

Suburbia and the World' Fair 1939-40

As we approach the last short research paper, today's excerpt from David Gelernter's 1939: *The Lost World of the Fair* has a lot to say about technology, the future, even corporate sponsorship of exhibits like Futurama or Democracy (The World of Tomorrow). If you are doing the third kind of research paper, with the fictional biography, this chapter provides a strong example of how a diary can comment on historical events in a personal voice.

- In groups of 2:

A Vision of Suburbia

- First, spend a few minutes re-reading / skimming the first section of the excerpt pp. 154-156 & 159-163 (in the COURSE PACK) after you look over the questions below.

- 1) **What is inside the Perisphere? How does Hattie Glassman describe the visit inside?** Who was the architect or designer of this exhibit? **What is Hattie's subjective (emotional) reaction to this exhibit?** How does she let us know if she is optimistic (or pessimistic) about the Future as represented by this exhibit?
- 2) **What are some features of city of the future as represented in the Democracy exhibit?** Using evidence from this section (including the diary entry), Gelernter's comments and his quoted sources, try to write down 2 relevant points or features of the new city. Also, how was this vision different than cities in the 1930s? (How was it different than New York City at that time?)

Gelernter's Main Argument

- Finally, skim the last few pages of the chapter (pp. 163-166) in which the author gives us his main thesis or argument about the World's Fair and the future, particularly, in the arrival of the American suburbs.

U- to – pi - a [yoo-toh-pee-uh] –

1. an imaginary island described in Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) as enjoying perfection in law, politics, etc.
2. (*usually lowercase*) an ideal place or state.
3. (*usually lowercase*) any visionary system of political or social perfection.

< New Latin (1516) < Greek *ou* not + *tóp(os)* a place + *-ia -y* ["no place"]

Citation

"Utopia." *Dictionary.com*, dictionary.reference.com/browse/utopia. Accessed 16 April 2018.

- 3) How was the Democracy exhibit an 'ideal place' or **utopia**? What was 'perfect' about it? Were there any problems that the planners did not see or solve? Is there anything potentially wrong with this picture? What did Democracy get right about the future of suburbia (one thing)? What did it miss or get wrong (more on this soon)?
- 4) What is Gelernter's main thesis or argument about the relationship between utopia and suburbia? Is he right or wrong? As a group, can you point to a sentence where he develops his argument?

(~20 min. + reading time)

- **Reporting Out** – Choose a reporter from your team who will give your group's answers to the above set of questions for the class.