson's adolescent dystopia *Feed* (2002) take place somewhere in the U.S., but Jonas has literally no conception of where in the world he is. Though *The Giver* is presumably set in North America, Lowry makes no mention of continents, let alone nation-states or other geo-political entities. Jonas's community does not even have a name. The community is connected to a larger political body, as evidenced by the search planes that hunt for him once he flees, and cargo planes that deliver supplies, but Jonas has no awareness of their point of origin. Whereas Bernard Marx, Winston Smith, and Offred each have distinct knowledge of their geographic and political whereabouts, even though Winston can never travel beyond the outskirts of London, Jonas knows only a terraformed Sameness, his myopic worldview limited entirely to similar "outlying communities"

(166). Everything else is simply "Elsewhere." Lowry's microcosmic depiction of nearly self-contained communities is similar to *Oryx and Crake*'s world of high-security corporate Compounds surrounded by "pleeblands," and both resemble the world foreseen by globalization and denationalization expert Saskia Sassen, who predicts "the formation of partial, often very specialised, assemblages of bits and pieces of territory, of authority, of rights, that used to be lodged in national states" (Sutherland 24-25). The combination of his lack of geographical and historical awareness makes Jonas thoroughly confused when he is selected as the new Receiver of Memory and the Giver (the name the current Receiver gives himself) attempts to explain the scope of the memories Jonas is to receive: "I'm sorry sir. [. . .] I don't know what you mean when you say 'the whole world' or 'generations before him.' I thought there was only us. I thought there was only now" (78).

Paul Connerton's work on memory as a social faculty is helpful for understanding Jonas's bafflement. In *How Societies Remember*, Connerton argues that social, as distinct from individual, memory is primarily transmitted through performative commemorations and bodily practices instead of written texts. Beginning with Maurice Halbwach's theory that nearly all individual memories are embedded within frameworks of group memories, Connerton emphasizes the "acts of transfer that make remembering in common possible" (39). For instance, how are collective memories passed from one generation to the next within the same group? Connerton writes that "if we are to say that a social group, whose duration exceeds that of the lifespan of any single individual, is able to remember in common, it is not sufficient that the various members who compose that group at any given moment should be able to retain the mental representations relating to the past of the group. It is necessary also that the older members of the group should not neglect to transmit these representations to the younger members of the group" (38). This type of simple and informal narrative passed from elder to youth is just one way that Jonas and his community are deprived of memory, since apart from parental child-rearing, no generation has sustained contact with any other. Connerton's main argument, however, is that social memory is "conveyed and sustained by (more or less ritual) performances," such as commemorative ceremonies (40). Examining a wide range of formal ritualized commemorations from major religions and national and political factions, Connerton contends that what makes commemorations so important to social memory and what

> sets them apart from the more general category of rites, is that they do not simply imply continuity with the past but explicitly claim such continuity. And many of them [. . .] do so by ritually re-enacting a narrative of events held to have taken place at some past time. (45)

Connerton perceives that modernity, grounded in economic development and constant transformation, is inimical to any true identification with the past since the "principle of modernity itself denies the idea of life as a structure of celebrated recurrence," which gives modern invented rites an artificially nostalgic tone (64). But even though Jonas's community exists outside of modernity—there is no ceaseless expansion of market forces or culture of disposable innovation to inhibit social memory—and even though its citizens are no strangers to ritualized performances, Jonas and his fellow townspeople have no formal practices which give them access to their past. The annual community Ceremony (the focus of the first third of the novel), which covers the Ceremony of Naming newchildren through the Ceremony of Twelve, where twelve year-olds are given their life Assignments, contains a great many "more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances" which give them symbolic significance (Connerton 45). But the symbolism of receiving tunic pockets for Eights or the cutting of hair for Tens, is almost entirely self-referential, signifying one age group's increased maturity, albeit within the context of increased responsibilities to the larger community. At no point does the usual Ceremony invoke the community's past or the present community's continuity with it; no mythic or historical origins are ritually re-enacted, no founding Elders eulogized. Only moments of the recent past typically receive mention, such as the assignment of a replacement child named Caleb to a couple whose first Caleb drowned.

Jonas's selection as the new Receiver of Memory, a very rare event, is also unusual because it momentarily ruptures the community's atemporality and even acknowledges its amnesia. The public choice of Jonas as the community's storehouse of memory formally, if somewhat implicitly, acknowledges that the community has an historical past, and that memory and knowledge about this past exist but are off-limits to all but one person. The potential of this admission to rouse dissension or at least curiosity among citizens about their past, and its failure to do so demonstrates the extent of the absence of social memory. The community's relationship to memory and history, beyond being mostly unintelligible abstractions, is that of a pain to be avoided. The Chief Elder says, "We failed in our last selection [. . .] . It was ten years ago, when Jonas was just a toddler. I will not dwell on the experience because it causes us all terrible discomfort" (61), and emphasizes that Jonas "will be faced [. . .] with pain of a magnitude that none of us here can comprehend" (63). To the Committee of Elders and the wider collective, acknowledgement of the past brings discomfort and pain, but Lowry shows that living without a past and its accompanying pain numbs emotional capacity and creates a citizenry with only childlike levels of awareness. The most shocking example of this is

when Jonas's father, a professional child nurturer, good-naturedly euthanizes a newborn baby with no understanding that he has taken a life. Significantly, it is only due to having begun his training as Receiver that Jonas, who views the killing of the newborn, understands its meaning. Lowry thus posits memory both as critical to full human development, and through Jonas's apprenticeship with the Giver, as the novel's one source of utopian impulse for a different future.

The memories Jonas receives during his training to become the new Receiver of Memory gradually cause him to reject the founding principles of his society and to voluntarily exile himself from the community, leaving behind a cascade of memories that will perhaps permanently disrupt Sameness. The means by which Jonas receives these memories is pivotal to his transformation. The Giver is the sole person in the community allowed to possess books (apart from directories, dictionaries and the Book of Rules), but despite the Giver's thousands of volumes, Jonas never reads as part of his training. Instead, he removes his tunic and reclines face down while the Giver places his hands on Jonas's back and passes memories *into* Jonas. As Michael Levy rightly indicates, the transference of memory is the point at which Lowry's novel moves from science fiction into fantasy (53), and in fact, almost nothing related to memory in *The Giver* can be explained scientifically, from the Giver's loss of a memory once he has given it to Jonas, to the way memories apparently exist as place bound entities independent of individual consciousness (so when Jonas leaves his community, the memories remain behind and become collective memories). When the Giver transmits memories to Jonas, Jonas inhabits them; they come to him as first-hand lived experiences, full of sensations and emotions rather than detached observations. Jonas finds when he receives his first memory of sledding in snow that "One part of his consciousness knew that he was still lying there, on the bed, in the Annex room. Yet another, separate part of his being was upright now, in a sitting position, and beneath him he could feel that he was not on the soft decorated bedcovering at all, but rather seated on a flat, hard surface. [. . .] And he could *see*, though his eyes were closed" (81). Interestingly, the Giver, whose memory it just was, is nowhere present in the scene. By receiving memories through a wakeful dream state as lived experience, as opposed to a more passive method, Jonas takes full possession of them. They become distinctly *his* memories and *his* past, not just a generalized historical past. This is true to such an extent that Jonas is able to "perceive" without being told, the names for things he has never actually experienced or heard of, such as sunshine (85). More importantly, the memories Jonas receives from the Giver call forth another layer of memory that is not received but created. In William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984), when the protagonist Case meets the Artificial Intelligence (AI) called Wintermute within cyberspace, the AI accesses Case's

digitally stored memory to appear in the form of people from Case's past. Amy Novak shows that Wintermute's holographic simulacra of memories provoke both actual memories and action from Case. The simulated images from Case's past "do not replace Case's memory, but instead [. . .] conjure forth memory" (401). The images not only trigger Case's own memory, they also create "a fury in him that propels him into action," leading him to assist Wintermute in changing the matrix (401). Jonas experiences a similar layering of memory in *The Giver*; as with Case, the memory images Jonas receives from an external source (which are more than just simulations) engender further memory, but a form of memory that reaches beyond recollection. Jonas's new memory, conceived in a dream, takes on a spatial dimension and becomes a place he wants to arrive at. The night after his first day of training, Jonas dreams repeatedly of sledding down the snowy hill:

> Always, in the dream, it seemed as if there were a destination: a *something*—he could not grasp what—that lay beyond the place where the thickness of snow brought the sled to a stop. He was left, upon awakening, with the feeling that he wanted, even somehow needed, to reach the something that waited in the distance. The feeling that it was good. That it was welcoming. That it was significant. (88)

Jonas's ungraspable but yet perceived destination, which looms large at the novel's end, is a product of memory but also beyond memory, a something yet-to-be experienced, a future/past of utopian longing.

Though not intentionally written as such, I believe Lowry's ambiguous treatment of memory can most usefully be understood as an enactment of Marxist philosopher of utopia Ernst Bloch's concept of anticipatory consciousness, and as a vivid illustration of the importance of Bloch's distinction between memory as recognition (*anagnorisis*) versus memory as recollection (*anamnesis*). Bloch is unorthodoxly Marxist due to his mysticism and his anti-materialist appropriation of the ideal of Utopia; his dense writings are also fairly critiqued as overly subjective, but have had considerable influence amongst theologians, and more recently, in the field of utopian studies.[4] Bloch considered memory to have a valuable utopian function, and in *The Giver*, memory leads directly to utopian desire because it is only by unlocking the past that Jonas can start to contemplate the future. The fact that Jonas receives memories of the distant past as his own lived experiences means that in a sense he has many lifetimes of experience with which to approach the future. In an essay on memory and Utopia, Vincent Geoghegan writes,

> My past memories will have a constitutive role in the forging of my present and future perceptions. Since I am not a blank sheet or piece of blotting paper, but rather

> a dynamic, constructive perceiver, I enter the future with a body of assumptions and preoccupations located in memory. [. . .] In this sense I can be said to be 'remembering the future.' (17-18)

Bloch's theory of memory is one that emphasizes the friction between past and present that unleashes creative potential for the future. Bloch rejects the Platonic conception of memory as recollection (*anamnesis*), in which the search for truth leads always to the recollection of perfect universal forms. In a conversation with philosopher Michael Landmann in 1968, Bloch argues that the "doctrine of *anamnesis* claims that we have knowledge only because we formerly knew. But then there could be no fundamentally new knowledge, no future knowledge. [. . .] *Amamnesis* [. . .] makes everything a gigantic *déjà vu*, as if everything had already been" (178). With *anagnorisis*, however, "the new is never completely new for us because we bring with us something to measure it by. We always relate what we find to earlier experience or to an image we have of it. [. . .] *Anamnesis* provides the reassuring evidence of complete similarity; *anagnorisis*, however, is linked with reality by only a thin thread; it is therefore alarming" (178). Similarly, Harvard psychologist and memory researcher Daniel Schacter argues that memory is more than simply retrieving stored information that we already know:

> for the rememberer, the engram (the stored fragments of an episode) and the memory (the subjective experience of recollecting a past event) are not the same thing. [. . .] Although it is often assumed that a retrieval cue merely arouses or activates a memory that is slumbering in the recesses of the brain, I have hinted at an alternative: the cue combines with the engram to yield a new, emergent identity—the recollective experience of the rememberer—that differs from either of its constituents. This idea was intimated in some of Proust's writings, in which memories emerge from comparing and combining a present situation with a past one [. . .] (70)

Bloch's conception of *anagnorisis* resembles Schacter's understanding of memory as subjective and creative, but with greater emphasis on memory's generative potential. Bloch stresses that "*anagnorisis* is a shock" (178) where in "rare moments" (181) our past meets the present to give new understanding:

> It doesn't mean merely that I recognize A which I see before me, as the B [. . .] I formerly knew, but also the opposite: that I only now recognize the B I knew as the newly known A, that what I previously did not understand [. . .] is made essentially clear by a new experience (181)

The plan Jacob conceives with the Giver for Jacob to leave the community and release his memories back into the population, a radical reshaping of the

future, proceeds from just such a shock of recognition (*anagnorisis*). In the course of his training, Jonas receives in fairly quick succession memories and knowledge of death (Civil War, chapter 15) and familial love (chapter 16). Jonas is still assimilating these concepts, hopefully telling the infant Gabriel at night that "Things could change, Gabe [. . .]. There could be love" (128-29), when a new experience shocks him into action. Seeing his father kill the identical twin newchild [the retrieval cue] confirms what Jonas already knows about violent or unnatural death, but when combined with the memory of familial love and the bonds between generations [engrams], the infanticide reveals the moral horror of his father's act, a complete violation of his role as Nurturer, and the terrifying recognition that his society ignorantly commits gross injustice merely in the name of organization. From this point on, Jonas is intent on Elsewhere.

During his training, the residual feeling Jonas is left with after the immediacy of receiving memories is a realization of lack, of what his society has forfeited by transitioning to Sameness. In *Notes from Nowhere: Feminism, Utopian Logic and Social Transformation*, Jennifer Burwell observes that some critics of utopian literature, particularly Fredric Jameson, see the halcyon future imagined by such literature as the "illusory resolution of the contradictions in this society," which the critic then works to expose (41). In a far less deliberate way, *The Giver* rewinds this scenario to similar effect in Jonas's case: rather than the imagined future, it is Jonas's memories of the past that expose the contradiction that the utopian peace and order of his present society is built on unseen violence. Jonas's memories lead to hope that things could be different; this is the novel's utopian drive and it is a mental orientation that Bloch well understood. Bloch critiqued Western philosophy's tendency to view the world as ontologically finished or complete, and its corresponding disregard for the undetermined better future for which people are hoping. In his massive *The Principle of Hope* (written 1938-1947, revised 1953 and 1959), Bloch expands the study of utopian hope far beyond the traditional literary utopia. "Indeed," writes Bloch, "the utopian coincides so little with the novel of an ideal state that the whole totality of *philosophy* becomes necessary [. . .] to do justice to the content of that designated by utopia" (15). To catalogue the world's cultural repositories of hope, Bloch considers fairy-tales, music, architecture, circuses, alchemy, daydreams and many other types of "wishful images" as viable forms of utopian desire. For Bloch, these types of desire are not merely fanciful diversions but productive instances of hope through which humans glimpse or anticipate a better future. This utopian impulse, or anticipatory consciousness, is a manifestation of what Bloch terms the Not-Yet-Conscious, an individual's pre-conscious and creative anticipation of a potentially realizable future, the Not-Yet-Become (Levitas 87). Starting with

his first book, *The Spirit of Utopia* (1918), Bloch developed a theory about the importance of daydreams and literature (and other aesthetic forms) to the Not-Yet-Conscious. Bloch argues that the "daydream can furnish inspirations which do not require interpreting, but working out, it builds castles in the air as blueprints too, and not always just fictitious ones" (*Hope* 86). Jack Zipes, in his discussion of Bloch, points out that "Unlike dreams, which house repressed and forgotten desires and experiences, daydreams can be productive for the formation of individuals and the world since they occur in semiconsciousness and point to real, objective possibilities" (xxxii). Literature goes even further than daydreams because it provides images through which individuals can critically ascertain what is needed to transcend human alienation. Bloch writes that in literature, anticipatory consciousness can occur because objects are depicted in a "dialectically open space" in which the object is

> immanently more achieved, more thoroughly formed, more essential than in the immediate-sensory or immediate-historical occurrence of this Object. [. . .] everything that appears in the artistic image is sharpened or condensed to a decisiveness that the reality of experience in fact only seldom shows, but that is most definitely inherent in the subjects. (215)

In *The Giver*, Jonas does not have time to utilize the literature available to him as the new Receiver, but his experience of receiving memories closely approximates the utopian effects of daydreams and literature described by Bloch. The physical sensation of receiving is for Jonas akin to an intense daydream, but the cognitive result is closer to the anticipation engendered by the "sharpened or condensed" images of literature. In Bloch's philosophy, the startling nature of Jonas's memories represent the *Novum*, the quality of the new that points toward the Not-Yet-Become. Jonas's new memories are genuinely new in that they exist completely outside of his society's ideology, and through them, he not only perceives what is missing in his society but also begins to actively anticipate a future with color, choices, and collectively held memories.

It could be claimed, of course, that Jonas's memories function simply as recollection and lead back only to an idealized past. It is not unusual for literary dystopias to critique or subvert the power of the state by doing little more than reinscribing the norms of bourgeois culture. Chris Ferns, in *Narrating Utopia*, argues that in many important dystopias like *We*, *Brave New World*, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, "the past [. . .] becomes the main source of the values in comparison with which dystopian society is judged and found wanting" (119). Similarly, *The Giver* certainly endorses the values of the past (our past) over the values of Sameness, but I would argue that Lowry does not intend just to recuperate twentieth-century western individualism. Rather, Lowry's

treatment of memory as recognition (*anagnorisis*) indicates a forward utopian momentum. As Bloch writes of daydreams, in what could be a description of Jonas's sledding memory, the "day-fantasy begins [. . .] with wishes, but carries them radically to their conclusion, *wants to get to the place of their fulfilment*" (95, my emphasis). Herbert Marcuse's appropriation of Freud also provides insight into the relationship between memory and the future, and why Jonas's favorite memory of familial love is crucial to the novel's ending. In *Eros and Civilization* Marcuse posits memory as the means to recover forgotten episodes of happiness and freedom that are repressed by the conscious but affirmed by the unconscious. Marcuse argues that the "truth value" of memory is its ability to "preserve promises and potentialities which are betrayed and even outlawed by the mature, civilized individual, but which had once been fulfilled in his dim past and which are never entirely forgotten" (33). Recapturing the truth of memory from the restraints of rationality leads to the desire for the "conscious recreation" of happiness in the future; Marcuse writes, "The liberation of the past does not end in its reconciliation with the present. Against the self-imposed restraint of the discoverer, the orientation on the past tends toward an orientation on the future. The *recherche du temps perdu* becomes the vehicle for future liberation" (33). In a similar vein, the semiotician provocateur Murray Jay Siskind in Don DeLillo's *White Noise* (1985) radically reinterprets the experience of *déjà vu* as pre-visioning the future as opposed to reliving the past, so that memory functions more as recognition instead of recollection and becomes oriented on the yet-to-be:

> Why do we think these things happened before? Simple. They did happen before, in our minds, as visions of the future. Because these are precognitions, we can't fit the material into our system of consciousness as it is now structured. This is basically supernatural stuff. We're seeing into the future but haven't learned how to process the experience. So it stays hidden until the precognition comes true, until we come face to face with the event. Now we are free to remember it, to experience it as familiar material. (151)

The escape plan Jonas hatches with the Giver calls for him to leave the community by hiding in the back of a vehicle when the rest of the town is preoccupied with the annual Ceremony. But when Jonas learns that the newchild Gabriel—who like Jonas has pale eyes and is able to receive memories from Jonas—is scheduled for immediate Release due to failure to thrive, Jonas is forced to flee with the infant on his bicycle. Many days later, after eluding the search planes hunting for them, they end up, near death, on a snow-covered hill. At the summit, almost frozen and without hope, Jonas suddenly feels joy and recognizes his whereabouts as the sledding hill of his dream. Jonas tells

Gabriel, "'I remember this place, Gabe.' And it was true. *But it was not a grasping of a thin and burdensome recollection*; this was different. This was something that he could keep. It was a memory of his own" (178, my emphasis). Jonas knows the sled, which becomes literally his "vehicle for future liberation," is waiting for him because he is, in a real sense, remembering his future. In his precognitive dream, Jonas perceived there was a destination waiting beyond where the sled stopped; now, with Gabriel, Jonas feels sure the sled is heading for the "final destination [. . .] the Elsewhere that held their future and their past" and "he recognized [. . .] the red, blue, and yellow lights that twinkled from trees in places where families created and kept memories, where they celebrated love" (179). The past is contained in Jonas's destination, but it is not a static already-has-been that he arrives at. The destination is also a place pregnant with expectation and future possibilities. Families create new memories, not just keep them, and Jonas knows that they "were waiting for him; and that they were waiting, too, for the baby" (180). Lowry's ending is famously and richly ambiguous, and it is not entirely clear whether Jonas really finds the sled or really sees Christmas lights. Michael Levy considers this "improbable," arguing that "it seems likely that he's hallucinating" (56). I disagree, not because Jonas's movement "across vast distances of space and time" (180) can be explained rationally, but because Lowry has much earlier situated memory in the fantastic in order to demonstrate its effects and its power. Jonas's final journey is nothing if not a journey through and beyond memory, so to discount the final scene as hallucination requires the entire process by which Jonas acquired his memories from the Giver to be dismissed as imaginary, for it is no less fantastic. What seems clear to me is that whatever utopian hope resides in the ending, it is memory, the novel's one real agent of change, which makes it possible.

The Giver is a striking object lesson in the human and political costs of relinquishing historical memory. Without directly satirizing contemporary American culture, Lowry critiques the anesthetizing effects of cultural amnesia—"the ability to forget" which Marcuse argues is the "mental faculty which sustains submissiveness and renunciation" (163). Jonas's decision to abandon his role as Receiver of Memory is meant to force his community to bear memories of the past so they can truly feel love and anguish and understand the implications of their actions. The result, if successful, will be to end the atemporal ever-present in which his townspeople live and return them to historical time. As much as the novel focuses on recovering the past as the means to achieving full humanity, Lowry also shows that memory is the primary utopian tool for opening up the future.

Notes

1. For an excellent and detailed discussion of how definitions of utopia, dystopia and anti-utopia have evolved in the fields of sf and utopian studies, see Tom Moylan's *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia.*
2. See Moylan, 155. Lyman Tower Sargent, another leading utopian scholar, designates "utopian satire" as a separate subgenre from dystopia in "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited" (9).
3. Qtd. in Cecilia Tichi, "Introduction." *Looking Backward* by Edward Bellamy, 12–13.
4. My reading of Bloch is indebted to Ruth Levitas's thorough analysis of Bloch's utopian thought in *The Concept of Utopia*, especially chapter 4, "Utopian Hope: Ernst Bloch and Reclaiming the Future," 83-105.

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