

The Rebirth of Utopia in 21st-Century Cinema: Cosmopolitan Hopes in the Films of Globalization, by Mónica Martín



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Mónica Martín has seen every Anglophone film made in the past two decades. At least, that's the feeling one gets while reading this encyclopedic accounting of films which depict her formulation of global cosmopolitan utopianism. In this, her first book, Martín expands on themes of intersectional feminism, environmental concerns, and the political potential of film—themes that fill her previous publications in venues such as *Utopian Studies* and *Atlantis*. *The Rebirth of Utopia in 21st-Century Cinema* is the first monograph in Peter Lang's "Ralahine Utopian Studies" Series to focus on film, greatly expanding the scope of collection. Martín interacts with the work of other utopian thinkers like Tom Moylan, Ruth Levitas, and Fredric Jameson, putting their theories in conversations with scholars of globalization such as Zygmunt Bauman, Gerard Delanty, and Ulrich Beck, and utopian film scholars such as Richard Dyer, Peter Fitting, and Celestino Deleyto.

THE REBIRTH OF UTOPIA IN
21ST-CENTURY CINEMA
COSMOPOLITAN HOPES IN THE FILMS OF
GLOBALISATION



Peter Lang

MONICA MARTIN

In a post-pandemic era when "dystopia" feels too much like a contemporary descriptor, Martín argues, utopian thought is experiencing a needed resurgence. She states, "[t]his book contends that twenty-first-century cinema illustrates the rebirth of utopia, conceived as an open method grounded in cosmopolitan worldviews and aspirations" (2). By "open method," Martín refers to stories which gesture toward egalitarian futures without attempting to forward a specific agenda or provide a blueprint for how such a society should operate. Rather, "[e]cocritical film spaces, caring protagonists, and cooperative networks" encourage viewers to imagine utopia as "a cosmopolitan method of critical resistance and transformative action, and also as a moral obligation toward future generations" (3).

Following the introduction, the text has four parts. The first, "The Art of Envisioning Life Otherwise: Utopia and Cinema," sets up the framework for understanding Martín's cosmopolitan, utopian filmic lens. Martín examines the ways in which film has become a form par excellence for depicting utopian possibilities, even though it has "been traditionally relegated to a secondary place within utopian studies in comparison to literary works" (32). Each subsequent section begins

with a chapter which provides an in-depth discussion of the critical conversation surrounding the section's focus, followed by a wide-ranging look at many films that exemplify this focus, and then a close reading of a film which showcases the focus through both plot and cinematic device.

The second part, "Hope amidst the Ashes: Cosmopolitan Horizons in Contemporary Post-apocalyptic Cinema," begins with a chapter that discusses how "in social theories of globalization, threats, and negative consequences (like growing economic inequalities), cohabit with progress and opportunities (such as the emergence of transnational communities and ideologies)" (50). Martín examines post-apocalyptic films to consider their impulses toward either apartheid or cosmopolitan spatial solutions; she then provides a close reading of the plot and cinematic devices of *The Children of Men* (2006), which begins in an apartheid mode, and eventually opens into cosmopolitan interrelations and movement.

Part three, "Reformed Ontologies: Cinematic Philosophies of Hope and Care in Global Times of Crisis," focuses on shifting global philosophy away from neoliberalism and individual gain, and toward "womb-informed nurturing dialogics" which encourage viewers to look to the future "with the eyes of those who need care and need to care for the world and others" (105). This section's filmic overview focuses on films that depict marginalized characters surviving in worlds inimical to their well-being. Martín argues that these "survivors—with racial, gender, or class traits that lie on the margins of what counts as mainstream Hollywood—perform modes of heroic resistance that put forward inclusive imaginaries" (108). To illustrate this inclusive imaginary of survival, Martín turns to a reading of *The East* (2013), in which the main character, Jane Owen, discovers a new way of living by rejecting both her role as a member of the neoliberal establishment and a new opportunity to become part of an eco-militant collective. Rather, the protagonist becomes conscious of both ecological and social concerns, rejecting the violence her company helps visit on the earth, and the violence her new friends seek to visit on others to protect it.

The final part, "Intersectional Politics: Egalitarian Cultures Occupy the Streets and Movies," takes a practical look at recent intersectional, global movements, and then examines how films "are engaging in political conversations that...contest hegemonic political models and cultures" by proposing their own "alternative paradigms" (151). In her final case study of *The Hunger Games* series, Martín reads Katniss as a boundary-crossing feminist hero: "Katniss's political agency challenges the divides between identity and class politics, the personal and the political, the local and the cosmopolitan, the ecological and the social, the moral and the political"—an agency that is echoed, Martín states, in the real-life work of activists such as Greta Thunberg (180). Martín then provides a short concluding section, in which she describes cosmopolitan film as giving us a challenge: "to hope for the best and work together to see it happen" (188).

The Rebirth of Utopia in 21st-Century Cinema is unique for its willingness to engage with multiple genres, finding the cosmopolitan utopian vision in realist and science fictional narratives alike. The collection of works demonstrates a dedication to crossing boundaries—of genre, of nationality, and of narrative. Represented in this work is an incredible range of films which depict

coalitional relationships between diverse peoples and celebrate moments of freedom and hope in otherwise bleak landscapes. At a time when the dystopian genre and realism can feel as though they are collapsing into each other, Martín's restorative readings provide an archive of cinematic tools for imagining a better future.

Sarah Nolan-Brueck is a PhD candidate at the University of Southern California, where she studies how science fiction interrogates gender. In particular, she examines the many ways SF authors question the medicolegal control of marginalized gendered groups in the United States, and how SF can support activism that refutes this control. Sarah is a graduate editorial assistant for *Western American Literature*. She has been previously published in *Femspec*, *Huffpost*, and has an article forthcoming in *Orbit: A Journal of American Literature*.