

Book Review: Utopia Limited: The Sixties and the Emergence of the Postmodern

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the nature of individualism in relation to the market, they dramatize problems that the theory either ignores or leaves implicit. Moreover, their generic and moral features also inform other popular culture texts, so that both for students of social theory, as for students of popular culture, *The Wild West* offers an invigorating demonstration of the intersection of political science with cultural studies in ways that confirm the cowboy as, indeed, a core cultural icon.

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Marianne DeKoven, *Utopia Limited: The Sixties and the Emergence of the Postmodern*. Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2004. 362 pp. (inc. notes, bibliography and index). ISBN 0-8223-3280-9 (hbk) \$84.95; ISBN 0-8223-3269-8 (pbk) \$25.95

In *Utopia Limited* Marianne DeKoven, a self-described '1960s person', revisits several of the defining texts of that era to show that the 1960s represents simultaneously the culmination of modernist utopian impulses and a critical moment for the emergence of the postmodern. The book focuses upon the textual analysis of key 1960s texts, some of which are now all but forgotten, such as Herbert Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man* and R.D. Laing's *The Politics of Experience*, and some of which have become classics, such as Barthes' *Mythologies* and Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown's *Learning from Las Vegas*. (Neither Barthes' book, written in 1957, nor Venturi's from 1972, are literally from the 1960s but they are part of the 'structure of feeling' that defines the 1960s for DeKoven.) DeKoven's analysis reveals how 1960s modernism, the search for wholeness, authenticity and meaningfulness, expressed often in relation to the individual subject, conditions an emerging postmodernism that valorizes fragmentation, the local, the temporary and the diffuse. By discovering the roots of postmodernism in the moment of modernism's most ambitious expression, DeKoven is able to establish continuity between the utopian impulses of the 1960s and the seemingly post-utopian or anti-utopian postmodern era. The utopian desires of the 1960s are displaced in postmodernism, but they persist in a form she refers to as 'utopia limited'.

DeKoven selects texts that captured the *zeitgeist* of their day, particularly in the United States, but which, with notable exceptions, feel anachronistic now. And it is precisely the difference between modernism and postmodernism as defining 'structures of feeling' that concerns DeKoven. By bringing the issue of postmodernism to the centre of 1960s literature, DeKoven potentially shifts our understanding of both these texts and postmodernism. It is exciting, as well, just to revisit many of



these texts, so inspiring to many of us in their time (or soon after; I am a '1970s person', but I grew up reading these texts). In addition to the books already mentioned, DeKoven discusses Hunter Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, *The Port Huron Statement of Students for a Democratic Society* (SDS), Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*, the Living Theatre's *Paradise Now!*, William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*, James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* as well as the work of Toni Morrison, E.L. Doctorow and others. While DeKoven's methodology is rooted in literary studies, the range of texts and references – from philosophy to politics to literature – defines the 1960s broadly and convincingly makes relevant the concerns of the 1960s to understanding our present. If this move itself seems anachronistic, just consider the central role that the 1960s has played in the recent presidential election season in the United States, which has been framed as a referendum on the Vietnam era.

The strength of DeKoven's book, its many adept close readings and its careful sorting out of modern and postmodern impulses within such readings, also points to its weakness. While it engages with the work of Raymond Williams, Fredric Jameson, Andreas Huyssen and others, the book does not contribute substantially to the theorization of the postmodern itself. DeKoven accepts conventional definitions of both modernism and postmodernism to enable her textual analysis. Similarly, the focus on modernism and postmodernism as 'structures of feeling' creates ambivalence in her book. She seems to try hard to convince us (and herself?) that modernist utopian desires persist in postmodernism and that this is an immensely hopeful fact. But her analysis cuts both ways. If 1960s utopian thinking spawned postmodernism through its radical relocation of subjectivity (summed up in the feminist insistence that 'the personal is political'), then 1960s radicalism was always doomed to failure despite the feeling of possibility that it imparted to its participants. DeKoven admits a 'bone-deep sense of loss' over the squandered promise of the 1960s and despite her claim that utopian desires persist in postmodernism, she provides little to impart hope to her reader. (I, for one, cannot accept that the film *Thelma and Louise* is an affirmation of freedom!) DeKoven's struggle to find hope in the present is honest and heartfelt and it underscores the premise of her book, which finds the roots of the present in that era that resembles it the least.

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