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ON ADVERTISING'S TERMS: THE WEAK CRITIQUES OF CONSUMER
CAPITALISM IN *PLAYER PIANO*, *FAHRENHEIT 451*, AND *THE SPACE*
MERCHANTS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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Title: On Advertising's Terms: The Weak Critiques of Consumer Capitalism in *Player Piano*, *Fahrenheit 451*, and *The Space Merchants*

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In developing his *Utopia* (1516), Thomas More drew on the many depictions of the good life present in myth since the Greek Golden Age, but his vision transformed these utopian forerunners in its insistence on egalitarianism and possibility: More's good life was community focused and historically grounded. So, too, have been the utopian fictions that followed his lead over the next four-hundred years. However, the dystopian fiction that developed in the twentieth century, whose development and popularity are often credited to the military and political upheavals of the time, have departed significantly from their predecessors' optimism that salvation is possible for humanity. While this pessimistic stance of dystopian fiction has been of interest to most literary critics, Frederic Jameson's explanation of the spatial logic underpinning consumer capitalism suggests that, rather than simply tone being the distinguishing characteristic between utopian and dystopian literature, the two genres depart at their very core.

The logic underpinning dystopian fiction is radically different from the logic underpinning utopian fiction and is more similar to the logic that underpins advertising, which also came of age over the course of the twentieth century and whose growth parallels that of dystopian fiction. Such a parallel suggests that the demise of utopian fiction in the twentieth century resulted from the influence of consumer capitalism, which—through advertising's power—transformed the cultural dominant from

community focused and historically grounded to individually centered and historically unaware. This effect is seen through an examination of three significant American dystopian fictions from the mid-twentieth century and a consideration of their engagement with the advertising industry of that time: Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano* (1952), Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), and Frederik Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth's *The Space Merchants* (1953). Because these novels fail to recommend collective action or historical consideration of the problems they depict, they cannot provide the same guidance for creating a better life as that offered by More, et al. This essential difference—between these dystopian fictions and earlier utopian fictions—points to the transformation of the utopian legacy within and as a result of the postmodern cultural dominant.