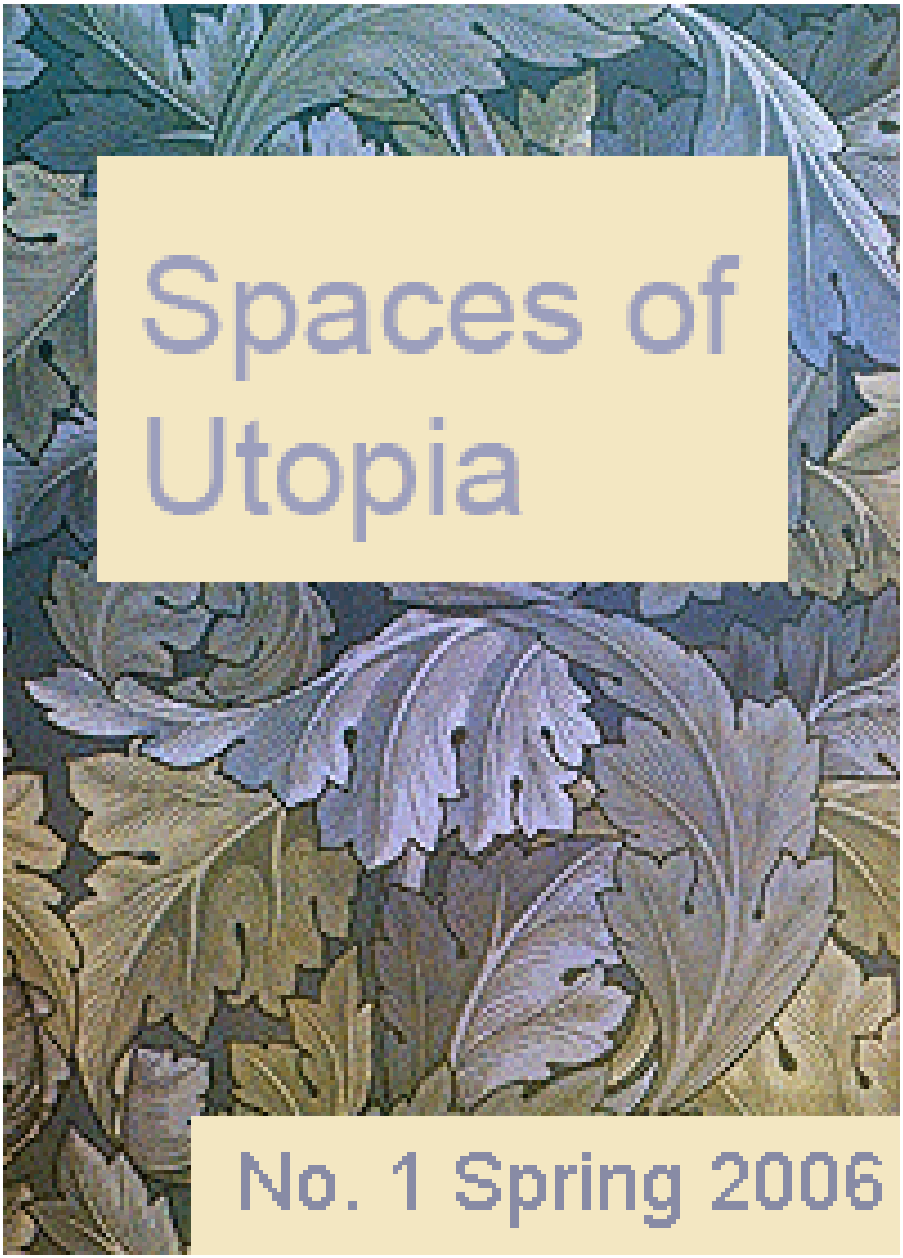
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Contents

Who Needs Utopia?

A Dialogue with my Utopian Self

(With Apologies, and Thanks, to H. G. Wells)

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Prologue

Readers will be familiar with the device used by H.G. Wells in *A Modern Utopia* (1905) to describe the relationship between the narrator (Wells himself) and his "utopian self", an improved version of his personality, who inhabits the better world.

What follows is a brief *jeux d'esprit* adapting the theme to still more modern conditions. "R.S." is my "real self" (with no philosophic explanation as to what constitutes this "real" "self". "U.S." is its utopian alternative.

Dialogue

R.S. Now you are going to bore us again by prating on about utopia. Don't you know that we are tired of this theme, that we distrust your use of the word, and are suspicious of your motives and occasionally even your sanity?

U.S. Not to pre-empt your objections unduly: but, consider going on holiday in a foreign country without a map.

R.S. A recipe for disaster – unless you are a risk-loving devotee of spontaneity and adventure.

U.S. Just so. I want to defend the concept of utopia by introducing the classical Wellsian theme, then: the century of thought which preceded the ending of the Victorian age, and the horrors of the First World War, was dominated overwhelmingly by a Providentialist conception of history. In Liberalism, this took the form of a theory

of progress by which it was assumed that things were getting steadily better through science and technological invention, and the gradual "civilisation" of the world. But even in Marxism, the presumption existed that history could be trusted – once it had been correctly interpreted – to "deliver the goods" – that the proletariat, in particular, would create the new world out of the ashes of the old, without the need for a careful assessment of what was required and how it was to be achieved.

R.S. Just what this has to do with me is uncertain.

U.S. Let me explain. The Liberal conception of progress, undefeated by socialism, continued to dominate modern thought in the fifty years after Wells's death. It was usually couched in terms of "growth", which meant an expansion of consumption, production, and demand. By the end of the twentieth century, spurred in particular by the extraordinary consumption of the United States, this had resulted in nearly as much consumption of the earth's resources – one third – as had been consumed in the preceding ten thousand years of human history. And now two-thirds, approximately, have been consumed. You know about global warming?

R.S. Obviously; but how does it relate to "utopia"? Surely a realistic assessment of our plight is what is called for? And in any case, persuade me that we are not too selfish, stupid and greedy to abstain from the course of conduct we have adopted. We love consumption far too much ever to part from it.

U.S. I return to my mentor. The great Wellsian theme – the greatest of modern themes for Wells – was that of world government. Wells believed that the problems of the world were global in nature, hence that a solution must be global in nature. Wells had some insight into the potential for ecological debacle, but not that which we do. We can be relatively certain that we are destroying the planet. And as certain that a global solution, commencing but very tenderly with the Kyoto agreement, implies a degree of collective control and responsibility far beyond what we have previously envisioned.

R.S. Surely you don't mean the United Nations? What use is it?

U.S. It deserves our full support, and an extension of its powers and scope of responsibility.

R.S. Not if the United States has anything to do with it.

U.S. We need to animate all nations both with a sense of our global plight, and of the duty of those who possess such awareness to act immediately and directly to support such measures as are likely to minimise the damage we are doing to the environment.

R.S. I return to my objection: who wants to give up their BMW's? Have I made the point clear enough?

U.S. The riposte is that an example must be set. If SUV's are selling well and increasing fuel consumption, governments need to point this out. And then tax them more heavily. And increase spending on public transportation. And tax consumption more heavily. This is the essence of any sane "green" politics. But it does require leadership – Wells's greatest worry.

R.S. At least you're not prating on about "utopia".

U.S. The first stage of the very modern utopia is the avoidance of dystopia. If we are able to collaborate in avoiding ecological catastrophe, we may see the merits of collaborating further in the cause of world peace. And the spectre of ecological catastrophe implies an extended collision of many powers in competition over scarce resources like water and agricultural land.

R.S. Then what we really need is rearmament.

U.S. You are really a closet supporter of Mr. Bush, aren't you?

R.S. No, I am only extending the logic of your own argument. And remember, I am you anyway.

U.S. You are my worse self, not my better self. That much you should remember. You are a part of me, but even you are capable of a more sane course of action, if you can be persuaded of the consequences of your current course.

R.S. You're going to tell me we're all in the same boat.

U.S. You guessed it: we will sink or swim together.

R.S. And utopia is the shore we will swim towards?

U.S. Not perhaps Crusoe's distant island of palm trees and verdant nature: but a land where life can continue for the entire species. A land where survival is possible: the alternative is too bleak to contemplate.

R.S. How can we reach it?

U.S. Reduce population growth by stringent birth control; reduce consumption by the measures I have suggested, and more; equalise the standard of living between the developed and less developed worlds to prevent overly great population growth in the latter.

R.S. Good luck! Who's going to agree with any of that?

U.S. Eventually we may persuade the world to act in this way. It doesn't matter. There is no choice in our course of action. My final word: it is the duty of the educated to promote this programme. Others have less understanding of the stark realities we face. We are privileged enough to be able to stand back from immediate self-interest.

R.S. Good luck! *Intellectuals*! Saving the world! Feathering their own nests like the rest of them, more likely.

U.S. You're an irritating sod sometimes.

R.S. Ditto.

U.S. But I won't give up. And admittedly, you have a point.

R.S. Good luck again! You'll need plenty of it.

The History of an Archaeological Utopia:

The Parthenon in Athens as an Imaginary Place

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For centuries, in the Western tradition, the Parthenon has been celebrated as one of the most impressive and important buildings in the world. Poets, architects, scholars have visited it, studied it, written about it, carved their names on it (as Lord Byron did, for instance), cried on its ruins. Sigmund Freud first visited the Parthenon in 1904 and was surprised and shocked to see that it was not a myth after all, and that it really did exist (Beard 2002: 7 ss.). The whole history of this temple, however, is a sort of mystery and illustrates the fragility of our comprehension of the Greek and Roman world. For, in spite of its fame, we know very little about it.

The problem does not consist in the fact that only a small part of it has survived: this happens, as a matter of fact, with most ancient buildings. It is true that we have to make a special effort to imagine the Parthenon with all its columns in their places, with all the carved marbles still *in situ*, with the original colours on the pedimental statues as well as on the metope panels and on the frieze, with the surrounding buildings standing magnificently on the top of the Acropolis. There were also some sculptures around, at least until the first decade of the 5th century, which contributed to give the impression of a crowd all around the temples: they were the *ex voto* statues of the so-called *kouroi* and *korai*, youths and maidens, dedicated to the gods of the hill (Fuchs 1980). They remained there, standing among the temples, surrounded by the real youths and maidens coming up from the villages nearby, until the great renovation promoted by Pericles towards the middle of the century, when, since

they had already been partially destroyed by the Persian invaders, they were thrown down the hill, where they remained undiscovered for centuries.

Our difficulties in understanding the Parthenon are not only due to the fact that it has been partially transformed during its long history. It became a Christian church in the 5th century AD, and was so deeply transformed that its orientation had to be reversed: the entrance (which was originally supposed to be on the short side facing east) was turned westwards, an apse was built to wall up the east doorway, a narthex was added; and some further changes were made in the interior. Sculptures were removed whenever possible (but some of them had already been seriously damaged during a fire in the 3rd century AD); when it was too difficult to take them down, as in the case of the metope panels, they were systematically defaced. These were only the first steps towards further changes that the Parthenon was going to undergo in the following years, as the cathedral of Our Lady of Athens: the apse was enlarged later on, and a tower was erected in the right-hand corner of the entrance porch soon after the arrival of the Crusaders. It was partly constructed using blocks coming from the nearby funerary monument of Philopappus, at about half a kilometre from the Acropolis.

The transformation of the temple of the goddess Athena into the cathedral of Athens was the first, but surely not the last change of destination of the monument. The new Turkish rulers converted the Parthenon into a mosque in the early 1460: the life of the Parthenon as a Christian church had been as long as its life as a pagan temple had been. According to two visitors in 1675, Jacob Spon of Lyon and George Wheler, an English gentleman, the Parthenon had been converted into “the finest Mosque in the world”: a minaret was adapted from the bell-tower in the right-hand corner of the porch, the holy relics and the Christian furnishing were removed, and a coat of whitewash covered the Christian decoration on the walls. As a mosque, the Parthenon was chosen for a very important destination in 1687: when Athens was under attack from the forces of a Holy League formed by Venice against the Ottoman Empire, the Turks decided to put their ammunition inside the sacred building, together with their wives and children. Perhaps they were exceedingly confident in the strength of the ancient walls, perhaps they thought that the Christian army

would respect the building which had been a celebrated cathedral. Either way, they were badly mistaken. The Venetian army shelled the building and a vast explosion (which killed about 300 people) blew out its centre (Sacconi 1991). The Parthenon was neither a church, nor a mosque nor a temple anymore: only a part of it, including the Western pediment, survived in ruins. Some of those ruins, and specifically those referring to the carved decorations, were to be found later by Lord Elgin's agents, and taken to the safe rooms of the British Museum: this has permitted visitors and scholars to see some magnificent masterpieces of ancient sculpture; but to appreciate the Parthenon as a Greek monument, or to imagine what it looked like in the 5th century BC, has become an impossible task.

The events and the difficulties listed above represent only one side of the problem of understanding the Parthenon. Our doubts regarding it begin much earlier. They start with a surprising lack of information concerning the monument as a whole. It is described so seldom in ancient texts that we do not even know whether it was really meant to be a temple. The word "temple" does not appear clearly in connection with it but once. This happens in the short description given by Pausanias, where it is referred to as "the temple they call the Parthenon". Pausanias' text, however, focuses more on the carved decorations than on the architectural aspects of the building, and the author gives a complete description only of its huge statue of Athena in ivory and gold.

Contemporary archaeologists have added some more doubts to Pausanias' dubitative sentence. In fact, we have no elements at all to assure us that the Parthenon was indeed a temple. Temples were, in ancient Greece, the houses of the gods: they hosted the statue of the god (in this case, the ivory and gold sculpture of Athena), and in front of these temples, usually outside the main door facing east, was an altar where the rites were celebrated. Sacrifices took place outside the temple; temples existed because a place was needed, where the sculptures of the gods could sit and look at the rites being celebrated outside in their honour. Without an altar, a temple could not be used. Without an altar, a temple is simply not a temple at all.

In the case of the Parthenon, no trace of an altar has been found so far. The many events that took place in the area cannot be held responsible for this situation: even the most fragile remains of previous temples on the same site have been detected beyond any doubt. Traces of the holes produced by wooden poles, for instance, could be easily recognised. A stone or a marble altar, on the contrary, was never identified, besides never being mentioned in the texts. In some cases, altars (like in Olympia) were not made of marble, stone or wood, but simply resulted from the superimposition of layers and layers of ashes produced during the sacrifices; when the heap of ashes was too high, it was simply levelled to the ground and the process started again on the same spot. Traces of a repeatedly burnt area, however, should have been easily detected on the ground during archaeological investigations; but nothing of the kind has ever been found.

Can we say, then, that the Parthenon is a temple? Is the evidence of the word – clearly mentioned in relation to it only once by a late writer – enough to imagine around it the usual ceremonies that took place in Greek temples? Could it not have been a big *thesauros* instead, a treasury, one of those buildings often shaped like temples, although usually smaller in size, where the most precious offerings where kept in safe hands? The idea that we are actually dealing with a treasury seems to be confirmed both by the description of Pausanias, who lists many offerings stored under its porch and inside the building, and by the fragments of inventories of the Parthenon's contents, originally drawn up by the Treasurers of Athena, inscribed on stone and put on public display. They list, for instance, 113 silver bowls, three golden bowls, a golden female statue, a silver basin, more than 70 shields, an ivory inlaid table, lyres, silver-gilt masks, thrones and so on. The Parthenon seems to have been a strong-box more than a temple.

Our doubts become even more serious if we consider the name of the building. *Parthenon* means "of the virgins". This is not the title of the goddess who was worshipped in it (at least not in this form, since her title was *Parthenos*). Parthenon, "of the virgins", probably has something to do with the ceremonies in honour of Athena, which took place during the Panathenaic Festivals, where a small group of selected virgins offered the goddess a *peplum*

they had woven for her. The back end of the cell, with its four ionic columns, probably had something to do with these virgins and their work (Cosmopoulos 2004). The Parthenon could therefore be the place where a selected group of worshippers of the goddess were housed; its function should be completely reconsidered, and it would not be surprising to conclude that it was not a temple after all. In any case, if we assume that it was really a temple, we should reconsider what we expect from these types of buildings in Greek times: temples were not exactly what we thought they were.

If the Western world has considered the Parthenon the main temple of antiquity, one of the greatest masterpieces of Greek architecture, and a supreme achievement of the classical spirit, this is probably due to the *Life of Pericles* written by Plutarch around the turn of the first and second century AD. The buildings on the Acropolis are presented in his text as the brilliant result of the association between Pericles and an elite circle of artists and architects: Iktinos and Kallicrates, the designers of the Parthenon; Mnesikles, who was in charge of the Propylaia; and, above all, Phidias, who was responsible for the gold and ivory statue of Athena as well as the general overseer (*episkopos*) of the whole scheme of the Acropolis and specifically of the Parthenon (Schweitzer 1940; Carpenter 1970). The Periclean building programme had been intensely controversial from the very beginning; some of the criticisms were referred to Pericles and Phidias in particular, with charges of sex and peculation (Stranier 1953; Burford 1965); but half a millennium after Pericles' death, when Plutarch writes his story, 5th century BC Athens had long since become an almost mythical place: it was already "classical", whatever this word may have meant at that time (Schweitzer 1931). The transformation of the Parthenon into a utopian building is a part of a wider process, in which the whole period is seen as a model and becomes perfect and unchangeable as every model should be.

The idealization of the Parthenon dates from that time and from that moment on we have started imagining it as we would have liked it to be, rather than as it really was. Its later transformation into a Christian church first, and into a mosque afterwards, never completely concealed its glorious past, which

continued to extend its shadow for centuries, in spite of its ruins (Tournikiotis 1996).

The Parthenon we see now is a recreation of the early 20th century: the explosion caused by Morosini had left behind only scattered debris. Even after reconstruction, however, the Parthenon is a *ou topos*, a place that exists in no site at all – or that does not exist any more. A place whose name we do not understand; a place whose true use we can only try to guess; a place we can hardly detect among ruins and fragments; a place very rarely mentioned by contemporary writers. If all this were not enough, we can add the fact that the surroundings of the classical Parthenon have changed so deeply throughout the centuries that the relationship between the other buildings on the Acropolis and the temple itself can hardly be imagined; and – last but not least – we have to take into account the dramatic difference between the black-and-white ruins we are accustomed to and the original, brilliant colours that used to cover almost every part of the building and the sculptures. The present surface of the Elgin marbles, for instance, is the product of more than two millennia of weathering, cleaning and decay, not to mention the washing and scrubbing they were submitted to by Elgin's men. It is now almost impossible to imagine what the marbles looked like in the 5th century BC.

In spite of all this, the Parthenon has remained the ideal temple of classical Greece (Neils 2005). The Parthenon we have in mind when we pronounce its name probably never did exist; but it has become the *idea* of the perfect Greek temple, and the arena where scholars of all age put themselves to the test to show how the Greek genius worked, and what its achievements were.

The Parthenon, in this sense, is a utopian building, because we cannot find it anywhere, neither in space nor in time, and because it is idealized to perfection, as only utopias can be. At the same time, however, such a utopian building helps us understand what the meaning of the "classical" world was in every single moment of our past and how the ideal of "classical" has changed in the course of Western history.

Many contemporary studies on ancient Greece aim at reducing the mythical "aura" that surrounds the classical past. The "miracle" of Greek

philosophy and thought, for instance, has been transformed into a matter of changes and relationships between Greece and the ancient civilizations of the Near East; the origins of Greek literature have been investigated in Mesopotamia and elsewhere in the same area; the first attempts at a Greek sculpture have been related to earlier examples of Egyptian statues, which have more than one detail in common with the *kouroi* and the *korai* of archaic Greece; Greece, more than the birth-place of Western thought, seems to be considered a sort of passageway connecting East and West. As far as architecture is concerned, however, temples seem to maintain a genuine Greek origin; hence the constant popularity of the Parthenon.

Today's Parthenon, this incarnation of an archaeological utopia, seems to be the last surviving fragment of the Greek miracle which can still bring back the genuine spirit of classical times. Our illusion, when we try to free it from its superimposed interpretations, is to reach its original spirit and to understand the past better than our ancestors did. But perhaps this is utopia, too, and studies on the Parthenon will always tell us more and more about ourselves, and less and less about its builders, designers, and worshippers. To find a way out of this impasse is a challenge for all archaeologists and art historians of the 3rd millennium.

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No Place and New Worlds:

The Early Modern Utopia and the Concept of the Global Community

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The early modern utopia is difficult to access. Utopias from this period are reached after difficult journeys, generally by sea, involving shipwrecks and storms. When they are found, utopian countries are strange and unknown; entering a utopia always involves a process of discovery, a process which by its very nature challenges the status and the knowledge of the reader. Though written at a time which has become celebrated as the age of discovery, utopias deny that the world is wholly known. The utopia insists upon the existence of secrecy, of unknown waters and lands, and asserts that the reader is not in full possession of knowledge of the world; there exists also no-place, never before visited. So whilst the early modern utopia may usually promote itself as being a better place in a variety of ways, it always underlines the reader's inferiority when it comes to understanding the world and the way in which it is laid out.

It is no coincidence that the first early modern utopia appeared at the same time as true travel narratives that detailed experiences from far-off lands. Raphael Hythlodaeus, who describes the newfound land in Thomas More's *Utopia*, has sailed with Amerigo Vespucci, and *Utopia*, published in 1516, resembles real texts printed by such sailors on their return. It was possible for the reader of travel narratives to feel a new and direct link between himself and the strange lands across the seas. As the early modern period progressed, increasingly large numbers of people were able to read firsthand accounts of those who had been to the far corners of the earth and returned to tell the tale.

So, early modern utopias originate from a time when borders were being crossed and the world was opening up. However, this paper will argue that

these utopias have difficulties with the idea that the world has been "opened", that is, with the process of globalisation. They recognise that the world is becoming a smaller place, in that their narrators are able to attain these far-off lands, but the utopian communities themselves are usually at pains to remain closed off. So there is a paradox in early modern utopian fiction: these texts are a product of globalisation, they seem to offer information on the new communities made available to the reader by the progresses of travel and technology, but their attitude to their own borders is frequently isolationist and protective. To use an anachronism, they are globalist, in the *OED*'s definition, in the sense that they "advocate an awareness of global issues [or] a global approach", but at the same time they are anti-global in the sense that they do not seek to foster an understanding of a global community (*Oxford English Dictionary,* 1989). At the rebirth of the utopian mode of writing, it is problematic for the utopia to imagine itself in any other way than in contrast to the world beyond its borders. English utopianism is born out of global exploration and its literature, yet the utopia, always defining itself by what lies outside, can never fully encompass the global community.

This paper will look at four utopias written in the early seventeenth century, tracing from them two distinct approaches to this issue of how the utopia relates to the outside world. The first two texts, Tommaso Campanella's *The City of the Sun*, written in 1602 but not printed until 1623, and Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*, published posthumously in 1627, are classic examples of the isolationist utopia: careful about their borders, secretive in their dealings with the outside world. The second pair, Johann Valentin Andreae's *Christianopolis*, published in 1619, and Jan Amos Comenius's *The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart*, printed in 1623, offers a different conception of the boundaries of utopia: in these texts, the utopia is difficult to access but nonetheless open to the reader. The reason for these two approaches, this paper will argue, is down to the contrasting purpose of the writers, and consequently their different use of the utopian mode of discourse. Campanella and Bacon, though they have come from dissimilar backgrounds and are ultimately using the utopian mode in quite different ways, are both advocating some degree of change in the workings of their own contemporary

society. Andreae and Comenius, on the other hand, although they recognise the need for improvements to their own environments, seek first and foremost to inspire the reader to enter what they conceive of as the only ideal community available to them; the invisible community of Christianity. The difference between the two approaches is down to a fundamentally distinct conception of the nature of the ideal community: in the first pair of utopias, it is conceived of as an earthly, temporal location; in the second, the ideal society is configured along Augustinian lines, as a spiritual place, rather than a physical one.

* * *

New Atlantis is a classic example of the isolationist utopia, deeply concerned about the protection of its borders and anxious about its relationship with the outside world. The narrator and his company reach the country of Bensalem after a storm, where that are met by officials who will not allow them to approach beyond a certain distance. These officials, when they board the visitors' ship, carry with them strange fruits to ward off contamination; they allow the company to enter their country, but under strict conditions, and keep them in special quarters. The visitors are held in quarantine for three days, and thereafter not allowed to stray further than a prescribed distance from the city walls (Bacon 2002: 457-462). Bensalem itself is a secretive place; particularly in the workings of its central institution, Salomon's House, which has as its purpose "the knowledge of Causes, and secret motions of things" (*idem*, 480). The policy of secrecy is practised in its relationship with the outside world. The Bensalemites have a series of ambassadors, who travel around the world undercover, gaining knowledge about other countries. The admission of strangers to this society is so rare that the narrator and his company are the first to have landed in thirty-seven years, despite the increased levels of international travel in the early seventeenth century (*idem*, 462). Contrary to contemporary belief, however, the Bensalemites maintain that world travel is not in fact burgeoning, but rather has decreased considerably. Three thousand years ago, the Bensalemites report, "the navigation of the world (specially for remote voyages) was greater than at this day" (*idem*, 467). Following a second

flood, which Bensalem survived, but which nearly destroyed the population of neighbouring America, international travel greatly diminished, so that few ships now reach Bensalemite shores (*idem*, 469). So whilst the travellers, and indeed the contemporary reader, may feel themselves to be part of an age of discovery, the Bensalemites' view is quite the opposite. New Atlantis is presented as the home of an older and wiser culture, absolutely in command of its dealings with the outside world. Bacon's utopia is difficult to find out about, difficult to reach and difficult to enter; in possession of the globe's secrets, it keeps the rest of the world at arm's length.

In this it has much in common with Campanella's *The City of the Sun*. Campanella wrote *The City of the Sun* whilst in prison, following his involvement in an attempted revolt against Spanish and Church authorities in southern Italy. His ideal city is protected from the outside world by a series of walls and fortifications, so strong that they seem to the narrator entirely impenetrable (Campanella 1981: 29). The narrator of this utopia is a Genoese sailor, one of Columbus's crew, who, like the narrator of New Atlantis, is forced to take refuge in a strange environment (*idem*, 27). Like the Bensalemites, the Solarians are protective of their borders, which are guarded, and defended with violence if they come under attack (*idem*, 79, 83). They also operate a system of spying ambassadors, who learn secretly about the world, and help to improve their own culture, whilst not publicising themselves (*idem*, 36, 67). Also like the Bensalemites, the Solarians are kind to visitors, showing them around, and even allowing them to become citizens after a probationary period (*idem*, 83). But despite this seeming openness to strangers, they are at heart a closed society, and there is a continual emphasis on their difference to their European visitors, and their superiority. They are very much a family body, sharing familial relations, having their partners and children in common, and so whilst on one level they may seem welcoming, they do not allow outside influences, like slaves or foreigners, to "corrupt the manners of the city" (*idem*, 83). Like New Atlantis, the City of the Sun has a great deal more knowledge and understanding of the world than contemporary societies. They are organised on entirely rational grounds, living by a kind of natural Christianity or right reason, although they do not have revelation.

In relation to this, the text even offers a theory as to why travel is increasing and the new world is being opened up to foreign visitors. To the Hospitaler, the knight to whom the sailor is relating his tale, this is all part of a divine plan to spread Christianity throughout the globe: “for this reason the Spaniards discovered the rest of the world so as to unite it all under one law, even though Columbus, your fellow Genoese, was its first discoverer. These philosophers you speak of must be elected by God to be witnesses for the truth” (*idem*, 121). So the provinces of the new world, the knight suggests, can offer proof to Europe that Christianity really is the truest and most natural religion. Thus the text tries to make sense of globalisation as having a higher religious purpose. *The City of the Sun* recognises the contemporary process of globalisation, and tries to conceive of it in a rational way, but as a society, it remains protective of its privacy.

What these particularly isolationist utopias share is a desire for change. Campanella, in a move that is crucial to the development of the utopian mode of writing, is using the utopia to suggest at real social improvements that he would like to see take place. *The City of the Sun* is intended as an inspiration to others, a force for reformation. The same motivation can be detected in Bacon’s *New Atlantis*, though on a lesser scale. Bacon is not seeking total social revolution. Rather, he is exploring the consequences of the establishment of a state-supported institution of natural knowledge, something that he advocated during his own time. Both Campanella and Bacon use the utopian form to explore the consequences of social change, but neither does so within the context of an open, inviting society; instead their utopias carefully control the extent to which external influences are allowed to infiltrate. Both of these utopias may be revolutionary, in Bacon’s case in the non-political understanding of that word, but they imagine their idealism in the context of an imperfect world. Utopia is, as always, found to be defining itself against what lies beyond its shores.

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Andreae's utopia, *Christianopolis*, shares the conventions of other Renaissance utopias in taking the form of a narrative reported by a traveller who happened upon foreign shores after a shipwreck (Andreae 1999: 155). But Andreae subverts the usual attempts to make the newfound land seem like a real place, giving it a nonsense geographical location, claiming to have reached it from the Academic Ocean on a ship called Fantasy (*idem*, 155-156). Andreae uses the idea of the journey, but his utopia is not interested in contemporary travel or the process of globalisation. Whilst Andreae employs the usual convention that the island is hard to get to, he takes pains throughout the text to emphasise that this ideal society is in fact open to anyone. In his opening letter to the reader, he directly enjoins the reader to come to Christianopolis with him; later he wishes that the reader will visit and learn more about the community firsthand (*idem*, 153-154, 252). After he has been examined on arrival, the narrator is welcomed into Christianopolis with open arms and told "You are ours!" (*idem*, 161). Once the narrator has been accepted, he becomes a part of this community, and when he leaves, it is only to return as soon as possible with his friends. His final leave-taking has biblical overtones: "Wherever you go, there will I go too. I shall have the same people and the same God as you. Where you die, there shall I too die and there shall I be buried. And so may Jehovah be merciful to me, that only death shall separate me from you" (*idem*, 283). The chancellor to whom this speech is made is happy at the idea that the narrator should publicise Christianopolis abroad and return with his friends to live there permanently (*idem*, 281-282). The primary purpose of this openness is to emphasise that Christianopolis represents a spiritual rather than a physical ideal. Andreae does suggest social improvements in his portrait of an ideal society, particularly in the field of education. However, his chief concern is not to provoke social change but to encourage the reader in devotion to the only community perceived as being universal, the invisible Christian church. Hence Andreae takes pains to liken the journey to Christianopolis to the journey to heaven, to stress that the reader may come to Christianopolis "very soon, if you are good" (*idem*, 283). This ideal society is not easy to get into, but it is unreservedly open to all.

Comenius's utopia, *The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart*, is somewhat different from the other texts here considered. In an

allegorical style that was to have considerable influence on later Protestant writers such as John Bunyan, Comenius charts the experiences of a pilgrim in his hunt for a vocation. Increasingly disappointed with the horrors of the world he sees around him, the pilgrim finally wishes he could escape the world entirely (Comenius 1997: 185). Hearing a voice calling him to return to his own heart, the pilgrim closes off his ears, nose, and mouth, and retreats inside his own body (*idem*, 187). Within his heart he meets Christ, and is brought to understand the folly of seeking fulfilment in the world. Instead he learns that the only true vocation is a life lived for Christ, and the text ends with the pilgrim devoting himself to a truly Christian life (*idem*, 225). The pilgrim is ultimately offered two idealised communities or utopias: the first is the province of his own heart and soul; the second, the invisible Christian community of worshippers. But this second community does not include all those who go to church and profess themselves Christians. Instead, the entrance to the invisible community is hidden within the church itself. As in *Christianopolis*, all those who wish to enter this community must undergo a rigorous examination, must give up all worldly knowledge in favour of humility, but this process results in a transformation: “the true church is the world turned upside down” (*idem*, 198). The pilgrim learns that so all-encompassing is the invisible church that the true Christian does not care who rules the earthly kingdom; because it is in the outside world that the pilgrim is a tenant, and it is the inner, spiritual community to which he really belongs. So the utopian community in this text is not easy to find, because it is not a physical location and its entrance is hidden, and it is not easy to access, because its members are truly pious and godly, but its doors are open to all who are humble enough to enter. As in *Christianopolis*, the pilgrim becomes a member of this new community, renouncing the earthly one: “Here I am, I am yours, I am your own, yours eternally (…). Lead me through this mournful darkness of the world to the eternal light” (*idem*, 224-225). This conception of the ideal society clearly takes much from the Augustinian tradition, in its insistence that the truly ideal community is spiritual, simultaneously inaccessible and open to all, and that the importance of earthly government pales in comparison.

Andreae and Comenius share an ideological and cultural background, rooted in the drive for further reformation that was taking place in northern Europe during the early years of the seventeenth century. In their focus on the importance of individual over communal reformation, on knowledge of Christ as the only useful knowledge, and on the best systems and practices of education, they share the concerns and motivations of the Second Reformation. Their utopias, just as much as Campanella's, are written to effect change, but the change that they envisage begins on a personal, individual level. They seek to motivate what they perceive of as a return to the true aims and habits of Christianity. They are aware that the earthly community is flawed, and can never be perfected, that as Andreae writes in his letter to the reader, "The truth is that while the world sins, it prefers to have this concealed rather than praised" (Andreae 1999: 149). The aim of these utopias is to reveal the sinful activity of the world, and to encourage the reader to turn to the spiritual community instead, as this is seen as the only society that can be perfected, that can really be made ideal. As with the more isolationist utopia, the spiritual utopia defines itself by what lies outside, but unlike Bacon and Campanella, the authors of the spiritual utopia extend an invitation to the reader to join the ideal society within.

* * *

This paper has attempted to trace two divergent manifestations of the utopian mode of writing in the early seventeenth century, and has argued that the disparity between the two is brought about by the different motivations of the utopias' authors. These two manifestations (utopia as political statement or blueprint and utopia as allegory or metaphor) are indicative of the ways in which the utopian mode was to be used by future generations of writers. They can also be traced back to the roots of early modern ideal-state fiction, to Thomas More's *Utopia*. But in the seventeenth century, the utopia has a unique status. It has become a serious means of both expressing dissatisfaction with the *status quo*, and of suggesting real improvements to it. In their seriousness, in their heartfelt conviction that humanity has the power to improve itself and in their belief that utopian writings can help in that effort, the utopian authors of the

early seventeenth century provide what might be called the classic utopian moment. During this crucial period of development for the utopian mode of writing, as indeed at any other period, it is impossible to read the utopian text in a vacuum. In its anxiety about its borders and reaction to the contemporary processes of global expansion in trade and travel, the utopia can be seen to be involved with the concerns of its age. Whether isolationist or open, insular or global, the early modern utopia, cultural product of the age of discovery, remains fundamentally engaged with the contemporary development of globalisation.

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Gemeinschaft in Kibbutzim and Monasteries[1]

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This presentation is part of a comparative study of communal societies, in which, using the kibbutz as a central model, I ask why people live in communes – or, more exactly, what reasons they have for doing so; for my interest is not primarily sociological or historical, but philosophical. And in such a study the comparison between kibbutzim and monasteries, though scarcely discussed by scholars up to now, seems to be a pretty good starting-point. In many respects the structure of the monastery is similar to that of the classical kibbutz: that is to say, of the kibbutz before the inception of the massive changes of the past two decades. The monks (or nuns) have no personal property; they eat in a common refectory; the monastery's property is communally owned and administered; work, allotted by the community's management, is compulsory; and the community, while not democratically administered like the kibbutz, is a dominant factor in the life of the individual. On the face of it, it would seem that here are two very similar types of community.

One of the central factors in kibbutz life is what is known in Hebrew as the *hevruta* – the closely-knit group, consisting of the kibbutz membership as a whole, or significant parts of it, which some thinkers have called the *Gemeinschaft*, others the Bund, or communion. I try to keep away from these names, with their sociological resonances, and simply call it "the communal experience".

Let me start with an ostensive definition:

> There was a sort of mutual yearning, a desire to sit together far into the night, and thereby to penetrate the very depth of the vision of communal life. Soul touched soul.

> We longed to become a sort of river of souls, whose tributaries would merge, and together create a fresh and mighty current of friendship and fraternity. (Likever 1947: 136-137)

This comes from a well-known description of a young kibbutz in the early twenties, and is paralleled in many other texts, from the kibbutz and elsewhere. There is a feeling of wonder at, and oneness with, nature, and with one's fellow human beings within their natural setting; and this oneness is felt so intensively that it leads to a state close to ecstasy, a sort of semi-mystic experience. This is the communal experience, which is a central factor in kibbutz thought and practice. It is a widespread occurrence, arising spontaneously from the actions and interactions of people – particularly young people – in small groups. It can be the result of working together of singing or dancing together, of the sort of discussion in which “soul touches soul”. History also shows us that it can be the result of fighting together – a phenomenon enshrined in the language as “esprit de corps”. The great majority of those who undergo it feel it to be positive, significant, and worthy of repeating if possible.

While very real, and often referred to in the ideological literature of the kibbutz, this experience is essentially transient, for nobody can live permanently with such intensity of feeling. It comes during the working day or at its end, in the heat of battle, during a songfest or dance, and may be repeated in many forms and at many times. In kibbutz life, for instance, many cultural events are arranged in such a way that “the together”, in the Hebrew phrase, is facilitated and emphasized: the Jewish festivals, the Reception of the Sabbath on a Friday evening, a wide variety of local celebrations, are not only cultural events, but also a framework in which the whole kibbutz population can be, and feel itself, together.

As I have said, this phenomenon is well-known in kibbutz life and thought. There are also many parallels from the experience of other communes, from Socialist thinkers, and elsewhere. Judging from the basic pattern of monastery life, one would have guessed that such experiences are also felt in the monastic community, and are expressed in the ways in which exponents of monasticism justify its existence. To find out whether this was as such, I began

with the body of writings that corresponds to the ideology of the kibbutz: monastic theology.

Essentially, monastic theology (though not necessarily monastic practice, which has a complex history of its own) derives from two biblical passages: first and foremost, from the description in the Book of Acts (4. 34-5):

> As many as were possessed of lands or houses sold them, and laid [the proceeds] at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.

This passage is often quoted as a model for an exemplary Christian life, imitated in its essentials by the monastic community. And it is backed by a passage from the Psalms: "Behold how goodly and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together" (Ps. 133. 1).

There is a considerable literature about the monastic life, and even more written by monks about theological matters. In one of the most celebrated passages of this literature, St. Aelred of Rievaulx, an English monk of the early twelfth century, writes of his feelings when entering the monastery after a journey:

> The day before yesterday, walking round the cloisters where the brethren were sitting, as it were a very garland of love, I was gazing on them as one might admire in paradise the leaves and flowers and fruit of every individual tree; and finding none there whom I did not love and by whom I did not believe myself loved, I was filled with a joy that soared above all the pleasures of the world. I felt my spirit pass out into all, and their affection flow back into me, until I found myself saying with the psalmist: Behold, how good and how pleasant it is when brothers dwell together in unity. (Matarasso 1993: 184-185)

No less deeply felt is a long Latin poem by Baldwin of Ford, an English bishop of the late 12th century, devoted to the subject of communal life. After detailing the provenance of the monastery from the communal life of the apostles, Baldwin praises communal life as such:

> Community life is, as it were, the splendour of eternal life, a radiance of unending life, a rivulet springing from the unfailing fountain whence flow the healing waters of life everlasting. (Baldwin, 1985, v : 9)

Baldwin draws a parallel between three different Christian communities: the community of the holy trinity, the community of the angels, and the community of "those who live in community" as did the disciples mentioned in the Book of Acts. Between these communards (the monks), "the deeper the love, the stronger the bond, and the fuller the communion; and, in turn, the closer the communion the stronger is the bond, and the more complete the love...".

And after a very long gap in time it appeared in 2004 an article by Martha E. Driscoll, the Mother Superior of a South American nunnery, emphasizing the need for *Gemeinschaft* in the monastic community.

> Living in empty cells, using desks in a common room, eating together at a common table makes it possible for us as a coenobitic community to live a perpetual pilgrimage with nothing in our hands to weigh us down, a pilgrimage to another land and another life, symbolised by our daily pilgrimages together from the church to the chapter room or the refectory. (Driscoll 2004: 183)

These extracts, together with a few remarks by pseudo-Macarius, a rather obscure bishop of the fourth or fifth century, seem to confirm my original guess that the social structure of the monastery, so similar to that of the kibbutz, would be a fertile ground for the communal experience. But it would be a mistake to draw this conclusion. For the most significant thing about them is that they stand virtually alone in the monastic literature, ranging from the third century until the present day. To understand how deep are the reservations from the concept of the communal experience, let us look at two fundamental documents in the history of monastic thought: a much-quoted article by St. Basil of Caesarea (329-379), known as "the founder of oriental monasticism", who seems to have invented the coenobitic monastery after having visited, and rejected the way of life of a whole cluster of eremitic congregations. This historical moment is of great importance to the present study, for it creates a possible version of Christian life and action based on a close-knit community, rather than an individual saint or hermit with, in the case of the eremitic monasteries, logistic support from a large number of disciples. It also initiated a model of what may be called active monasticism: the community as a whole does good works, lives in a town where it deliberately comes into contact with

moral and economic distress, establishes a hospital and orphanage, and so forth. It is to this – the social involvement of the coenobitic monastery, as against the deliberate isolation of the eremite – that one of Basil's most frequently quoted passages is thought to refer:

> For, behold, the Lord for the greatness of his love of men was not content with teaching the word only, but that accurately and clearly He might give us a pattern of humility in the perfection of love. He girded Himself and washed the feet of the disciples in person. (Basil 1925: 166)

And addressing the eremitic monks:

> Whose feet then will thou wash? Whom wilt thou care for? In comparison with whom wilt thou last if thou livest by thyself? How will that good and pleasant thing, the dwelling of brethren together, which the Holy Spirit likens to unguent flowing down from the High Priest's head, be accomplished by dwelling solitary? (*ibidem*)

At first sight this seems to be simply a defence of the coenobitic, involved, way of monastic life as against the deliberate isolation of the hermit. But it is more than that. It is also part of an apologia for community life as such. The whole passage concludes with a mention of the communal life of the apostles, as described in the Book of Acts (4. 32-36). And it opens with a series of reasons for living together: mutual aid as the expression of Christian love; greater ability to do good works; the benefits of mutual criticism; mutual enrichment, "when a number live together a man enjoys his own gift, multiplying it by imparting it to others"; and self-evaluation in the context of the community:

> For wherewith shall a man show humility, if he has no one in comparison with whom to show himself humble? Wherewith shall he show compassion, when he is cut off from the community of the many? How can he practise himself in long-suffering, when there is none to withstand his wishes? (Basil 1925: 165)

All these are no doubt cogent arguments for communal living. But they sound more like utilitarian considerations, suited to a *Gesellschaft* type of society, than an advocacy of *Gemeinschaft*. Apart from the biblical references, there are no references to the communal experience of the sort described in the extracts quoted above.

So, at the very beginning of monastic theology, the basic motivation for communal living is not to achieve a communal experience, and to find a way to

God through that experience, but to create a substructure for the elevation of the individual, and his (or her) perfection through the doing of good deeds.

As it begins, so it goes on. The *Rule of St. Benedict*, which Western monks still have read to them three times yearly at mealtimes, speaks of the monastery as a school, whose purpose is to educate the monks in the ways of righteousness, and train them to lead the good life, under the guidance of the abbot (Fry *et al*., 1982: 45-50). Most of this fundamental document of monasticism is devoted to technical details of monastic life, interlarded with pious exhortations intended to raise the spiritual level of the monks: all on the level of the individual, to whom the educational message of the "school" is addressed. True, the technical arrangements of the monastery include the prohibition of private ownership, and distribution of goods according to need, in a formulations reminiscent of the ideals of communes and kibbutzim (*idem*, chaps. 33, 34). But this is not said to be for the greater glory of the community, or any of the many reasons advanced by advocates of *Gemeinschaft*, except that "in this way, all the members will be at peace" (*idem*, chaps. 34, 5). The final chapters of the *Rule* deal with relationships between the brethren, and an exhortation to observe the monastic rule in order to reach "the loftier summits of the teaching and virtues we mentioned above" – all of them individual virtues such as humility, chastity and obedience – but no real mention of the community as such (*idem*, chaps. 71-73).

Perhaps this can best be illustrated by a look at the structure of life in a monastery – a structure which, with very few exceptions, has remained unchanged over the past six hundred years, if not more.

There are, of course, various types of monastery. At one end of a wide range is what may be called the outer-directed community. The monks (or nuns) live together in a communal framework, but much of their time is spent in doing good works: charitable work among the poor, educational work ranging from work with delinquent youths to the management of and teaching in a boarding-school, and many more variants. At the other end of this spectrum is the contemplative monastery. The monks or nuns are "enclosed" – that is to say, their contacts with the outside world are very limited; indeed, in the not very distant past they were completely cut off from their families and, for instance,

forbidden to take part in their parents' funerals. The communal society of the monastery is their world. Here, one would have thought, is fertile ground for the development of *Gemeinschaft:* a community focused on its own needs and development, and based on the communal principles central to the kibbutz and other forms of communal societies. Let us see how this works out in practice.

In a typical contemporary contemplative monastery, the day is built round the Liturgy of the Hours – the seven services sung and recited in the chapel by the whole monastic community. The day will usually begin at 5.30, with Vigils, and end after Compline, at about 9 p.m.; then begins the "great silence", during which speech is forbidden until the following morning. In all, of his 16 waking hours, the monk spends some six or seven in chapel; the three meals take up about two hours, and work about four. In addition, some three to four hours are devoted to *lectio divina* – guided reading of sacred texts. Two periods of about forty-five minutes (one after lunch and one after supper) are devoted to "recreation": free intercourse between the monks, during which they converse freely about matters secular or divine.

Thus, by far the major part of the day is devoted to what may be seen as communal activity – prayer. Of the rest, the second greatest parts are work, which may be in the kitchen, the guest-house, or the living quarters, in the monastery's farm or in one of its workshops. Since, under modern conditions, the number of workers in each branch is small, this part of the day does not contribute greatly to *Gemeinschaft* –like experience. The same applies to *Lectio Divina*, which is, in effect, individual study and/or meditation, under the supervision of the abbot or prior, or one of the priests.

Meals are indeed eaten in common. But the monks do not talk to each other at mealtimes. They listen to readings from sacred writings and the Rule of St. Benedict, read by each of them in turn according to a weekly rota.

In many respects, therefore, it seems as if the structure of the monastic day is designed almost to prevent the creation of *Gemeinschaft*. The only times in which the monks are engaged together in activities parallel to those which contribute to the communal experience in kibbutz or commune are the short periods of "recreation"; although in many contemporary monasteries

opportunities are occasionally made for informal “get-togethers”, celebrations of special events, and the like.

But does not the main monastic activity – choral prayer – create a form of *Gemeinschaft?* I shall deal with this question at greater length later. But preliminary consideration would seem to lead to the answer “No!”. True, the sight and sound of a monastic congregation, however small, singing and intoning the traditional prayers, whether in Latin or the vernacular, has a quality all its own, which makes a deep impression even on the unbeliever – and, of course, even more on the devout participant. But there are few references, if any, in the literature I am familiar with, to the value of collective prayer as such. Prayer, of course, is much discussed. But prayer is the means whereby the individual finds his way to God; and the collective background is explicitly seen as a tool for the elevation of the individual.

It is no accident, therefore, that in the considerable literature about monasteries written by travellers, writers and others who set out to discover the nature of the monastery by visiting, conversing with monks, and the like, as well as by apologists for the monastic life – writers who explain the monastery to the general public, rather than to those who are themselves committed to one – the theme of *Gemeinschaft* is virtually ignored. Here are a few examples:

Peter Levi, who gives a very sympathetic account of monastic life, emphasizing its function as a framework for relief from the troubles of the world, and opportunities for solitary contemplation, writes:

> The deep desire of monasteries is personal; it is the desire for God and the need for study and meditation…. Monasticism… is a kind of love. The sense that such a quest can be communal has often been disappointed. (Levi 1987: 62)

And, somewhat surprisingly:

> The worst of all religious penances is community life: it is not the penances of religion, which are private, but its communal pleasures which are hard to tolerate. (*idem*, 182)

This is a very far cry from the kibbutz, where the “communal pleasures” are a prime factor in the way of life and aspirations of the members.

There is very little sociological research on the monastic community; mainly, no doubt, because the monks are not interested in admitting outsiders

to their inner sanctuary in the physical sense, and even less to secrets of their hearts and minds, and their mutual interactions. One sociologist who has attempted such research, primarily on an American Trappist community, is George A. Hillery, Jr. He, too, speaks little of *Gemeinschaft*. One of his most revealing remarks, about an incident which occurred in the 1960s, is:

> [In the sixties] two experimental houses were begun, composed of only four monks each. Neither house proved successful. In each case, the monks were "searching for community". The monastic search is, of course, for God. (Hillery 1992: 15)

And an exhaustive reading of one of the most prominent apologists for the monastic life, Thomas Merton, shows no tendency whatsoever to see communal life as a religious or moral value; on the contrary, even within the religious order his tendency is to praise the life of the hermit – and, indeed, in his own life he did for a period live the life of a hermit within the monastery.

Esther de Waal's *Seeking God: The Benedictine Way* is a popular and widely-read introduction to monastic life and thought. Though herself neither a Catholic nor a monastic, she has a deep understanding of the monastic community. If we are looking for an appraisal of *Gemeinschaft*, we would expect to find it here. Yet there is no more than a cursory reference to it in either of the chapters which would seem to be relevant: on "people" and on "prayer". The first concentrates on face-to-face relationships between the monks, and between them and people from outside the monastery; while in the second, prayer is presented as a "full-time occupation" for the individual. The only reference to its communal aspect reads:

> [Prayer] is of course a corporate activity, and (...) it is important that I do not lose sight of the role that St. Benedict assigns to praying together and to sharing worship. Just because prayer is so personal and arises from the centre of my being it might develop into some individualistic self-indulgence unless anchored in the local community to which I belong. My praying must not become so hidden and so secret that it becomes an entirely private affair, no longer supported by others and by the mutual learning which contact with other people brings. (Waal 1984: 150-151)

In other words, communal prayer, the experience which can be overwhelming in more than one sense – quantitatively, as filling the major part of the day, aesthetically, as a result of the beauty of the singing, and socially, as an expression of the "togetherness" of the whole community – is primarily an aid

to the proper performance of individual prayer, rather than an end in itself in any of these respects.

Why does this happen? Even though most kibbutzim are not religiously observant communities, it seems to me that we are comparing two types of society based on different religious traditions and ways of thinking; and, as a result, on deeply divergent cultural and psychological patterns. In both of them the concept of salvation is very important. But Jewish salvation is essentially the salvation of the nation, the society – or, on the microcosmic level, the group (as evidenced, for instance, in the writings of the Dead Sea sects). For the Christian salvation is individual: personal belief in God and in Jesus, and personal redemption in the world to come. All Jewish synagogue prayers are couched in the plural: on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year, Jews confess their sins in the first person plural: we have sinned, we have gone astray, we have slandered, etc. The central event of the Christian prayer is the mass, culminating with Holy Communion, which is a preliminary stage to the salvation of the individual. These differences reverberate throughout Jewish and Christian religious history, though there are, of course, variations and mutual borrowings.

It is not surprising, then, that despite the structural similarities between these two types of community, the differences between them are so great. The general conclusion, if one is required, is that a simple structuralist analysis is not sufficient: societies whose institutions and methods of organization are very similar can be deeply influenced by cultural and historical factors, with very dissimilar results. My knowledge of the monastery is, on the whole, quite superficial, and I would hesitate to draw far-reaching conclusions from this minor piece of research. But, as far as the kibbutz is concerned, my conclusion is that cultural factors often not consciously appreciated by the members themselves – in this case, the Jewish religion and ethos can have a deep and lasting effect on the life of a profoundly non-religious, and often even anti-religious, community.

Note

[1] I should like to thank my many informants about monastic theology, who generously gave of their time and knowledge to introduce me to a world of which I knew little: Professor Brian Patrick McGuire of Roskilde University, and a group of theologians of Oxford University whom I met through his good offices: Benedicta Ward, Pauline Matarasso, Liz Carmichael and Bernard Green; and the Abbott, Prior, and Guestmaster of Quarr Monastery, Isle of Wight.

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Spacing Out an Unsettling Utopian Ethics

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> *Because there is no time out from expressive being, perception of a situation and response are intertwined and assume a kind of "response-ability"*.
> (Thrift 2004: 60)
>
> *Uncanniness is the basic state of Being-in-the-world, even though in an everyday way it has been covered up.*
> (Heidegger 1962: 322)
>
> *Is this feeling of being ill at ease, this uncanny, unhomely sensation… merely our fear of death? Or is it more like a pervasive, indeterminate anxiety, a fundamental or founding mood that Heidegger at times reads variously as joy, melancholy, and, most strikingly, profound boredom? In the face of* what *are we anxious, joyous, melancholy or deeply bored? Everything and nothing. …An impersonal yet thoroughgoing alienation or expropriation marks our efforts to learn who we are*.
> (Krell 1997: 94)

1. Two questions

This paper seeks to attend to two considerations, or questions, that are pertinent to contemporary utopian thought. Both questions invite debate regarding the problem of ethics (and morality) to utopia. Furthermore, they encourage us to consider the fundamental difficulties that individuals' *everyday* and contingent ideas and ideals of "the good" pose for utopianism: at once, everything and nothing.

The first question is: if utopia is about the (or a) "good", then can we, and should we, attempt to extend that notion? For philosophers, this is a meta-ethical problem. That is, one embedded in the process of understanding how

something can be good. It is also normative. The question asks whether it is (now) appropriate to extend the notion of utopia, in light of so many well-worn critiques, and in light of an explosion of contemporary arenas within which utopian tendencies might be installed (Sargisson 1996 and 2000; Anderson 2002; Pinder 2002; Bauman 2003; Halpin 2003). This paper is narrowly concerned with the latter, normative problem, understood through practices, materials and affects. It argues that the notion of utopia should be extended to encompass that which is simultaneously banal, ephemeral and unsettling.

The second question is: what *place* for utopia? Utopia is also about the or a "good place". In light of our first question, there is significant potential for contemporary theorizations of place and space from human geographers to attend to a summative problem: can our notions of the "good place" be extended? Human geographers have variously stressed the contingent, unsettled, performative and more-than-representational styles in and through which spaces are created and lived. This paper demonstrates how such different conceptualizations of space might affect the ways that we think about the good (place). In doing so, it highlights how, strikingly, much of what exceeds most utopian thought *is* concerned with the good place – albeit in manners simultaneously banal, ephemeral and unsettling.

I begin the paper by presenting a series of ways of thinking about space and place. Drawing on those, the rest of my argument is constructed through a series of "events" from a geography of a Steiner School in Pembrokshire, UK. Kumar has argued that architecture is perhaps the most utopian of the arts, with its inherent futurity and (Modern) utopian heritage (Kumar 1991). Yet, in conceiving and researching space differently, through ethnographic engagement with everyday goings-on at Nant-y-Cwm Steiner School, it emerged that utopianism can be thought, practiced and felt in a surprising diversity of forms. Very often, these were specifically geared around "doing good" for children.

It is important to clarify that not all of the instances of doing good that took place at the school are essentially utopian. I would also rather avoid a lengthy discussion with regard to definition that any extension of utopianism might seem to necessitate. Utopia is, beyond the (inescapable) bounds of

representation, a way of feeling about the world and one's active place therein. Yet in that very ethical-affectual sense, it is possible to find crystallizations of feeling about certain phenomena or impulses (such as doing good for children), within which it can be agreed that a kind of albeit unexpected utopianism can be found, which may even be partially aligned with our more common-place understandings of the good place. For, I argue, seemingly banal "events" of the type I examine are rarely attended to by academics at the best of times; more rarely are they seen to hold ethical implications; and still more rarely could they be conceived as utopian – perhaps because they are too banal, perhaps not "representable" – or perhaps also because they are unsettled in nature, unsettling in impact, and, at times, desire the unsettling, worrying and anxiety-inducing (Kraftl 2004 and forthcoming; Sargisson elucidates a related argument about the "unsafe" [1996: 95]).

2. Space, spacing and utopia

Space and place are crucial to utopia. To say this is not to elide the importance of time, or process, to utopia. For, quite simply, time and space are inextricably implicated in the going-on of (utopian) existence – whether dialectically (Harvey 2000) or performatively (Grosz 2001). In this sense, many features of contemporary geographical thought about space will feel strangely recognisable to readers not familiar with the discipline of human geography. Indeed, both a stress on process and open-endedness, and on deconstruction of ends and means, are key features of post-structural and feminist utopian theory (Sargisson 1996; Sandercock 1998; Grosz 2001; Levitas 2003). Nevertheless, there are four specific characteristics of space that I wish to suggest should be, and in some senses already are, important to utopia (for a fuller review, see Lorimer 2005). These raise ethical points in themselves, and extend what we conceive to be good, in or about places.

Space is a verb, not a noun

Usually, space is considered to be a noun – a thing, that can be visited, or a container, for action. However, our experiential and imaginative encounter with spaces is often (but not always) otherwise. Spaces are complex: to talk of them

in such neutral terms belies the sheer "complexity, contradictoriness and contingency" of "space(s)" in particular (Renold 2001: 372). That is, in any given "geography", at any given time, there will be *loads* going on, on all sorts of levels (Horton & Kraftl 2005: 136). Spaces are multiple, created in, as and through bodies, personal and collective: "instead of a single space-time, we will generate as many spaces and times as there are types of relations" (Latour 1997: 174). Spaces *are* processes, made up of constantly shifting relations, assemblages and bundles of materials (Law 2002). Objects and events are not set *a priori* into spaces but become-spaces, they make space. Hence, space may be better conceived of as *spacing*:

> I use the term "spacing" in terms of "space" for similar reasons that "consuming", "ordering" and "clubbing" are more useful conceptually than "consumption", "orders" and "clubs" respectively... Spacings differ conceptually from spaces in that the former are explicitly "never finished", always open to negotiation and thus always in a process of becoming. Further, many "sets" of spacings (or spatial *orderings*) may co-exist within the same physical space. (Malbon 1999: 94)

Or, "this is a world bowling along, in which decisions have to be made for the moment, by the moment" (Thrift 2000: 216). This is "the buzz of existence (…). The buzzing is, first and foremost, *unsettling*" (Doel 2001: 503, emphasis added). Since the world does not come to rest, we cannot always or ever step back to imagine it other, because it is *always-already other*: the world has already eluded us. The implication of this is quite the reverse of a foreclosure of utopianism and utopian space. It is instead a call to engage somehow with utopian spacing: the unutterably complex and banal which is always new, yet only sometimes infectiously creative. We might read a kind of latent utopianism into what Nigel Thrift terms "*the push* that keeps the world rolling over; the energy that fuels change; the work of transformation which ensures that 'the reproduction of the other as the same is not assured'" (Thrift 2000a: 216; cites Phelan 1993).

Much of what goes on is more-than-representational

The implications of the above for representation should be clear. A "crisis" of representation in the social sciences has been apparent for some years, for

various reasons (Wittgenstein 2001; Harrison 2002). With regard to our above discussion of spacing, it would be at least tactful to deny someone's claim that they have "represented" a space or even spacing. There are two particular facets of spacing that justify this denial. First, and simply, there is much that goes on that evades and exceeds representation – that is impossible to write, explain or subject to cognitive thought. These acts, emotions and impulses are either ignored, or "deadened" in attempts to represent them. We need more and other ways to release them from the shackles of representation, to bear witness to spaces, "to move towards an account that takes seriously the world's own forces" (Dewsbury *et al*. 2002: 440). Second, consider the word: re-present-ation. The very idea evokes an attempt to conjure what once was, to repeat the present, to produce sameness (Deleuze 2004). But the world can only be engaged in producing variation (Thrift 2000): an incessant buzzing (Doel 2001). It is not possible to repeat because the present can *never* be repeated: to repeat it would be to do exactly that – to repeat, but not at the same time/place, and, crucially, as a repetition (not for the first time, not as that very moment). A repetition, even identical, is still and always that moment *again*. So, to re-cap: places and spaces are not necessarily "things" that can be described, because they are active, and evade definition. They are thus unsettling. This is true even (and perhaps especially) of utopian spaces – at least, of the most *powerful* of utopian spaces. Ironically, many of these go un-noticed, in a pervasive but understandable emphasis on utopian texts and pre-defined communities: this paper is one attempt to re-dress the balance.

Most banal, material practices go un-noticed

As much as spaces and places are contingent and unsettled, they require a tremendous amount of work, from human and non-human agents. To recognise this is a moral point in itself (Smith 1994). Moreover, the attentions of geographers and others have been drawn to the unequal manners in which spaces are divided, represented and experienced (Harvey 1975; Cosgrove 1998; Hinchliffe 2000). More lately, there has been a significant move to consider what might be termed the geographies and sociologies of banality and materiality (Latour 1999; Seigworth 2000). Each of these manoeuvres has

brought a distinctive flavour to our understandings of "everydayness" and everyday spacing. These are more-than-adequately documented elsewhere (Bingham, 1996). I wish to consider three specific implications of material practices for utopianism. First, with a very few exceptions (Anderson 2002; Bann 2003), there has been precious little engagement with banality and materiality, as understood by post-structuralists, outside of fictional texts. Matter matters to human life: "consider things, and you will have humans. Consider humans, and you are by that very act interested in things" (Latour 2002: 20). More to the point, "there is so much to learn not only from the things we value, but from the rubbish, detritus and discarded things" (Attfield 2000: xv). If this is the case, why are utopian academics so *disinterested* in engaging wholeheartedly with things? Second, the relationship between utopia and work is under-theorised. Material practices – like cleaning toilets, carving door-handles, making apple crumble, cuddling – are crucial to our experiences of places. Not only must one work to obtain utopia (whether one knows that this is what one is doing), but work might itself *be utopian*. The most banal, mundane, laborious tasks might – perhaps retrospectively – become utopian. Third, taken together, such small materials and practices might be constituent parts of seemingly larger, fundamentally important ethical ideals with regard to what is good. Conversely, such small materials and practices might themselves be massively important to certain individuals' experience of place, to the extent that they might be termed utopian. In this paper, ideas and ideals of the good with regard to childhood are our primary focus.

Utopia affects us profoundly

The emotional tug of reading or experiencing utopia is often sickeningly profound (Kraftl 2006). The impact of utopia is often said to be nostalgic, provocative or compensatory (Garforth 2005). Yet, aside from largely theoretical discussions of hope drawing on Bloch (cf. Levitas 1990), there has been little consideration – and particularly empirical consideration – of the place of emotion in utopia. Specifically, drawing together the three characteristics of space outlined above, there is a need to consider *affect*. Affect is more than emotion. It exceeds an individual or place, residing more ineffably in a moment

or event as atmosphere or tension: it could be "the *push* of the terrain upon the 'muscular consciousness' of the body (…) the spiritualized *pull* or uplift of a chord of music, [or] the stillness struck by the colour of paint. Affects are not about you or it, subject or object. They are relations that inspire the world" (Dewsbury *et al.* 2002: 439). Affect is an emergent, but pervasive feature of an event. As a qualitative mode of feeling or intensity, it is increasingly subject to political, cultural and economic control in minority world countries (Thrift 2004). Yet, for instance, "[g]iven the utter ubiquity of affect as a vital element of cities…you would think that the affective register would form a large part of the study of cities – but you would be wrong. (…) [S]ystematic knowledges of the creation and mobilisation of affect have become an integral part of the everyday urban landscape (…). [T]hese knowledges are not only being deployed knowingly, they are also being deployed politically" (Thrift 2004: 57-58). By extension, one would imagine that Thrift's "affective register" would form a large part of the study of utopia: one can only imagine both the mundane and spectacular ethico-political implications of such mobilisations of affect in city planning, community building and consumption practices. Yet, with a few exceptions (Sandercock 1998; Anderson 2002; Pinder 2005), this is lacking. We should attend better to patently un-representable, fleeting moments of not only hope but affects like nostalgia, euphoria joy, boredom and anxiety (Kraftl, forthcoming). Although sometimes un-planned, contingent, fleeting and momentary, perhaps too small-scale to notice, these affects and the spacings, materials and practices attached to them *have the potential to be(come) utopian*. In terms of ethics, these affective spacings have clear implications for what we judge or feel to be good or right, whether before, during and/or after a moment of affective encounter.

Whither utopia?

These four characteristics of space *do not* imply that we need to ignore or move away from utopian texts, or architectural designs and visions. Instead, in this brief review, I have demonstrated that there is much else in which we should be interested. If utopia is at least partially about space, there are so *many* ways to think about space that we might be presented with a multitude of other ways to

think about utopia. The four facets of space above (a bare description of some of many facets) suggest that if we *care* that space can be ongoing, unsettled and hard to represent or explain, that banal, small-scale things and practices matter, and that moments of nostalgia, euphoria or anxiety are profoundly embroiled in the production of the ethical, we might be well-placed to question what we mean by "the good" and by the "good place".

The rest of this paper follows a series of instances at which these considerations are thrown starkly into relief. Through ethnographic, critical architectural research at a building – that most utopian of artistic edifices – I present a number little intersections through and of spacings. I do not pretend that these are fully non-representational, or encompass all four characteristics of space. Instead, these snippets bear witness to *more* ways in which life lived with a building might bear utopian potential in perhaps novel ways.

3. Nant-y-Cwm Steiner School

Nant-y-Cwm Steiner School is located in South West Wales, UK. It is a privately-run Steiner School, which charges termly fees for attendance and/or asks parents to compensate for shortfalls in payment by working at the school. The school was built between 1979 and 1990 by a group of parents and teachers who were disenchanted with mainstream education. As explained below, the majority of the money, labour and materials were provided by this founding group. Steiner education is based around art- and movement-based teaching methods, and is geared towards a holistic, protective *and* creative nurturing of children's psychological and physiological development (see Steiner 1909 for more). One of the parents was an architect, Christopher Day, who interpreted Steiner's educational principles in the design of several "ecological" buildings at the school. The kindergarten, for four-to-seven year-old children, is, with its grass roof, wavy walls and warm, enclosing rooms, the best example of such environmentally and aesthetically sensitive architecture at the school (Plates 1 and 2).

Plate 1: Kindergarten at Nant-y-Cwm, exterior. As an unusual building, the school stands out with its irregular grass roof and undulating, deep pink walls. Author's photograph.

Plate 2: Kindergarten at Nant-y-Cwm, looking into classroom. Upon entering the building, the children walk along a dark, labyrinthine, corridor, painted in yellow-green. The classroom is beyond, painted a deep pink-orange, with table and chairs set for a meal, and an alcove in the background. Author's photograph.

Nant-y-Cwm's story represents in many ways a struggle to realize a vision for a better education – and childhood. The kindergarten symbolizes a strikingly ruralised, idyllic and "British" notion of childhood, sited on a wooded hillside above a rushing stream, inhabiting a protected, nurturing, warm and "cuddly" interior. Such appeals to community, childhood and the correcting influences of architecture seem easily bound up in enduring

utopian moralities. Indeed, in some ways, they are, and it was this which attracted my initial interest in the school. Yet it transpired that there was no overall plan for the school's building-up, still less one to build the type of close-knit community that has emerged there. For instance, the kindergarten, built eleven years after the school's founding, was built (pragmatically) to cater for Nant-y-Cwm's expanding pupil numbers. Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, the *many ways* of "doing good" that I encountered in my work at the school link with and extend more traditional and even post-structural theorizations of the utopian. Over a period of nine months, I undertook a "critical architectural geography" (*apud* Lees 2001) of the life and spaces of the school, and especially the kindergarten (the main focus for this paper). I interviewed teachers, parents and former pupils, and participated in school life by acting as a classroom assistant. Therein, drawing on geographical theories of spatiality, I followed how the spacings of the school were created, worked and invoked, contingently, through diverse arrays of practices and materials. Similarly, I attended to the ways in which certain atmospheres or affects were evoked – sometimes unplanned – in moments, events and feelings which became "good" (or bad). In the rest of the paper, I explore how four of these moments were attached to, and exceeded, more explicitly utopian themes connected to childhood, education and community.

Building the school: a pioneering (community) spirit

For Nant-y-Cwm's founding parents and teachers, the periods during which the school was built were fundamentally important to its ethos and teaching practices. In particular, they draw attention to the ways in which people, place and materials (were) worked such that a sense of community was built *with* and as the school. In other words, that community did not exist *before* the school; nor was it an abstract, bounded aim; instead, it emerged through its very construction.

> S It was very different from now. People were still full with this *pioneering*, building spirit and you never *thought* about money or anything like that, we just thought about *ideas*, and how to make them come true. So we sit around now in our fifties, sort of harking back to the good old days when, you know, it was *possible* to do that sort of thing. And it was *great*. In the way of material things, everybody was happy to hand

> down old clothes, and old cars which were barely moving, cheap cement or planks of wood. Yeah, we didn't know what was going to happen next, but it was really a *wonderful* time. (Founders, ex-parents, male and female)
>
> P From having watched this school grow, using gift-labour, using it as a way of also bonding the community. When I'm in the classroom, and you look at all the things in the school, that's been made, the beautifully-carved door-handles and windows, and, invariably, you would have a child saying, my Dad did that or, my Mum did that, and, as a result the children look at the school in a totally different way. I just think it's a fantastic example, educationally, for children to see adults say, we need this, we'll build it. (Male, ex-parent)
>
> V [W]e learned to work the render (…) it was very tactile and enjoyable. (…) Parents saw their children's reactions when the water first came down to the pond and things like that. So, it did help a great deal in, building an identity of the children and parents of the School together. (Female, founding parent)

A set of larger-scale, familiar utopian themes pervades these quotations: an attachment to utopian styles and modes of education has been apparent for some years (Halpin 2003; Freire 2004). Furthermore, S's nostalgia for the *community*-focussed "pioneering spirit" attached to the realisation of albeit abstract goals is particularly affecting. Her assertion that it was "wonderful" is a *result* of the unsettled, contingent, even anxious period during which the school was constructed. Hence anxiousness and contingency in themselves may become affectively utopian (cf. Kraftl, forthcoming). However, the point is simultaneously that these *specific* actions, and these memories, were and are given such meaning by multifarious little materials and practices – getting involved, working render, old clothes, building materials, door-handles, and much, *much* more. Neither these materials and practices, nor the buildings, are merely symbolic of that time: as both P and V explain, these were active in bonding and inculcating Nant-y-Cwm's community. Most importantly, these little practices were just as important as, and provided the flesh and connective tissue for, the "ideas" that were so important. In fact, it would be sensible to suggest that these *were* in some senses those ideas: for both P and V they embodied the creation of community which therefore emerged as an important part of the school's life, and its retrospectively defined teaching goals. For instance, one idea(l) that is "good for children", forming part of their education, is to see adults in the process of realising a vision. Stories about this process are also an important part of the school's history and ethos beyond simple curricular concerns (almost everyone I spoke to recounted the same story).

Therefore, when a child of today runs their hands over the same door-handle as their father carved, this education is constantly re-enacted, tacking together seemingly abstract discourses of community, education and a "pioneering spirit". These idea(l)s, materials and practices are then set to work in everyday practices at the school, such as teaching at and maintaining the buildings.

Teaching with buildings

Broadly speaking, there are many different ways of caring for, and protecting, children. In the UK, although many of these increasingly involve more rational, "accountable" and represent-able practices, much work is done in both mainstream and alternative school environments to ensure the right affective "atmosphere" for children. This is particularly the case at Nant-y-Cwm's kindergarten. There, a tremendous amount of work is done *with* the building and very specific assemblages of materials, toys and foods. The fundamental implications of such work mix a normative ethics with a particular ethics of care (*apud* Darwall 1998: 217-228), even though they seem quite banal and common-place.

> M It's meant to be dreamy and sleepy and, in their imaginations, in their own little cubby-hole kind of areas. Playing with dolls, or playing kitchen, rockets or setting up a shop and selling stuff. Going off to imagine, role-play really. And also, a lot of what they've experienced at that age is just like being in the home. So they want them to feel, I suppose what a Steiner home might feel like. Like, there's a little kitchen in each classroom, and they do baking, chopping apples for apple crumble, making millet bake. Because I suppose proper Mums would do baking… (Former pupil, female)

> T Well, the school has changed in that, when we started, it was just people wanting to carry out their ideals. And, then, over the years, things like Health and Safety applied to you as well. (…) And these mad rules came out where you weren't allowed to touch children under any circumstances. Which was so alien to us, you know, if a child cried, you'd put a child on your lap and cuddle them. (…) It was like being thrown into, into a colder time all of a sudden. But it was maybe, leaving this sort of blissful and rosy time behind all of a sudden. (Female, ex-teacher, parent)

It became clear that an atmosphere of "homeliness" was the greatest affective good that the school could create. In a normative, ideal and discursive sense, a condition of homeliness was one that *should* be achieved – either to nurture a rather universalising notion of the "state of being" of a young child, or as a remedy for social malaises varying from divorce to car travel. T contrasts

M's sense of what "proper Mums would do" with more recent, "colder" legislation (such as Health and Safety policies) which affects all schools. For T and others, the importance of touch, of cuddling – something perceived to be almost innate – is indicative of a "blissful and rosy time". Yet this normative position requires constant negotiation and performance: it cannot be merely an abstract goal, and can never be afforded by the building alone. Therefore, "proper" Mums are defined by each teacher (male or female) and the skills and materials – and children – available to them. Practices such as cooking, baking and cuddling *should* evoke some affective, perhaps abstract notion of home. At the same time, these quotations generalise specific events of homeliness which are important in and for themselves: they (fail to fully) depict the vitality of the moment when a child cries, or when a teacher must decide what atmosphere to create for *these* children, on *this* day – and how. Therefore, the creation of homeliness is perhaps doubly ironic and unhomely (read as the Heideggarian *unheimlich*): first, in the simple truism that the school is not a home; second, in the very contingency and momentariness of the creation of the homely as a form of car-*ing*, of do-*ing* good – of *spacing*.

Maintaining the school: cleaning toilets is "good"

It would be easy to over-hype the importance of the banal (Seigworth 2000), especially in an over-eagerness to extend utopian thought. Yet, seemingly mundane materials and practices do matter, fundamentally, to all sorts of places, in all sorts of ways. At Nant-y-Cwm, this is especially the case for maintenance work undertaken on the buildings. Such work matters in a joint, two-fold sense: in the context of the "pioneering" work carried out by the school community during the 1970s and 1980s; and as a method for the performative perpetuation of the school's community and accompanying ethos.

> J The parents are in the school, they know what's going on. They hear everything, and they hear the lessons from the outside, when they're cleaning the toilets or sweeping the floors. So, the parents are, *in* the school ideally, the children *feel* that the community of parents is around them, carrying the *fabric* of the school, essentially. It's happened to greater effect at Nant-y-Cwm I feel. So that's one, fundamental aspect that keeps the school going, that the parents are there, caring for the physical, everyday, ongoingness of the school. (Female, parent, five years)

> PK So how do you think the School will be in the future?
> A Well what I would *like* it to do is *grow*. I do find there's some people who are, not letting go of the past? Which, in a way, is inhibiting growth for the future. People have been saying, oh, you know, all the *work* that was put into it, and, Chris Day designing it and blah blah, and isn't it all wonderful blah blah. But actually, there are people who do unseen boring work, that have helped keep the School going as well. (Female, long-term parent)

Interestingly, these quotations do not require over-zealous explanation. This is partly the point: seemingly banal practices are ethically important when they are experienced as such, yet also may *become*-important in reflection. Toilet-cleaning and the other types of "unseen boring work" that A describes are part of the constant production and reproduction of the school – the daily chores that allow it to function. A continuation of the mindset that rendered construction work a part of the school's ethos, such work almost reaches the status of "pioneering spirit". In fact, in the face of the school's history, A argues that it is an equally important "good" as the school struggles to survive. Bizarrely, in a more traditionally hopeful mode of utopianism, toilet cleaning is identified as part of planning for the future. At the same time, it is quite *unsettling* that these banal, contingent practices could be *so* "good". It is striking that one might *desire* work, but perhaps more striking still that one might desire such mundane work. This unseen, boring work is therefore doubly important to the school and its future: first, as the manner in which community, education and the good are most commonly actualised; second, as an affectual quality of life at the school. This latter sensing of work is both pragmatic and ideal, active and passive: it is a synthesis of many work-events, a pervasive appreciation of the ways in which the school is spaced out, and a source for an uncanny kind of hope for that which is good now, and in the future.

Aggregating affect: hope and pain

For many people, the school's close-knit community, its protective attitude towards children, its fees, and its constant requests for work, may all seem far from utopian. Indeed, several parents are either tired or angry (or both) with the ways in which the school has been managed and funded, and with its general isolation from the surrounding community. Yet all is not what it seems. And this

is the crucial point: it may be possible to identify and critique the elements – the form, function and content – of a utopia (Levitas 1990). It may be that hope and the good life may be contained within the content of many utopias, a more-or-less essential affective condition of reading certain texts (Garforth 2005). However, we may be constantly surprised by that which is utopian. A glance at the conference booklet for any Utopian Studies conference will illustrate this quite simply. More pointedly, though, we may be surprised or even shocked at that which is utopian (Kraftl, forthcoming). This is particularly the case when one attends to "real" practices which were not intended to be utopian – or, at least, not intended to spawn an unpredictable multitude of utopian morals and affects, some of which we have encountered in this paper. Spacing is, as I have already argued, contingent and unpredictable.

Hence, the spacing of the utopian – the utopian affect, the utopian moment, the utopian ethic – is *always surprising*, *always excessive* of intention. *How* could the struggle that characterises life at Nant-y-Cwm be utopian? How could door-handles and toilet-cleaning be utopian in themselves, or as part of a constantly mutating school ethos? One potential answer is contained in the following quotation from a parent at the school:

> PK What were your first impressions when you came to this School?
> J I was visiting a friend, and it was almost *painful*, because I liked it so much. I was living in Scotland, and I thought, I'd really like to send my children, but I don't suppose it'll ever happen. It was all quite painful! It just looked very idyllic to me, very green and, slightly scruffy. I thought it was fantastic, I mean it's magical, you know. Homely. Nothing clinical. And it's just lovely the way there's, flowers everywhere, and the paintings on the wall up the stairs. And, it all seems really, so different to anything. The styling of the inside, you know the rounded corners and everything, was just so different, it was brilliant. (Female, parent, helper)

Like many parents, J recounts how she was powerfully drawn to the school when she first arrived. There was much that was patently so powerful and affectual about this encounter that it exceeds representation in all but the barest and most inadequate of phrases: "idyllic"; "fantastic"; "magical"; "brilliant". This (e)utopian *eu*-phoria is fundamentally affective and ethical. It affected and effected a decision about moving from Scotland to Wales, as well as J's compulsion to send her children to Nant-y-Cwm. Importantly, this euphoria is necessarily accompanied by paranoia and pain. This pain exceeds nostalgia,

although she does mention nostalgia for *that anxious* moment. Not only does pain accompany such intoxicating euphoria, but it is actively desired-for: J wanted to return to the school and wanted to send her children there. It is rare, I would suggest, that someone might visit a place and feel pain. Yet that pain seems to be part of a euphoric, anxious desire for something good.

But what good, exactly? Although it might be fallacious to pinpoint exactly that which is "good" about the emergence of this euphoria, we might be able to offer some related suggestions. First, J's reaction is an *affective* one: it exceeds any personal reaction to the school, and is a function of her being affected by the school's architecture and atmosphere. This reaction is represented by generic affectual adjectives such as "idyllic" and "scruffy". Second, J's memory of this affecting event is structured by recourse to a number of *material* objects – flowers, paintings, rounded corners and so forth. Third, the combination of atmosphere and materials is something which has been achieved by the ongoing (ethical) spacing of the school – by the types of *work* about which we have already heard. This is implicit in J's reaction – yet far more explicit a part of similarly euphoric affective responses to the school:

> S But, funny things happen because, I remember, one person talking to X, and X was saying, how many years since he had worked at the Kindergarten. This person was nearly in *tears*, and saying, I'm so moved by this, because it's so, so *amazing*, this dedication, you don't *find* that sort of involvement, very often. (Female and male, founders, ex-parents, teacher)

The two excerpts from J and S also demonstrate the combinative complexity and dynamism with which places – spacings – may *become-utopian* at a given moment (rather than in any essential, continuous sense). The school's ethos, its history, its materials, buildings and work which render it actively spaced, all of these are combined in the production of responses to the school which are powerfully emotive. Moreover, an emergent ethics is evoked in each case, centred around childhood in the first instance (J's extract), and "dedication" in the second. In other words, a place may *come to be good* – very good – in and as small-scale yet momentous moments such as these responses, and in and as the many events, materials, affects and ethics they synthesise.

4. Conclusion

This paper has begun to consider how, in theoretical and empirical senses, we might extend our notions of that which seems and becomes good, of the good place, and hence of the utopian. Specifically, via a critical architectural geography of a school, it has advocated a kind of *spaced-out, surprising, utopian thinking*, whose ephemerality and contingency, materiality and affectivity, point to ineffably irrational, banal, delirious and unsettling – yet uncannily *real* – modes of utopianism. Underpinning this argument is a set of four of many ways to theorise space – and spacing – which have the further potential to extend an attention to "the good (place)". Empirically, this should incite us to follow materials such as buildings and door-handles; to follow practices such as building and toilet-cleaning; to follow utopian affects that are painful and paranoid, euphoric and hopeful. In this paper, the spotlight has been trained on the contentious and highly politicised issue of what is good for children, and for school-life more generally. It has highlighted an ever-increasing and diversifying excess of utopian moments, which are in the main *unintentional* as utopias *per se*, yet whose mixture of affective and ethical *work* has the capacity to imbue them with a sometimes maddeningly un-representable utopianism. These moments *become-good* – or very good – in themselves, and as constitutions of larger-scale idea(l)s such as childhood, community and education. Despite and because of an attention to protection, happiness, homeliness and comfort (perhaps some of the more traditional realms of the utopian), the *unsettling* and *unhomely* capacities of some (but not all) utopian affect-ethics are brought into stark relief.

Both theoretically and empirically, to pursue an argument such as that presented here as *spacing* is to raise a set of *ethical* questions about what is good, in meta-ethical, normative and performative, momentary and more-than-representational manners. Three of the most important concern the relationships between childhood and utopia, between intentionality and utopia, and between the (affective) unsettling and utopia. There are many more questions with regard to this and other equally pertinent debates: yet without an attention to the ways in which ethics of the good are spaced out, in practice and

in theory, we will never even raise some of the most fundamental questions. A spaced-out, surprising and delirious utopian ethics of materiality and affect would be well-placed to pose – and to deal with – such timely questions.

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A City in the Forest:

Gaia in the Postmodern Contact Zones of Auroville's Wider Intentional Community in Tamil Nadu, India

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> *"bio-power" or the "political technology of life" or "the disciplines of the body"*
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> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (Vol. 1, 144-145)

1. Introduction

Auroville, in Tamil, Nadu, India, is one of the oldest territorially-based intentional communities, with a third-world location and a lifespan of almost fifty years. Intentional communities are often described as those created by groups of people who come together to actualize a shared vision outside of the cultural mainstream. In a Gaian context, they feature as laboratories for the "other possible worlds" advocated by the global peace and justice movement. These utopian spaces are designed to experiment with the lifestyles that will make it possible for the biota to continue to host our species. Auroville's spiritual vision anticipates the scientific findings that ensued when astronomer James Lovelock and bioscientist Lynn Margulis developed their Gaia theory. It is based on a mystical conflation of "The Mother", aka Mirra Alfassa, the co-spiritual leader of the mid-century Indian guru Sri Aurobindo Ghose, and *Mahashakti,* the universal mother of Hinduism, with *Shakti* being a representation of the sacred as embodied in the feminine.[1]

This willful conflation and the regenerative, creative impulses that ensued have generated a wider intentional community which includes Auroville proper and

its neighboring Tamil villages, for a total of some 20,000 people over a several square miles bioregion. With its Dravidian basis, Tamil culture has survived the multiple colonial legacies of the north Indian, British, and Western dominations. Its pantheon of deities and avatars and their adeptness in the arts of loving are well known to those interested in Indian and south-east Asian spiritual traditions. This adeptness, I claim, translates into the advanced knowledge in the arts of healing one finds in today's wider Auroville, including its surrounding Tamil villages. As a utopian space, Auroville is a laboratory for Western residents and visitors to learn from the biotope lifestyle of Tamil villagers. For the local population, it is an opportunity to become familiar with the eco-friendly technologies and collaborative disciplines these spiritual seekers bring here – in what might be described as a postmodern "contact zone" where transculturation and border gnosis occur.

The hippie Westerners who came to populate Auroville in the 1960s and 1970s participated in a radical process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization by which they left behind the excessive materialism and mass consumerism of that era and came to live in close proximity with rural Tamil Nadu, a bioregion depleted by excessive grazing and wood fire use, whose mostly illiterate villagers were nonetheless capable of subsisting with such a minimal resource usage, with such a reduced per-capita impact on the environment, as had not been seen in Europe since before the Industrial Revolution. The vision that inspired the community is one of "peace and human unity", which obviously includes local Tamil villagers, whose well-honed biotopic skills are a boon to any collaborative ideal. Hence, a measure of Auroville's success in actualizing its vision is the extent to which the reterritorialization process of those who moved into the area has been conducive of mutual empowerment for two such diverse groups and for the bioregion that sustains them.

As a participant observer during the 2004 dry season, I was impressed with the success of the forestation effort and its attendant effect of improving the area's microclimate; with the widespread use of solar panels and other renewable sources of energy and its attendant effect of gradually reducing the use of network

electricity; with the ongoing gnosis of dexterities and body disciplines apt in freeing Westerners of technological servitude, in the areas of construction, transportation, nutrition, health, and education; with the building of prototypes apt to design the technologies of an eco-friendly future; with the widespread gender-bending practices in education and cultural activities; and with the respect for diversity and its attendant hospitality to non-conventional sexualities and indigenous modes of healing, despite opposite tendencies in mainstream India. The extent to which this mutual educational experiment works for the Tamil population can also be appreciated from the Auroville website's recent statistics, which indicate an incidence of poverty 50 percent below the rest of Tamil Nadu, accompanied by higher rates of literacy, education, labor skills, female employment, and small business initiative (2005b).[2] Also important is the widely documented high rate of recovery from natural disaster, observable in the coastal communities affected by the 2004 Tsunami wave. In this article, my observations will be presented in the context Mary Louise Pratt and Walter Mignolo's theories of "contact zones" and "border gnosis", and of Deleuze and Guattari's theories of postmodern fluxes and plateaus. On these bases, I propose to envisage the wider Auroville as a Deleuzian plateau where postmodern fluxes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization have converged to produce a utopian space where the knowledge-in-the-making necessary to invent Gaia's future is generated.

In the article, I will also summarize the history of Auroville's spiritual leadership; I will briefly explain the personal significance of my research trip to Auroville; I will theorize the space of enunciation from which I speak; I will establish the geographical, demographical, organizational, and administrative characteristics of the community; and I will proceed to describe its ecological prototypes and experimental energy production systems, its worker-friendly production units, its architectural landmarks and their spiritual significance, as well as its unique, two gender, Earth based spiritual partnership.

2. The Spiritual Leadership

The conflation of Mirra Alfassa, a world-traveled French occultist, with *Mahashakti*, or the Hindu universal mother, started with Aurobindo, who, due to his interest in a yoga of doing that would transform India into a progressive country and would assuage its colonial passivity, in 1926 joined Mirra in a dual-avatar spiritual partnership and began to theorize the sacred feminine as a mode of spiritual healing (Joshi 67-108). As a pamphlet of his explained in 1928,

> The Mahashakti, the universal Mother (...) enters into the worlds that she has made; her presence fills and supports them [while] (...) [t]hat which we call Nature or Prakriti is only her most outward executive aspect; she marshals and arranges the harmony of her forces and processes, impels the operations of Nature and moves among them secret or manifest in all that can be seen or experienced or put into motion of life (Ghose 1999: 31).

This description, I claim, is uncannily similar to the concept of a super-organism with a life of its own that Lovelock and Margulis present, in its macroscopic and microscopic aspects respectively, in their books and theories developed from the 1960s onwards. It finds a philosophical correlative in the Spinozian *natura naturans* and *natura naturata* of the Western tradition, and, as a parallel development to the scientific Gaia hypothesis, it emphasizes intuition over empiricism.

Aurobindos' vision emphasized the *Shakti* with its all-encompassing personalities and attributes, including wisdom, strength, harmony, and perfection (Ghose 1999: 38). His interest in the sacred feminine became even more evident with his progressive empowerment of Mirra. Her commitment to being the embodiment of his vision and his partner in avatar-ship overcame the resistance of some of his male disciples, whose mentality was still controlled by misogynistic Vedantic thinking (Satprem 2003: 284-309; Van Vrekhem 1997: 51-65, 180-208). Aurobindo's theory about today's humans, and modern Westerns in particular, reprises Nietzsche in that he believes we are not the endpoint of evolution, but rather that we represent an intermediate phase leading to a more advanced stage of development in the near future (Ghose 1993: 229-238). He believed that the evolutionary crisis humans are now in demands an inner transformation that will then transform the environment too.

Aurobindo envisaged this transformation as one that would occur when the Supramental power, a symbiotic consciousness much stronger than any individual reason, would descend in a given, spiritually-based community. In his view, the practice of Integral Yoga is the biopolitics through which this transformation can be achieved for it integrates the introspective aspects of the Vadantic tradition with the Tantric focus on being-in-the-world as a force of transformation. In his mind and Mirra's, Auroville was the imagined community, the "city of dawn", where this consciousness and biopolitical practices would begin. The city was actually founded 18 years after his death, in 1968. In Mirra's view, the Tamil villagers who lived in the northern area of Pondicherry were to be "the first Aurovillians". Their biopolitics of subsistence, practices of the body, and skill at using local materials modeled a lifestyle designed *as if* Lovelock and Margulis's hypothesis were true. Mirra was evidently aware that these skills would make the ideal of peace applicable in the globe's environmentally uncertain future.

The new consciousness Mirra and Aurobindo's dual spiritual leadership envisioned can be seen as a form of Gaian awareness, while Auroville's wider intentional community, based on a sacred feminine principle, was the utopian space where the "new [human] race" would begin to develop the wisdom and skills to invent a new future.[3] Accordingly, today's Auroville is a city in the forest with ubiquitous solar panels and signs to new-age and Hindu-sounding destinations, including "Aspiration", "Nilatangam", "New Creation", "Samasti", "Gratitude", and "Shri-ma". It is a quiet, well-organized oasis in the hustle and bustle of urban India. Its vision of "peace and human unity" has been actualized by its diverse population which includes several dozen nationalities and ethnic groups. Its "soul", or spiritual center, is a large womb-shaped building called the Matrimandir, or temple of the mother, home to an inspiring meditation room (Various 2001; Various 2000).

3. The Regional Biopolitics

Tamil Nadu is one of the least affluent states in India, and one with a long standing cultural and literary tradition expressed in its own ancient language and script. It

occupies the eastern and central portion of the tip of the subcontinent. Chennai, or Madras, to the north of the state, is its political capital. In the state's central region, Bangalore is the fastest growing and most productive city, with its area dubbed India's "Silicon Valley" due to its burgeoning computer industry. 160 kilometers south of Chennay, Pondicherry, is a quiet hub in the former French colonial district, with its focus on spiritual practices and healing (Various 2003: 977-996).

The area technically designated as Auroville is within a 2.5 radium circle about six kilometers north of Pondicherry. It extends over an area of some 20 square kilometers, two kilometers away from the seashore. The once depleted dry tropical forest is now luxuriant. The area is home to some 1,700 Aurovillians, the official resident members of the intentional community. About two thirds of them are Westerners, most of whom from west and east Europe, with smaller contingents from South America, Russia, and Australia. A high percentage comes from multinational families, and a significant group is from Italy. One third of all Aurovillians are from various Indian states, including Tamil Nadu, and some are from other Asian countries (Various 2001: 22-23). The immediately neighboring Tamil villages include Kottakarai, Kuliapalayam, Sanjevi Nagar, Edayanchvadi, and Alankuppam. Numerous other villages in the area also participate in the Aurovillian economy, for a total of about 17,000 people, some 5,000 of whom are directly employed in Auroville's production and service units (Various 2001; Various 2000).

The Integral Yoga's focus on doing has encouraged the imaginativeness and creativity now deployed in a variety of products, services, and activities made possible by various forms of collaboration between residents and villagers. These, and the extremely convenient prices when one pays in hard currency, attract ecologically and spiritually aware Western tourists and long-term visitors. I also observed a number of north Indian visitors, as well as many local tourists intent in visiting the Matrimandir. Finally, the safety of the area attracts middle-aged Western women who travel solo or with other women, and might feel intimidated by other Asian destinations.

The Tamil villages affected by the intentional community are not only the places where the day workers employed at Auroville live. They have developed cultural centers and production units of their own which often compete with Auroville-based ones. The long-time community members who befriended me while in Auroville remember the boundless commingling that characterized the Tamil/Western relationship in the early years. On their part, this included a religious effort to learn Tamil and to raise their children together with village children. Ironically, the very expansion of Auroville as a visitor's destination and center of production in the region has enhanced the holistic organization aspect of the community at the expense of the intentional aspect.[4]

This has deemphasized the villagers' lifestyle as a model for the community, and their construction, in a Gaian perspective, as the "slaves" masters need to serve and learn from due to their superior knowledge. My sense is that over the years this reverse master/slave relationship has turned into a more conventional one, with Westerners as employers and villagers as employees, and all attendant inequalities and resentments. The raise of Hindu fundamentalism and the Tamil-Muslim civil wars in nearby Sri-Lanka have not made things easier. The high tension point was perhaps reached in February 2004, when Sydo, aka Sytze van Loo, a Dutch Aurovillian, was killed by a Tamil gang member for being ready to testify against some at-large Tamil criminals who had already killed some villagers. The recent Auroville socioeconomic study of the nearby Tamil population confirms my hypothesis. It encourages Auroville residents to treat Tamil workers as collaborators rather than employees, thus rekindling Alfassa's vision of them as "the first Aurovillians". The comparatively mild natural-disaster situation caused by the Tsunami wave must have catalyzed the two groups to function together on a new collaborative basis.

4. A Testimonial Interlude

It is about 8.00 pm on a weekday in the dry season in Pondicherry, and three middle-aged European-looking women are walking in the French Quarter. They

have been fasting for a week, while on a *panchakarma* program at a local Ayurvedic clinic. Their minds and bodies feel delightfully light and clear as they reach the nearest internet café. I am the tallest of the three and I drag my right foot which is broken due to a local accident. Thanks to a fiberglass cast made at the Pondicherry Institute of Medicine, the fracture is healing. We feel completely safe in this relatively privileged neighborhood bordering the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, where his partnership with Mirra Alfassa first developed after he took shelter in the French district due to British persecution as a political leader of the Indian independence period.

The streets are crowded with local people. The Tamilians, a population that lived in the Indian peninsula long before the arrival of the Sanskrit speaking populations from the north, have their own language, Tamil, which, unlike other regional languages in India, is older than Sanskrit, and has its own script and literary classics. Pushed to the south of the peninsula by the lighter skinned invaders who now inhabit northern India, the Tamilians made their home in the southern region and parts of Sri Lanka.

At dusk, on a weekday, the streets are mostly peopled with men riding their bicycles to wherever their destinations may be. The Tamilians have ebony colored skins with sculpted, Indo-European features. Their black hair is thick and lightly wavy. Their vegetarian diet gives them thin bodies with round elbows and knees. Most men have relinquished their traditional attire – a loin cloth down to the shins and turban – to wear roughly sown cotton pants and shirts. During the day and on weekends, the women go out in droves, their voluptuous bodies wrapped in seamless saris. They remind me of my favorite Greek mythological figures. Their long, straight black hair is made into braids as thick as a wrist, which gracefully rest over the nape of their necks, adorned with colorful flowers. I imagine how they must groom each other in their home intimacy and, as they carry out the most humble chores in their goddess attire, I admire the elegance of their movements.

I have been blessed with the delicate care of one of them. On my second day in India, I fell on my foot as I was trying to start a moped, and a metacarpal

fracture ensued. I had just started my field trip. With my swollen foot, I was desperate that the immobility caused by the fracture would sabotage my research plan. The coordinator of Quiet, the community-based healing center where I was staying, proposed a solution. Having assessed my ineptness as a non-walking guest, he called Arndal, a trained health worker from a nearby Tamil village, to my help. He reassured me that having a personal assistant was common in India, for both locals and foreigners. Arndal arrived at 8:30 am in a green-print cotton sari and a thick, flower-adorned braid, a lipstick-red third eye painted between her eyebrows. And I was blessed with her elegant, sapient, and highly effective care, which included bathing my entire body in less that a bucketful of water while I stayed seated in my armchair; soaping and rinsing it in all its parts in the most thorough way, the touch of her hands a sweet caress on my skin; sweeping my room with a sage broom, her movement as delicate as a dancer's; and synchronizing her subtle perception system to mine so that she could gently anticipate any need I might have without the slightest intrusiveness. I learned that in her hands water is a liquid body her dexterity can multiply and control, not a flow that bursts out of a tap and quickly flushes away. With the amount I use to brush my teeth she can wash an entire person.

This experience was a prime example of border gnosis for me, and, I hope, for Arndal too. It was the process I learned to understand from Mignolo's theory, of creating knowledge from experience, especially subaltern experience, a process that engenders the kind of sustainable knowledge which is both scientific and humanistic, and also transcends either as it attains mystical, sacred, erotic, and magic certitudes in its mapping out and predicting other possible worlds and sustainable futures (Mignolo 2000: 3-48). Running water, I realized, occurs to us modern Westerners like an endless stream, a resource we can waste at our ease, even as we know about its widespread scarcity. The practice of sharing resources and learning the art of using them well is what, in the other possible worlds advocated by the global peace and justice movement, will overcome scarcity and create abundance.

In *Water Wars*, Vandana Shiva, a strong ecofeminist voice from India, argues that the privatization and control of water system will cause the wars of the future, unless a common-based approach prevails. To Arndal, who does not have running water at home, water occurs as a body of fluidity that laps and swashes according to one's wishes, and of whose movements the artist of care is in control. Her healing arts were so pleasurable to me that the pleasure alone made me want to heal. It answered the question that attracted me to India. Unlike Christian deities, and more like pagan ones, avatars of Hindu religion, including Vishnu, Shiva, and Krisna, are often represented in the nude and the mythology attached to them includes erotic activities. However, as in Foucault pre-modern Europe, so in today's India, the romantic passion that modernity associates with a healthy sexuality is rather uncommon.

Indeed, as Indian cultural theorist Dipesh Chakrabarty explains, in Bengali literary modernity, "the body is what threatens the domain of interiority" (Chakrabarty 2000: 136). The concept of romantic love became established as *pabitra prem* (pure love) which is achieved through a "set of techniques of interiority" (*idem*, 138) and is thus divorced from external nature often associated with appearance or *rup* (*idem*, 137). Nonetheless, as I observed in my trip, the symbology implied in the decorative patterns that most handicrafts repeat *ad infinitum* speaks of scripted modes in which visual and tactile pleasure comes to fruition for those educated in it. The grace with which women adorn and deport themselves in their traditional hairstyle and costumes occurred to me as a form of erotic expression that impacts a visitor's sensibility regardless of gender. It spoke to me of long-standing traditions of *ars erotica* that have evolved based on the intensity with which pleasure is distilled out of them.

This contrast between what a Western mind might read as sexual repression and *ars erotica*'s ubiquitousness is central to the quest of my trip: what happened to the erotic flamboyance of ancient Hindu mythology and religion and why does it not translate into the lovestyles of those who practice it? What factors intervened to generate this crease? The simple answer is Buddhism and the British

domination. But that *is* too simple, even without the border gnosis I experienced. I love water and have a mystical passion for it, as I've lived near the ocean for the past 15 years. I consider bodies of water live creatures. As Arndal washed me, I imagined Tamil women grooming each other and giving each other the pleasure she was offering me. Her healing occurred to me as a practice of love designed to teach me what water really is. As Foucault predicted, the "truth" of my border-gnosis experience was "drawn from pleasure itself (…) evaluated in terms of its intensity, its specific quality, its duration, its reverberations in the body and the soul" (Foucault 1990: 57). I became aware of how cultural any concept of water really is, and realized that the purpose of my accident was for me to learn about what water is to female Tamil villagers and disseminate this notion. Auroville provided the perfect transcultural space for the passage of tropes, and my surrender to the local modes of healing enabled the border gnosis to take place.

In the French Quarter rickshaws offer rides for a few Rupees. Most drivers have motors, while some still pedal away with their own hamstrings. My fasting companions get a motorized one for us. Giuliana, from Rome, has spent most of her life working in Italian consulates around the world; and Janice, from Connecticut, spent ten years in Singapore with her first husband. Even as hybrids in a multicultural world, the three of us are highly aware of our neocolonial ignorance and privilege. The border gnosis I experience in this trip eats at the credibility of the identity-based feminism I have been implied in for the past 20 years. I am now aware that the very preoccupation that gave rise to it was an anxiety of material acquisitiveness that inspired me to pursue my own career goals – despite my doubts about the integrity of any career or profession in a consumerist, acquisitive, materialistic social order.

The lessons of this trip are deep for me. They go much beyond my proposed study of an intentional community and cause me to question the epistemological basis of my most important decisions. With my body/mind light from a week's colon purification procedures, my perceptions are crystal clear. I see how little people here need to live with joy and dignity. Tamil villagers make their

dwellings from nearby resources like red clay, bamboo shoots, and palm trees. They grow most of their food. They squat in a resting position since their flexible heels are their most comfortable chairs built in via body discipline. They sit cross-legged on the floor and eat their food out of palm leaves. Their adept fingers are their silverware, and straw mats meet all their bedding needs. They are limber and free, and not, like us, addicted to cars and other high-energy consuming implements.

I look in retrospect at my end-of-graduate-school decision to design a career for myself rather than follow my creative impulses. And I realize how that either/or that controlled my life was only fear. What if, like these Tamil villagers who live on less than one dollar a day, I knew that what's around one is all one needs? What if the disciplines of my body had empowered me to do without the material implements I believe I need? All of a sudden, the decision about which, as a feminist, I have been proud of all these years looks like a young person's cowardice. Would today's wisdom advise against allowing that passing cloud to take hold of me? The practice of surrender appears to me as the most valuable asset in the ecofeminist life based on love I now plan to design for myself.

This epiphany happened as part of a process in which many Western visitors took part while in the wider Auroville; learning from "Orientals" how to surrender, trust the universe, and feel limber and free. With my digestive system well-rested and clean from the fasting, the oxygen I breathed went straight to my mind. Suddenly, the bicycles that crowded the Pondicherry streets appeared to me as the force of freedom, the swarm intelligence that animates a flight of butterflies, and symbolizes lightness as opposed to my heaviness and that of other car-dependent people.

5. Bits of Italian-Style Neocolonial Theory

As a nomadic polyglot from Italy who has made her home in the north- and central-American higher education industry, I feel in some ways inadequate to write about India. I wonder how my background and culture can make me a suitable person to

study Auroville. I feel that the inspiration this community has provided for me, as well the life changing experience I had during my trip, make me a unique candidate. But I also realize that including the space of enunciation from which I speak might involve the risk of slightly tweaking neocolonial theory. As I do so, I will therefore write neocolonial speak with an Italian accent.

An Italian perspective on neocolonial theory involves an awareness that certain peoples consciously chose not to engage in modern national unity and the neocolonial endeavors that ensued. This includes Italians of the early modern period, who, unlike the French and British, did not follow the teachings that their own theorist, Machiavelli, expounded in *The Prince*. This awareness implies the possibility that a history of being at the center of the decomposition process of a large system of global domination – such as the Roman Empire had been in antiquity – might be an effective vaccine against any such ambitions. The factual consideration to begin with, then, is that the concepts of Orient/East and Occident/West were invented when nobody suspected that the Earth was a globe. In the Tolemaic system, the sun raised from what is today called the Middle East, and set where Hercules supposedly placed his columns, at Gibraltar. Since it turns out that we live on a globe, a definitional problem ensued. If we spoke languages original from the Pacific, we would probably think of Japan as the Occident/West and California as the Orient/East, namely the places where, if you're in Hawaii, the sun sets and rises, respectively. But the reality is that languages original from the Mediterranean have spread around the globe, thus mixing up geography and history.

In Italian, a Western language whose neocolonial legacy is thin, *ovest* and *est* are used as cardinal points, *occidente* and *oriente* as cultural descriptors. For example, Western civilization translates as *la civiltà occidentale*, and in connection with the word "west" people think of *il far west*, with its cow boys and *pistoleros* – quite the opposite of any civility. One could argue that the scarce neocolonial legacy in this language makes for some semantic clarity between geography and history. As a cultural construct in the English language, "Orientalism" comes from a

long-gone Mediterranean centrality, which is still semantically assumed in most Western languages. As Said rightfully claims, “the Orient is not a fact of nature” (Said 1979). It is indeed a cultural construct that confuses geography and history and causes resentment in those it threatens with exclusion. As an Italian, I am supposed to represent this west Orientalism resents, yet I often feel “Orientalized” in Said’s terms when some mainstream American scholar expects to understand antiquity or the Renaissance better than any Italian can. The healthy thing to do, then, is perhaps not staying caught in the desire to be included in the west, but rather assuming one’s exclusion as the fount of an *eros* that generates self-knowledge and definition. Coloniality is a never ending process with its winners and losers. But how can both cultures that exchange tropes win? My mind goes to Mignolo’s theory about colonies that become empires before their cycle of dependency from their former colonial power is complete (Mignolo 2000: 3-48).

A sheer discourse of Orientalism puts me in a position with respect to Auroville and India similar to that of those American scholars who I feel don’t understand Italy. I must ask who and what purposes this discourse serves. I cannot speak for the Tamil villagers I met at Auroville, nor for the Western Aurovillians who functioned as my informants and are as Indian as I am American. But I can and must claim a right to speak as a participant observer in the Auroville community, and the cultural-political reality that surrounds it, with my gender, nationalities, sexual orientations, age, and not quite able body. The propositions that Aijaz Ahmed, a scholar from India, presents in “Orientalism and After” come to my rescue. He claims that Said’s Orientalism served “those who came [to the US] as graduate students [in the 1980s] and then joined the faculties, especially in the Humanities and Social Sciences [and] tended to come from upper classes in their home countries . . . [and] needed documents of their assertion, proof that they had always been oppressed” (Ahmed 1994: 167). There is nothing wrong *per se* with making these claims for the purpose of getting an entry into an exclusionary system. However, believing in these claims conveniently hides significant historical and political circumstances of modern coloniality, namely the fact that, while the

majority of people in Asia and Africa suffered from colonialism, "there were also those who benefited from it" (*ibidem*), just like the infamous war, disaster, and terror profiteers of today.

In the context of alternative globalization theories, this ignorance is pernicious. One cannot lie to oneself about the past and claim to be in the process of inventing a new future. Mary Louise Pratt's theory of "contact zones", developed in the context of early modern and modern colonial studies, suggests that certain areas or regions where colonials and locals met were favorable to the exchange of cultural tropes between the two groups. I submit that such areas can also be seen as utopian spaces, where transculturation produces new hybrids. This of course does not mean that everything is pleasant in them, but rather that the encounter between significantly different cultures is fraught with risks, and that, even as often the most valuable, serene, and peaceful group succumbs, transcultural processes help cultural tropes survive so that some of the knowledge therein can be passed on.

Mignolo's theory of "border gnosis" elaborates on this. He suggests that the Greek concepts of *episteme* and *doxa* give rise to the modern sciences and humanities disciplines, with their respective interpretive modes of epistemology and hermeneutics (Mignolo 2000: 9). In his view, this binary system tends to transmit existing knowledge rather than create new knowledge, which happens precisely in the interstices between existing disciplinary configurations. Gnoseology, also known as gnosis or the logic thereof, is a mode of knowledge production widely practiced at different times since the Middle Ages and in various regions, and is an answer to normative binary configurations. As he studies the transculturation processes of modern coloniality, Mignolo focuses on border gnosis as the kind of gnosis that happens in contact zones and unsettled regions where cultures impact one another. Today, one such region is the area of North-American known to people of Mexican descent as Aztlan, which Latina feminists like Gloria Anzaldua also describe as Borderlands (*idem*, 24-25, 260). Border gnosis, Mignolo claims, is based on a method which is also an object. It provides access to

knowledge-in-the-making, knowledge, that is, which is empirical yet filtered through knowledge-acquisition processes that are a product of the transcultural impact itself. Border gnosis therefore is a manner of acquiring knowledge which presumes nothing except the desire of all groups involved in the transculturation process to genuinely participate in it. The concept of gnosis comes from the passion with which the divine is studied by certain religious groups. Even in its secular manifestations, gnosis does produce knowledge that is in some way sacred, precisely because it presumes a shared faith among those who participate in its production (*idem,* 3-48). One such community, I submit, is the wider Auroville.

The space of enunciation opened by Mignolo's theory seems to me more radical than the one indicated by Bhabha's theory of hybridization. Mignolo presents authenticity not as identity – hybrid as it might be – but rather as that which resides in the process of transculturalization itself, a process that becomes knowable via gnosis, and does not assume any original purity. In the wake of his theory, I submit that colonization is an unending process and contact zones always exist. This, in my view, is the constant of history, which is exemplified by the trope according to which the Roman Empire, at the apogee of its power, still understood itself as a cultural colony of the Greeks. In a similar way, the prevalence of specialists in British literature in any Department of English in a United States university institution – while Americanists are still few and far between – testifies to a cultural dependence the one-superpower system is not ready to sever yet. More than two centuries since the American Revolution, in other words, the complex of the colonized has not been shed yet. Thus, as Mignolo indicates, colonies become empires even as their independence is still in process (Mignolo 2000: 280-281 and *passim*).

Even as it has been destabilized by Aijaz Ahmed's more recent claims, Said's theory of Orientalism unproductively barred my space of enunciation. Mignolo and Pratt's perspectives enable my claim that intentional communities can be utopian spaces where border gnosis occurs, for they are based on intent rather than accident or destiny, and therefore on the love that intended members bring to

the vision they share. The force of this love is what I call *eros*, an inner drive to self-knowledge that eschews the permanent state of desire induced by consumer capitalism and its schizophrenic symptoms. There, I submit, the laboratory for the "other possible worlds" auspicated by the global peace and justice movement begins. The "deterritorializations and reterritorializations" which are inherent in the formation of an intentional community denote sapient ways to navigate the postmodern "fluxes" theorized by Deleuze and Guattari. In the wider Auroville area one can see how these fluxes converge into tantric "plateaus" that allow people to live *as if* Gaia was an organism with a life of its own. When this model applies to the globe as a whole, today's abject multitudes theorized by Hardt and Negri will become the empowered multitudes they auspicate, who can operate like a global intentional community and therefore bring the interrupted project of modern democracy to fruition.

6. Environment, Architecture, and Administrative System

With its legacy of backwardness and its more recent environmental depletion, in the late 1960s, north-eastern Tamil Nadu, south of Chennai, was a most suitable location to find Auroville. Its red-clay soil speaks of a special connection with the earth's chemical and gravitational forces. Despite its glorious ancient history, Tamil Nadu is still one of the Indian states with the lowest literacy rates. Its one-time florid dry tropical forest has been depleted by overgrazing and excessive wood fire use. The state is not as attractive to Western tourists as Kerala, its counterpart on the Western southern tip of India, with its navigable backwaters, theater festivals, healing practices, progressive politics, and Catholic traditions. As is often the case with intentional communities, the region's position out of the mainstream made the Auroville project more feasible.

The city was officially founded in 1968, in a ceremony that reflected the internationalist political landscape of those years, with its impulse towards world peace and its ecumenical inclusiveness. Indira Gandhi, who was known in the west for her appreciation of progressive views and who kept Hindu fundamentalism at

bay even as she enhanced the pride of independent India, was a personal friend of Alfassa and an advocate of Auroville. On February 28, about 5000 people met near the site of today's Matrimandir. They were representatives of 124 countries and all the Indian states. Each placed a handful of soil from his or her original land into a marble urn. Accordingly, the township's vision was going to be creating a utopian space where "men and women of all countries are able to live in peace and progressive harmony, above all creeds, all politics and all nationalities" and whose purpose is "to realize human unity" (Alfassa 1977a: 2). Predictably, in the high years of the social and cultural revolution that goes under the name of the 1968 Movement, the community attracted European baby boomers ready to reject Western acquisitiveness and the extreme consumer materialism that accompanied it during the economic growth of the 1960s. Some of them were already in the Indian subcontinent as long-term visitors in search of alternative spiritual visions.

The city's spiritual center, or Matrimandir, is designed to symbolize the city's earth-based spirituality and its devotion to Alfassa. Based on her connections and reputation as Ashram leader, in the early years Alfassa called in Robert Angier, a well-known French architect, to design the meditation center. The main building has a flat oval dome shape which looks like a womb, its exterior covered in gold-glazed disks that reflect the sunlight in various directions. Inside, a majestic meditation room whose white decoration is completed by the one sunlight beam that pierces in from the top of the building and falls on a large crystal placed at the center of the room. The womb-shaped building is surrounded by twelve small, petal-shaped buildings that host smaller meditation rooms. The complex is completed by a wide red-clay amphitheater that demonstrates the effective elegance of local building materials and serves as performative and ceremonial space for the community. The concept of a womb-shaped temple dedicated to a maternal deity is what initially attracted me to Auroville.

Alfassa's plan envisaged a city that would develop as a galaxy around the Matrimandir. Its sectors, including a cultural, international, industrial, and residential zone, were to be distributed within a 2.5 kilometer radium surface of

what then was a totally depleted dry tropical forest area (Various 2000: 4). The isolated surviving trees I've observed in pictures of those early years are only evidence of the impending desertification process which Auroville's forestation efforts have now definitely reversed (Various 2002, 12). As Hilda, the community's midwife explained to me during my stay, the technique that started the forestation process involved the excavation of linear ditches sided by mounds, which allowed the depleted soil to retain rain water, and therefore enable plant growth. A similar soil-management technique was also in use with the pre-Colombian Tainos on the Caribbean islands of Hispaniola and Puerto Rico.

One large surviving banyan tree, with its sacred character to Indians, marked the area where the Matrimandir was eventually built. Initially, the Aurobindo ashram, based in Pondicherry, took charge of the administration of the beginning township. During my visit, I learned that at one point its milder interpretation of Auroville's worldly oriented Integral Yoga came to a clash with the town's leadership. As a result, Auroville earned its administrative independence through a lawsuit, and is now organized as a Foundation. The area developed as a city-in-the-forest mostly invisible to superficial tourists. Its unpaved red-clay roads are frequented by cyclists, moped drivers, and occasional taxi vehicles, and the imaginative names of its neighborhoods are designed to inspire more thoughtful visitors.

The community eventually developed a rather selective entry process for its membership, which, as I learned, includes and intermediate stage as a "newcomer" and a gradual verification of the newcomer's ability to live up to the community's charted vision over a period of about two years. This process seemed to me inherently exclusive for it does not invite the Tamil villagers in, even as they collaborate with Auroville's services and production units. However, I also realized that the effort to recruit more perspective members from these communities was being debated when I visited. It was explained to me that the automatic inclusion of these workers would significantly dilute the cohesiveness of the community.

Auroville's proper form of government is a self-declared "divine anarchy" which involves operating by consensus rather than voting, with a commitment to participating in the assembly meetings. During my visit, in January-February of 2004, the dire winds of Hindu fundamentalism reached the heart of the community, and provided an opportunity to observe this form of government in action. On February 1, 2004, at 4 am, Sydo, a resident of the solar-powered green belt that surrounds the central buildings, was murdered in his home presumably to intimidate Aurovillians from helping in the state's judicial system. The following Tuesday the assembly came together in an open space at the international building Barhat Nivas, with community members joined by many visitors like me. The community's wound was first processed spiritually, with expressions of grief and anger followed by spontaneous healing rituals. Then practical matters were discussed, including what to do with the body and with the request to have it shipped to Europe from the victim's family, and the necessary protective actions that would ensue. The dramatic occasion enhanced participation, which made observing "divine anarchy" in action more moving. Gnostic forms of love were clearly in play as the decision-making process unfolded. Naturally, more decisional procedures ensued later on, even as transparency in administrative processes is part of Auroville's *ethos*, as I've observed from the detailed administrative documents available on its website too.

A main feature of divine anarchy is that all real estate property belongs to the community, with new Aurovillians expected to bring in all or part of the capital needed to build new homes. If an Aurovillian leaves, his or her descendants can use the property indefinitely. However, if all descendants leave, five years later the property will go back to the common fund. Most Aurovillians are foreign nationals whose ability to forestall deportation for political or whatever reason is quite limited. The thought of investing in a property one does not own located in a country one is not a citizen of is a far cry from conventional acquisitive thinking, even as it does happen frequently in Auroville. Predictably, though, the community has also been experiencing a shortage in newcomer housing. As I learned during my visit,

Auroville's successful forestation efforts and good land stewardship have revalued the whole bioregion, which includes several areas within the imagined perimeter that still belong to local villagers. For the Auroville Foundation, it has been increasingly difficult to purchase this land, for the owners in the nearby villages, well aware of possible developments in a more capitalistic mode, and not often willing to price it reasonably. Many Tamil villages have production units of their own non-affiliated with Auroville, as well as a number of Integral-Yoga inspired cultural initiatives. While a number of Aurovillians are Tamil Indians, the production units I visited were presided by either north Indians or Europeans.

7. Production, Services, and Healing

The economy of Auroville is based on an honor system which allows the use of a local currency, and on the interdependence of its production and service units. Establishments that produce artifacts, goods, and services sold to visitors and tourists are considered production units. Service units, including food, education, and healing, are those that deliver services to other Aurovillians. The Foundation collects 30 percent of all income from each production unit and applies it towards a maintenance fee for Aurovillians employed in the service units. During the dry, or high season, the community focuses on its long-term visitors and tourists, so that more hard currency can be stored for the rest of the year. The focus is on residents during the low season. A local card system encourages visitors to experience the moneyless economy and trust it is based in.

The meaningful work and creativity encouraged by the practice of Integral Yoga has resulted in a large number of Auroville-based production units, devoted to a variety of activities including making and dying textiles, making jewelry, making lamp shades and other rice-paper products, making red-clay bricks and other construction materials, and more. The production units I visited during my say were all hosted in healthy and ecologically sound buildings. The production processes I observed therein appeared to be environmentally friendly and respectful of worker's health and well being. Auroville's artifacts are characterized by the

originality with which they recombine elements of local craft traditions to create something new. A wide variety of them is on sale at the Visitors Center and at the Auroville Boutique in Pondicherry's French District. The most complex unit I visited is Saradanjali, which I will describe in detail. The unit uses rice paper produced at the Pondicherry Ashram and locally-grown flowers to produce decorative artifacts, including its famous screens, lamp shades, picture frames, trays, stationery, and a variety of other similar implements. Its limestone-paved building has wide openings that keep the working environment cool, and it employs 15 Tamil women. In the garden outside the building I could observe the flowers that, flattened and dried under weights, are applied to the rice paper as decorations. The models include variations on designed patterns. Some are framed in light local wood. The unit is one of the most successful in the community, with its products attracting numerous visitors. It is coordinated by … a north Indian woman.

Another area in which Integral Yoga manifests is holistic healing. As a former holistic-health practitioner, I am quite tuned to the various forms that this approach to health takes. I found the services Auroville offered of exceptional quality and variety. My accident also provided an opportunity to probe the local medical facilities, the traditional village healers, as well as the level of cooperation among these three main healing modes and systems. I can truly say that, at least for my conditions, I cannot think of a better place to heal than Auroville. Quiet, the healing center near the coast where I was staying offers watsu, or water massage; homeopathy, syndrome-based and unicist; polarity therapy; a variety of massage styles, including Thai, Californian, osteopathy, and Kahuna; and a number of other modalities, most of which I experienced with glee. The center attracts some of the world's most experienced healers, and functions as an educational facility, with numerous classes in various healing specialties. It is also an ideal space to experiment with vegetarian food, as its buffet is known as one of the best in the region.

Auroville's emergency room is one of the most efficient I've ever seen, where half an hour and a dollar after my arrival the doctor on shift and I looked

together at the x-ray of my foot and agreed that there was a fracture. He also accepted my decision not to get a cast immediately, and indicated the bone setter of a nearby village where my driver took me to have the trauma treated with traditional Tamil systems. I allowed natural healing for about two weeks, when the need to use my foot induced me to go to the hospital and have the cast made. The whole process cost so little that I didn't even keep the receipts for insurance reimbursement.

Other healing practices I became familiar with include the Somalin treatment for back asymmetries and injuries, and the panchakarma or purification of the digestive system. I experienced both to much benefit, as the first brought my spine back into symmetry, saving me much pain when I work in a standing or seated position, and the second taught me the skill of keeping my mind and body light and clear. The style of care usually matched what I experienced with Arndal. A woman from France I met had a fracture similar to mine. Panicked at the idea of being stranded in a "third-world" country, she asked the consulate to repatriate her. I realized how my familiarity with the healing arts empowered me to benefit from arts of loving and healing offered by this intentional community.

Once the tourist season is over, the Quiet healers turn from production to service people, as they provide free healing practices for other Aurovillians. In accordance with their visions, community members also use other forms of holistic health practices, including home births and ecological child rearing which minimized diaper use. Hilda, Auroville's midwife, described to me how she prepares a birth by being in constant contact with the woman and her family, and by helping her anticipate possible difficulties. Another concern of hers is that, if resorting to the hospital becomes necessary, the woman gets there before an actual state of emergency ensues. In response to my preoccupation with the escalating waste related to children, such as excessive diaper use, and what being wrapped from the waist down until the age of three does to a child's body, Hilda also indicated to me that Tamil women are not embarrassed by their children's excrements. This I had observed in a Pondicherry temple, while seated on the floor

with other audience members. As an infant peed near his mother, she simply wiped up the liquid with the end of her sari. Hilda explained that Tamil women often manage to gently toilet train them in the first months of their existence. Similarly, Aurovillian parents take advantage of the warm weather to allow toddles to roam free of diapers and therefore quickly become self-sufficient.

8. Socialization and Relationships

Another area of observation made possible by border gnosis is that of socialization processes and relationships in Auroville proper. From my observation, it appeared that heterosexual couples are the main social unit. These often also form the basis for family-style production units. They are often formed by partners who came to Auroville together, and it is not clear that, if a partnership breaks up, forming another one is easy. Due to the entry process and the adaptation to Auroville's vision, it is also not easy for single members to bring in a partner from outside. Short-term and/or repeat relationships between visitors and between visitors and Aurovillians are certainly possible, even as they are not openly encouraged. Visitors tend to come back from year to year and this allows for a certain continuity and stability in social and emotional relating.

While male homosexuality is still legally banned in India, I was able to observe how Auroville offers gay and transsexual men a reprieve. Some of my most insightful conversation happened with a gay man who lives with a younger partner. I also met another male gay Aurovillian, whom I will call Mark, and a male-to-female transsexual from a nearby area whom I will call Savitri. Mark, who has experimented with amorous relationships with Tamil men, emphasized his commitment to helping young men from the villages create social spaces conducive to mutual appreciation and growth. Savitri appreciates deeper forms of acceptance in Auroville, well beyond the conventions of flashy parade exhibitionism. He explained to me that, as an MTF transie partner of an Indian man, he can only play bottom in their sexual activities, and his partner will go on to marry without ever telling his wife about him. He also indicated that local sex-

change operations mainly consist in creating a shallow opening in the genital area. Heavy hormone dosages are used to complete the process.

With the limited exposure made possible by my visit, I cannot say for sure what one's sexual and social life is like in Auroville. By and large, it seemed to me that the yoga of doing put the focus on work rather than leisure. During my stay I observed that resident Aurovillians still know each other by first name, and are so known also to visitors. This keeps alive a village-style coziness that appeared to me inconsiderate of the fact that the wider community now encompasses some 20,000 people. The preoccupation with this coziness might be a cause for some social unease, as the community goes through the growing pains of realizing its actual magnitude and potential therein.

9. Eco-Friendly Technologies and Prototypes

Auroville appears immediately as a utopian space for those interested in learning about eco-friendly technologies and prototypes of the low-environmental impact machines of the Gaian future. As one gets around the city in the forest, its ubiquitous solar panels speak of a widespread use of solar power. During my stay I learned that the whole green-belt area around the central part of the city is exclusively powered by solar energy, with much pride for the Aurovillians who live in it, and offer ongoing forestation efforts and effective land stewardship. Like most residents of India, Aurovillians are sparing in their electricity usage, with small indoor lamps and little street lighting. Realizing that living on solar energy is possible for such a large community was very empowering to me, as it appears that the systems developed in Auroville could be applied towards resolving the energy crises that affect various regions, including California, Italy, and the New York area.

In the area of construction, Auroville also models learning from indigenous cultures and adding new elements to their systems. The basic brick in use … is made from local red clay just like the sun-baked mud bricks Tamil villagers use for the perimeter walls of their thatch cabins … is fired and has the added element of a

5 percent concrete. This makes it more resistant and apt for multistory buildings, like the Visitor Center and the Solar Kitchen, both of which are elegant specimen of Auroville's imaginative architectural styles. The Solar Kitchen is a radiant, inviting cafeteria which serves residents, guests, and nearby communities.

Besides its architecture, the Solar Kitchen is worthy of note for its Solar Bowl, the functioning prototype for a solar power machine able to produce enough steam to power a 2000-meals a day kitchen. This prototype was built based on a plan designed by Gilles Guigan, a French Aurovillian well versed in eco-friendly technology. The availability of Tamil labor, considerably cheaper than its Western equivalent, made the experiment of its construction more feasible. Ironically, the economic disparity between Westerners and Tamilians supplemented to the lack of commitment to funding ecological research so common in the greedy Western governments of our era. The Bowl's inauguration, in 2001, called the attention of India's minister for Non-conventional Energy Sources (Various 2005b). The system can certainly model similar bowls in the future which can significantly reduce the use of cooking gas and electricity.

Another interesting feature in the wider community is the ubiquity of well functioning and equipped Internet cafes, often managed by women and men from the Tamil villages. Their proximity to the thatch cabins and the unpaved roads populated by goats, chickens, cyclists, and women carrying fire wood, and sided with Dravidian-style sculptures of ancient deities, made the coevalness of it all come alive for me.

10. Activities in the Tamil Villages

I was able to observe the structural organization, lifestyle, and activities of the Tamil villages thanks to a one-day tour offered by Balu, a Tamil Aurovillian I met through Mark, and to my driver Prakash, who shared many moments of tribulation with me due to my injury, and, based on the intimacy that ensued, felt inclined to invite me to dinner in his home with another Italian woman.

The Mohanam Center, in the Sangeevi Nagar Tamil village north of the Auroville- proper area, is designed to preserve Tamil cultural traditions and to offer life-enhancing, extra-curricular activities to village children and young adults, including ceramics, painting, summer camps, dance, and martial arts. The show I attended features young women in a concerted dance based on Thai-Chi movements. I was impressed with the gender hybridity of the feature, which mixed masculine, martial arts tropes with the more feminine dance movements and pointed to gender-bending as one of the positive experiences the center provides for its young participants. The center stores many artifacts made in village, including wallets, purses, musical instruments, ceramic mugs, and others. A nearby production unit we visited was run by two young Tamil women and made lamp shades. We were able to observe their water dying techniques. The village-based artisan production units do not pay dues to the Auroville Foundation, and therefore can apply lower prices. We were also invited to attend a religious festivity related to the Pongal, the January harvest festival, where I could observe a number of Dravidian-style wooden sculptural groups representing mythological events. The bright colors of the paint over their wood-frames matched the evocative brightness of the ghee candles that filled the floor decorations.

Near the village, a wide area has been fitted as a botanical garden complete with several bamboo cabins and a kitchen to host gatherings for youth in a convivial yet educational atmosphere. We were served a traditional, rice based meal while cross legged in a circle on the floor of the main cabin in front of fresh green palm leaves. We learned the etiquette of eating with the tips if one's fingers, without allowing the food to go past the first phalange, and using the left hand.

This prepared me for the dinner at my driver's home in the Kulyapalayam village, whose cabin is typical of the area. Over a brick wall a bit about three feet tall sits an eve-shaped bamboo structure that sustains a thick roof made of palm leaves. The entrance is a simple interruption of the wall, which allows people in as they bend their head. Inside, Prakash showed us the wooden-fire kitchen, to the right of the central room or entrance, and the bedroom, to the left, with its straw

mats and storage area. The cabin is home to Prakash, his wife and child, and his parent, all of whom sleep in the bedroom. The backyard has a well, a loo, and a banana tree, with a couple of cows for milk and other useful animals. The meal consisted in several grains and complex-fiber cereals cooked in various styles, all very tasty, healthy, and coming from the nearby fields tended by village families. The atmosphere was jovial and convivial, even as we sensed that this kind of dinner party is rather unusual, and even as the women's shyness pointed to their scarce familiarity with Westerners with respect to Prakash and other male drivers. I did not see any female drivers in Auroville, and, since this is a high-paying job which requires the upscale investment car ownership – still quite unusual in south India – I attribute this exclusion to the male cultural privilege that still prevails in the subcontinent.

Another significant gender disparity I noticed was in the level of competence in English language between men and women. Prakash was a rather competent, even though self-taught speaker, more competent than many other drivers I used. Arndal had a comparable competence, and was an extremely keen listener, even as her range of expression was more limited. My experience in the area of speech leads me to the next topic of language use in the context of border gnosis within the wider intentional community.

11. Language Gnosis

Mignolo's theory of "bilanguaging love: thinking between languages" (2000: 250-277), provides the perfect context for my descriptive analysis of language gnosis at Auroville. According to Alfassa's chart, four s are officially in use in the community, with equal status: English, French, Sanskrit, and Tamil. The reality is that not a single speech act in the region is devoid of the in-betweeness described by Mignolo's theory, as language use shifts continuously among speakers and as other linguistic codes interface with the main language in use in any dialog, speech, or performance. It is in the space between linguistic codes that, argues Mignolo, border gnosis and the love it produces occurs. Since native speakers of

English are notoriously poor learners of other languages, and since English has been the unifying colonial language of India, one can safely say that it functions as a lingua franca among the multinational population of Auroville's residents and guests. French follows by one length, due to its own colonial legacy and attachment of its native speakers.

In this area of linguistic interchange one listens to a fairly cultured but quite stiff international English, spoke with a variety of thick accents and interspersed with an interlinguistic idiom referring to the local reality. For example, an Aurovillian will mention *darshan,* the Hindi word for devotion, a *lingham*, the Hindi word for a phallic symbol, or a *dahli*, a type of Indian bread, in the middle of a conversation in English. The border gnosis happens in the improvised lesson about Indian traditions available to an attentive listener. Aurovillians whose native languages are not English will break into another European language as soon as the group is small enough to include members who have one of these languages in common, including German, Italian, French, Spanish, Dutch, and others. This makes for still another level of interaction, where the cultural tropes learned in previous conversations can be rehashed and reviewed.

The situation of Tamil native speakers is not altogether different. Sanskrit, the unifying ancient language of north India, is an anti-identity language for them, a bit like English for Spanish-speaking Puerto Ricans. They study and know it less than they do English. And they attribute cultural authenticity to Tamil, which is even older than Sanskrit and reflects their heritage, culture, and region. I cannot comment on the quality of this language, since I learned only a few words during my visit, but, given its well-respected classical literature, one can assume that it is a language with a wide range of expressiveness and embedded wisdom. Its beautiful script is ubiquitous in the region, which indicates a good level of literacy. To my knowledge, it is not widely taught or learned in the intentional community, which might be a cause for the rift often observed between Auroville residents and Tamil villagers. It is accompanied by the body-language tropes typical of India, including the well-known rhythmic tilting of one's head, which gets Western

newbies like me quite confused, since it looks either like a “yes” *and* a “no”, or like neither, and actually, as I learned, only means “I am here, I am paying attention to you”. I found it fascinating, an added feature of the gentle arts of loving and healing that characterize the villagers’ behavior in the region. Interestingly, I observed a number of old-time Aurovillian tilt their heads too, especially those who are in daily contact with Tamil workers. And on a few occasions, I surprised myself while imitating this contagious feature. I experienced logical oppositions as unnecessary and began to think in both/and terms too. What a lesson for a mind trained in Western logic and its in-built Manicheanism!

12. Conclusion

The wider Auroville, with its multinational residents and surrounding Tamil villagers, is a utopian space of transculturation where various forms of border gnosis occur. The knowledge-in-the-making generated therein is the social, production, and environmental technology of the future, when Gaian awareness will reach critical mass and the human community will turn the present scarcity and environmental uncertainties into ecological harmony and abundance. My research trip was a lie-changing experience for me, which I understand as border gnosis thanks to Mignolo’s theory. The practice of Integral Yoga, together with the dual, two-gender spiritual leadership of the community, and the earth-centered spirituality that ensued have empowered Aurovillians and their collaborators among the Tamil villagers to actualize their vision regardless of economic disparities and political divisions. The effects of the vision are evident throughout the bioregion affected by the community, including widespread forestation, renewable energy production, healthy use of local materials, prototypes of eco-friendly machines, imaginative artisan productions, ongoing education, high-quality health services and holistic healing, gender-bending practices, hospitality to sexually diverse people, social commingling among residents, visitors, and villagers, and thinking between languages in the communication styles used therein.

The wider community is suffering the growing pains of any group intent in keeping faith in its vision as reality evolves in unexpected ways. In my view, Auroville can expand in a number of directions, some of which include hosting educational programs for world students in fields related to ecological regeneration and eco-friendly energy production; continuing and expanding the synergy of holistic and conventional healing; and further developing as a site of transculturation and border gnosis with their inherent coevalness. The community suffered a blow when a Tamil gang assassinated one of its resident members, and when the Tsunami wave affected the nearby coastal area and Tamil villages. However, in agreement with its spiritual leadership, it learned to be more attentive to the social transformations around itself, and rekindled its original vision of the surrounding villagers as collaborators and as "the first Aurovillians".

Notes

[1] *Shakti* prevails in the tantric counter-tradition, which emphasizes the body, sensuality, sexuality, as opposed to the more ascetic representations prevalent in the Vedantic traditions, according to which the world is an illusion, and females a prime example of this illusion a true sanyasi or spiritual disciple must eschew. According to some Aurovillians, the Tamil population believes that it comes from Lemuria, the mythical continent of the Southern hemisphere, which, as opposed to Atlantis, was more conducive to symbiosis and intuitiveness. About Hindu's conventional concept of the world as illusion see also Ghose 1993.

[2] The document uses the BLP measure, namely the Below Poverty Line standards designed by the Indian government.

[3] It is even said that, to empower Mirra further, Aurobindo decided to "leave his body" prematurely, as he died of a relatively mild illness he chose not to fight off in 1950, so as not to be in Mirra's way as she would actualize it (Wilfried 1990: 66-69).

[4] My informant is Ambre at Nilatangam, who also became my friend and guide.

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No Oil:

The Coming Utopia/Dystopia and Communal Possibilities

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The world is rapidly running out of oil, and we stand on the brink of a horridly dystopian new world reality. This paper makes three arguments:

1. We are running out of oil. Spot shortages will be here very soon, and devastating shortages will not be far behind.

2. When a serious shortfall of oil supplies finally becomes evident to everyone, the world scene will be hideously dystopian.

3. There are possibilities for moving smoothly to a post-oil culture, and the world of utopian communities, and particularly ecovillages, shows us what is probably humanity's most promising way out of this terrible situation.

1. We are running out of oil

It seems obvious that a finite resource will eventually be used up, but even among educated people that is not necessarily accepted. For the average citizen the most noticeable oil shock comes with increased gasoline and diesel prices, and many seem to think that we are victims of a vast conspiracy by the multinational oil companies. Although there is probably truth to that contention, that is the smaller, not the larger, problem. Inescapably, we are burning oil at a prodigious rate, and supplies are on the brink of major decline.

The only scientists and other specialists who argue that oil supplies are abundant are those who are economically tied to the energy industry, which even in these perilous days has a vested interest in getting us to use ever more fossil fuels. The independent observers who have examined the world's supply of oil vary in the details of their analysis, but not in their overall conclusion, namely that the production of oil will start declining in the very near future, and will continue to decline thereafter.

The evidence for that scenario is provided not only by environmentalists and those who oppose the power of the multinational companies on political grounds, but also by the oil companies themselves. Richard Heinberg, of the New College of California, USA, provides strong evidence that the decline of oil will come in the very near future. He concludes that the peak of production will come between 2006 and 2015, and the latter end of that range will be the case only if the world economy goes into recession and demand for oil drops (Heinberg 2003: 118-119).

The analysis is supported by the data gathered by Richard Duncan, who has looked at peaks in oil production by country and continent. He finds that production peaked in North America in 1983, in the former Soviet Union in 1987, and in Asia and the Pacific in 2004. Looking at current trends, he projects a peak of production in Europe in 2006, in South and Central America in 2006, in Africa in 2006, and in the Middle East in 2009. Putting all the world numbers together, he projects a world production peak in 2006 (quoted by Heinberg 2003: 103-104).

Paul Johnson adds an even more sobering note in his book *The End of Oil*. He notes that heroic oil-recovery measures have already been used to push the peak of production farther into the future, and that as a result when the peak does come, the decline will not be as gradual as it would have been otherwise. In other words, we are facing not a gentle downhill slope but a steep cliff (Johnson 2004: 52).

But let us not depend for our analysis on the prediction of leftist and environmentalist analysts. Let me provide some information from recent issues of the *Wall Street Journal*, the holy scripture of multinational corporations, including oil corporations. On February 22, 2005, the *Journal* reported that the reserves of Exxon Mobil, the world's largest oil company, had declined in the year 2004. Exxon

maintained that the reason for the decline was that the accounting rules of the Securities and Exchange Commission, the governmental agency that supposedly oversees business financial statements, were based on false premises, and that reserves were actually increasing. BP made a similar claim. But even within corporate financial circles analysts were skeptical, especially because last year Royal Dutch/Shell was forced to admit that it had overstated its reserves by 41% ("Shell Inflated Reserves" 2005: C4), and since then other large oil companies, including ConocoPhillips and ChevronTexaco, admitted that their net oil reserves were declining (Ball 2005: B3).

How do the oil companies respond to the news? In the usual corporate manner, through bookkeeping and takeover actions. ChevronTexaco, it was reported in March, in response to pressure from investors, was considering trying to take over Unocal, another large oil company. As the *Wall Street Journal* observed, "As it becomes more difficult to develop reserves, growth through mergers looks better" (Gold & Berman 2005: C1).

The standard counterargument to this scenario of steady decline of oil production is that new supplies will be found – both new supplies of conventional oil, and exploitable supplies of alternative forms of oil and related hydrocarbons, including tar sands and oil shale. Because new supplies of conventional oil are declining steadily, there is quite a lot of activity in the oil industry surrounding unconventional oil sources. One hint of what is to come emerges with the purchase by the China National Offshore Oil Corporation, owned by the government of China, of a stake in MEG Energy Corporation of Canada, which is looking to exploit the huge deposits of oil sands in Canada.

Oil sands and oil shale look good because they contain vast amounts of oil. The problem is that of turning the reserves, locked into other geological formations, into useful oil. According to current estimates, for each three barrels of oil produced, two barrels must be used to produce the oil. And then there will be vast byproducts. Richard Heinberg reports that to replace the net energy of current oil production with oil sands would require a waste pond of over 17,500 square kilometers – about the

size of Lake Ontario, well over three times the size of the Bodensee (Lake Constance), about six times the size of Luxembourg, just slightly smaller than Wales, and well over half the size of Belgium (Heinberg 2003: 112).

The American government of George W. Bush is pushing hydrogen as the fuel of the future. However, the only ready source of hydrogen is natural gas, and that supply is declining with oil. The other obvious source of hydrogen, water, is impractical, because it takes more energy to separate the hydrogen from the oxygen in water than is produced. Some would promote increased use of coal, but coal is much less versatile than oil, and it has terrible problems ranging from emissions of greenhouse gases to toxicity.

The only plausible answer to the dilemma is the rapid development of new and alternative sources, but it is already too late for them to replace the decline in oil. Had we started working on such sources a decade or two ago, things might be better. But the investment it would take to replace oil with wind, solar, and other alternative power sources will keep that from happening in a timely fashion.

The last option is nuclear power, and that presents all kinds of problems of its own. Even if nuclear is pursued, it will take at least ten years to develop substantial additional resources, and during those years oil production will be declining dramatically.

2. The after-oil scene will be dystopian.

It is entirely rational to forecast that the reaction of the people of the world, and especially those in the developed countries, to the decline in oil supplies will be entirely irrational. Presuming that market economics continues to prevail, as supplies start to dwindle, even as demand continues to rise, then we can expect prices to go up substantially.

One telling sign of what is to come is the downgrading of the creditworthiness of General Motors and Ford. Those two companies, formerly the largest automobile companies in the world, have become enormously dependent on gas-hogging sport-utility vehicles. But those sales are dropping, and are projected to drop dramatically in

the future. On that basis Standard and Poor, the leading American credit rating company, has reduced the creditworthiness of both Ford and General Motors to “junk” status (Hawkins 2005: A1).

Frantic development of known oil sources will be of only small help. As the oil production of the United States declined after 1970, North Sea oil from England and Norway was brought online quickly and staved off disaster. But a trick like that will be hard to pull off again.

Will people accept much higher oil prices calmly? We have already seen truckers strike when their fuel prices have gone up, and many violent incidents flared up when the United States had its relatively minor fuel crisis of the 1970s. Anyone who says that the human response will be rational is uninformed about both history and human nature.

And will our oil-based economies respond positively to reduced supplies of our sacred nectar? If an economy is based on vast supplies of oil, and those supplies disappear, then economic collapse will surely follow. The social dimensions of the new reality may be utterly dystopian.

Governments will step in quickly to maximize the flow of oil. We recently saw the United States try to depose the democratically elected Chavez government in Venezuela, and it is not an accident that Venezuela is a major American oil supplier. Such political chicanery will increase, and it will not be only the United States that will be pursuing it.

Before long the response to scarcity will inevitably be war. Wars could take place among the various consumers of oil that will fight for access to supplies, and they could and will take place between the Western consuming nations and the major producing nations of the Middle East. Will the United States go to war with China over oil supplies? One hopes not. But war involving the producing countries has already happened. The West, and particularly the United States, has already gone to war to preserve its hegemony over the oil fields, and as the crisis becomes more intense it is impossible to believe that a military solution will not be irresistible.

Ironically, war will make the situation even worse simply because war itself is

an intensive user of oil. The current American occupation of Iraq is enormously dependent on oil, most of which is trucked in from Kuwait, Jordan, and Turkey. 2,000 fuel trucks leave Kuwait daily to supply the inefficient vehicles of the occupation forces in Iraq with their fuel, which amounts to about 1.7 million gallons, or about 6.5 million liters. The fuel convoys are frequent targets for Iraqi nationalists, and so they must be defended and armored, all at great expense in further petroleum use (Bryce 2005: 34).

Had we had visionary political leadership in the West much of this dystopian scenario for the near future could be avoided. Oil production in the United States peaked in 1970; had American leaders then started developing conservation and alternative-energy programs, things would be much different today. But neither in the United States nor elsewhere in the industrialized West has there been leadership that has done timely planning for a future of sharply reduced oil supplies.

3. The utopian communal world gives us a positive, even utopian, vision of a post-oil future.

Although time today is critically short, there are many on our planet who are showing us a way to a future that will not depend on vast supplies of oil. Nowhere are those visionaries more evident than in the world of utopian communities, and especially ecovillages. I personally doubt that their message will be heeded sufficiently to head off our crisis, but we would do well to look at the utopian possibilities being worked out in the real world today.

Environmental visionaries have long been pointing out that we could continue most of our present comfortable lifestyle by making some relatively minor adjustments in our approach to the use of energy. We could build efficient, well-insulated houses and heat them or cool them only moderately. We could transport ourselves in ways that would decrease fuel use enormously – by using self-propulsion, public transit, and cars that get fifty or more kilometers per liter of fuel, a level of fuel use that is already available if we give up large, powerful car engines. We could shop and structure our lives to work and shop within walking distance of our homes.

And that kind of list could go on at great length. We all know all of those things. I want to conclude, however, with a salute to those who are demonstrating just how good the future could be even with a great decline in the availability of oil. The ecovillage movement is a set of practicing utopian experiments that shows us that a sensible future is no pipe dream.

Precursors to ecovillages have been around for a long time. Some farmers have always engaged in sustainable agricultural practices, and traditional cultures have lived in harmony with the environment for thousands of years. In the last few decades, however, a new generation of visionaries is taking the best of the past and combining it with the best of what the technological age has to offer.

As a result, ecovillages exist on truly small inputs of fossil fuels. They take both of the main tracks on energy efficiency: they reduce their use of energy, and they develop energy from alternative sources. Buildings are superinsulated, often of straw bale construction. They are oriented to take advantage of passive solar heat. They use solar hot-water systems and photovoltaic electricity. They are built compactly so that cars are not often needed. They grow much of their own food so that their food does not need to be trucked in.

And their environmental friendliness goes far beyond low consumption of fossil fuels. They use natural, chemical-free methods of sewage treatment, for example. They pay attention to the way in which we make decisions, disdaining conflict in favor of cooperative approaches toward solving disputes. They are dedicated to permaculture, which seeks to create sustainable ways of living by developing permanently renewable fuels, food production, housing, and other systems (Holmgren 2002). Most importantly of all, they work on changing attitudes, recognizing that human beings have to be retrained to live in a sensible way with limited resources.

Today there are hundreds of ecovillages in the world, all of them standing as demonstration projects for a greener future. Gaviotas, in Colombia; Sieben Linden, in Germany; Torri Superiore, in Italy; the Farm, in the United States; and Longo Mai, in France, are just a few of the utopian experiments that can help teach the human race how to live in a future that is nearer than most of us are willing to admit.

So there we have it: an impending dystopia, yet some utopian possibilities. We humans are given the power of choice. It will be more than interesting to see what ones we make.

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Which Utopias for Today?

Historical Considerations and Propositions for a Dialogical and Paradoxical Alterrealism[1]

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My intention here is to propose two ideas: 1) our present moment may include a renewal in the writing of utopian and legal fictions, a prelude to political action; 2) the forms, contents and modes of production and distribution of these texts can avoid major defects which are either those of certain utopian projects, or are often wrongly attributed to utopia and utopian projects in general.

I will refer to the current context in which we find the struggle between the children of the philosophy of optimism, according to whom our world is the best of all possible worlds and the partisans of "another world is possible". I will show that the philosophical position of optimism is responsible for the pejorative meaning of the word "utopia". And I will answer the question: "which utopias for today ?", and give an account of a program for encouraging the writing of utopian and legal fictions, or what I call "legal utopias".[2]

The context in which we have most recently found the conflict between optimism and utopia is that of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet bloc.[3]

The belief in marxist communism has been almost abandoned, but the monopoly of marxism on alternative thought was such that almost nobody now dares imagine a concrete content to the idea that "another possible world" may come to exist. Class struggle, at least in terms of images, has been replaced by old time religious and racial hatreds.[4] In parallel, stockmarket capitalism

progresses and claims to be an adaptation to a globalisation which pretends to be something new (Mattelard 1999 and Lebaron 2003).

Resistance is organising itself nonetheless and from the French association ATTAC[5] to the alternative groups who crystallised around Seattle:[6] its slogan corresponds to the hopes stimulated by utopian texts: “another world is possible”; this slogan is the contradiction of another: “our world is the best of all possible worlds”. This is the optimistic slogan. For economical ultra-liberal propaganda is the reincarnation of philosophical optimism, which was once the most radical opponent of political imagination.

I will now deal with the pejorative meaning of the word utopia. Those who are sold on the moral, social and political order of the day have imposed a pejorative meaning on the notion of utopia: that of chimeras or impossible dreams. I am referring specifically to the founders of the theological doctrine of optimism, according to which God created the *optimum* and the doctrine of liberal political economics according to which social defects are necessary for the collective good. These thinkers wrote as if the authors of utopian fictions did not know they were offering a fiction. In reality, they were fighting the power of texts that could incite people to action or provoke legal texts that would transform social reality.

The idea of optimism emerged around the beginning of the eighteenth century.[7] Leibniz wrote his *Essais de Théodicée* in 1710, to defend God in the trial that accused him of having created evil (Hazard 1941). Leibniz was not the only optimistic philosopher, but he was the most famous. This mathematician invented a system in which God had imagined all of the possible worlds and then created the one which contained the least evil and the most good. God did not do the *maximum* (God himself is perfect), but the *optimum*, the best of all possible worlds. In the 1730s, this idea was disseminated by Alexander Pope in English, and Voltaire in French. In 1737, the Jesuit Father Castel attacked the doctrine which he baptised by the name of “optimism” (Castel 1737-1738).

In fact, optimism is the most important ideology in terms of its incitement to submission to the political and economic inequalities that the eighteen century invented, adapting Christianity to the new *mentalités*.

The English philosophers reveal the economic stakes of optimism.[8] One of the founders of economic liberalism, Bernard de Mandeville, published in 1705 *The fable of the Bees, or Privates Vices, Public Benefits*.[9] This successful poetic fable tells the story of a beehive. The bees have the vices of humans; society is unequal, only the rich enjoy the hard labour of the poor; everybody complains, even those who benefit from the system. One day, Jupiter is sick of these complaints, and abolishes vices… Society falls apart: luxury related industries disappear along with many jobs; magistrates are no longer necessary, as there are no arguments. Society falls asleep, produces nothing and finally disintegrates. The moral of the story is that evil serves a higher good.

The success of this ideology was staggering, and finally totally imperceptible. In 1788, Colin d' Harleville imposed the psychological meaning of the word "optimism" in his play *The optimist or the man who is happy with everything* (Collin d' Harleville 1988). This very mediocre play was an immense success. In 1789, Pigault-Lebrun published *The Pessimist or The man dissatisfied with everything* (Pigault-Lebrun 1789). From that time on, everybody thinks that optimism is a question of character, that the opposite of optimism is pessimism, and that it is impossible to be neither one nor the other. What has been forgotten, hidden, is that optimism and pessimism are religious and passive attitudes. The real opposite of optimism is active atheism, an atheism which claims that knowledge of cause and effect may allow the transformation of reality.[10] What was also eliminated was the original meaning of the word "utopia".[11]

Today, in all the dictionaries, the meaning of "utopia" is pejorative. In French, "Utopie" towards the middle of the nineteenth century is synonymous with chimera, an unrealistic dream; "utopian" is synonymous with "idealist". This meaning is the result of a long series of attacks that do not start, as the dictionaries say, around 1848 from liberal economists. It dates from the beginning of the eighteenth century (and in English maybe before), and stems from the founding texts of what I call the *optimistic-liberal* theology.

To believe that Thomas More is utopian in the modern meaning of the word is the deepest possible nadir of a clearly hypocritical bad faith. People forget the first part of *Utopia*, the fictional dialogue which analyses the socio-

economic situation of an England struck by misery and criminality in the wake of agricultural reforms. Also, the name of the country, Utopia, plays with Greek etymology: *eu-topos*, the place of happiness, is precisely *u-topos*, the place that does not exist. Thus, More is the first to claim that it is really a work of fiction! By calling the authors of utopias "utopian", one pretends that they do not know that they write works of imagination, works whose aim is to stimulate the political imagination (Abensour 2000; Madonna-Desbazeille 1998 and 2002).

In English, the adjective "utopian" has been used with a pejorative meaning since the middle of the seventeenth century.[12] As far as I know, the two first authors, in English and in French, to use the word "utopia" as a common noun, and with a pejorative meaning, are Mandeville, in 1705, and Leibniz, in 1710. The moral of Mandevilles's fable runs as follow:

> THEN leave complaints: Fools only strive
> To make a great and honnest Hive
> T'enjoy the world's convenencies
> Be fam'd in War, yet live in Ease
> Without great Vices, is a vain
> EUTOPIA seated in the brain

This text, translated into many languages (into French in 1736), is the first to use "utopia" (here "eutopia", according to the word-play in a stanza in *Utopia* probably by More) as a noun which is associated with More's text but which is already a common noun, and already pejorative.[13]

As to Leibniz, in the *Theodicée* (1710), he pretends to believe for a moment that we could imagine a world better than that created by God. He writes: "It is true that we may imagine possible worlds, without sin and without unhappiness; we could conceive Novels, Utopias, *Sévarambes*". But he goes on to explain that it is in fact impossible to imagine a world better than the best of all possible worlds (Leibniz 1969: 109).[14]

So that the critique of utopia is already there in the theologico-economic philosophy of optimism, and dates from three centuries ago.

Then, there was another attack against Utopia. While recognizing its debt to traditional utopias, marxism has contributed to the disqualification of the word "utopia", of the rich imagination and the subtle and sophisticated belief that its written words allow. I think of the text of Engels, first published in French in

1880, under the title: *Socialisme utopique et socialisme scientifique* (Engels 1977). Whatever the interest of its economic philosophy, marxism in this case sought to eliminate the competition of other socialist ideas.[15]

Contemporary neo-liberal faith inherits much from the *optimist* doctrine; it feels itself as strengthened by the fall of the Wall, seen as the death of the idea that "another world is possible". But the praxis of utopian ideas is necessary today so as to combat neo-liberal powers. And I want to suggest that the end of the idea that communism suffices to solve problems raised by relationships between individuals is perhaps a precondition for rethinking practical utopia. For this we must free our imaginations from the *exclusiveness* of the communist idea, and give content to the idea that "another world is possible".

Now, I would like to think about utopias for today: freedom-oriented utopias[16], I would say, are based on three paradoxes. The first paradox: make-believe *vs*. not "making believe". A utopia creates a tension between two beliefs: the belief in fiction, a precondition for reading as a game, and the belief in the possibility of another world, a precondition for political action.[17] Readers must not believe that an author's fiction is perfect, and that all we have to do is to realize it in this world. In More's case, the very meaning of the word "utopia", the place that does not exist, allows this ironic distance. There are texts that play on this ambivalence between belief and doubt, which avoid fanatical belief. Fiction offers to politics an interesting model of paradoxical belief: the adherence to fiction necessary for reading does not prevent critical distance; it may be desirable that political involvement focuses on ideas while maintaining the critical distance needed to prevent threats to freedom.[18]

The second paradox pertains to the economic and anthropological system of utopia. I would distinguish two types of utopian anthropologies: the Christian and paradisal model of virtuous beings and the deist model which values passions, integrates evil, history and diversity (Morel-Daryani 2000 and 2004). The first model inspires communism, the second liberalism. I myself am in the paradox: against absolute perfection and against optimism: they both prevent imagination and action!

The utopia of the communist paradise has perhaps functioned as negative for the transformation of socio-political relationships *as* the optimistic faith. A possible solution: understanding that the distinction between communism and liberalism does not suffice to characterize a social, cultural and political system, and that we must enlarge perspectives to avoid forms of inequality that can be found both in liberal utopias and communist ones.[19] Another solution: aim for a better world, and not a perfect one. And as one must continue the struggle against the enemies of utopia who accuse all utopias of unrealism, I have invented a word: "alterrealism".[20] Utopia must be neither realist nor unrealistic, but *alterrealist*.

The final paradox involves the written form of utopias, as an answer to the question: how do we write utopias without being authoritarian authors (Loty 1998)? Dialogue is or should be the predominant form for the genre which connects fiction and reality, belief and demystification.[21] It is this form that allows an escape from the authoritarian monologue of a perfect world. Dialogue allows a distanced kind of belief.

For the utopian imagination to work well, it must stimulate the desire for dialogical writing: this will produce many collective texts, especially legal texts, which unite imagination and reality, and possess the virtue of changing reality if we all believe in them.[22]

Finally, one must hope for the emergence of some equivalents of Thomas More's dialogical *Utopia* for today's world, and also the development of a large-scale collective movement, the association of individualities ready to reinvent utopia and politics. Numerous texts. A few powerful texts, but no unique or sacred texts. Texts that inspire others, especially legal work, so that in this world, everyday more violent, we may hope for a legal radicality that may reduce the level of physical violence.

I will end with an account of a program for encouraging the production of new utopian and legal fictions, a program that I have opened to my students already. The first stages were the following: I proposed to my students at the University of Rennes that they write a utopian or juridical fiction, outside of their required work. The first time, I got four fictions. The following year, about twenty

texts, and I xeroxed a collection of them. Each year the number increased: I think this comes at once from the greater force of my conviction and from the increasing urgency of planetary politics. There are now three collections from Rennes (Loty 2002c, 2004 and 2005a). This year (2005) I have given some seminars and talks in the United States, with my American friends Julia Douthwaite and Mary Baine Campbell. Julia and Mary have proposed to their students that they write utopias as well.[23] The collection from Notre Dame University has already arrived, and we expect the collection from Brandeis University soon (Douthwaite 2005; Campbell 2006). Anne-Rozenn Morel, who is writing a doctoral thesis on utopias written during the French revolution, has just edited a collection from the University of Haute-Alsace ([Morel-]Daryani 2005).[24] Next time we are going to edit a Franco-American collection (and this time, or soon afterwards, we hope to include texts from others countries and languages, especially Portuguese…).[25] The project also involves reflection on the uses of the internet, especially the collective writing of legislative texts (laws, statutes, etc.). Jean Sallantin invited me to present this program during a week of meetings organized by the National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS) on theories of law and juridical systems as complex evolutionary systems – a series of meetings organized specifically by Danièle Bourcier and Paul Bourgine (Loty 2005c); in the wake of our work together I hope sometime to put in place, at the intersection of law, literature and informatics, some experimentation with software for the collective drafting of bills (*projets de loi*), or a Constitution (the collective and democratic writing which we so lacked in the case of the "European Constitution").[26]

The eventual aim of this program is the organization of a large editorial operation, the publication of pamphlets and small-format books, from utopian fictions to legislative bills. This will be accompanied by an Internet site permitting the diffusion of brief texts and experiments in the collective writing of legal texts.

My hope is to arrive eventually at a very large distribution of many texts, including if possible an international edition. Hundreds of thousands of copies will still be too modest compared to the need for renewal of a form of belief in

politics, and for the collective elaboration of positive new projects for the battles and the victories to come.

My final words will be to say that we are looking for writers, on the one hand students, from all countries and languages, to whom their teachers propose participation in our program; we are also looking for some more experienced writers – perhaps among you, readers – who would like to try writing longer texts.[27] This activity will constitute a meeting-place of reflection and action. So please don't hesitate to join us.[28]

Notes

[1] I thank David Allen and Mary Baine Campbell who have helped me translate this article. Any linguistic faults which remain are my own.

[2] The full program proposes the writing of imaginative political texts, from utopias to law. Between these two kind of texts, there is what I call "legal fictions" (or "legal utopias"), which are legal texts presented in utopias or as utopias (proposed or adopted in a fictive place). The best example of such an author (but not a good ideological model!) is Rétif de la Bretonne, who wrote, at the end of the eighteenth century, a number of legal texts or constitutions presented as realised in an imaginary country, or to be adopted in this world: *L'andrographe* [or *Anthropographe*], *ou idées d'un honnête-homme, sur un projet de rêglement, proposé à toutes les Nations de l'Europe pour opérer une Réforme générale des mœurs, et par elle, du Genre-humain*, 1782 [The Andrographe (or Andrographe), or ideas of a gentleman concerning a regulatory project, proposed to all the Nations of Europe for putting into effect a general Reform of manners, and by that means, of Human-kind]. See also Rétif de la Bretonne 1980a, 1980b and 1987. The complete works of Rétif have been published in a facsimile edition by the Éditions Slatkine (Genève); a series of critical editions is in production from Éditions Champion (Paris). For an account of the whole set of works by Rétif, see Testud 1977; Coward 1988 and Coward 1991. On *L'Anthropographe*, see Loty 1988. See also the website of the Société Rétif de la Bretonne: http://www.retifdelabretonne.net/

[3] Berlin is a geopolitical and geo-cultural epicenter for thinking utopia today. For a study of attitudes towards utopia in the two Germany's before the fall of the Wall, see Baillet 2003 (for a review of this book, see Loty 2005d). For a profound and ironic view of contemporary modes of utopian hope, see also the film *Good Bye Lenin!* (2003), directed by Wolfgang Becker from a screenplay by Bernd Lichtenberg: http://www.ocean-films.com/goodbyelenin/sommaire.htm

Berlin has played an important role in my thinking, at the intersection of investigations presented first in France and then in the USA and Europe. I thank Fernando Vidal and Claudia Swan, who invited me in 2002 to the Max Planck Institute of the History of Sciences in Berlin, a few steps from the former Wall and the former headquarters of the Gestapo, to give a talk entitled: "Discours sur l'imagination divine et pratiques de l'imagination utopique: un combat politique" [Discourse on the Divine Imagination and the Practices of the Utopian Imagination: A Political Struggle] (Loty 2002a). In January 2004, Lorraine Daston enabled me to pursue my research in Berlin as a Visiting Scholar at the same branch of the Max Planck Institute, in the framework of the research program "Knowledge and Belief". My two stays in Berlin occasioned

the beginning my collaboration with Mary Baine Campbell and Julia Douthwaite, who invited me in 2005 to teach classes on utopia at Brandeis University in Massachusetts and at Notre Dame (Indiana), and to give at Notre Dame, as well as at Harvard University's Center for the Humanities (thanks to the kind invitation of Lynn Festa and Susan Staves), a talk on the subject of "Optimism as a religious Faith, *vs*. Utopia as a political Belief. Is another World possible? (1705-2005)" (Loty 2005b). (This academic collaboration, pedagogical and editorial, could not have taken place without the financial aid of the Nanovic Institute for European Science at Notre Dame, for which I am especially grateful.)

[4] Since this talk was delivered, France has undergone serious urban violence, during October and November 2005. It is essential to get beyond the growing ethnicisation of many practices and interpretations (which can also, paradoxically, arise from certain forms of anti-racism); it is necessary to look into political solutions at once educational and economic at the height of the problems. The situation is complex, but this does not prevent the understanding that a terrible economic violence and the lack of a belief in a political alternative have produced in turn a sterile aggression (see the newspaper article of Hémery *et al.* 2005: 36: "The forces which are reclaimed from democracy and social justice must urgently organize a solidarity movement, to affirm the imperative of a radical change from the neo-liberal decisions which have led to the present explosion, the refusal of an ethnicisation of the problems, and the necessity of looking into solutions at the global level").

[5] Association pour la Taxation des Transactions pour l'Aide aux Citoyens [Association for the Taxation of Transactions for Citizen Aid], founded in 1998 (http://www.france.attac.org/), and international in scope (http://www.attac.org/index.htm).

[6] The protests in Seattle of 1999 took place at a summit meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Seattle is considered the birthplace of what has been called the "altermondialist" movement, a name which began to appear commonly after the first World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, in January 2001, and after the demonstrations in Genoa against the G8 summit in July of the same year. See Ramonet 2005 and the web site of *Le Monde diplomatique*: http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/mav/

[7] On the history of optimism, see Loty 1997, Loty 2001a, and my doctoral thesis, Loty 1995.

[8] On the relations between the idea "optimiste" and economic liberalism, especially the concept we would today call economic ultra-liberalism, see Loty 1993 and 1994. See also Elster 1975.

[9] Mandeville 1705-1714-1723-1729. See Gautier 1993.

[10] This paradoxically active determinism is that of Diderot in *Jacques le Fataliste et son maître* (Diderot 2000 [1778-1780 and 1796]) and of Condorcet in the *Esquisse d'un Tableau des progrès de l'esprit humain* (Condorcet 1988 [1795]); see Loty 1989.

[11] For an analysis of the mystifying effects of words like "utopia", see Loty 2006.

[12] The *Oxford English Dictionary* (online version of 28 April, 2005; http://www.oed.com/) permits me to add, for the adjective form "utopian", some usages conveying the pejorative notion of impossible idealism earlier than those I had discovered for the common noun. It is difficult to interpret the shifting of usages and the moment of emergence of the pejorative connotation of the word. I cite from the examples in this historical dictionary an occurrence of 1646: "J. Cook, Vind. Law 28, Thats but a Utopian consideration, a possibility which never comes into Act" and, to describe an individual (a "utopiste" in present-day French), another of 1661: "Cowley, Cromwell Wks. 1906 II. 373 You are… a Theoretical Common-wealths-man, an Utopian Dreamer". Thanks to Mary Baine Campbell and Jason S. McLachlan for helping me to do this research, in the heart of the Harvard Forest (Harvard University).

[13] For the transformation of the word from a proper noun invented by Thomas More in 1516 to a common noun with a pejorative sense, my dating (1705 for the first usage in English as a noun at once common and pejorative) differs from the analysis of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which only cites the notion of the impossible ideal from 1734.

[14] The cited passage continues: “these same worlds, however, would be quite inferior in goodness to our own. I wouldn’t know how to make you see it in detail, because how can I know infinities, how can I represent them to you and compare them to each other? But you must judge them, with me, *ab effectu*, since God has chosen this world just as it is”. Here is the original in French, with the passage that follows: “Il est vrai qu'on peut s'imaginer des mondes possibles, sans péché et sans malheur; et qu'on pourrait faire comme des romans, des utopies, des Sévarambes; mais ces mêmes mondes seraient d’ailleurs fort inférieurs en bien au nôtre. Je ne saurais vous le faire voir en détail; car puis-je connaître et puis-je vous représenter des infinis et les comparer ensemble ? Mais vous le devez juger avec moi *ab effectu*, puisque Dieu a choisi ce monde tel qu’il est” (Leibniz, 1969: 109). [*ab effectu:* from or by the effect]. For a critique of Leibniz’s hypocritical and illogical rhetoric, see my doctoral thesis (Loty 1995). On the Leibnizian practice of hypocrisy, see Friedmann 1962.

[15] Our own epoch is, on the contrary, perhaps propitious for the rediscovery of the diversity of socialist ideas. Among them, the ideas in Marx’s texts can be rediscovered, in order that they will no longer be read as absolutely necessary, perfectly sufficient, and definitively sacred. I read with interest Karl Polyani (Maucourant 2005), and a Marx revisited by anarchism (Zinn 1999).

[16] The literary, anthropological and political genre of utopia is neither to be defended nor accused *en bloc*. Everything is possible, happily and unhappily, in the domain of the political imagination. I have deepened my thinking on this thanks to Marianne Duflot-Czarniak, who invited me to present a talk in June 2003 entitled “L'utopie: de quelle imagination politique avons-nous besoin? [Utopia: Which Political Imagination do We Need?]” (Loty 2003). There are both emancipatory utopias and others which are abominable in their authoritarianism, their sexism, their racism, their eugenics: see Loty 1986 and Loty 2002b. See also my paper from the conference “Eugenics in Europe, Yesterday and Today” [L'Eugénisme en Europe hier et aujourd'hui], of which the proceedings were supposed to appear from Éditions Autrement: a paper which was summarized by Éric Bacque (Loty 1994b): http://www.genetique-et-liberte.asso.fr/pagecrconference.html#Desutopies

[17] Jean Goulemot has stressed this very old hesitation between the reading of utopias as political texts and their reading as texts of entertainment (Goulemot 1984). Anne-Rozenn Morel-Daryani is pursuing a study of the possible articulation between the ludic and the political (Morel-Daryani 2006).

[18] These thoughts correspond to the object of the research program “Croyance et Imagination utopique et juridique [Utopian and Juridical Belief and Imagination]” of the research group “Textes et Savoirs, Transdisciplinarité et Politique [Texts and Knowledges, Transdisciplinarity and Politics]” (TSTP), research group drawn from the research team “Centre d’Etude des Littératures Anciennes et Modernes [Center for the Study of Classical and Modern Languages]” (see http://www.uhb.fr/labos/celam/, or for the TSTP seminar: http://www.uhb.fr/labos/celam/seminaires/seminaires2.htm#tstp). The program is being developed also in connection with the Institute of the Americas at Rennes (http://www.ida-rennes.org/), under the title “Imagination utopique et juridique: France / Amériques”, potentially open as well to comparison with other countries or continents. The research into forms at once powerful and distanced from faith in politics, which belongs with the tradition of utopian irony, is a key to utopias for today (see Campbell 2006a).

[19] I thank Claude Blanckært, Jacqueline Carroy and Nathalie Richard, who invited me to present a talk in May 2001 to the seminar “Histoire des sciences de l'homme et de la société [History of the Human and Social Sciences]” at the Centre Koyré, a seminar sponsored by the Société

Française pour l'Histoire des Sciences de l'Homme [French Society for the History of the Human Sciences: http://www.bium.univ-paris5.fr/sfhsh/]. This talk allowed me to sketch a preliminary synthesis of my work on optimism and utopia, to think about the relations between the two and between economic liberalism and communism (Loty 2001b).

[20] I invented the word in the subtitle of a collections of utopian fictions published in June, 2004 (Loty 2004). On the stakes of this neologism, see "Alterréalistes de tous les pays… [Alterrealists of all countries…]", introduction to Loty 2005a.

[21] On dialogue as literary and philosophical genre, see Pujol 2005.

[22] Reflection on the particular and combined effects of literature and law is one of the research interests of Philippe Corno (see Boisset & Corno 2006, and see especially Corno's doctoral thesis in progress: *Le divorce dans la littérature de la Révolution française (1789-1804): Textes et représentations*, directed by Isabelle Brouard-Arends and Laurent Loty, at the University of Rennes 2).

[23] In order to dare to imagine utopia today, and to incite people to compose them, a consciousness of the dangers inscribed within "reality" is necessary, a consciousness of the ambivalences of the utopian imagination itself, as well as the desire not to dissociate one's knowledge from action, the freedom of spirit and the combativeness to oppose oneself to academicism without ever losing courage (see Campbell 1999 and 2003; Douthwaite 2002 and Douthwaite & Vidal 2005).

[24] The subject of Anne-Rozenn Morel's thesis engages new perspectives on utopias in regard to the anthropological conceptions of which they form the vehicles, and to their interactions with historical reality, legal texts, etc.: *Imaginaire et politique: les fictions utopiques pendant la Révolution française (1789-1804)*, directed by Isabelle Brouard-Arends and Laurent Loty, Université Rennes 2.

[25] It was a great pleasure to meet at New Lanark the Portuguese team which has launched an annual competition of new utopian texts; my bet is that the Franco-American and Portuguese teams will figure out how to join together, that writers in France, the United States and other countries will participate in the Portuguese and international competition, that the texts of this competition will be published by the Franco-American editorial venture, which aspires to be world-wide. Who said or even thought that an immense international movement was impossible? Utopian? Alterrealist!

[26] The project is under way with Jean Sallantin, who works at the intersection of law and informatics in the LIRMM: Laboratoire d'Informatique, de Robotique et de Microélectronique de Montpellier [Montpellier Informatics, Robotics and Microtechnology Laboratory] (CNRS). The free software used for the Wikipedia encyclopedia would be interesting for this project (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page, and on the "wikis": http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wiki). Thanks to Jean-Baptiste Soufron (Lead Legal Coordinator of the Wikimedia Foundation), for his offer of help in this area. See Sallantin & Soufron 2005: http://complexsystems.lri.fr/Portal/tiki-index.php?page=The+evolution+of+free%2Flibre+and+open+source+software+contracts+%3A+a+dynamic+model

[27] It took me a long time to figure out that I could also make this demand of myself. A writing project is under way: for starters, the scene takes place….in Berlin.

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Utopia Now

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> *In the 1950s I did not do Theater of the Oppressed. I did theater like everybody else in that you call the spectator to come, you charge a price for the ticket and then you do plays, the best that you can. But soon I understood that I was doing good plays, wonderful plays for people that were good writers for an audience that came just to look at it and say, "Okay, it's nice." And then they went away and nothing else happens. And always for me theater should be more than that. Shakespeare…said in* Hamlet *that the theater should be and is like a mirror in which we look at the mirror and then we see our vices and our virtues. I think that's very nice, but I would like to have a mirror with some magic properties…which…could – if we don't like the image that we have in front of us…allow us to penetrate into that mirror and then transform our image and then come back with our image transformed. The act of transforming, I always say, transforms she or he who acts. So to use the theater as a rehearsal for transformation of reality. This was my idea, but not my practice until the dictatorship was every time more severe on us and they started forbidding our plays, not allowing us to do our plays to do nothing. So when we lost our theater, we lost everything. We found theater.*
>
> Augusto Boal, interview with Juan Gonzalez on *Democracy Now*

Utopia as we have known it belongs to the modern world of printed texts to which Thomas More's genre-founding *Utopia* (1516) was one of the earliest original contributions. In a period when, as Walter Ong has elaborately shown, printed texts (and I would add geographical exploration and colonial appropriation) led to a profound spatializing of knowledge, that text too is focused on space, and opens with a map (see Ong 1958). But More's fiction and its progeny have had a

problematic relationship with time – the historical time, especially, within which its readers and writers must not only read and write but suffer and act. For the verb tense of fictional narrative is the "historical past". One can see the problem even in the pre-modern precursor of More's *Utopia*, Plato's philosophical *Republic*, which was composed in the early days of European writing (a technology that Plato himself deeply distrusted): his Atlantis is delivered in what we can at least metaphorically call the conditional mood of the verb. When people think of Utopia without thinking, they think of a place outside of space-time, outside of this *world*: and *world*, if we move backwards down its etymological branch, comes to mean "a period in human existence", not the place we lead it in.[1] And so the great utopian philosopher Marx repudiates utopia – as do the quick-talking mouthpieces of global capitalism, which nonetheless depends on our displaced utopian longings for the brisk trade in luxuries and travel that floats its rising ship.

Now is where we live, act and suffer. The hopes that motivate our reading and writing of utopia, and evoke the disparagements of the powerful (about which Laurent Loty writes in his contribution to this collection), are hopes for an enactment of another sort: immediate and historical, collectively and not individually imagined, here and not no-place (see Loty 2006).

Utopia, No-place, was almost always – even as late as Margaret Meade's exoticised *Coming of Age in Samoa* – set in geographical reality, almost but not totally inaccessible to the European reader at home. America, Terra Australis, Tahiti, even the Moon (there was something of a "space race" between Germany and Britain in the 17th century, as both Kepler and John Wilkins felt the moon shot was technologically feasible). Gabriel Chappuys, author of the 16th-century geographical encyclopedia, *L'estat, description et gouvernement des royaumes* (1585), includes Utopia as the subject of his 24th and final section.

But this ambiguous spatial linkage has now become increasingly ineffective. Geography now is completely mapped and owned – even Antarctica, even the moon have become the terrain of "global capitalism" and its commercial *Lebensraum*. There is no place left for "no-place". Space, like the planet itself, is

contaminated. The US National Air and Space Administration (NASA) sells tickets on the space shuttle to the very rich, and John "Leavin' on a Jet Plane" Denver has bought one.

What does a hopeful utopian activist do? The written proposal of an alternately structured social space is not a dead genre, and offers a mental space for reflection to both reader and writer that is the special contribution of books. I am writing one myself at the moment. But as an *activist* I have been looking elsewhere as well: for an activist needs to awaken the dead.

Looking elsewhere I have found a new kind of No-place that is equally describable in most cases as a special form of *time*, the "Now" of my title. It is most immediately descended from the happenings and street theatre of the 60s and 70s, and has a parent too in the World Wide Web, which facilitates not only world-wide markets but sometimes spectacularly effective resistance as well. Although the last and most important case I'll discuss here has a great deal in common with Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, and particularly its offspring The Invisible Theatre (see below), the current development of performative alter-realities, to borrow from Laurent Loty's term *alterrealisme*, has roots as well, and importantly, in initially apolitical dance forms such as break-dancing and Butoh, which express the experience of death-in-life without any world-reordering pedagogic intent.

Butoh, which frequently took and still takes the street and other public places as its venue, emerged in Japan in the late 1950s. It was a time of high anxiety in Japan, culminating in the 1959 renewal of the US/Japan Mutual Defense Treaty, which made permanent the many American military bases in the archipelago and re-confirmed the American commitment to an imperial presence in the world.[2] Break-dancing is or was also a public art, for the most part, an African-American expressive form almost exclusively for young men (unlike Butoh), which in its unforgettable style – sometimes *like* Butoh – presents humans as puppets manipulated by invisible puppeteers, or the reanimated bodies of the dead. It developed in the late 70s after a decade or more of imperial militarism abroad, and rioting at home in the Black ghettos which provided so much of the cannon fodder.

Butoh's signature is the Hiroshima-body – many of which were unforgettably translated into stenciled ghosts on the sidewalks of that city by the heat of the atomic blast, but all of them recalling puppetry in the unnatural positioning of limbs whose ligatures and joints seem to have been shaken loose by super-violence of the blast. Break-dancing is more blatantly the dance of the broken body – as slavery more deeply breaks a body than does the sudden bomb, though it too recalls the human devastations of that more momentary blow. In both dance forms we are expected to appreciate the artistry with which the dancers represent the re-animation of the unjustly destroyed. The presence of these dancers on the street, particularly the slower-moving Butoh dancers, represents the darkest possible tone of utopia, but is nonetheless utopian. The motion and presence of the awakened dead, in whom so many cultures have traditionally rested their hopes for a more just society, is both a sign of hope and a case of the impossible. Their dance is the creation of an *alter-reality*: impossible and yet experienced, fictional and yet here in our midst. The dead are alive, and the living are dead: in the words of Butoh's founding genius Tatsumi Hijikata, "I may not know death, but it knows me".

In the decades after Butoh emerged in Japan, Brazil and Argentina saw the rise of Boal's "Theatre of the Oppressed" and the "Theatre of the Invisible". Boal countered the increasing censorship of his more traditional theatre work in Brazil by escaping the theatrical space altogether and bringing the transformational power of performance not just to the city streets of São Paulo but to farms, factories and churches in rural villages. The fictive spaces created by Boal's Invisible Theatre, as well as the public and minimally narrative dance forms I've been describing, had a number of features that separated them radically from the clearly marked heterotopia of the theatre's raised and darkened stage (see Boal 2000 and 1998). These spaces have become some of the ground for more contemporary events that project another world on the sidewalks and, as we will see, the conference rooms and television and computer screens of this one. They elaborate especially well

Boal's revolutionary notion of the "spect-*actor*" – the spectator who becomes an actor in the spectacle, a member, in my terms, of the utopian Now.

San Francisco's Butoh-inspired street theatre and dance troupe, Corpus Delicti, whose motto is "Deconstructing the Empire, one performance at a time", use Butoh movement and body-décor in a program of theatrical interventions of which the most recent is fetchingly entitled "Guantanamo A-Go-Go: A Night of Butoh Karaoke".[3] To make their ghostly co-existence with us a little more concrete, here is a photo-sequence by Randall Case of a recent event in San Francisco:

Note the evocations of Hiroshima flashes in the flour-stencilled Butoh bodies on the pavement, the corpse-like, Butoh-derived whiteness of the dancers' flesh, the tattered grave-clothes of zombies. Note regular old sidewalks and awnings, note local passers-by with expressions identical to those of the actors. As the Talking Heads would say, "*This* is not my beautiful home". And yet we are sharing a stage with our ghostly brethren. Their decision about what constitutes reality is, in the moment of this special Now, more powerful than our own. The people who look most out of place in this palpable No-place are those who are using the sidewalk for its expected commercial purpose.

Another ancestral technique: the cord (usually a wire) used in orthodox Jewish communities all over the diasporic world by which, for the purposes of observance of the Sabbath the Jewish world is separated from its secular environment. This cord is called the *eruv*, and it is erected by special delegates of the local rabbi. Within the space it demarcates, thus designated as internal to the Jewish world, certain necessary movements and tasks (such as wheeling a baby carriage to services at the synagogue) are permissible on the Sabbath. Life can be carried on.[4]

This action imitates or perhaps is imitated by the utopian genre, which insists on negation (it is *No*-place, not *happy*-place) and consequently on the separation of worlds: Utopia is somewhere *else*, and we are reminded of that in its

fictional settings – ever since the canal dug by More's Utopians to separate themselves from the mainland – by astronomical distances, unnavigable mazes, lost coordinates and dislocations in narrative time. Corpus Delicti has transcended the physical border, but still represents a significantly other world, where living skin is an impossible color and all motion is significant and expressive rather than practical and instrumental.

The border between worlds is an important feature of Utopia, whether written or "performed", but the performative medium of the 21st century's newly interventionist Utopian experiments pressures this border most startlingly, perhaps, in the case of the Yes Men – who make their projects at least partially available in French, and conduct their "alterrealist" events in countries or language zones from the BBC to Austria, Finland, and Australia. My purpose today is mainly to let you know about them, if perhaps you haven't yet drawn a connection between the various utopian Yes Men pranks that have been covered in such mainstream news sources as CNN, CNBC, the *New York Times*, *The Financial Times, Le Monde, the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung,* and *La Reppublica* (not to mention countless less august venues like the*Texas Pagan News*, and a wonderful article by Dr.Thomas Schauer on "Perspektiven fuer die biologische und kulterelle Diversitaet in einer globalisierten Informationsgesellschaft" for the mysterious *Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer seltene Kulturpflantzen*).[5]

I had originally hoped to discuss many such groups in this article, including Britain's CRAPS (Capitalism Represents Acceptable Policy Society):[6]


4x4's are BO COOL
BOMBS not BREAD
Ladies and Gentlemen, an independent business!


How dare they!

and its American cousin Billionaires for Bush:

whose hoaxes are more transparently satirical and who help to alleviate the piety of the protest marches that have accompanied the Bush and Blair regimes'

escalation of American imperialism and British poodle-ism.[7] I'm leaving out as well a number of ingenious uses of the World Wide Web – in both cyber-space and cyber-time, although the Yes Men's actions have themselves been dependent on the new dominance of the Web as a forum for information-sharing, networking and practical arrangements.[8] The Web for instance brought to New Lanark for the Utopian Studies Society conference represented in this series of three issues from *Spaces of Utopia*. It also made possible the Yes Men's penetration of a number of organizations involved in the day-to-day domination of the "global village" by the multi-national corporations of the G-8 (which was meeting in nearby Edinburgh during the USS conference).

The Yes Men's project began with the prescient purchase by a friend of the domain-name GATT. A false GATT/WTO web page permitted the Yes Men's first intervention, intended as a more daring version of the "Invisible Theatre" performances of Corpus Delicti, CRAP, Greene Dragon, Rev. Billy and his Church of Stop Shopping, Code Pink for Peace and many others. Andy Bichlbaum, an American who lives in Paris, in cahoots with his friend the photographer Mike Bonnano, after setting up their faux-WTO web site, had the bright idea of appearing as a delegate from the WTO at an international trade law conference in Salzburg in May, 2000. Expecting to be hauled off by security guards in mid-speech, Andy ("Dr. Andreus Bichlbauer") delivered, as the Yes Men website (provided by the German groupThing.net) puts it, "an alarming Power-point lecture about removing hindrances to free trade. He suggests that violence is acceptable in banana trade so long as prices stay low and trade is free; that the siesta in Spain and the long lunch in Italy should be outlawed in the name of standardized business hours; and that a 'free market' in democracy should be encouraged by allowing the sale of votes directly to the highest bidder through voteauction.com." NB: all descriptions of their interventions, on their web site and in their book, are delivered in the present tense of Now.[9]

No objections were raised in the question and answer session following Andy Bichlbaum's speech. At lunch, Andy defended the "'free-market' character of

Hitler's economic policy", again without stirring controversy. Surprised, he returned later that day, head shaved, as a journalist who announced that "Dr. Bichelbauer" had been "pied", and interviewed delegates and organizers to find out what in his speech might have provoked the attack.[10] No one had any idea, although one person said that, were he Italian, he might have been offended by the part about the long Italian lunch. Via e-mail, a faux-WTO secretary later announced to the delegates that the pie carried a bacterial infection and that Dr. Bichelbauer was gravely ill. Still no one could offer a suggestion as to why he might have been pied, nor did they after her announcement that Dr. Bichlbauer had died of the pie-borne illness. In the end the deception was unveiled, and the *New York Times,* among others, carried the story.

Each of the Yes Men's subsequent interventions increased the brutality of language and audaciousness of imagery (including a prototype inflatable golden phallus to hold equipment for tracking foreign high-tech workers by videocam!). Still no protest was encountered. Readers may be familiar with 2004's major stunt in which Andy, as "Jude Finisterra", representative of Dow chemical corporation (which manufactured the napalm used in Vietnam), announced that Dow was dissolving Union Carbide, which it has recently purchased, and paying the $12 billion of its value in reparations to the town of Bhopal for the 1984 chemical accident there that took 18,000 lives and left another 120,000 permanently ill or disabled. News of this announcement spread as far as Bhopal before Dow exposed the fraud. (Union Carbide has come in for trouble from inspired artists before. Until recently its most infamous action was the Depression-era "Gauley Bridge" case, in which WPA workmen hired to dig a tunnel in West Virginia found themselves unknowingly cutting through pure silica discovered during the initial conduct of the drilling. Union Carbide was eager to have the valuable substance, but most of the workers sickened or died soon after of silicosis from inhaling the glassy dust. A suit was filed on behalf of their survivors, but in the end Union Carbide paid less than $50 each to the families. The poet Muriel Rukeyser accompanied a filmmaker to Gauley Bridge, and produced her own poetic

documentary – a work of inspired formal innovation, including stock quotations and equations, "The Book of the Dead", published in *U. S. 1* [1938]).

Click next on the link below to see a video clip of the BBC interview.[11] You might want to consider how scary these events are for the perpetrator as you see one of them unfolding before your eyes, though I think the speeches given live at conferences were scarier. These men are not actors or economists or businessmen: they have no experience in the venues where they perform their "alterrealism": they are just brave and clever, as no doubt you are too.[12] Information on how to become a Yes Man yourself is plentiful on their website and in their book.

http://www.theyesmen.org/hijinks/dow/video.html

The Yes Men climaxed their long adventure this year (2005) at a meeting in Sydney of the Certified Practicing Accountants Association of Australia. Andy (this time as "Kennithrung Sprat") explained at that meeting that the WTO had decided to shut down and launch itself as a new organization, to be called the Trade Regulation Organization,

> devoted…to making corporations behave responsibly towards *all* world citizens, not just the wealthy. The lecture includes nearly an hour of shocking statistics drumming home the need for this massive transformation. The accountants rally behind the plan with excitement…. At the luncheon, some of them give suggestions for insuring that the new organization will serve the poor. …After Mike and Andy send out a press release from the WTO announcing the imminent improvement, a Canadian member of parliament takes to the floor [of Parliament] to announce the good news. Andy and Mike receive hundreds of congratulatory e-mails.[13]

As was the case, perhaps more poignantly, for the people of Bhopal, this hoax created a good deal of disappointment – but this time the disappointed are the accountants of a G8 nation! And this disappointment is something whose consequences may be far-reaching. The theatricality of the Yes Men has consistently challenged the utopian border between the better world and the one we live in, between the No-time of fiction and the moral urgencies of historical time. Their effect *depends* upon this border of course: on the shock, shame and disappointment of its exposure.

But for several hours in Sydney the people who make their living managing and facilitating corporate globalization believed they could be, that they *were*, participating in the construction of a better world in real historical time. Sydney is not Utopia, nor was the meeting site. The Utopia of this collective effort to imagine just and equitable economic structures was a matter of time, an alter-reality, to play again with Laurent Loty's term. A very brief time, less time than it takes to read More's *Utopia* – which was itself set in the then-imaginary geography in which Australia would later be discovered, and so many prophetic 17th-century utopias set.[14] But for many of the disappointed accountants, that time is not over. In the words of the great post-Holocaust Jewish poet Allen Grossman, "The Work continues by another means". Here is the last sentence of the Yes Men's description of that Utopia Now: "Although clearly another world is possible, it will have to start from the bottom up". I would say it already has. Or rather it is, now and again, starting. Fellow bottoms, Arise!

Notes

[1] *Oxford English Dictionary*: article on "world", introductory etymological derivation (from Germanic "Wer-" (man) and "–ald" (age or life); see also entry Ia in that article.

[2] There is a wealth of information on Butoh available on the web at http://www.butoh.net.

[3] For images and information see their website at http://www.corpusbutoh.org/.

[4] For extensive explanation of the *eruv* see http://www.lakefronteruv.org/letter.html. For a particular example in New York City, go to http://www.dziga.com/eruv/index.php.

[5] The article is available online at http://www.global-society-dialogue.org/dgsk/study-german.pdf.

[6] For images from CRAP events, see http://www.beyondtv.org/nato/crap/craps.htm

[7] For image see http://www.stratecomm.net/~fritz/gallery/bfb/0415q**.** For Billionaires for Bush website, go to http://billionairesforbush.com/index.php

[8] It's a particular sorrow not to be able to link you to the e-mail utopia of Andrew Albin, a doctoral student at Brandeis University, who created a penetrable false Yahoo e-mail account for himself into which he slyly tempted members of a list-serve in my 2004 course on "Alternative Worlds" – the e-mails in the Inbox there documented an ingeniously crafted dialogue between Albin and the coded messages, in apparently real commercial e-mail solicitations (spam), of a person in a utopian (cyber-?)world.

[9] The book: *The Yes Men: The True Story of the End of the World Trade Organization* (2004). The website: http://www.theyesmen.org/hijinks/sydney/. The film *The Yes Men* (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer 2005), dir. Chris Smith, Dan Ullman and Sarah Price, is available from several online venues on DVD in English, French and Spanish. (I prefer the book and webpage.)

[10] For non-anglophones, "pie" refers to the anti-authoritarian prank of throwing a pie in someone's face.

[11] For a follow-up story on the UK's Channel 4 (BBC's chief rival) see video clip of interview with Andy Bichlbaum at <http://www.theyesmen.org/hijinks/dow/movies/Channel4news-small.mp4>.

[12] Andy and Mike are really (really?) Jacques Servin, the writer and ex-computer programmer whose first appearance in the news was as the prankster who secretly inserted code that would display images of two scantily-clad men kissing in a computer game he worked on for Maxis, and Igor Vamos, a graphic and installation artist and Associate Professor at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in the United States. For more about Vamos's work (including the Barbie Liberation Organization and the Center for Land Use Interpretation ("dedicated to the increase and dissemination of knowledge about the nature of human interaction with the environment"), see his Rensselaer webpage, http://www.arts.rpi.edu/people/vamosi .

[13] I quote from the account on the Yes Men's webpage.

[14] For the strange tale of the seventeenth and eighteenth-century's geographically prophetic imaginary voyages based perhaps on real gossip, see Faussett 1993.

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What Happens When God Describes Utopia?

Neale Donald Walsch's Utopian Vision

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The first part of this article will discuss the writings of Neale Donald Walsch, and in particular one of his best-selling books, *Conversations with God Book 2*, in which what purports to be a dialogue with God, Walsch outlines a utopian vision of society. In the second part, I would like to offer some reflections on an area of thought which has interested me recently, namely current theories on Emergence and Complex systems. Hopefully some connections between the first and the second parts of this essay will eventually emerge.

For those of you unfamiliar with Neale Donald Walsch's *Conversations with God* series of three books, they began to appear in the mid 1990s and are a record of what Walsch claims to have been a series of conversations with God, in the form of dialogue. Book One can be read as a thorough deconstruction of most people's traditional notions of God and a reappraisal of what a relationship with the divine might mean for an individual in the contemporary world, while Book Two considers how this new understanding could be applied on a broad, social level, and offers a blueprint for a contemporary utopia. Book Three goes on to deal with more obscure themes such as life on other planets, reincarnation, etc. Walsch's conversations have continued up to last year's publication, *Tomorrow's God*, although this book ends with God announcing that it is now Walsch's turn to speak on his own, integrating his voice with the divine.

About half of Book Two is dedicated to God's outlining his/her/its – Walsch purposely varies gender often mid-sentence to challenge traditional

Western characterisations of the divine as male – current vision of a better world. Briefly, the conversation covers an education system whose core syllabus would be values-based rather than fact-based, along the line of the Rudolf Steiner and the Waldorf schools. There would be a redistribution of current massive military spending into social and welfare programmes for the poor throughout the world. But to achieve such global aims, individuals must first be clear about their own aims. God says, "World peace is a personal thing" and "Anger is fear announced" (Walsch 1997b: 152, 151). So, for war to be eliminated from Walsch's utopian world, individuals would have to, first, achieve a peace within which would allow them to see their apparent needs as mere preferences, and to develop a fearless sense of self, which would no longer be dependent on an outer material expression to affirm itself.

It must be said that Walsch's God never espouses a particular social idea as right or wrong. Rather she/it/he simply affirms that a certain idea/attitude when put into action will tend to produce a certain result, and it is the duty of individuals and collectives to decide what their grandest vision of themselves is, and then ask themselves whether a particular practice serves to bring that vision into the realm of experience or not. Hence, perhaps surprisingly, God's utopian vision here is not new, and, as it is acknowledged, cannot be new, but it is rather a composite of the very best ideas of past and present utopian thinkers for experiencing what mankind generally holds as its highest values – justice for all, declaring the truth, loving one's neighbour, etc.

In God's view, the purpose of life is to "create anew and Know, Who You Are *in your experience*" [original italics] (*idem*, 158) and certain design features make it possible for us to experience our true nature in this life. Three key characteristics of this life are, firstly, its relativity, whereby you can exist only as an entity in relationship to someone else; secondly, forgetfulness, a "process by which you willingly submit to total amnesia, so that you can *not know* that relativity is merely a trick, and that you are All of It" (*idem*, 158); and thirdly,

> Consciousness, a state of Being in which you grow until you reach full awareness, then becoming a True and Living God, creating and experiencing your own reality, expanding and exploring that reality, change and *re*-creating that reality as you stretch your consciousness to new limits – or shall we say, to *no limit*. [original italics] (*ibidem*)

The point of all this forgetting and then remembering is that we can thus create "Who we are and who we want to be," so that, as God says, "through you [mankind] I experience being Who and What I Am. Without you, I could know it but not experience it", and God goes on to say, "I'll choose experience every time" (*idem*, 159). Walsch's radical message is that there is no essential separation between the human and the divine, as they are both aspects of the same absolute consciousness. In moving from one stage of consciousness to another, through cycles of amnesia and remembrance, growing human awareness of its true divine, creative nature simultaneously allows the absolute all-encompassing consciousness to experience itself.

The social structure of the utopia outlined in Walsch's book emerges from a collective ever higher awareness, in which people follow "Laws of Love" which make legislation unnecessary. Like the Ten Commandments, asks Walsch? No, comes the answer; the Ten Commandments do not represent God's requirements of mankind: as God is everything how can he require anything of anyone? The Ten Commandments are, rather, merely the description of ten types of behaviour which a person living according to the highest values would naturally manifest. "Thou shalt not…" would be better rephrased as "You, – when you realise your divine nature, and live according to it, simply WILL NOT… do such and such a thing". Of course while we labour under the illusion of separateness, governments will have to legislate.

Sometimes Walsch seems to ventriloquize a voice representing right-wing Christian America, to put across attitudes he imagines some of his readers might harbour towards points arising the dialogue. So, for example, this projected voice at one point asks in horror whether God is a Communist. When the discussion comes onto the *Communist Manifesto's* "From each according to his ability, to each according to his need", God recognises its/her/his inspiration behind the idea, but also recognises that before this fundamental tenet could manifest, basic human nature would need to shift from a selfish individual to a loving collective consciousness. Walsch's conservative voice wonders whether such a group consciousness would not cause the individual's to be disempowered. The answer that comes is that, from a collective consciousness's point of view, the idea of one person being well-off while others

are dying is unthinkable, as a collective sensibility would experience "well-offness" and destitution simultaneously. The individual who fears their disempowerment as a result of a more equable distribution of wealth is merely ignorant of the ultimate reality, not "evil" *per se*, and so will not be "condemned" in any sense. There is no punishment in this utopia, but simply varieties of experience resulting from particular world-views. And besides, as God says, "no-one does evil given his model of the world" (Walsch 1997b: 171). If this is indeed the case, then while it does not relieve the perpetrators of evil or their victims of their suffering, it does relieve us of the right to assume that anyone is in any sense condemned in any metaphysical sense. Julian Barnes seems to be making the same point in the final section of *The History of the World in Ten-and-a-half Chapters,* which was set in heaven. It may be recalled that the protagonist was at first horrified and then fascinated to discover that one of the famous people he could choose to meet there was Adolf Hitler.

Other characteristics of God's utopia are the elimination of money, in order to overcome the problems caused by its invisibility, or the fact that it can be hidden so successfully, and the setting up of a World Wide Compensation System (WCS) of credit and debit, in which knowledge of all earnings and savings, individual and corporate, would be public and freely available to all. Price tags would display both price to consumer and production cost to encourage fair trade.[1] The WCS would deduct 10% on all earnings for those volunteering it. Of course, complete financial visibility would ensure a tendency of even reluctant earners to volunteer their tithe; by reluctant earners I mean those still labouring under the illusion of their individual consciousness, which allows them to think that they can be rich while others go without. These voluntary deductions would support government programmes and services as voted on by the people, and would replace income tax as such.

Such visibility would not mean that all thoughts were visible; the only requirement would be for honesty at the moment of communication. Similarly, that traditionally great moment of total visibility, the moment of one's death, when we stand before God and have all our sins relived before us and are judged accordingly, is revealed here by God for the illusion it has always been. There is no final judgement. As God does not consider actions in terms of right

or wrong, and so has no grounds for condemning, death is nothing to fear, therefore. It is, rather, a wonderful moment when the illusion of our separateness from each other will be finally dispelled, even for the most hardened individualist.

God recognises that at lower levels of consciousness violence may break out, wars will persist while people are under the illusion they can be won. The solution is a World Court and a peace-keeping force, with all 160 nations as guarantors. For global decision-making, Walsch's book proposes a congress of two representatives per nation, and an assembly with proportional representation. A simultaneous federal system would ensure most governmental decision-making will be taken at more local levels. One might suspect that God is behind the European idea of subsidiarity, even if not responsible for thinking up the term itself.

What about the redistribution of wealth? What about those who work harder and earn more than others? These are concerns expressed by Walsch's hypothetical right-winder. In response, God defends equality of opportunity not equality of fact, as clearly some people will prefer to experience monetary wealth, while others will seek to enrich themselves through different types of experience. The divine solution is for there to be a mutually agreed limit to any individual's maximum earnings, up in the millions, so enough for most of us to feel more than comfortably provided for. Beyond that limit, all further earnings would be put into a charitable trust: 60% being spent in the community along lines specifically chosen by the original earner, while 40% would be administered by government. There would be no limit to earnings, simply a limit on their being retained in their totality, beyond a certain amount.

In conclusion to his book Walsch writes of the society it envisages:

> It is not an organisation or an element of society so much as it is a process by which all of society shifts from one way of being to another. It is the hundredth monkey theory in action. It is about critical mass. I have presented this material here, exactly as it was given to me, in order to assist in facilitating that movement, to help in achieving critical mass, and producing that shift. (*idem*, 255)

There are a few things that strike me as being of particular interest in this utopia. The first is that by being conceived globally, like Al-Farabi's paradise, and unlike Thomas More's island, which is linked by a causeway to a non-

utopian mainland, Walsch's utopia eliminates the problems of setting and maintaining boundaries which other utopian visions always struggle to overcome. I would like to offer two examples to illustrate this point: in the film *The Village*, directed by M Night Shyamalam, the utopian community maintains its outmoded values by cutting itself off from the modern world with a border wall which is regularly patrolled by a private security company, and the community's continuity is threatened when one of its members, Ivy, gains special insight into the group's taboos and breaches the wall, later to return; or, to offer a historical instance, in William Lane's *New Australia* project in Paraguay in the late 19th century, disintegration of the community was attributed by the founder to his fellow utopians' (sexual) relations with the non-utopian natives in the forest beyond the palisade. Walls and boundaries are always fundamental problems for utopian communities to resolve.[2] The second point of particular interest is that by suggesting a two-level system of government simultaneously on a local federal level and on a global international level, it provides in the first instance a legislative and political entity which corresponds to the individual consciousness of separateness, which is an inevitable aspect of our embodied experience of our own lives, while in the second instance it offers a legislative and political entity which corresponds to the group consciousness of the ultimate unity of all things. It is as if the dual form of government is a macrocosmic analogy of the awareness of the individual, at a microcosmic level, of their existence as apparently separate and yet ultimately unified.

And now to come on to Emergence Theory.

Emergence Theory is best explained with the frequently used example of the ant community. The highly organised structure of the ant community into areas such as a food store, a nursery, a rubbish tip and a cemetery[3] is a form of ordered behaviour which emerges through the interaction of all the members of that community. However, from our knowledge of the rather limited behavioural patterns of individual ants, we can suppose that the order which is evident when we consider the entire community is beyond the intellectual grasp of individual members of that community, and certainly not the product of any individual's will. According to Paul Cilliers, emergent behaviour is produced in a self-

organising complex system. What does he mean by "self-organising"? Cilliers states that "the capacity for self-organisation is a property of complex systems which enables them to develop or change internal structure spontaneously and adaptively in order to cope with, or manipulate, their environment" (Cilliers 1998: 90).

What are the main attributes of a self-organising complex system? Cilliers enumerates eight.

1) The structure of such systems is not the result of an *a priori* design, and not determined directly by external conditions. Structure results from the interaction between the system and its environment.

2) Such a system can therefore adapt dynamically to changes in the environment.

3) In such a complex system, adaptation is not simply a process of feedback/regulation which can be described linearly. It involves higher-order non-linear processes which cannot be modelled by sets of linear differential equations. A thermostat, for example, which switches on or off according to changes in its environment would not be considered a self-organising complex system.

4) Self-organisation is an emergent property of a system as a whole. The system's individual components only operate on local information and general principles. Macroscopic behaviour emerges from microscopic interactions.

5) Self-organising systems increase in complexity. Since they "learn" from experience, they "remember" previous situations and compare them to new ones, to determine best behaviour. So an increase in complexity also at least partly explains why self-organising systems tend to age, becoming saturated at some stage.

6) Self-organisation is impossible without some form of memory. Without memory, systems would only mirror the environment. So with a self-organising entity there is always a history. The diachronic component cannot therefore be ignored in descriptions of the system, since previous conditions influence present behaviour. Forgetfulness also plays its role – as information which is no longer used fades away. This process not only

creates space in memory; more importantly, it provides a measure of the significance of the stored pattern. The more a pattern is used, the stronger its representation in memory. Use it or lose it. Self-organisation is only possible because the system can remember *and* forget.

7) Similarly, the self-organising process is not guided or determined by specific, pre-set goals, so it is hard to talk about the function of such a system. Trying to introduce the notion of function runs the risk of anthropomorphising (*i.e.* the myth of the Queen Bee), or introducing an external reason for the structure of the system, such as a creative agent, for example "God". One can, however, talk in terms of sub-functions, as component actions which contribute to the emergence of the overall pattern. The notion of function is closely related to our descriptions of complex systems, but the process of self-organisation cannot be driven by the attempt to perform a function. It is rather the result of an evolutive process whereby the system will simply not survive if it cannot adapt to more complex circumstances.

8) In the same way, it is not possible to give crudely reductionistic descriptions of self-organising systems. For example, when sand is poured slowly from above onto a disc, it will form a cone of sand. There will come a point where apparently the next grain of sand will cause an avalanche or dribble and the perfect cone will be temporarily impaired. To argue that the fall of one particular grain of sand "caused" the landslide would be erroneous. Pointing to one event as the cause of the next in a complex system is reductionist and therefore inappropriate. Only the system as a whole in its interaction with its environment can be understood to produce what appear to be subsequent events (see *idem*, 91-93).

To conclude, I would like to consider the view of society and how it works as set forth in Walsch's book, in relation to Cilliers's work. What happens if we consider society in terms of self-organising complex systems as outlined by Cilliers? As Walsch's God observes, levels of unconscious behaviour produce emergent patterns of order. The more unconscious the behaviour of the individual, the less aware they are of how they contribute to the overall pattern of their society. Thus, supremely egocentric behaviour whether on a personal or

national level might perceive doing violence to another or going to war as beneficial, while the ability to observe the entire complex system would also see such behaviour's detrimental effects, which in turn would annul any illusions of benefit. Similarly, the importance of memory and the ability to forget in Cilliers's description of self-organising complex systems finds echoes in the process of creation described by Walsch's God. Here, the process of forgetting our divine collective nature occurs when we, individually and collectively, willingly enter into the illusion of relativity and separateness from each other at birth, or perhaps more accurately at the moment of our birth into language, as Lacan would argue. The process of remembering and gradually reawakening to the divine nature of our being in this life comes with the realisation that our experience of the universe is a result of the creative power of our thoughts, both individually and collectively, and that we are ultimately all one. For Walsch, minds which labour throughout their lives under the delusion of human beings' separateness from each other, will remember the truth of that delusion, when they suddenly awake to the reality of their divine and unified nature at the moment of their death. Remembering has therefore a sense not of merely recalling but also of finally unifying the hitherto dismembered – separate – elements. What is the point of all this? Can we talk in terms of this system, human society, as having a function? According to Cilliers, we cannot, as the system exists merely to perpetuate itself, as long as possible. The metafunction of this forgetting and remembering is, according to Walsch's God, is to enable the divine to experience itself, or, in terms more akin to Cilliers' argument, for the system to experience itself. This metafunction is only perceptible to us to the extent that we are able to align our thinking with the divine, and perceive the emergent order of the system, from outside, or above, or whichever positional metaphor you prefer, at the same time we form a miniscule part of it.

Cilliers claims that self-organising systems cannot be thought of as having an *a priori* plan, or single creative agent. Does Walsch's God act as a separate creative agent, according to his/her/its master plan? If there is no *a priori*, there can apparently be no teleological function to creation as traditional Christian thinking has held.

In Walsch's books, God does not judge in terms of destiny, does not judge actions in terms of good or bad, but rather limits observation to how certain sub-patterns of behaviour appear to produce certain temporary effects on the emergent order. However, there is no final goal, along the lines of building the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth, as traditional teleology has formulated. Cilliers says that emergent order has no function; Walsch's God seems to say that what emerges is awareness, and that the function of growing awareness is merely to continue to grow and to manifest itself through changing patterns of behaviour, but there is no final goal at the end of it all.

As for Cilliers' observation that agency and *a priori* plans have no place in self-organising complex systems, this goes completely against traditional understandings of the role of the divine creator. However, Walsch's God eschews these traditional roles, too, and indeed comes close to self-destructing, or rather self-deconstructing, as it/she/he identifies that which is divine so closely with us – God experiences its/his/her creativity through us experiencing ours. According to Walsch, God is us, we are divine, God has no separate existence from the universe's. Just as the separation between us and our neighbours is illusory, so is the separation between God and us.

Cilliers cites Derrida's insistence on introducing Time into Sausurre's model of how language systems work and how they generate meaning, through the Derridean concepts of "deference" and the awareness that the "metaphysics of presence" can only be achieved beyond now. Similarly, introducing Time into God's utopian society, as spelt out in Walsch's books, reminds us that society only exists as a process and processes can only manifest to us in Time, even if it is a process without a specific goal.

Much utopian thinking seems to be focussed on the achievement of future goals, which imply society moving from a present state of collective "lack" in the Lacanian sense, to a future state of abundance, where that "lack" is overcome. These days, from an individual perspective, Self-Help manuals and courses are structured along much the same lines as were the Christian Church's "spiritual exercises" in former times. Such a movement implies a process in time, a movement from the present of lack, to the future of abundance. Walsch's God encourages us to accept that, when we perceive our

divine nature (a nature which by definition cannot lack anything), the illusion of our separateness from each other, or to put it another way our underlying oneness with the divine and with each other as reality in the present, then the sense of lack will be replaced by one of abundance, in the present. At the moment we accept this notion, the idea that it is possible to move from a state of lack into a state of abundance will be shown to be an illusion. When that illusion is dispelled, Walsch claims, Time will also be shown to be an illusion, a mere product of our limited selfish perspective on the various processes we live.

The state in which unity with the divine is experienced is not an imaginary one, or rather is no more imaginary than any other state described by individuals who claim to have experienced them. It is at any rate one which has often been described by people within what might be called mystical literature.[4] Of course, all such experiences happen to human beings who after their transcendent moment(s) of enlightenment return to live in their separate bodies and under a corresponding separate notion of Self. However, their moment of illumination, the literature suggests, generally teaches them that though they live as separate, they now know for sure and never forget that that apparent separateness is illusory.[5]

From the point of view of Cillier's descriptions of Self-Organising Complex Systems, it is as if, while under the illusion of the separateness of our Self from others, our understanding of the overall system is as limited as an individual ant switching from foraging for food to dragging dead ants to the colony cemetery because the overabundance of pheromones of other foraging ants triggers off in their brains a compulsion to change to another social role. We contribute to the overall creation of order while reacting to only the most local circumstances. On the other hand, when in the moment of illumination we have a momentary god-like glimpse of the overall pattern of society, the world, the cosmos, and see the interconnectedness of all things, it is as if an ant momentarily becomes the observer of the ant colony, who can see the emergent order, and realise how apparent individual decisions can contribute to that overall evolutionary pattern.

Walsch's utopian vision invites us to recognise and live in the knowledge of this higher awareness, when we understand how the apparent separation

between us is an effect of our identity as created by language, and therefore ultimately illusory. The choice to look for, find and experience the emergence of this higher consciousness, and the society that such an awareness will produce, is always our choice now – we can act as ants or/and gods. In the words of the final lines of "A Talking Book", a poem by Don Patterson,

> There is no wall
> Pick up your bed
> Walk through it –
> Last chance, friend,
> So do it, or don't do it. (Patterson 2004: 31)

Notes

[1] In fact Walsch's CWG web-site shop has put this into practice in cataloguing at least some of the items on sale there in this way.

[2] It is not really by being global that a utopian project solves the problems of boundaries with the non-utopian. In Walsch's case, his utopia must be global, because it can only exist as a result of an increased higher awareness in which everyone participates, and from which no-one is excluded or remains an outsider. It is global in the sense that it includes all minds on the planet, rather than all territory.

[3] See research by Deborah Gordon at Stanford University, Palo Alto, as described in Johnson 2001: "The Myth of the Ant Queen", 29-72.

[4] Two contemporary examples of this type of mystical writing are: Tolle 1999; and Parsons 1995 and, at greater length, 2002. But there are numerous others, both contemporary and historical, as for example, collected in Bucke's *Cosmic Consciousness*, a classic collection of descriptions of mystical experience outside religious tradition.

[5] It is interesting to note, as Tony Parsons points out, that there exists plenty of Self-Help teachers, gurus and other spiritual teachers, and I suspect utopian academics and other thinkers, who have a vested interest in keeping the goals of their programmes forever in the future, forever deferred, as in that way they attempt to guarantee their status as guardians and mediators of those goals, when in fact, Walsch's God, Parsons, Tolle and many others, argue that all necessary knowledge for the achievement of those goals, whether socially or individually utopian, is available to everyone all the time, without other people's intermediation.

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