In historical retrospect, all utopias are ambiguous. On the one hand, they reflect the historical realities, dilemmas, and obsessions of their time; as such, they are soon burnished with the indelible luster of some retrofuturity or other. On the other, as the markers of paths not taken, these unrealized possibilities continue to indict the history that spurned them. It is the contribution of two recent monographs on German-language utopias of the 19th and 20th centuries—both published, as it happens, in the quincentennial of More’s *Utopia*—to reclaim large and fascinating swaths of utopian territory, not only cataloguing various flavors of historical utopias, but also and more importantly, excavating the diverse conduits through which the utopian imagination informed history; reminding us not only that, as Raymond William’s epigraph to Robert Leucht’s book puts it, “imagination has a history,” but that the reverse is true as well.

The reader of either of these books is struck by the sweeping panorama of utopian visions on offer here: the hidden, domestic utopia of Stifter’s Rosenhaus; the Munich Council Republic; Herzl’s Palestine; a multi-ethnic, cosmopolitan, Germanophone pan-Slavism located in Galicia; schemes of universally providing for basic welfare; future histories that confront the utopian with the dystopian; and the whole atlas of empty spaces, clean starts, and salubrious redoubts strewn athwart the tropics from East Africa to the South Pacific. These two works address similar deficits in the scholarship, although they do so in very different ways. Leucht’s work considers German-language utopias from bourgeois realism to Neue Sachlichkeit in order both to recover the importance of utopia for German literature and to contribute to the theorization of utopia as literary genre and discourse. Bach explores the close connections between utopian and colonial
imaginaries in order to show how authors from von Sacher-Masoch to Joseph Roth used utopian literature to delineate a distinctly Austrian colonial imagination.

As Leucht’s title suggests, his book seeks to offer a new conception of utopia as a genre that is dynamic and political in specific senses—“dynamic” indicates both the way that competing political visions encounter and modify each other within utopian literature, and the way that utopian literature, having incorporated and inflected various non-literary discourses, acts upon society. The approach necessitated by this perspective is thus synchronic and interdisciplinary. If, in other words, utopian literature is traditionally seen as an evolutionary lineage from More to the present, with generic changes (such as the shift from spatial to temporal utopias) located along a diachronic axis, then looking at the tensions, conflicts, and fault lines within the genre of utopia at any given historical moment can yield more than just nuances. Interrogating the genre synchronically can recover its importance as an imaginative field of political struggle.

This approach also, it soon becomes clear, expands the notion of what might be considered a utopian text, thus bringing works, genres, and discourses into dialogue with each other that might not otherwise be read in a single context. To corral the threat of proliferation of such a catholic approach, Leucht adopts as his basic criterion of utopia the presence of a “two-world scheme” (12) that juxtaposes two distinct—and often narratively disjoined—places, societies, or political economies. Ernst Bloch, Karl Mannheim, Fredric Jameson, and others allow him to discuss utopia as a set of distinct yet closely related fields of signification: as a literary genre, a deep and constant human impulse, and a political praxis. This conception of utopia necessitates the inclusion of non-literary discourses. Such an interdisciplinary footing shows how utopias have historically both constituted and exceeded a particular literary genre—they both reflect and participate in their historical moment, shaping its possible futures.
Leucht productively brings this approach to bear on dozens of texts, mostly written in German, from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, some already canonical, many less so. If the book’s primary goal is a new approach to utopia as a genre, this goal is closely tied to the historical scope of the study, which informs its secondary and tertiary goals: to pick up an overlooked strand in German literature between bourgeois realism and Neue Sachlichkeit, and to follow the changes as the utopian genre cycled through booms, busts, and shifting constellations with other discourses during this time. This historical scope is motivated by the fortunes of utopia itself within a German context. The revolutionary year 1848 marks the entrance of utopia as a politically contested term; besides its disfavor in socialist and communist discourse, the aesthetic tendencies of 19th-century realism helped shape a context in which utopia was linked pejoratively to *Wirklichkeitsferne*. The “Abbau utopischer Intensität” that Leucht, drawing on Mannheim’s 1929 sociology of utopian thought, locates around 1930, might be seen as the mirror image of this *Wirklichkeitsferne*. Indeed, in a sense utopia fell victim not only to historical developments such as the project of communist revolution or the rise of fascism, but largely to its own success. No longer connoting an idealistic distance from reality, utopia by the end of this period is defined by Mannheim precisely in terms of its aspiration and ability to actually realize its vision. Yet the wild flowering of competing, praxis-oriented, and often self-critical utopias led to the loss of utopian intensity, as each utopia attacked the others’ claim to transcendence per se, rather than merely quibbling over details of their utopian visions. Utopian competition, post-revolutionary disenchantment, and even, one senses, the intensification of utopian theory (Mannheim, Bloch) led to an ebbing of the utopian tide; the rise of National Socialism and the dislocations of the German public sphere finalized this process.

Between these two bookends of 1848 and 1930, German utopias passed through various configurations. The utopias of bourgeois realism—examples discussed include Adalbert Stifter’s
Der Nachsommer (1857) and Marie Ebner-Eschenbach’s Das Gemeindekind (1887)—are identified by the presence of a “two-world scheme,” yet realist conventions mean that such works cloak their wishful visions in various rhetorical displacements including tropes of the ideal domestic order or the emigrant. The immense popularity of Edward Bellamy’s Looking Backward (1888) sparked a utopian boom of works portraying the future from the perspective of a future looking back at the past. By comparing the German variations on Bellamy’s theme, which lent itself to many other, contrasting visions of the future, Leucht shows how utopian literature functioned synchronically as a dynamic site of contestation. Utopian literature thereby gained the function of interrogating progress and imagining the future, as well as critiquing the present; no longer disguised, it also became an explicit way to think about socialism.

And about colonialism: the discussions of Theodor Hertzka’s Freiland. Ein sociales Zukunftsbild (1889) and Theodor Herzl’s AltNeuLand (1902) show how the imagined empty spaces of East Africa and Palestine served as geographic displacements of the ideal future society. Crucially it was not just discourses of colonialism and imperialism that informed utopian writing at the turn of the century, but also science and the heroic new figure of the engineer. With the engineer as symbol and agent of progress, the utopian was no longer juxtaposed to the practical, but rather imagined in terms of practicability: the engineer became the figure tasked with realizing utopia by constructing it. Yet, in one of several precise and fascinating dialectical reversals this book tracks, the optimism of the engineer, seen most fully in Bernhard Kellermann’s Der Tunnel (1913), soon becomes skepticism about progress’ blind spots. Yevgeniy Zamyatin’s We (1925) and Robert Musil’s Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften (1930–1943) feature the engineer as a trope of social critique rather than progress. The book’s final chapter stages the confrontation of the utopian imagination with the historical experiences of war, revolution, and reaction. The genre’s maturity and acceptance, characterized by the intensity and proliferation of competing, nuanced, self-referential
utopian novels, theories, and other projects, is also its gloaming, at least for the coherent trajectory this work chronicles.

Utopia is historicized in this study as an imaginative strategy that continually pushed against its changing generic habits and constraints to articulate new possibilities. This emerges as an important tendency within both 19th and 20th-century German literature and the much larger history of all the ways in which literature and society have pushed against and shaped each other. It is certainly appealing to link Realism and Neue Sachlichkeit as the ends of an arc that traces not how literature responds to the real but how it addresses the utopian. One would have liked to read on. Although the book's historical scope is rigorously motivated, it is hard not to wonder how its approach might apply to the fate of utopia after fascism, exile, war, and holocaust, in two Germanys and beyond. The synchronous view of utopia as a dynamic genre could be extremely useful in thinking about the ambivalent situations of science fiction in the GDR, say, which often explicitly thematized the relationships among utopia, imagination, alterity, and futurity (see for example the novels of Angela and Karlheinz Steinmüller, or Johanna and Günter Braun). Yet one wonders whether, after the heady fin-de-siècle decades of social reform pamphlets, colonial committees, and diverse tinkering schemes for solving the social question, the perception of (and channels for) utopian applicability to political life might not have become clouded. Certainly utopias and dystopias continued to inform broadly social senses of what is possible (or inevitable), but perhaps the idea of a dynamization of society, proceeding from the utopian genre, is no longer applicable; if this is the case, one wonders whether this is due to some historical change or to a tectonic shift of genres, such as the rise and entrenchment of science fiction; here largely undiscussed, science fiction is both utopia's neighbor but also, seen in terms of its Gattungsdynamik, perhaps in some ways its antithesis. That Leucht's book raises these (and many other) questions is to its credit; that it leaves them for others to answer is in no way a shortcoming.
At first, “Tropics of Vienna” sounds something like “the coasts of Bohemia,” a geographic modifier rendered nonsensical by the nature of the place being modified. Yet the sense of paradox, projection, and displacement evoked by the phrase fits the texts here explored. In Ulrich Bach’s reading, the utopian imagination of colonial space allowed Austrian writers from Leopold von Sacher-Masoch to Joseph Roth to explore, reconfigure, and, in a sense, solve the social, economic, gender, political, and ethnic problems of a multi-national empire by displacing them from the Viennese metropolis onto the imaginative space of the periphery, whether this means Galicia or the South Pacific. And this ambivalence is crucial: by linking the (actual) internal ‘colonies’ of the Habsburg Empire in Central and Eastern Europe to (imagined) overseas colonies, Bach is able to read these spaces as ciphers for—and displacements of—each other, such that a contemporary Austrian landscape of anti-Semitism, multi-ethnic identities, economic crisis, and other features could be examined at arm’s length.

Moreover, this unique combination of real internal colonies and imaginary foreign ones differentiates the Austrian colonial imagination not only from the French and British situations, where knowledge of and discourse about the Orient involved very real power relationships and national interests, but also from Germany. While the fantasy of colonies it did not possess had fueled, according to Susanne Zantop, Germany’s nascent imperial identity, Austrian intellectuals’ experiences of marginalization informed a more empathetic sense of colonial possibility seen as a liberal-humanist, Enlightenment project (2–3). Thus both the idea of what a colony could be, and, more importantly, the function of imagining colonies played a different role in Austria than in Germany—not to actually realize an overseas empire, but to symbolically resolve the social conflicts of Vienna in an imagined “vacant colonial space” (5).
These narratives from the last several decades of the 19th century and the first years of the 20th both reflect and produce colonial and utopian discourse. Leopold von Sacher Masoch, the subject of the first chapter, stages ethnic and gender conflicts in the texts Der Kapitulant (1870) and Paradies am Dniester (1877) in order to arrive at a utopian, pan-Slavic community in Eastern Europe that has implications for all of Europe. The peripheries of this “internal colonialism” (Michael Hecter) offer a space for hierarchies and anxieties to be rendered intelligible and transgressed, in ways that trouble the status quo of the whole multi-ethnic empire and suggest an imperial identity that might resolve the contradiction between inclusion and exclusion. Lazar Baron von Hellenbach’s Insel Mellonta (1883) displaces the ethnic conflicts within the Habsburg Empire onto an imagined encounter between Europeans and Polynesians, in a textual exposition revealed by a narrative twist to have been the dream of the protagonist. This novel does many things at once: the Polynesians model a more egalitarian way of managing social and economic problems, while the revelation that the whole vision was an unrealizable dream serves as a vehicle for the author’s theosophy, and the novel both embodies and transgresses the dominant discourse of its day, both drawing upon colonial rhetoric and using it to express the marginal position of the intellectual. Hertzka’s Freiland locates its utopia in East Africa, proposing the abolition of land ownership as a solution to various crises of liberalism in Vienna, especially stark inequality and anti-Semitism. Bach reads this novel negatively—it is not the specific program alone that interests him, but the contradictions of Hertzka’s work, and what these say about Habsburg society. The rescue of Austrian liberalism was thus transposed to the imagined vacancy of East Africa, in order to foster a local alternative that would, it was hoped, have global ramifications. Herzl’s Altneuland, largely inspired by Hertzka’s Freiland, mobilizes several aspects of the utopian genre, including the tour of the model society and spatial and temporal hiatuses that render the utopian vision intelligible and desirable. By blending Enlightenment cosmopolitanism with secular nationalism, Herzl’s vision of a

communal Jewish utopia in Palestine, bolstered by a forward-facing embrace of science and technology, thus responds to his formative experiences of anti-Semitism in Vienna and abroad. The blank map of utopia thus provided the form necessary for the reorientation of Zionism away from religion and towards a youthful, hygienic nationalism. And finally, a final chapter on Robert Müller and Joseph Roth considers the afterlife of Habsburg colonial utopias from the perspectives of modernism and the twilight years of the empire. Müller's Tropen: Der Mythos der Reise (1915) interrogates the idea of exoticism by imagining the global fusion of cultures, thus representing “a modernist appropriation of Austrian colonial discourse” (8), while Joseph Roth’s historical novels Radetzkymarsch (1932) and Kapuzinergruft (1938), and his 1927 essay Juden auf Wanderschaft criticizes Habsburg identity for its failure to realize the promise of the non-German communities at its margins.

Both studies devote attention to Hertzka’s and Herzl’s novels; the difference between their readings illuminate these two studies’ divergent approaches to utopian literature. Where Bach’s symptomatic reading of Hertzka’s colonial projection situates Freiland in the context of Austrian works about colonies that provide imagined solutions to dilemmas of political economy, gender roles, or national identity, Leucht explores how Hertzka’s project troubles the distinction between literature and social praxis; for Leucht, the Gattungsdynamik of utopia means that Freiland is a political intervention, both in its dialogue with other literary utopias and in its impact on actual colonial projects, particularly on the “Freeland committees” that sprang up in the novel’s wake with no little goading from Hertzka himself. In a similar fashion, it is the inflection of the trope of the engineer that organizes Leucht’s reading of Herzl’s novel. The utopian colonization of Palestine is situated in a larger trajectory of the engineer as the figure who realizes and embodies the future. For Bach, by contrast, the utopian space of the colony allowed Herzl to project—and solve—the dilemmas of fin-de-siècle Vienna.
Even while Bach's project is to constellate utopianism, postcolonialism, and exoticism, and even though the focus of this book is the Habsburg political imaginary, it raises the broader question of whether there might be something inherently colonial about certain facets of the utopian imagination (or vice-versa). What the texts he discusses make impossible to overlook is that there is an uneasy, yet perhaps necessary, kinship among ideas of space, race, and the future. Merely imagining a territory to be a blank slate—or simply avoiding the question of a place's historicity altogether—constitutes a kind of violence that seems both epistemological and political. Such a juncture also raises the question of the relationship between liberalism’s idea of universal progress and the particular violence of colonialism. The study brushes closely up against this question in its discussion of Herzl’s fantasy of Palestinian absence—metaphors of hygiene, clearing, cleaning, absence, and blank slates practically jump off the page asking to be read together and theorized even more explicitly.

*Tropics of Vienna* and *Dynamiken politischer Imagination* both constitute a significant addition to our understanding of the utopian tradition in German literature. They will be of real interest and benefit to those pursuing specific questions about the history of German-language utopias, as well as more general questions about the relationship, both nebulous and historically specific, between literature and society at any given moment.

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