



## Utopia Limited: The Sixties and the Emergence of the Postmodern (Post-Contemporary Interventions)

By Marianne DeKoven

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*Utopia Limited* is an original, engaging account of how postmodernism emerged from the political and cultural upheaval of the 1960s. Marianne DeKoven argues that aspects of sixties radical politics and culture simultaneously embodied the full, final flowering of the modern and the beginning of the postmodern. Analyzing classic sixties texts, DeKoven shows where the utopian master narratives underlying the radical and countercultural movements gave way to the “utopia limited” of the postmodern as a range of competing political values and desires came to the fore. She identifies the pivots where the modern was superseded by the nascent postmodern: where modern mass culture was replaced by postmodern popular culture, modern egalitarianism morphed into postmodern populism, and modern individualism fragmented into postmodern politics and cultures of subjectivity.

DeKoven rigorously analyzes a broad array of cultural and political texts important in the sixties—from popular favorites such as William S. Burroughs’s *Naked Lunch* to political manifestoes including *The Port Huron Statement*, the founding document of SDS (Students for a Democratic Society). She examines texts that overtly discuss the conflict in Vietnam, Black Power, and second-wave feminism—including Frances FitzGerald’s *Fire in the Lake*, James Baldwin’s *The Fire Next Time*, and Shulamith Firestone’s *The Dialectic of Sex*; experimental pieces such as The Living Theatre’s *Paradise Now*; influential philosophical works including Roland Barthes’s *Mythologies* and Herbert Marcuse’s *One-Dimensional Man*; and explorations of Las Vegas, the prime location of postmodernity. Providing extensive annotated bibliographies on both the sixties and postmodernism, *Utopia Limited* is an invaluable resource for understanding the impact of that tumultuous decade on the present.

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#### Review

“In a series of wrenching, heretical re-readings of its classics, Marianne DeKoven rescues the decade of the sixties from a false familiarity and restores a sense of its adventurous if fragile alliance between literature and theory, modernist utopian critique and the messy creativity of the postmodern present. Instead of the usual nostalgia and polemic, *Utopia Limited* delivers intellectual precision and tough love. The story of the sixties has never been told with more rigor or more freshness.”—Bruce Robbins, author of *Feeling Global: Internationalism in Distress*

“Marianne DeKoven has written a blueprint for how to delve deep into the sixties without romantic or cynical nostalgia. She recaptures fully that cultural moment by showing how sixties writers kept sliding back and forth between totalizing dreams of utopia and more private and diverse expressions of their wishes and identities.”—Ann Snitow, coeditor of *The Feminist Memoir Project: Voices from Women’s Liberation*

“*Utopia Limited* will set in place a new way of understanding the interface between social, cultural, and political impulses in the sixties. Its aim—and its success—is not simply to mark out what we can now see as the emergent postmodern in texts as diverse as *The Port Huron Statement* and *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, but to interpret, through attentive close readings, precisely how and where the modern and nascent postmodern are joined in such texts.”—Cora Kaplan, author of *Sea Changes: Essays on Culture and Feminism*

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#### About the Author

Marianne DeKoven is Professor of English at Rutgers University. She is the author of *Rich and Strange: Gender, History, Modernism* and *A Different Language: Gertrude Stein’s Experimental Writing* and the editor of *Feminist Locations: Global and Local, Theory and Practice*.

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