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# Periodical Utopianism: Charles Fourier, *Playboy*, and Erotic Serialization

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## The Present Labor of Future Dreams

This article proposes a formal connection between two unlikely bedfellows: the canonical utopian writing of Charles Fourier in the early nineteenth century and issues of *Playboy* magazine beginning in the mid-twentieth century. Put together, they bring out aspects latent in each. *Playboy* not only amplifies the eroticism of Fourier's utopianism—which was already explicit for this theorist of “very brilliant orgies” (Fourier 1971: 263; see also Wark 2013: chap. 8)—but also, more importantly, highlights the fact that Fourier's writings were, like the magazine, serialized. In return, Fourier reframes *Playboy*'s project as utopian in its promise of future bounties of pleasure. For both, serialization provides a form of erotic labor that keeps open these promises without realizing them; whereas the erotic is often seen as opposed to repetition or to something like what Fourier called “logic,” this utopian serialization is a way of maintaining and renewing desire even as the basic mechanics of sex do not themselves become new. By suggesting a resonance between them that is primarily formal, I draw upon Fredric Jameson's own formalist approach to utopian writing, but I also argue his approach to Fourier is actually not formalist enough. I also seek to extend Frances Ferguson's compelling if idiosyncratic take on pornography as a utilitarian genre by considering what is at stake in calling it utopian instead.

In *Archaeologies of the Future* (2005), Jameson set out to guide us away from reading utopian writing just for its ideas, that is, for its content. In the essays that comprise the first part of *Archaeologies*, Jameson not only details various

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Line 1 features of the utopian genre—most importantly for my purposes, a systems  
2 theory of the utopian text that attends to the necessary condition of a differentiat-  
3 ed social space in which imaginary enclaves, or subtractions from real social  
4 space, can be elaborated and dilated to the level of an alternate world—but also  
5 meditates on the formal tradition of textual utopianism. Jameson (2005: 3) tracks  
6 two lines of descent from Thomas More’s inaugural *Utopia*: “the one intent on the  
7 realization of the Utopian program, the other an obscure yet omnipresent Utopian  
8 impulse finding its way to the surface in a variety of covert expressions and prac-  
9 tices.” Clearly, Fourier belongs to the former line, and he has great importance  
10 there. In particular, in Jameson’s account, Fourier is the utopian who elaborates  
11 the bourgeois enclave of subjectivity itself. For Fourier, the perfect society comes  
12 from “passionate attraction,” a perfect matching of sexual partners. For all think-  
13 ers who follow in Fourier’s tradition, the political program of utopianism must  
14 then be eminently a project of “ontological” (rather than, say, technological or  
15 economic) revolution; the Fourierian program is to have an affective and finally  
16 erotic superstructure coordinate the economic base (Jameson 2005: 19). First,  
17 create the conditions for the full and coordinated exercise of the passions; then,  
18 utopia follows (245).

19 But what do we make of the second line of utopian descent, and how do we  
20 distinguish between a “program” and an “impulse”? For Jameson (2005: 143),  
21 “one of the unique features of the Utopian tradition consists in the way in which  
22 the form itself seems to interiorize differences which generally remain implicit  
23 in literary history,” which is to say not only that utopianism synchronically can-  
24 nibalizes other genres and puts them into dialogue in the production of a different  
25 newness, but also that a given utopian text diachronically absorbs its predeces-  
26 sors in order to present this production as the final answer. Caught between the  
27 plurality of its past and the prophecy it makes of the future, the form of the uto-  
28 pian text cannot help but be an ambivalent mediation. Here Jameson’s account of  
29 utopian ambivalence is remarkably close to Theodor Adorno’s aesthetic theory of  
30 the modernist artwork, always caught up in the simultaneity of its conservative  
31 and revolutionary impulses, but Jameson’s intervention is to name the synthetic  
32 impulse utopian and then, surprisingly, to find it distributed in a wider range  
33 of texts. Because, for Jameson (1979), it is not just someone like Fourier who is  
34 utopian; mass-cultural products like the films *Jaws* and *The Godfather* are also  
35 utopian in their alienation from the world as it actually exists.

36 The Jamesonian heuristic that finds utopian impulses distributed every-

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2 where, across genres, leaves little room for the specificity of the “programmatic”  
3 utopian genre itself and its textual practice of imagining not only to the possibil-  
4 ity but also the shape and functioning of alternative worlds. My complaint is that  
5 the utopian formalist too often declines to give attention to the form of texts they  
6 deem overtly utopian in content: it is as if the programmatic utopian text can  
7 speak the utopian shape of all other texts and therefore does not need any special  
8 characterization of its composure. Peculiarly, the avowed utopian text even ends  
9 up appearing less utopian than all the other texts that unwittingly bear its impulse,  
10 because the utopian text does not have a complicated enough, which is to say  
11 contradictory and ambivalent enough, relation to the world from which it comes.  
12 Jameson himself is guilty of this nonformalist reading when it comes to Fourier,  
13 the subject of the first chapter of the second part of *Archaeologies*. The program  
14 Jameson extracts from Fourier is given directly in the noncontradictory contents  
15 of Fourier’s writings, which Jameson submits to a decidedly nonformalist read-  
16 ing. Jameson’s engagement with Fourier is primarily through four block quotes  
17 from *Nouveau monde industriel* (1829) and *Nouveau monde amoureux* (1816–18).  
18 The critical exercise that Jameson undertakes is therefore essentially paraphrase  
19 and contextualization, putting Fourier’s words into the vocabulary and formulas  
20 that make them commensurable with more recent theorists, preeminently Jean-  
21 Paul Sartre and Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe.

22 Where, then, is the formal contradiction that marks the utopian impulse,  
23 and does its absence from Jameson’s account suggest Fourier provides a utopian  
24 program without a utopian impulse? Certainly, there is mention of contradic-  
25 tion because Fourier mentions contradiction, namely, as Jameson (2005: 245)  
26 paraphrases it, “the need, within unifying groups or groups-in-fusion, for fun-  
27 damental internal dissonances and contradictions.” But because Fourier is a pro-  
28 grammatic rather than impulsive writer, Jameson declines to excavate his writing  
29 for the ambivalent mediation that its form is tasked to make between the absorp-  
30 tive present and the utopian future. Despite the great work that the first part of  
31 *Archaeologies* undertakes to establish the generic outlines of utopianism and the  
32 discontinuities of its contradictory temporality, Jameson’s chapter on Fourier is a  
33 broad reading of the utopian’s content, which is what secures Fourier’s belonging  
34 to a utopian tradition.

35 In this essay, I argue for renewed attention to the form of Fourier’s writing,  
36 especially the punctuated temporality of repeating prophesies of the future in  
such a way, ironically, as to delay the work of ensuring the future’s appearance.

Line 1    What follows is a utopian commitment to inhabiting and surviving the present  
2        rather than taking up fantastic residence in the promised, but not yet existing,  
3        land. For Fourier, this continual return to the present is erotic, and attending  
4        to the temporality of that erotics not only reframes a formalist understanding  
5        of his project, but also what the labor, rather than dream, of utopianism entails.  
6        In Reinhart Koselleck's ([1959] 1988) classic *Critique and Crisis*, utopianism  
7        emerged as a critique of Enlightenment politics but, deferring its own vision to  
8        the future, ended up missing politics altogether. The point was that utopia would  
9        miraculously arrive and thus the labor of revolution, or of bringing it about, was  
10       unnecessary. The utopian critic spoke from the position of the future to judge  
11       the present, having seen the superior order of things that his (always "his" in  
12       Koselleck's survey) reasoning revealed to him. The "hypocrisy" was that criti-  
13       cism extended into politics but was self-assured of its rightness because of its  
14       exemption from politics, its operation through neutral and "natural" (here replac-  
15       ing moral) reasoning. It became possible for the critical subject to "address[] the  
16       King on equal terms"; eventually, "the critic saw himself as the King of Kings,  
17       the true sovereign" (119). And so criticism, "which has initially kept itself apart  
18       from the State so as to be able to function unimpededly, now, by virtue of its own  
19       authority, eradicated the boundary line it had once drawn" (121). At the same  
20       time, assured of his natural rightness, the utopian critic declined the necessity  
21       of any labor to bring about his utopia. In an essentially progressivist philosophy  
22       of history, "the abolition of the State is planned and indirectly aspired to, but  
23       revolution is not necessary, for the State will collapse anyways. . . . The assurance  
24       of history ruled out the need for direct conflict" (133).

25       This refusal of direct conflict survives in more recent strands of utopia-  
26       nism, including the influential and beautiful *Cruising Utopia* by Jose Esteban  
27       Muñoz (2009: 4), who proposes a utopian methodology consisting of "a backward  
28       glance that enacts a future vision." In this double evacuation of the present, the  
29       critic looks to the past and to the future but never at where their feet are now,  
30       for "the present is a prison-house" (3). For other leftists, a messianic relation to  
31       time has meant designating the present as a waiting room for a miracle, whether  
32       Alain Badiou's (2008: 585; 2006, 173–83) "event," Quentin Meillassoux's (2011a:  
33       187–88; 2011b) substitution of worlds, or Eric Santner's (2005) "calling" from  
34       beyond ideological interpellation. The challenge with these accounts is not that  
35       they propose what Ernst Bloch ([1954] 1995: 146) called "abstract utopias" with  
36       no sense of historical footing, for they do retain a sense of history and are in fact

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motored by the promise of historical change.<sup>1</sup> Koselleck would worry, instead, that each of these theorists' attempts to get outside the impasses of politics in the present end up removing the option for actual political intervention, as the radicalism of the political intervention becomes judged precisely in terms of its inability to be intelligible in the present—off the ideological radar, so to speak.

When launched in 1953, *Playboy* positioned itself similarly, explicitly refusing the terms of politics and instead cultivating a space of erotic retreat that was self-assured of its rightness precisely because uncontaminated by what it called the “out-of-doors.” This is the first way in which its project can be understood as utopian: when you cannot solve something like the Cold War, you can at least make sure your apartment has the right taste. But in this essay, I will argue *Playboy* is utopian in a more formal way as well, first modelled by Fourier, in its serialized labor of repetitively reminding us what this taste is. Both Fourier and *Playboy* incarnate the need not merely to be satisfied with a dream but to find a way of constantly talking about it with sufficient difference that it seems “new” each time—a problem both see as formally similar to that of maintaining erotic interest when the fundamental facts of sex remain basically the same. Through them, in turn, I suggest we might recast utopian hope as a form of erotic labor. The formal resemblance between the writings of Fourier and of *Playboy*, I argue, gives us more leverage on understanding what utopianism *does* as a periodic practice of taking up more and more space by delaying its climax. I also wonder if there might be something worth learning from this labor that sustains political projects of hoping for a radically other world in the face of relentless disappointment and an absence of evidence that such otherness is even remotely on the horizon. How do we make the waiting room for the revolution habitable, despite recurring delays?

In the writing project she was working on while battling breast cancer during the last years of her life, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2011)—still our best pedagogue for the value of a hope that declines the “paranoid” totalization of the world, however persistently toxic—turned to Marcel Proust for some light on a similar question. She wanted to understand Proust's “continuing access to a psychology of surprise and refreshment, as well as his nourishing relation to work”

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1. Muñoz (2009: 3), who builds on Bloch, prefers “concrete utopias,” which reference or anticipate political collectives “relational to historically situated struggles,” to ahistorical “abstract utopias” that have value “only insofar as they pose a critique function.”

Line 1 (4). Like Sedgwick, I want to understand how utopianism sustains its messianic  
 2 relation to the world—its belief that the world could be surprising and surpris-  
 3 ingly better—and does not tire of the exhausting work that goes into recycling  
 4 prophesy and hope after the daily disappointment of things turning out pretty  
 5 much the same: how to keep the sex dream sexy after so many years. I appreciate  
 6 that neither Fourier nor *Playboy* fit the bill when it comes to this queer tradition  
 7 from Proust to Sedgwick, and I do not wish to suggest that their utopian pro-  
 8 grams, which is to say the content of their writing, provide us any urgent answers.  
 9 In contrast, one of the values of attending to them formally is to somewhat side-  
 10 step the masculinist nature of their politics in pursuit, more reparatively, of a  
 11 possibly edifying pattern of action. In both Fourier and *Playboy*, the rehearsal of  
 12 utopia in writing becomes a principally formal challenge of coordinating two dif-  
 13 ferent temporal scales: a larger scale on which the drama of world transformation  
 14 plays out, and a smaller one on which the hope for this transformation is practiced  
 15 and nourished. What their doubled temporality of promised but deferred pleasure  
 16 makes possible—when formalized in periodical writing as a comforting, albeit  
 17 ambivalent, state of suspension—is a kind of utopianism that locates itself in the  
 18 activity of *planning* to build the world today, rather than living in the built world  
 19 tomorrow.  
 20

### 21 **Sexy Formalism**

22  
 23 What if, contra Jameson, the nineteenth-century canon of (especially socialist) uto-  
 24 pian writing—which, following the Friedrich Engels of *Socialism: Utopian and*  
 25 *Scientific* (1880), we might quickly specify as, in addition to Fourier, Robert Owen  
 26 and Henri de Saint-Simon—marks not in content but in form a new genre? Then  
 27 we might be compelled to see that the form of even “programmatic utopianism”—  
 28 the media it took, the print culture that circulated it, and the material culture that  
 29 commoditized it—is a primary component of what its utopianism *does*, besides  
 30 what its content can, independently, be paraphrased to say. In particular, we might  
 31 give importance to the fact that the format most utopian thought took in the  
 32 nineteenth century was not the isolated essay, but the various media of periodical  
 33 textuality, especially self-published newspapers and magazines. Indeed, it would  
 34 seem that utopian programs do not come into their own as discrete things—as  
 35 specific ontologies or political programs or sociological principles that can cohere  
 36 under a (usually proper) name—until, in the 1830s or 1840s, they produce their

Line 1 own journal. Saint-Simon got most of his ideas out in journals in the 1810s, nota-  
2 bly *L'industrie* (1816), *La politique* (1818), and *L'organisateur* (1819–20), and  
3 his disciples followed suit with their purchase of *Le globe* in 1830 and with their  
4 influential deployment of that newspaper in the succeeding two years (before  
5 it was banned). Owen, who never quite achieved the following of either Saint-  
6 Simon or Fourier, nonetheless had his *Millennial Gazette* (1856–58), the prod-  
7 uct of an almost melancholy logorrhea in the last two years of his life, when he  
8 seemed frantically bent on continually assuring the world and himself of the force  
9 and the singularity of his scientific utopian discovery (but why does something  
10 so singular require so multiple an exposition?).

11 It is obvious from Fourier's letters—but also, as I will demonstrate below,  
12 even from his treatises—that he, too, considered the formation of a journal the  
13 decisive step in his and any utopian agenda. Fourier, who dabbled in journalism,  
14 first found an audience for his ideas in such periodicals as the Catholic *Gazette*  
15 *de France* and the provincial *Journal de Lyon*. By 1829, he was getting wider and  
16 more devoted circulation through the Besançon newspaper *Impartial*, directed by  
17 his disciple Just Muiron. But after failing to reach his publicity goals for the dis-  
18 tribution of his treatises in Paris in the 1820s and 1830s, Fourier was increasingly  
19 jealous of the Saint-Simonians and their *Globe*; after a conflict with the Saint-  
20 Simonians, he wrote Muiron, “If only I had a journal, how I would set upon those  
21 clowns” (quoted in Beecher 1987: 421). Without a journal of his own, Fourier was  
22 particularly impotent to engage in the public and ongoing debates of utopianism,  
23 making his ideas stagnate in the past stage of prophecy instead of becoming  
24 the real utopian thing he wanted them to be, a continued engagement with the  
25 present. When, in June 1832, Fourier's disciples had raised enough money for a  
26 journal and the first issue of *Le phalanstère* came out, it was therefore nothing  
27 less than what his biographer calls the realization of a “longstanding dream”  
28 (Beecher 1987: 432). But it was not only a dream, which would seem a species of  
29 hope always present in utopianism. It was also a new way of life: Fourier lived in  
30 an apartment adjoining the office in which *Le phalanstère* was produced, and it  
31 began to organize his daily habits, especially his writing, now synchronized to  
32 the rhythm of a dream being rehearsed and published every two weeks.

33 *Le phalanstère* only lasted two years, but it was instrumental to the propaga-  
34 tion of Fourier's thought within France, extending through the provinces—and  
35 then beyond France, extending to the United States. In particular, it marks the  
36 origin of a number of other periodicals devoted to the realization of his sexually

Line 1 organized utopian spaces, or “phalanxes,” across the world and makes this wider  
 2 spread of utopian thought possible precisely by shifting the medium of its recep-  
 3 tion from the treatise to something more accessible and more easy to produce  
 4 and reproduce. But the periodicals are more than the propagation of thought:  
 5 they become the primary *activity* of utopianism as well, creating the scene of the  
 6 collective enterprise that becomes its publication, first the Parisian office of *Le*  
 7 *phalanstère* and then eventually such projects as far away as *The Harbinger* in  
 8 Brook Farm, Massachusetts.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, it is possible to map the spread of Fourier-  
 9 ist thought and practice throughout the United States in the 1840s as a network  
 10 of periodicals: the *Phalanx*, edited by Albert Brisbane in New York City (for six  
 11 weeks in 1840 and then again from 1843 to 1845); the *Future*, edited by Bris-  
 12 bane and Horace Greeley in New York City (for eight weeks in 1841); Brisbane’s  
 13 weekly column in Greeley’s *New-York Daily Tribune* (1842–43); the *Present*,  
 14 edited by William Henry Channing in New York City (1843–4) and the *Spirit*  
 15 *of the Age*, Channing’s second Fourierist journal (in 1849); the *Social Reformer*,  
 16 published in Boston by John Allen and Joseph A. Whitmarsh (1844–45); and  
 17 the *Harbinger*, which absorbed the *Phalanx* and the *Social Reformer* (1845–49).

18 Each of these journals or periodicals makes continual reference to a prior  
 19 treatise and to a revelation offered therein that establishes a promise of a future  
 20 perfect society: future perfect in both the semantic and grammatical senses. But  
 21 the fact that these journals take on an autonomous publication history and sub-  
 22 sume the energy of utopian publication altogether, instead of disciples invest-  
 23 ing energy in, say, the simple republication of said treatises, recommends them  
 24 as a distinct genre and not merely, as they are often claimed themselves to be,  
 25 translations of and writings continuous with a prior and static monograph. I call  
 26 this genre, and the weird coordination it tries to make between, on the one hand,  
 27 its present material existence and reception and, on the other hand, its fantastic  
 28 temporal orientation to the future, the *utopian serial*.

29 Of course, utopian theory was not the only discourse to be serialized in the  
 30 nineteenth century. Given the emergence not only of technologies for the mass  
 31 publication of periodicals and of mechanisms for its wide and efficient distri-  
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33  
 34 2. Brook Farm conveniently found itself to be home to four printers at the same time that it  
 35 sought to establish its national presence in the Fourier movement and, as an added bonus, secure a  
 36 stable source of income (see Delano 2004: 191). On the role of *The Harbinger* in uniting disparate  
 associational energies in the nineteenth-century United States, and then how Fourierism dies out  
 when *The Harbinger* ceases publication, see Guarneri 1991: 238, 291.



Line 1      bution (for instance, in the United States, distribution by the US Post Office),  
2      but also the emergence of an expanding literate population on both sides of the  
3      Atlantic and the capitalist incentives to consume print culture for a variety of  
4      motivations, this century saw the capture of a wide range of genres within maga-  
5      zines and newspapers, not least the novel.<sup>3</sup> The great historians of the nineteenth-  
6      century periodical have aptly shown how the synchronization of print production  
7      with such emerging routines as the paycheck facilitated the expanded commodi-  
8      fication of public culture and private leisure, and all this remains relevant for the  
9      production of utopian newspapers and magazines as well. But a few particular  
10     attributes recommend the utopian serial as a distinct genre, and not only because  
11     the writing of utopian theory—unlike, say, the novel—exploded simultaneous  
12     with, and not anterior to, the explosion of periodicals in nineteenth-century print  
13     culture, which is to say it lacked autonomous media in which to develop its own  
14     generic identity. From the beginning, the utopian periodical has also been distinct  
15     because periodicity itself has a stranger relation to utopian content. Programmatic  
16     utopianism functions as *revelation*, the sudden discovery of a hitherto secret  
17     ontological or social truth that will spontaneously visualize the perfect society,  
18     thus the impact of its temporality is singular, marking an event that prophesies  
19     the future. But the generic temporality of the periodical is multiple, extending  
20     into the future but only as the continued saturation of connected presents with  
21     its recurring instantiations. Eventually, the tension between the singularity of  
22     its truth and the episodocity of its rehearsal seems to make the utopian serial a  
23     parody of itself: for what self-evident, natural, and transcendent truth requires the  
24     continued nurturance and proclamation of itself as such? The prophetic serial's  
25     repetitious form, and the routines it collects, would seem to detract from and in  
26     fact denigrate the rupture it speaks.<sup>4</sup>

27             The oddness of the utopian serial is dramatized in Fourier's handling of his  
28     own thought, even in the publications from the early nineteenth century before it  
29     appeared in programmatic periodicals like *Phalanstère*. The most important of  
30     his texts, in which appears the first but also most detailed account of his "social  
31

32             \_\_\_\_\_  
33             3. The literature on serial publication and capitalist leisure is vast, but see especially Sutherland  
34             1976; Feltes 1986; Hughes and Lund 1991; Erickson 1999; Turner 2000; Payne 2005.

35             4. I mean to agree with Margaret Beetham's (1990: 25) point that "the formal qualities of the  
36             periodical are shaped by its particular relationship to time," but want also to suggest that, with uo-  
           pianism, this relationship to time also makes form contradictory to content. See also an elaboration  
           of Beetham in Murphy 2010.

Line 1 science” and which was the go-to text for his disciplines in the United States in  
2 the nineteenth century as well as today (when it remains the only substantial text  
3 completely and carefully translated into English), is *Theory of the Four Move-*  
4 *ments* ([1808] 1996), which was also intended as a serial of sorts. *Four Movements*  
5 is itself a collection of a first, second, and third treatise, and it alludes to future  
6 publications that will be made available by subscription. Of course, in that text,  
7 *serial* (and its nominative cousins) has special meaning. Fourier’s “progressive  
8 Series” (or “Series of groups” or “passionate Series”) refer to a population of  
9 people who will occupy his utopian phalanxes; the key to the proper functioning  
10 of a society, in Fourier’s account, is a symmetrical distribution of unequal human  
11 beings, whose differences in “age, fortune, character, understanding, etc.” will  
12 facilitate the natural forming of alliances and contrasts that make work pleasurable,  
13 as well as make possible the satisfaction of each person’s passionate needs  
14 (292–93). Fourier’s theory of history is also serialized, cutting up the life of the  
15 globe into its proper and again symmetrical periods. What makes Fourier’s theory  
16 in both cases a “definitive science” (16), in his account, is that series have a mathe-  
17 matical logic, which is the God-given universal across all domains of existence—  
18 that is, the titular four movements that are the material, organic, animal, and  
19 social (38). Thus, to give to the social domain a geometry that selects and arranges  
20 a population is to align it finally with nature, freeing the eternal passions of indi-  
21 viduals to their full realization.

22 But the progressive series, which Fourier is always talking about and which  
23 serve as the telos for his entire project, he declines to fully theorize until the third  
24 treatise of the *Four Movements*, and even then, he defers complete elucidation  
25 for future explication: “This will be contained in six small memoranda which  
26 will appear one after another and in which I shall describe the combined order  
27 in action” (307); “subscribers to these six books about passionate attraction will  
28 be able to send me their objections and their comments on developments they  
29 consider necessary. I shall give them clarifications which will be of the general  
30 use and, as each book comes out, I shall devote a few pages to answering what  
31 seem to me to be the most important points raised by readers” (308). The entire  
32 movement of the *Four Movements* is one of delay and stalling, spacing out the  
33 revelation of the theory so that its event is serialized, occupying not an instant  
34 but a periodicity: “I have decided to postpone the theory of the combined order,  
35 or progressive Series, to the third treatise, and for the time being to put forward  
36 only the general results” (21); “all I am trying to do is to arouse curiosity in the

Line 1      treatises that follow. . . . So be patient until 1821!" (30); "I intend to reveal my  
2      theory just a little at a time, disseminating it imperceptibly in each treatise, only  
3      bringing it all together as a body of doctrine later. In brief, I mean to make the  
4      amounts of theory proportionate to the amount of curiosity I am able to arouse"  
5      (107–8); "some people want provisional accounts of the combined order—they  
6      want *the prospect before the theory*. I must do something to satisfy them in this  
7      prospectus, which has to take into account the tastes of different kinds of read-  
8      ers" (159); "I have already said that a complete demonstration of [some of the  
9      following claims] belongs in a full account of the mechanism of the progressive  
10     Series . . . ; until I have published this theory readers cannot expect proofs of these  
11     provisional descriptions (166); "all your objections are systematically resolved  
12     by the mechanism of the progressive Series, and the results of this order will  
13     provide not only the objects of your desires, but a happiness far beyond anything  
14     you can desire" (168); "until the laws of social movement have been published,  
15     I can only clothe this advertisement in negative proofs, such as the incapacities  
16     of our scholars to deal with the problems of the civilised mechanism" (192); "I  
17     cannot provide a more thoroughgoing demonstration before I publish the theory  
18     of passionate attraction" (307).

19             I quote at length from this large survey to foreground how much Fourier's  
20     writing is structured by the conclusion of an episode and therefore the delay  
21     of an explanation. The *Four Movements* delivers its content "proportionate to  
22     the amount of curiosity [Fourier is] able to arouse," ultimately giving its form  
23     an affectively determined organization (107–8). But this is also a technique of  
24     making the *Theory* longer and more sustainable, a project that is not just about  
25     the future, but about continuing to take up room in the present. Fourier wants to  
26     control the reception of his theory by serializing it, pointing toward a truth while  
27     denying its sudden appearance in order to saturate the ongoing present with a  
28     "curiosity" that seems finally to be the point of publication altogether.

29             This perhaps explains why Fourier valued so much the establishment of a  
30     journal devoted to his thought not only as the sign that his thought had arrived  
31     and was being picked up by a wider public, but most importantly as a mechanism  
32     in tune with his own subjective orientation to his own prophetic utopianism. A  
33     journal materially actualizes the pacing aimed for already in *Four Movements*  
34     and extends the repetition of promise and the ritual of reminder into an indefinite  
35     (and optimistically infinite) future. Indeed, Fourier's habits of contribution to the  
36     *Phalanstère* suggest that the personal act of creating precisely this predictable

Line 1     ritual of rehearsal and preparation exceeded any motive for real publicity: he  
 2     writes too many articles to ever be published in the eight pages of the biweekly  
 3     journal, and he writes at times both too esoterically and too technically, such that  
 4     even his disciples become alienated from his writing and seek to displace his  
 5     editorial authority before finally abandoning the journal altogether. If the journal  
 6     really were to serve only the practical aims it declared, namely the translation and  
 7     distribution of Fourier's thoughts to a wider audience, Fourier's writing would  
 8     have taken both a different style and a different scope of production. But it is  
 9     precisely because the writing comes to take force as ritual, and because it is the  
 10    production of the form of writing rather than its content that names the action of  
 11    Fourier's utopianism, that Fourier declines to let his writing be coordinated by his  
 12    disciples or by his public and insists instead on a habit that performs utopianism  
 13    as the continued because serialized performance of a promise.

14         In the widely influential *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* ([1971] 1989), Roland Barthes  
 15    diagnosed something similar in Fourier's queer temporality, which he called  
 16    “counter-paralypse,” delaying and denying the final revelation promised by his  
 17    doctrine and investing instead in the promise itself. Fourier's discourse is “dila-  
 18    tory, incessantly withdrawn further away: only the signifier remains, stretching  
 19    out of sight, *in the book's future*” (90). In Barthes's view, this method not only is a  
 20    way of managing Fourier's fear of failure by delaying the exposure of the doctrine  
 21    to be evaluated, but is also a way of deploying the failure of language itself to  
 22    signify, to have the subject it speaks. For me, the main point of the dilatory dis-  
 23    course is that the utopian book cannot be a book, that the form utopianism must  
 24    take as the promise of a revelation perpetually delayed can only be the form of a  
 25    serial, unbound by covers, detached from the singular, static thing that a book is.

26         The serial provides a space of pleasurable suspension. A utopianism premised  
 27    on the erotic must, Fourier's writing argues formally, be serial, for what exists  
 28    is never enough; what I write today must be replaced by what I write tomorrow,  
 29    just as my orgasm today does not satiate desire but motivates me to find better,  
 30    more interesting orgasms tomorrow. What Fourier shows in his inhabitation of  
 31    this restlessness—literally, in his taking up residence in the press of his journal;  
 32    performatively, in his repetition of a prophecy—is that utopia is not that tomor-  
 33    row itself. Utopia is not the orgasm deferred, but the pleasure of the deferral itself.

34         It is here that we return to Jameson's “enclave.” Programmatic utopianism,  
 35    with its official plan to transform the world, officially practices a kind of expan-  
 36    sionism: circulating, exporting, proselytizing, building. But by calling the rest-

Line 1

2 lessness of Fourier a state of suspension, I mean to claim this going out into the  
3 world is in the last instance a retreat. It is not only that Fourier's journal, which  
4 has the official goal of "disseminating" his ideas, has the programmatic effect of  
5 keeping him inside all day, in the press that is his home, to write. It is also that  
6 the mode of being that this restless doing affords is itself a kind of hermitage, an  
7 isolation of one variable of the human experience that Fourier then dilates from  
8 part to whole so that it seems all of life can be lived in the anticipation of an erotic  
9 promise.

10 What such a program brings into relief, or what is the obverse side of this  
11 reduction to a single variable, is that what is wrong with the world, to Fourier, is  
12 how complex it is. His "Series" offer a logic to the world; his writings, serialized,  
13 perform the pleasures of logic's predictability. Such an isolation of the erotic  
14 variable is only possible in a functionally differentiated society, such as the one  
15 in which Fourier is coming into, in which there can be a private that is distinct  
16 from the public, a leisure that is distinct from labor, and so on. It is not just that  
17 industrialization makes possible Fourier's activity—the standardization of the  
18 printing press, the protocols of dissemination and subscription, the speculative  
19 imaginarity of capital investment, which allows a futurity in which for the utopian  
20 promise to be lodged—but that it makes it necessary: to chart pathways through  
21 the complex world, Fourier imagines a life organized by, always in the orbit of, a  
22 repeated deferral of pleasure.

### 23 **What Serialization Did to Action**

24  
25 It is popular to say that Fourier's disciples misunderstood him, not only because  
26 they did not understand his writing, but because they avoided the sexual connota-  
27 tions of it. Famously, Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Blithedale Romance* ([1852] 2009:  
28 53), a satire of the agrarian and intellectual utopian attempt at Brook Farm in 1840s  
29 Massachusetts, picked on Fourier's more fantastic promises while ignoring—  
30 as Brook Farm did, too—that Fourier's promise of a future was not some miracu-  
31 lous arrival of utopia but a dwelling within the erotic today: "When, as a con-  
32 sequence of human improvement," says the dreamer and narrator of the novel,  
33 "the globe shall arrive at its final perfection, the great ocean is to be converted  
34 into a particular kind of lemonade, such as was fashionable at Paris in Fourier's  
35 time. He calls it *limonade à cèdre*. It is positively a fact! Just imagine the city  
36 docks filled, every day, with a flood tide of this delectable beverage!" However,

Line 1 considered as a formal and generic matter—that is, if we are more interested in  
2 the shape of Fourier’s writing rather than his musings on lemonade—Fourier’s  
3 writing seems to have direct heirs in the periodical culture a century later, in the  
4 United States. Those heirs are the Gentlemen’s Magazines of the mid-twentieth  
5 century, and especially *Playboy*.

6 In calling *Playboy* utopian, I do mean to advocate for its political project, one  
7 that relies on sexual and class exclusions. Indeed, my formalist approach means I  
8 am relatively agnostic to the magazine’s “contents.” Instead, I am interested in its  
9 temporal logic, its invitation into “exclusive” spaces that are always on the hori-  
10 zon instead of already here. In other words, in this section I mean to emphasize  
11 several matters of form. First, just as Fourier retreated from the complex world  
12 by emphasizing the single variable of the erotic, *Playboy* responds to the dangers  
13 of its Cold War world by offering a retreat into a Jamesonian “enclave”; Fourier  
14 had his publishing house, and *Playboy* offers up its “mansion.” Second, the seri-  
15 alization of the magazine provides readers an opportunity to suspend themselves  
16 in the hope of a pleasure deferred, just as Fourier revels in the rehearsal of a  
17 promise, not its delivery. Pornography is organized by the sense that there is  
18 always another, better orgasm on the horizon. Third, utopia is to be locating in  
19 this suspension itself, in the serialization of the magazine rather than the future  
20 it promises.

21 The first issue of *Playboy*, from January 1953, began by offering an enclave.  
22 Announcing, on the first page, an allergy to the “out-of-doors” that other maga-  
23 zines took as their subject, “thrashing through thorny thickets or splashing about  
24 in fat flowing streams,” *Playboy* explained it was less interested in hunting and  
25 fishing and preferred to spend “most of our time inside”: “We like our apartment.  
26 We enjoy mixing up cocktails and an *hors d’oeuvre* or two, putting a little mood  
27 music on the phonograph, and inviting in a female acquaintance for a quiet dis-  
28 cussion on Picasso, Nietzsche, jazz, sex” (3). Like Fourier retreating to his pub-  
29 lishing house, and dwelling within the erotic as a buffer from everything else in  
30 the world, *Playboy* recommends you stay in. It is the pinnacle of a certain moment  
31 of private property ownership as buffer in increasingly discombobulating urban  
32 environments in which there are simply too many people; Beatriz Preciado (2014:  
33 31) calls the success of *Playboy*’s “indoor man” model a “sign of the displacement  
34 from a disciplinary spatial biopolitics of gender to a postindustrial one.” A reader  
35 wrote into the magazine for its May 1953 issue: “I whole-heartedly back your idea  
36 of staying at home. I’m getting tired of reading about ‘Joe Jones’ Jaguar Jaunts

Line 1

For Jerks,' even though I enjoy the outdoors. I enjoy it, but I'm getting tired of reading about it. And it seems that the publishers of the other 'men's magazines' have one idea in mind—EVERYBODY OUTSIDE!" (3).

The asyndeton in *Playboy's* preferred series of art ("Picasso"), philosophy ("Nietzsche"), music ("jazz"), and sex suggests some of the magazine's aim for urban domestic space to provide a convergence of disparate fields of experience, not only assimilating intellectual discussion to leisure time by eroticizing it, but also by intellectualizing sex, making it seem the inevitable conclusion to the trajectory of a conversation. Picasso, Nietzsche, and jazz protect the apartment's domestic eroticism from the great outdoors, allowing taste to curate the space of sexual possibility. *Playboy's* preference for the indoors was also visually rendered on the opposing page's cartoon of a masculine bunny in a smoking jacket, holding a cocktail in front of a fireplace whose mantle features a trophy, a small collection of pipes, and three hardcover books secured between bookends sculpted in the figures of lounging women. The image of books and women echoes the formula of "Picasso, Nietzsche, jazz, sex" by visually figuring a dialectic between women and cultural knowledge: this knowledge is both supported by, literally held erect, by women; while the purpose of women, reduced to the function of bookend, is to prop up cultural knowledge.

*Playboy's* bachelor pad is an enclave that, premised on space more than institutions, is different from, say, the enclosure of marriage.<sup>5</sup> Just as the nude bookends envelop the knowledge symbolized by the books, a larger nude statue seems to supervise the scene from her elevated position, facing the room to get a better view of it than even the bunny has. On the one hand, this is a fantasy, facilitated by capitalism's colonization of leisure time, that the good life follows from having the good things: the right taste in clothes, cigars, and spirits. But it is even more fundamentally a fantasy that your leisure time can be supervised by the erotic, that everything can be staged in reference to it. An earlier draft of the cartoon presented not a bunny but a stag as the protagonist of the magazine, but this seems to have provided too strong a citation to the outdoorsy masculinity *Playboy* sought to displace. A bunny, more familiar as a possible pet than as an object of hunting, fit in better with the domestic vision. The rounded features of the bunny, compared with the sharp lines and edges of a stag's muscularity, also

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5. On this point, and the collusion of women's liberation with pornography in their mutual promotion of sexuality outside of marriage, or opening up extra spaces for sex, see Pitzulo 2011.

Line 1 suggested that masculinity was to be found not in the body but in its environ-  
 2 ment. This impersonalization of the masculine figure—it represented no person  
 3 in particular—made its embodiment more accessible to a wider array of readers:  
 4 *even a bunny*, if placed in this apartment, would become the man *Playboy* was  
 5 trying to cultivate. In both the case of the “female acquaintance,” whom *Playboy*  
 6 invites “in,” and the bunny, who might have belonged to the great outdoors but  
 7 shows up in a smoking robe indoors, *Playboy*’s original issue put forward the  
 8 apartment as a sort of conversion machine, transforming the potentially unruli-  
 9 ness of whatever lay beyond its walls into refinement and pleasurable availability.

10 It is as a policing of the boundaries of an enclave that the opening page’s  
 11 geopolitical language also makes sense. When *Playboy* explains that “affairs of  
 12 state will be out of our province,” it both deploys and disavows the language of  
 13 politics, claiming the apartment of the “city-bred male” as a space that, too, has  
 14 borders which ought to be policed, and asserting that one of the things it ought  
 15 to be protected from are the anxieties of official politics. Thus, we return to utopia’s  
 16 self-aggrandizement as apolitical in Reinhard Koselleck’s sense. *Playboy*’s  
 17 explicit humility—“We don’t expect to solve any world problems or prove any  
 18 great moral truths”—is really its aggressive optimism that a space can be carved  
 19 out of the world independent from, here, the economic and political systems of  
 20 international relations and the ethics of religious discourse. *Playboy* wants to  
 21 create a smaller world in which the concerns of this larger world are, not solved,  
 22 but somehow invisible. So long as “Picasso, Nietzsche, jazz, sex” can take up the  
 23 space of a man’s mind and body, he is somehow outside the world beyond his  
 24 walls, nourished in his own miniature utopia.

25 It matters that the bunny does not have a live partner; that the signs of femi-  
 26 ninity are merely prosthetic, in the pornographic statues on the mantle rather  
 27 than in the flesh. *Playboy* is, like Fourier, a great believer in the erotic who lives  
 28 alone—an aloneness that was not just sexual but social. In a June 1953 letter to  
 29 the magazine, one reader remarked that “the Ale-house has long since vanished  
 30 and the modern bar has not taken its place, but the best company, ribald laugh-  
 31 ter, comely wenches and other aspects of the Ale-house survive in the pages of  
 32 PLAYBOY” (51). Why go to the bar when you can have one at home; who needs  
 33 people, when you have pinups? It is this coincidence of the erotic and the enclave  
 34 in the sexualized individual we have come to call the bachelor that also brings  
 35 out an ambivalence latent in Fourier: that making the erotic your buffer to the  
 36 world is also de-eroticizing the world by giving it a proper place rather than an



Line 1

2 ever-present atmosphere. To give eroticism a place—safely secured within the  
3 walls of an urban apartment—is also to subtract its possibilities from the great  
4 outdoors. Eroticism in this view is not a force that saturates daily, public life with  
5 possibility, emerging at times in, say, a glance on the subway. Similarly, despite  
6 its public circulation, *Playboy* certainly does not produce a public sex culture  
7 alive to the possibility of sex in a widened range of times or places, as in, say, the  
8 bathhouse or tearoom subculture of gay male cruising.

9 Pornography instead gives sex a proper time and place, where it is expected  
10 and often scripted. Its rehearsal of pleasure is in part born of its decision to avoid  
11 seeing pleasure anywhere else but in the scenes it establishes. This tension has  
12 been widely explored in critical accounts—both literary and anthropological—of  
13 the condensation of liberatory and oppositional energies in the space of carnival:  
14 whether a designated space and time for the inversion of norms feeds back into  
15 a general subversion of authority or else, precisely by being confined to a pre-  
16 dictable spatiotemporal location, provides only the necessary relief that makes  
17 longer-term submission to authority palatable, sustainable, and even, for some,  
18 desirable.<sup>6</sup> But here, *Playboy's* utopianism is truly apparent: the point for the  
19 utopian is that there is “no place” in the world for the life it envisions, and so its  
20 enclave, here erotic, must be protected from the world it finds hostile to it. The  
21 point is that this hostility may be born from the production of the enclave itself,  
22 as a projection that legitimizes pornography's subtraction from the world.

23 In a fascinating article on the editorial afterlife of an eighteenth-century  
24 pornographic text—first published in 1749 and revised and condensed multiple  
25 times throughout the nineteenth century and into the mid-twentieth—Kathleen  
26 Lubey (2015: 899) has shown a historical contraction of pornographic narrative.  
27 Once upon a time, her persuasive story goes, texts with what we would now  
28 identify as pornographic content were crowded with multiple discourses more  
29 collaborative than competitive—religious, moral, philosophical, and nonerotic  
30 fictional—in turn offering a “miscellaneous model of reading” that invites the  
31 pleasure not merely of orgasm but of meandering among a field of discourses that

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32 6. Each in their own way, theorists and anthropologists such as Mikhail Bakhtin in *Rabelais*  
33 *and His World*, Barbara Babcock in *The Reversible World*, Clifford Geertz in “Ritual and Social  
34 Change,” and Herbert Marcuse in *One-Dimensional Man* (where he coined the term “repressive  
35 desublimation”) ask: Does having a space set in contrast to the everyday subvert or re-entrench  
36 the rhythms of the ordinary? The best answer is probably something like “a bit of both,” like when Leah  
37 Marcus (1987: 7) talks about festivals’ “inclusion of both normative and reactionary impulses” that  
38 can “constitutive a process of adjustment within a perpetuation of order.”

Line 1 reference, but do not reduce to, sexual acts. The history of pornography is one  
 2 of steadily pruning the genre, discarding both the “miscellaneous” parasexual  
 3 discourses and experiences of the sexual that exceed the satisfaction of a bodily  
 4 desire. Gone today is an erotic pleasure that is as much about mental imagination  
 5 as genital stimulation; and gone with it is the messy, multiply categorizable text  
 6 in which that pleasure participates. Parallel to this generic trimming run a couple  
 7 other cuts: the creation of sexuality as identity rather than a polymorphous and  
 8 unbounded sphere of experience; the cropping of sexual activity to center pro-  
 9 creative, penetrative, heterosexual intercourse; and, concomitantly, the deletion  
 10 of any motivation for sex beyond the essentially capitalist one of disciplined and  
 11 efficient reproduction.<sup>7</sup>

12 What the Gentleman’s Monthly genre brings out—as Fourier had originated  
 13 in his own periodical—is the desirability of repetition once narrative has been  
 14 trimmed down to the sexual, which is to say that the pressure the erotic puts  
 15 on form is an impulse to serialization. From the very beginning, *Playboy* cul-  
 16 tivated a readership that understood each issue as both a concentration of the  
 17 erotic and a promise that it was the end-all, be-all of its presentation. One reader  
 18 who preferred brunettes wrote to the editors not to complain that the first issue  
 19 featured the blonde Marilyn Monroe but to announce his participation in an end-  
 20 less series: “I am sure you will cater to all tastes in each issue. Just pattern them  
 21 after your first issue and you will have it made.” The idea of “pattern” as being  
 22 the desired thing more than the content—for different pictures can be plugged  
 23 into the larger form of erotic rehearsal—picks up on the essentially formal nature  
 24 of the prophetic periodical. And when a reader writes in the April 1953 issue that  
 25 he “enjoyed your second issue from cover to cover. It was even better than the  
 26 first, which leaves me anxiously waiting for the issues coming up” (2); or when  
 27 *Playboy* itself promises in the same issue, “The very best issues of this new,  
 28

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29  
 30 7. On these last points, Lubey leans upon Henry Abelove (2003: 26), who has deduced from the  
 31 great rise in procreation during the eighteenth century a privileging of heterosexual intercourse to  
 32 completion as the only proper mode of sexuality, which he pairs as well with “the rise in production.”  
 33 As Lubey (2015: 929) glosses his argument about the long eighteenth century: “Non-reproductive  
 34 sexual practices were widespread and fluid prior to this historical shift, Abelove speculates, and only  
 35 with the rise of industrial capitalism do they become consigned to the status of ‘foreplay,’ or non-  
 36 essential, ‘preliminary’ precursors to a more central act deemed to be intercourse itself”; she adapts  
 his argument about sexuality to hers about pornography: “Like foreplay, non-sequential pieces that  
 originally constituted pornography were redefined as ornaments or even barriers to some more pri-  
 mary spectacle—to those repeated penetrative acts we have naturalized as pornography but that we  
 might now name, following Abelove, pornography so-called.”

Line 1 sophisticated magazine for men are coming up. A subscription will make certain  
2 you don't miss out on a single one of them. Guarantee yourself month after month  
3 of PLAYBOY pleasure by subscribing today" (2); or another reader suggests in  
4 the September 1953 issue, "I think your magazine is the best thing to hit the news-  
5 stands in my generation, and if I thought you could keep up the pace, I would  
6 order a lifetime subscription" (4) and another commits, "I'm finally convinced  
7 that you can continue the pace and live up to the promise of the first issues" (4):  
8 what is going on in all these writings is an echoing of Fourier's promises in *Four*  
9 *Movements* to give greater pleasure through longer subscription—an anticipation  
10 of an endless series ("a lifetime subscription") that is both familiar ("continue the  
11 pace" of a branded, which is to say generic "PLAYBOY pleasure") and refreshed  
12 (because next month may be different than this one).

13         Serialization is central to the pornographic genre across media in the later  
14 twentieth century, most notably in film franchises—for example, *Anal Addicts 1*  
15 (2000), . . . , *Anal Addicts 10* (2002), . . . , and so on. Just as Lubey has tracked the  
16 condensing of pornographic discourse, pornography of the late twentieth century  
17 has seen a movement from the polyvocal text to the singular act. Classics of the  
18 so-called "golden age of porn," such as the 1973 *Devil in Miss Jones*, had rela-  
19 tively complex narratives (enough to be taken serious by critics including Roger  
20 Ebert) and extrasexual discourses (in this case, an engagement with Jean-Paul  
21 Sartre's *No Exit*). In contrast, a film like *Anal Addicts 10* or *Deep Throat This 54*  
22 (2012) is a sequence of sex scenes collected not by the continuity of a narrative  
23 but on account of being species of a common, branded genus or category. More  
24 importantly, their franchises are of the utopian serial form, like Fourier's *Phala-*  
25 *nastère*, that performs a restless pleasure in pursuit of the new at the same time  
26 as pursuing the same.

27         The dialectic of familiarity and surprise is internal to any genre: if I say we  
28 are going to see a comedy, we both know what that feels like even before we expe-  
29 rience the specific way in which *this* comedy will secure our laughs. And yet I am  
30 arguing there is something particular to the pornographic genre's formalization  
31 of temporality, giving a holding pattern to a desire whose pleasure becomes habit-  
32 able in its deferral. This is also to shift the terms laid out in Frances Ferguson's  
33 (2003) description of pornography's role in the emergence of democratic moder-  
34 nity in *Pornography, the Theory: What Utilitarianism Did to Action*. Ferguson's  
35 description of pornography as a utilitarian genre for the appraisal of actions is a  
36 robust, if controversial, theory of what pornography, politically, *does*. For Fergu-

Line 1 son, utilitarian social structures—including institutions like the school, factory,  
2 and hospital—cultivate microworlds in which actions can be seen, presented, and  
3 given value. They restrict the claim of transcendental truths to the hyperlocal and  
4 specifically present situation in which actions are performed. In turn, people are  
5 not seen as having consistent identities that could be hierarchized across social  
6 contexts; what matters is their achievement of value through performing differ-  
7 ent actions in different and always shifting contexts. In other words, the shifting  
8 of context coordinates a shifting of the person (as the actions expected of and  
9 valued in me change when I go from the school to the hospital, etc.). The charac-  
10 ters in Ferguson’s pornographic novels similarly enter the scene of sex in order  
11 for their actions to take up a position in a hierarchy of value according to their  
12 performance and the pleasure it produces; pornography also offers a protocol  
13 of recognition in which readers feel out for environments in which their sexual  
14 behavior can be given meaning and in which, further, they finally recognize their  
15 sexual behavior as a pleasure, to be ranked according to the other outcomes of  
16 pleasure performed by parallel actions in the sexual economy.

17 Ferguson’s theory of pornography’s orientation to actions rather than actors  
18 seems right to me, but the utilitarian account is only part of the picture that con-  
19 nects pornography, action, and attachment to a social world. We both understand  
20 modern pornography as a shift of emphasis from content to environment, tied  
21 to an increasing attention not to what pornography shows, but in what context it  
22 shows it. And we both think of this context as what I have called, through Fourier,  
23 a reduction of complexity. The artificial social context of the school, for instance,  
24 values performance on just one variable, the demonstration of educational learn-  
25 ing, and theoretically is indifferent to sexual performance. The opposite holds  
26 true for the artificial social context of pornography. What this artificiality brings  
27 out for me, first, is the inherently utopian nature of pornography, like any other  
28 institution designed to direct attention to one species, and only one species, of  
29 action. Indeed, we might recall that the paradigmatic model of the utilitarian  
30 institution for attributing value to action, Jeremy Bentham’s panopticon, was  
31 never built and was therefore *u-topian* in a literal sense. But whereas a school or  
32 a panopticon can be built, and once it is built it permanently provides its utopian  
33 space, pornography requires a more vigilant, essentially performative, labor to  
34 keep its space open. Moreover, the work of creating the space becomes the action  
35 that is valued more than the sex acts within its boundaries; what Fourier and  
36 *Playboy* both bring out is the utopianism of suspending yourself in the serialized

Line 1 labor of creating erotica, of creating a space *for* orgasm rather than experiencing  
2 orgasm itself.

3 To see pornography in a utopian in addition to utilitarian tradition alters  
4 the place of pornography in the postwar twentieth century by shifting the terms  
5 of what its morphological changes—such as, following Lubey, the length and  
6 function of novelistic episodes—really index. In Ferguson’s account, the utilitar-  
7 ian logic of pornography, and thereby pornography’s participation in democratic  
8 systems of social attachment, reaches its logical exhaustion by precisely the time  
9 that something like *Playboy* gets underway. Through a reading of Bret Easton  
10 Ellis’s *American Psycho*, Ferguson (2003: 146–56) claims that postmodernity has  
11 multiplied so many artificial social contexts that the people who traffic through  
12 them no longer have any coherence beyond the context itself; they aren’t recog-  
13 nizable as people at all. In a final blow to an agency behind action, persons can  
14 only shift from one commodified naming of themselves to another. In contrast, I  
15 suggest that the migration of pornography from the novel to the periodical in the  
16 mid-twentieth century adds a different epilogue to pornography than does a novel  
17 like *American Psycho*. A periodical, unlike a novel but like the film franchises  
18 mentioned before, has shifting context built into its form from the beginning,  
19 and in fact derives its longevity from a calculated and serialized mutation that  
20 continually provides new contexts for essentially the same material: each issue  
21 of a magazine is both the specific issue and the temporally elongated genus that  
22 is its title. Thus, *Playboy* takes the contextual schizophrenia of something like  
23 *American Psycho* for granted, but distributes its contexts across time, providing  
24 an enduring project of mediating persons with a social world, even as both person  
25 and world remain undefined.

26 The serialization of a magazine, in other words, seems perfectly consonant  
27 with the utilitarian philosophy of proliferating ever-present but multiple artificial  
28 environments in which to process and evaluate action, and yet it is not until the  
29 mid-twentieth century, at precisely the moment that the form of the novel seems  
30 to suggest the fading of utilitarian efficacy, that the form of the magazine emerges  
31 so strongly with its utilitarian pornographic genre. This emergence comes as  
32 so many brands, *Playboy* obviously foremost among them in naming not just a  
33 magazine but a product and a range of other products collected under its com-  
34 modifying reach; late capitalism—the proliferation of brands, the speed-up of  
35 commodification, and the attendant fragmentation of subjective objectification—  
36 is part of what, in Ferguson’s account, makes the pornographic novel defeat its

Line 1     utilitarian origins and ambitions. But if the brand is the death of the novel, it is  
 2     also, from the perspective of the utopian, what Fourier was all along after: a genus  
 3     to oversee the regularized punctuation of an erotic promise.  
 4

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 6     lege. His first book is *Crisis Style: The Aesthetics of Repair* (2021). He is at work  
 7     on a second book, tentatively titled “What Does Rape Look Like?,” which argues  
 8     we should replace the legal and public health discourses that dominate contem-  
 9     porary discussions of sexual violence with an aesthetic vocabulary. His writing  
 10     has also appeared or is forthcoming in publications including *differences*, *New*  
 11     *Literary History*, *Signs*, *Social Text*, the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, *Public*  
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