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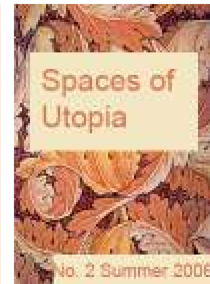
Ed. Iolanda Ramos



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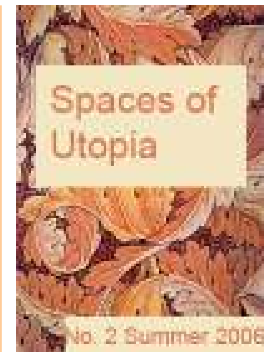
Utopia Re-Interpreted

An Interview with Vita Fortunati

By Iolanda Ramos



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Vita Fortunati, Professor of English Literature at the University of Bologna, has published extensively on modernism, utopian literature, women's studies and Interart studies. She is the editor of the *Dictionary of Literary Utopias* (with R. Trousson, Paris, Champion, 2000) and of *Perfezione e Finitudine*: *La concezione della morte in utopia in età moderna e contemporanea* (with M. Sozzi and P. Spinozzi, Torino, Lindau, 2004).

An Interdepartmental Research Centre on Utopia has been active in the University of Bologna, since 1989, under the direction of Professor Vita Fortunati. Since 2002 she has also been the Co-ordinator of ACUME – A European Thematic Network on Cultural Memory in European Countries.

We have asked Vita Fortunati a few questions about her research interests in the field of Studies on Utopia.

Q. In 1975 you published *La Letteratura Utopica Inglese*. Was it your response to the general assumption that utopia, over the centuries, has traditionally been a male genre?

A. When I wrote my book on the utopian genre in the 1970s, I felt an urgent need to trace the history of utopias from the female point of view. The book revealed the existence of a profound gap between the reformist intention which the utopist demonstrated in writing his innovative political-economic and religious proposals and his moralistic and censorial conservatism, when dealing

with the problem of women. Utopian projects which for men incarnate male tensions and desire for renewal, do not represent an alternative place for women. In the traditional utopia, there is no possibility for women to escape reality. The utopist, when dealing with this subject, does not do so in a critical manner but merely repeats the myths and customs of the patriarchal society of the time: on the one hand, women become the object of his desire, on the other, there is the prevailing image of women as life-givers and providers of goods and values. Reviewing the history of utopia in a female perspective revealed the duplicity of the image of women in Western culture: on the one hand, women as 'land to be cultivated', 'womb', exalted and sublimated because of their naturalness, on the other, women as an obscure, threatening force, with an insatiable sexual appetite. So utopia becomes either the place in which the utopist gives voice to the most unrestrained erotic aspirations or the place in which the fear of sex and women is exorcised by rigorous Eugenic practices.

The subordinate position of women in utopia could be explained by the fact that the majority of utopias of the past were written by men. But this explanation is insufficient because the few utopias written by women do not present a radically new vision compared to the male utopias. In these utopias, in fact, a patriarchal vision is replaced by a matriarchal vision in which men have been eliminated (see, for example, some utopias in which the myth of the Amazons is taken up again), but the image and the roles of women only appear to be *new* because, in reality, these women in power blindly repeat and ape male roles. On the other hand, the incapacity and impotence of these women to think independently, this need to relate to the male world in order to define themselves, is the historical consequence of the fact that power management, be it political or religious, and economic planning and scientific research were the prerogative and sphere of male domination.

Q. What is your opinion on the link between utopianism and feminism?

A. Although some scholars have defined the 20th century as a graveyard of utopian writing, from the end of the 1970s and especially in the last three

decades of the 20th century, there has been a considerable flourishing of utopian and science-fiction writing by women, especially in North America. This rebirth of utopia as a literary genre can be explained by the happy marriage between feminism and utopianism. The utopian and science-fiction genre is seen by writers both as a privileged strategy for deconstructing the patriarchal system, responsible for the exclusion and oppression of women, and as fertile ground for narrative and stylistic experimentation, searching for a female utopian language. There are, in my opinion, some specific reasons for this important link between feminism and utopianism. One of the aspects which feminism has in common with utopia is not only the desire to criticize and deconstruct the *status quo*, but also, and more importantly, the desire to present a world which is radically different from the present: that is, a world no longer structured on the rigid traditional division of sexual roles, a world capable of giving voice to 'the female territory of difference'. It is no coincidence, in fact, that feminist philosophers, such as Rosi Braidotti in her book *Nomadic Subjects* (1994), have strongly emphasized how the post-structuralist stage of feminism is characterized by a profound utopian tension and by a considerable vein of inventive creativity. Female thought, in fact, has worked to reveal the close relations between logocentrism and phallocentrism, to go beyond binary logic and affirm the importance of differences between women. Women have come up with a strong criticism of the Cartesian notion of the thinking Subject which permitted a clear distinction between body and mind, to give rise to a new concept of the body as a place of interaction between material and symbolic forces: the body as threshold, a surface area which is inscribed with many codes of power and knowledge. Female thought, therefore, is profoundly pervaded by a wide planning capacity which leads to the formulation of new conceptual schemes and, above all, to the creation of alternative political fictions, reviewing old myths to suggest new ones. This feminist project could not but find the utopian genre ideal, as it was this genre which naturalized this desire to break preset schemes and, above all, the ability to look at the present situation with foreign eyes. Women can do this, as they have been excluded, for centuries, from political power and social life. They have developed a detached point of view which allows them to see original possibilities,

unthinkable for anyone only interested in preserving domination. Women, therefore, create for themselves a condition which Simone de Beauvoir, in her seminal work, *The Second Sex,* identified as different from that of men. From this territory of difference, they develop the critical point of view which strongly animates feminist utopias and represents the opposite pole to the dominating patriarchal ideology. We can make a distinction between utopias only populated by women and separatist utopias where the female utopian community is rigorously divided from the male community, which has dystopian characteristics. I am referring to utopias such as *The Wanderground* (1978) by Sally Gearhart, *Motherlines* (1978) by Suzy McKee Charnas, *The Female Man* (1975) by Joanna Russ and *Houston, Houston do you read?* (1976) by James Tiptree. There has been much debate about these utopias, because, far from proposing alternative realities due to their extreme radicalism, they use mental formulas and frameworks which man always applies when dealing with women. I agree with the position of some scholars who emphasize the usefulness of the separatist utopia as a rhetorical strategy for eliminating patriarchal and sexist logic from society.

Female utopian writing of the last thirty years, in fact, has given voice to new utopian models which are desirable because they exalt the real values of female culture: pacifism, ecology and decentralization of power. These utopias come to represent, for an ever increasing number of women writers, the possibility of giving voice to an unexplored female universe, as they permit the representation of unusual situations as well as experimentation with new behavioral models. Utopia, as journey in time and space, could only be a splendid metaphor for this adventure in a territory not yet completely explored by the female conscience. Therefore, utopia, as a project for a new alternative reality, also becomes a metaphor for the construction of the 'new woman', a new concept of the female far away from the discriminating concept forged by patriarchal culture.

Q. Do you therefore assert that women writers have revised the concept of utopia, renewing a genre both from the formal point of view and in terms of contents?

A. The revival of utopian writing is centered on a revision of the concept of utopia and its paradigm. A static utopia of eternal and unchangeable happiness is replaced by one which is new, kinetic and 'in progress': a utopia constantly involved in self-criticism to avoid the risk of immobility and institutionalization. Tom Moylan, in his book of 1986, *Demand the Impossible*, proposes the important concept of 'critical utopia', which does away with the Manichean division between the source society (the one to be deconstructed) and the point of arrival (the perfect utopia). There is a higher level of conflict between the source society and the new utopian society, because not only do the writers emphasize the process of social change which leads to utopia, but also because there is a constant desire to debate the utopian society itself.

The critical utopias written by women not only criticize, unmask and investigate the imperfections of present-day society, but also those of the alternative society, of the utopia itself, which is not in the least immune from errors, problems and failures. In the 'critical utopia' the attitude of the inhabitants of the utopia has also changed; they are no longer passive followers of orders, but individuals who are actively involved in the creation of possible alternatives. The inhabitants of the utopia force themselves to explore human potential and revolutionary strategies and tactics to confront and change an unsatisfying reality. Utopia, then, is no longer static and is no longer a system which has been planned one time for all, but a continuous battle to achieve a better world. This new concept of utopia which is open and problematic inevitably leads to a lucid revision of the utopian paradigm whose rules appear to be constrictive and limiting.

Q. Can you briefly illustrate how women writers have made the concept of "critical utopia" their own?

A. I will use, as a point of reference, the work of a great science-fiction writer, Ursula Le Guin, who, for some time, has been questioning the great heuristic capacities of the utopian and science-fiction genre. For this important and profound critical revision, she makes use of the vast patrimony involving several

cultures: European, American, Indian and Oriental. This cultural syncretism seems to be self-evident in her essay of 1982 with the emblematic title “A Non-Euclidean View of California”, where she defines her utopia as yin, that is, anarchic, pacifist, feminist and ecological, as opposed to the male utopia characterized by the ideas of control, absolute perfection, linearity and the logic of language. Le Guin's utopia does not want to be European, Euclidean or male. Le Guin creates a dialectic dialogue with the Western utopian tradition dominated by a force which wants to control every aspect of reality and, above all, emphasizes the dominating and imperialistic vein which underscores much utopian and science-fiction literature. The utopist who theorizes the future utopian location is dominated by a conquering ‘European’ spirit and by the Euclidean presumption of dictating one’s own laws and of dominating the future from the present. In the Western utopia, there is this blind faith in reason, the single and uncontestable instrument for definitively solving the problems of humanity. This type of conception does not consider that human experience is not only multiple, but that it acquires a particular nature in every single individual. Le Guin, however, does not categorically reject reason; she rejects, in the name of individual liberty, ‘the happiness at all costs’ desired in the classics of Western tradition: a Euro-centric utopia in which the other worlds only exist so that they can be conquered and exploited without any respect for those who already live there. For Le Guin, on the other hand, it is fundamental to think of the future and of utopia as something which does not belong to us because someone else already lives there. Le Guin's utopia, however, is never, unlike many feminist utopias, a separatist utopia, because it is inspired by Taoist philosophy which is based on the balancing of opposites.

The need to review the traditional language of utopia is seen in Le Guin's narrative in the importance which she attributes to the active, not passive, role of the reader of her novels: the narrative strategies which Le Guin invents are aimed at arousing, in the reader, a curiosity for exploring alternative worlds. All of Le Guin's work is characterized by a continuous experimentation: from her first volume *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), where she deals with the fascinating theme of androgyny, to *The Dispossessed* (1974) which contains a vision of an ideal society based on anarchic ideology, to *The Word for World is*

Forest (1972) and *The Eye of the Heron* (1978) in which utopia and dystopia coexist, to arrive at *Always Coming Home* (1985), her most subversive and feminist utopian text. These works can be interpreted as consecutive stages to arrive at a revision of the very concept of utopia and as attempts to find the most suitable formula for containing and driving her utopian project which always has anarchic, pacifist and feminist values.

Q. Would you point out other differences in the way scholars tackle the subject of utopia from the 80s up to now?

A. Utopia is distinguished by intertextuality, i.e. it implies and in its turn enriches a net of intersections and cross-references both on a formal and on a substantial level. It presupposes the knowledge, on the part of the writer and the reader, of the thematic and structural features that mark it and that are represented, re-elaborated, certainly, and re-contextualized, in different texts, conceived in different historical contexts. Utopia, furthermore, is a polysemic object, by its very nature it lends itself to be analysed by means of different critical methods, and it is transversal, that is, it crosses many cultural areas and historical periods. Hypertextuality, being polysemic and transversal, gives utopia a complexity that opens wide research prospects. I would say then that studying utopia is propitious, especially now in a planetary society, because we are pursuing a field of research that is still open.

Nevertheless, I would like to stress that in the last years utopian studies and certainly research carried out by the Bologna Centre have primarily followed two paths. The first is focused on strictly theoretic and methodological issues: the definition of 'utopia', 'anti-utopia' and 'dystopia', in order to overcome the dichotomy, that in the last years had generated discussion, between the straightforward, separated representation of the best and worst of possible worlds. With the term 'critical utopia' we intend to refer to the description of an *otherplace, a nowhere* carried out by means of a process of deconstruction and reconstruction, reconciled in an *other* world, no longer strictly codified, but open to the subject's negotiations. Together, the critical analysis and the planning constitute the most lively character of the utopian

speculation. The second path, closely linked to the first, implies a re-reading of the huge utopian corpus, aimed at highlighting and discussing the most problematic, contradictory and perturbing aspects of the planned societies, and the unresolved issues of the dogmatic and rigid mentality of utopian thinkers.

Q. Having in mind your previous and current European research projects, do you think there are national and specific characteristics of utopianism according to each country and age?

A. Linked to the raising of problems emerging in utopia, to the search for its strengths and its weaknesses, to the individuation of specific traits and stereotypes, there is the investigation of the universal or the specific nature of utopias and of the utopian texts written in different geographical historical contexts. These matters generated a lively debate amongst scholars participating in a congress organized by the Centre in 2000. The papers, collected in *Utopianism / Literary Utopias and National Cultural Identities: A Comparative Perspective* (2001), edited by Paola Spinozzi, show extremely well how, by mapping utopias and dystopias in Europe, every utopian text, in representing an *otherplace*, confronts the cultural tradition and the national history of the country towards which the author expresses his/her sense of belonging.

The investigation of utopia in relation to cultural and national identity appeared so complex and stimulating that after the Conference me and my colleague Raymond Trousson conceived the idea of a *Histoire transnationale de l'utopie littéraire et de l'utopisme*, which is currently being published in French by the Parisian publishing house Champion. The work, collecting the contributions of 95 scholars from all over the world, investigates different national utopian traditions, both European and extra-European. I would like to stress that the aim was not to describe the history of utopia as a literary genre, but rather pinpoint which were the emerging and qualifying utopias, in each nation at a specific historical period, that is, which were the utopian texts which enjoyed a strong reception at a European level. The investigation was extended to literary utopias, to utopianism, in the sense of the emerging of the utopian

thought in political and religious movements, in utopian communities, in treatises on social and urban planning and on education.

Q. Can you recall some of the intellectuals whose reflections on utopia are still challenging? How important is interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity to the Centre on Utopia?

A. Amongst the intellectuals who have examined and re-interpreted utopian thought in the first decades of the twentieth century Martin Buber, the author of *Ich und Du* (1923) and *Pfade in Utopie* (1950), Karl Mannheim and his *Ideologie und Utopie* (1929), Ernst Bloch for *Geist der Utopie* (1923) and *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (1951), Walter Benjamin and his theses *Über den Begriff der Geschichte* (1939) must be remembered. After the second world war Marcuse in *Das Ende der Utopie* (1967), already mentioned at the beginning of this interview, and Th. K. Adorno in *Negative Dialektik* (1966) have both rethought utopia.

I would also like to recollect the significant contribution of theorists of architecture and urbanists, amongst whom Lewis Mumford, the author of founding texts such as *The Story of Utopias. Ideal Commonwealths and Social Myths* (1923) and *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects* (1961), and Françoise Choay, author of *L' urbanisme: utopies et realites: une anthologie* (1965) and *La Règle et le Modèle: sur la theorie de l'architecture et de l'urbanisme* (1980). The relation between utopia and the town hides a complicated theoretical problem. The theoretical writings of the architects that have studied the city as a field of creation, as a place for creativity and utopias that propose a 'counter-space', as the basis for a 'counter-society', reveal a double movement: on the one hand, the utopian imagination tries to grasp and make its own the language of urban planning and of architecture, on the other, urban planning joins utopia, reaches towards utopia. This tension underscores, as Françoise Choay maintains, the dialectic relationship between utopia and architecture, understood, the latter, as semiogeny, i.e. a system of signs. The edifice is comparable to articulated language and the architect, operating on volumes and spaces in the edifices,

has, at his disposal, a system of signs which he can use to express his/her vision of the world. Utopia, greedy for projects, proposes static spatial models, uncorrupted by time; utopia prospects static towns in which change is impossible. In architecture, considered as semiogeny temporality dominates, the city appears as the result of a process. The history of utopias and that of urban planning are distinguished by continuous attempts to intermingle the utopia of towns to the town of utopia, that, despite being doomed to failure, highlight the strong bond between utopian planning and town planning.

Amongst the scholars who have actively contributed to the Centre on Utopia, I would start with the professors of Bologna University, amongst which the historian of philosophy Nicola Matteucci, French lecturers Carmelina Imbroscio and Nadia Minerva, and Italian Literature Professor Andrea Battistini. The English Literature scholar Adriana Corrado, of Istituto Universitario Suor Orsola Benincasa di Napoli, and American Literature professor Gabriella Morisco, of the Università di Urbino, have constantly adhered to the Centre's activities. Foreign members whose research has contributed significantly to the Centre's congresses and publications are Raymond Trousson, Bronislaw Baczko and Alexandre Cioranescu, history of ideas scholars; Krishan Kumar and Ruth Levitas, political thought historians; Lyman Tower Sargent and Vincent Geoghegan, Political Sciences professors; Louis Marin, semiologist; Jean-Michel Racault, French Literature scholar; Hans Ulrich Seeber and Patrick Parrinder, English Literature scholars; Fátima Vieira, expert in Cultural Studies from the University of Porto (Portugal).

Q. Are there in Italy and abroad other Centres analogous to the one you direct?

A. In Italy there is the Centro Interdipartimentale di Ricerca sull'Utopia of the University of Lecce, directed by Professor Cosimo Quarta, professor of Philosophy of History. The Centre, created in 1982 in the Philosophy department, was subsequently promoted by the Foreign Languages, Historical and Social Sciences Departments. Abroad there is the *Society for Utopian Studies*, both in the United Stated and in England. The members of our centre have been taking part in, and reporting at the European and American annual

meetings. The *Centro Interdipartimentale di Bologna* has built a fruitful and constant scientific collaboration with the *Centro Interdipartimentale di Lecce* and the *Society for Utopian Studies*, there have been many conferences and published works in which the members have dialogued and corresponded on common research themes.

Q. Would you list some of the classic texts on utopia and the critical studies the Centre has promoted the publishing of?

A. The primary and critical texts that the Centre's Scientific Committee considers relevant for publication appear in the series "Forma dell'Utopia", published by Longo, in Ravenna. The choice has been that of offering the Italian public little known utopian texts and at the same time texts that are representative of specific cultural traditions in different historical periods. Since it was England that offered the political and historical context that allowed the birth of utopia as a literary genre, which took place in 1516, with Thomas More's *Utopia*, particular attention has been reserved to Anglo-Saxon culture: *Man on the Moon* by Francis Godwin, edited by Giovanna Silvani and published in 1995, *Peter Wilkins: The Life and Adventures of an Inhabitant of Cornwall* by Robert Paltock, edited by Gabriella Morisco, translated by Silvia Castellari and published in 2002, and finally the *Fixed Period* by Anthony Trollope, edited by Vita Fortunati, translated by Lucia Gunella and published in 2004, are utopias that are deeply entrenched in Seventeenth-, Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century England. The publication of *Imperium in Imperio* by E. Sutton Griggs, edited by Maria Giulia Fabi and translated by Pierpaolo Mura, with a preface by Vita Fortunati, answers the need to introduce the public to the first Afro-American utopia, published in the late nineteenth century. The author establishes a dialogue with Edward Bellamy, the author of a fundamental text of American narrative, *Looking Backward*. Bellamy makes no mention of multiculturalism, whereas Griggs shows how an authentic process of social change cannot be disjoined from racial integration.

It is the methodological outlook that brings together the critical monographs, characterized by an interdisciplinary and comparative approach.

Scholars of different subjects question the same themes, confronting different research perspectives. Theoretical and methodological issues regarding utopia as a literary genre and utopianism are investigated in *Per una definizione dell'utopia: Metodologie e discipline a confronto* (1992), edited by Nadia Minerva. The typology of travel and the status of utopian travellers are examined in *Viaggi in utopia* (1996), edited by Raffaella Baccolini, Vita Fortunati and Nadia Minerva. The intricate relations between biography and utopia are asserted in *Vite di utopia* (2000), edited by Vita Fortunati and Paola Spinozzi. I would mention, finally, the Italian edition of Raymond Trousson's seminal text, *Viaggi in nessun luogo: Storia letteraria del pensiero utopico* (1992).

Q. Judging on the scientific production of your Centre it seems that the study of literary utopias and utopianism responds to the need to explore the history of ideas. Is there also a social function in these research activities?

A. Certainly, studying utopia at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century cannot be carried without asking what function must be assigned to it in history and society. This issue is fundamental not only when research projects are elaborated, but also if one chooses to focus University courses on the concepts of utopia and utopianism. I would like to reinforce the idea that the power of utopia lies in the capacity to speculate on the possible laterals of experience. Utopia can also be seen as the search for compensation for something that we lack and that is strenuously looked for, both in personal and in social terms. As F.E. Manuel and F.P. Manuel have stressed in *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (1979), the relation brought about by the utopian thinker/writer towards time and history is a complex and intertwined one. The utopist observes reality with a piercing eye and then distances himself, he even becomes estranged, in order to assume a critical, deconstructionist attitude towards contemporary evils and society. Utopia, and here the genealogical link to satire shows itself, presupposes a global refusal of the world: the utopist carried out a dissection that brings him to effectuate a radical cut. While the

satirical writers anatomise reality in order to show its defects, utopists can overcome the *destruens* phase by creating a project: they deconstruct reality in order to recompose it according to their *nomos*. In positive utopias one always passes from a *destruens* phase to a *costruens* one. To observe conventions and institutions from an estranged point of view means to empty them of the meanings common sense generally attributes to them. Estrangement generates a cognitive tension, because the observer, not happy with what current opinion upholds, wants to slowly discover the uncanny, odd features of a familiar object. From a state of mind, estrangement becomes not only a literary device, but also a way of delegitimizing every political, religious and social aspect of the society in which the utopist is living.

It is clear that the utopian mentality shows its limits and contradictions, especially when it wants to be applied to ethics and moral codes, when it wants to impart forbidding precepts. Utopists can be inflexible pedagogues. It is even more dangerous when the utopist, caught in a frenzy for the reforming of the world, becomes a leader and wants to correct the deviations of human nature. It is understandable, then, why, in utopian societies, the danger of totalitarianism is ever present, and why dystopian societies are overwhelmed by dictatorial and repressive regimes. Finally, the most problematic issue utopias must confront is the *reductio ad unum*, i.e. the simplification of the anthropological complexity of the human being, and the reduction of reality to just one dimension, rigidly regulated by rules that are closely linked to the geometry of relations of utopian spaces.

Q. 1989 witnessed the crisis of political regimes that had claimed to be utopias and then became dystopias. Was it a coincidence that the Centre on Utopia, which gathered Italian and foreign scholars from diverse fields of studies, was formally constituted in such a symbolic year?

A. I would like to answer by pointing out a paradox. The 20th century, that destroyed the concept of utopia, also gave impulse to the renaissance of studies on utopia as a literary genre and on utopianism. There is no doubt that the experiment brought about by real socialism has solicited rigorous reflections

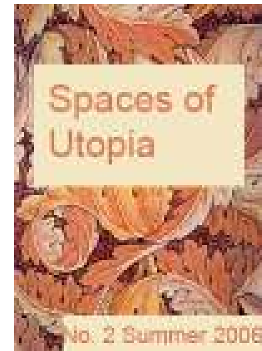
on the possibility of realizing a utopian society and on the boundaries between communitarism, communism and totalitarian regime. And when the conferences held by the communist thinker Herbert Marcuse at the Freie Universität Berlin between July 3rd and 10th 1967 were published under the title *Das Ende der Utopie*, intellectuals were pushed into a re-conceptualisation of Utopia, asking themselves when and how the speculative faculty that distinguishes the utopian mentality might be made to interact with the historical dimension. During the 60s and 70s contestation to talk about utopia acquired a strong political connotation, to support a utopian vision meant articulating dissension against the ruling classes. Questioning the reasons for which a utopian project for the transformation of society was not feasible meant a revision of the Marxist lesson, a debate on the notion of historical materialism, in a nutshell, it meant assuming a critical attitude towards Marxist orthodox thought.

The birth of the Centre on Utopia takes place in a very significant year for the history of Europe, but the motivations are much more profound. To constitute a research group on Utopia involving scholars from different branches of learning meant expressing a clear will to rethink both the capacity for speculation and abstraction that utopia implies, and its historical declensions and its ideological and political implications. And even more ambitious was, and still is, the will to understand if utopia can be adopted as a method, i.e. as a tool for the investigation of reality, as a hermeneutic method. In this perspective, I think that to investigate utopia and anti-utopia in these years has meant attributing an important value to the heuristic path that every utopian thinker, although differently oriented, traces.

From Mindscapes to Landscapes:

J.G. Ballard's Self-sought Utopia in *Concrete Island*

Pere Gallardo-Torrano
Universitat Rovira i Virgili, Tarragona, Spain



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Geography has always been a faithful ally of utopian narratives. The need for an isolated place which allowed aseptic experiments in social organization always found ample room for development in the estrangement provided by unexpected hidden valleys, unexplored tropical forests, remote islands absent from maps and, most especially in the twentieth century, alien ecologies on far-off planets.

In 1962, J.G. Ballard wrote a guest editorial for *New World Science Fiction* in which he somehow lamented the disastrous [*sic*] influence H.G. Wells had had on the development of the science fiction genre because

> Not only did he provide it with the repertory of ideas that have virtually monopolised the medium for the last fifty years, but he established the conventions of its style and form, with its simple plots, journalistic narrative, and standard range of situation and character. (Ballard 1962: 117)

As a conclusion to his argument he suggested that a return was required to less scientific but more fictional literary landscapes because, as he saw it, "the biggest developments of the immediate future will take place, not on the Moon or Mars, but on Earth, and it is *inner* space, not outer, that needs to be explored". And he concluded: "The only truly alien planet is Earth" (*ibidem*). This statement, which in time has become a defining trait of much of his short and extended fiction, outlines what Peter Brigg has called Ballard's "Urban

Disaster Trilogy" (Brigg 1985), a term which would include his novels *Crash* (1973), *Concrete Island* (1974) and *High Rise* (1975).

It is precisely Ballard's concept of inner space, understood as a redefinition of the science-fictional scenario, which allows for new insights into the human mind and its interfaces with society. This, together with his reassessment of the idea of cosmic solitude present in most of his work, which often borders on existentialism, encourages a reading of *Concrete Island* from a utopian perspective. What follows is thus an attempt to understand the utopian and dystopian elements of Ballard's novel, be they internal or external, and the ways in which they may relate to more conventional interpretations of the utopian *locus*.

For Gregory Stephenson, "[l]ike those of the surrealists, Ballard's landscapes are mindscapes, externalizations of inner, psychic states possessing precisely that quality which the author has ascribed to the imagery of pictorial surrealism, the attribute of representing an 'iconography of inner space'" (Stephenson 1991: 164).

The working hypothesis is that, as Ballard's novel seems to suggest, there is no real difference between inner and outer territories when it comes to creating a utopian landscape. As a matter of fact, as is the case with *Concrete Island*, both spaces tend to overlap.

Concrete Island deals with a brief period in Robert Maitland's life. Maitland is a 35-year-old successful architect whose car has a blow-out as he is driving at more than 70 m.p.h. As a consequence, the car jumps an embankment and he is thrown into an enclosed plot of land, a traffic island created by the convergence of three motorways above. Miraculously alive, despite the write-off condition of his car, he manages to climb the slope of the as yet unlandscaped traffic island and tries to have someone stop and help him. Unfortunately, the kind of thoroughfare, the speed of the vehicles at that

spot, the impossibility to stop without endangering one's own life and the apparent disinterest of most drivers prevent his rescue. Eventually, when he gathers strength and courage to cross the motorway in order to reach an emergency call-box, he is hit by a wooden trestle thrown at him by an unexpected car. Seriously injured and exhausted by the effort, he falls again onto the island. Several unsuccessful attempts confirm that getting out will not be an easy job. In the end, he falls asleep only to wake up to a new reality, which conforms the remaining ninety percent of the novel.

The similarities in plot between *Concrete Island* and *Robinson Crusoe* are so evident that the comparison between the two texts comes almost automatically. For instance, the publisher on the Farrar, Straus and Giroux edition (1974) uses Crusoe as a cultural referent on the book cover. Peter Brigg (1985), David Punter (1985) and Roger Luckhurst (1997) do not fail to recognise the connections between the two works; and even the main character, Maitland, establishes an intertextual link between his present condition and that of Defoe's hero when he says: "Maitland, poor man, you're marooned here like Crusoe — If you don't look out you'll be beached here for ever…" (Ballard 1998: 32).

As the novel progresses, Maitland's stay on the island goes through several stages which, when observed in detail, very much overlap with Crusoe's period spent in isolation, the only difference being the length of the stay, which in Maitland's case is reduced to some days. Roughly speaking, Crusoe's story could be divided into five stages which are neither mutually exclusive nor necessarily consecutive. Stage one would correspond to the period immediately after his arrival on the island (though it spans over the years) and it is characterized by his expressed or implicit conviction that sooner or later he will be rescued or will sail away from the island. Stage two is best represented by the period he devotes to exploring the island and salvage as much as he can

from the shipwreck flotsam. Stage three is outlined by the acceptance that he may remain on the island indefinitely and features and increasing concern with security. In stage four the island has become his home and is regarded as a property, a sense which is distorted by the sudden intrusion of new characters whose relation with the place was prior to his arrival. Finally, stage five marks the conclusion of the story with Crusoe physically – though not psychologically – leaving the island for a receptive society which has even respected his fortune.

The structure of the plot in *Concrete Island* suggests a very similar division. Much like in Defoe's novel, the nexus between the various stages is provided by Maitland's emotional need to control (or possess) the island. Between his early intention "to fix in his mind this place of wild grass and abandoned cars where he had very nearly lost his life" (Ballard 1998: 11), when he was convinced his rescue was a matter of minutes, and his book-closing explanation that "he felt no real need to leave the island, and this alone confirmed that he had established his dominion over it" (*idem*, 176), his personality undergoes an evolution which can only be understood if the conflict of self-acceptance remains central.

If, on the one hand, for Crusoe the idea of control and possession is clearly defined by capitalism, empire and religion, in the case of Maitland his version of the control/possession idea is delimited by the need to come to terms with himself. Therefore, despite all the opportunities to escape offered by circumstance, he decides to stay on the island waiting for an ambiguous and idealised moment that may never occur.

Maitland's predicament develops in an existential territory grotesquely familiar, the outcome of corrupting Crusoe's coordinates. The representation of that scenario, sketched by coarse references to capitalism or by revealing examples of the power of money, adds to the notion that regardless of their

common starting point, Crusoe's and Maitland's attitudes and behaviour while on their respective islands respond to differing strategies in life. In the case of Crusoe, because his stay on the island is regarded merely as an accident, one more stage in his progress as a good Christian, an honourable English subject and a modern *homo economicus* (Watt 1957). In the case of Maitland, because his accident and subsequent stay on the island trigger off an emotional chain reaction clearly linked to a fragile psychological condition prior to the accident. In his analysis of *Robinson Crusoe* from a Calvinist point of view, Stuart Sim maintains that "Defoe's virtue lies in his attempt to encompass the contradictions of his own belief system: to construct a character who is simultaneously a free agent (free to sin or to do good) and a pawn in a universal game (predetermined to be elected or reprobated as the case may be)" (Sim 1995: 169).

In turn, it may be said of Ballard's novel that this new Crusoe is a free agent insofar as he is given chances to escape. Paradoxically, his escape would only imply a return to an alienating reality which somehow was instrumental in his accident:

> Today, speeding along the motorway when he was already tired after a three-day conference, preoccupied by the slight duplicity involved in seeing his wife soon after a week spent with Helen Fairfax, he had almost wilfully devised the crash, perhaps as some bizarre kind of rationalization. (Ballard 1998: 9)

Throughout the story the periodical references to his wife Catherine and his lover Helen, the broken promise to collect his eight-year-old son from school, the aloofness of his daily work, and some other instances suggest that the material comfort of his life is regularly intruded by anxiety and a deep sense of guilt. A sense of guilt that can only be exorcised by deserting the external world and focussing on his isolate and desolate inner space.

The reasons why Maitland's personality, otherwise described as "cautious and clear-minded" (*ibidem*) may have been framing an alibi to vanish

from the real world are to be found in a state of apparent satisfaction with his social status quo which, nevertheless, harbours a profound individual dissatisfaction. It is in this context that the accident becomes a sought-for solution and the island emerges as a utopian landscape in the classic sense: a chance to start afresh. The utopian background provided by the island, though, responds to a circumstantial need and is not to be taken as a final stage. It is a sort of stop-over for Maitland to come to terms with himself and the world around him. In other words, a conscious self-marginalization until the alienating structures of the external world – represented by the three motorways above him – allow him to re-enter his social niche. At least, this is what he seems to wish, given his recurrent analyses of his plight as something temporary. The island cannot thus be understood as a closed system offering a new social organization which grants individual happiness. It is merely a parallel reality destined to converge with the external world at a more favourable vertex. This interpretation may be said to question the utopian quality of the island, as the notion of utopia as a perfect place seems to belong to Maitland's original world, to which he wishes to return.

During his bouts of fever Maitland often mentions his mother, his wife Catherine and his lover Helen. They are the three corners of a defective emotional triangle marked by dissatisfaction. It is precisely the recurrence of female images what endows the island, this "desolate pubic triangle" (Punter 1985), with a new role and which fosters an interpretation of the text closer to psychoanalysis.

To Maitland's great surprise, the island is inhabited by two weird characters: Jane, a young, mentally unstable prostitute who abandoned a secure and conventional life after an unwanted pregnancy, and Proctor, a former circus acrobat, now a grotesque male figure, mentally handicapped after

an accident. Both of them form yet another triangle which Maitland will have to face in order to disentangle his own life.

One of the most fascinating and controversial tenets in psychoanalysis is the so-called transference process by which the patients transfer onto their psychoanalysts parts (or the whole) of the philias and/or phobias which make up their mental disorder. Psychoanalysts become then indirect participants in their patients' sufferings, who can thus estrange themselves from their own selves and analyze the nature of their conflict.

As the text displays more remarks which reveal Maitland's unhappy condition before the accident, his early attempts to leave the island become less and less convincing. What at first could be understood as the challenging arrogance of a rich, famous architect who thinks is in control of his life proves to be the flickering flame of a thin personality increasingly torn by guilt and emptiness. The three motorways which delimit the boundaries of the new territory gradually become psychological contours: namely, Maitland's mother, Catherine and Helen, and unlike the physical space of the island, they grow more and more blurred, just like his relationships with each of these women.

In the first place, there is Maitland's mother, who appears in the text as a painful recollection of childhood regrets. She is the one who deserted him when he was crying to go to another room to take care of his younger sister. Secondly, there is his lover Helen Fairfax. Their affair is publicly known: even his wife knows. Actually the chances of being rescued from the island are very limited as both lover and wife are bound to understand his absence as part of the alternative emotional game he plays regularly. Finally, his wife Catherine, who resurfaces in the text in moments of psychological crisis, as if to confirm that the great conflict points at her and the other two women were mere Freudian sidekicks in this charade. Whereas Maitland's mother just exists as part of his emotional backdrop, and Helen is only a faint rival to his wife,

Catherine is alternatively and literally used and abused by Maitland. At times he shouts her name at the passing cars (Ballard 1998: 21). Other times he thinks that “the sound of his wife’s name moved through the silent grass” (*idem*, 23). Sometimes he whispers her name “well aware that in some obscure way he was blaming her for his plight, for the pain of the injured leg, and for the cold night air that lay over his body like a damp shroud” (*idem*, 25). Other times he feels “he should have thanked her for marooning him here” (*idem*, 27). All three emotional referents eventually narrow down to create a territory he calls “the island”.

Originally meant to be a geographical reference, the island soon acquires a psychological dimension, becomes a personified element in the story, and begins to act as Maitland’s interlocutor. That is how the island becomes involved in the process of psychoanalytical transference mentioned before. Ever since the moment of the accident, Maitland sees his body and conscience as separate elements. For instance, the surface of his car renders “a distorted reflection of himself” (*idem*, 13). His injured leg seems to belong to an alternative other, and so we read that “he carried his right leg in both hands like a joint of meat” (*idem*, 30). On one occasion he admits to himself that “[he was] behaving in a vaguely eccentric way, as if he had forgotten who he was. Parts of his mind seemed to be detaching themselves from the centre of his consciousness” (*idem*, 63). And last but not least, in the course his monologues he often addresses himself as “Maitland”. All in all, a clear picture that he is prepared to trust, love and hate the island much like a psychoanalyst.

In turn, the island offers both the physical milieu and the psychological features to act as mediator between his external self, that is, his life before the accident, and his present situation. From a physical point of view the island is an enclosure, seemingly with no way out but the steep embankments which delimit its borders. Most of the island is covered with waist-high grass,

something which far from threatening Maitland's injured body, "rustled excitedly, parting in circular waves, beckoning him into its spirals" (*idem*, 68). But the grass is not only alluring. It is also firm and comforting. Maitland is fascinated by "the reassuring voice of this immense green creature eager to protect and guide him" (*ibidem*). The island is actually the result of building the motorways on a plot of land which had already been there before World War II. Maitland's car is not the only one. There are other car wrecks which possibly conceal secrets Maitland is not interested in, too involved in his own survival. There is neither food nor water, though by the time Maitland begins to worry about these two elements, the problem has been sorted out as he discovers he is not alone.

From a psychological point of view, the island is harsh but sympathetic, reassuring though metaphysically impossible. The island will help, but only those who want to help themselves. Consequently, the island features two elements which require the will to join (or to oppose) them, namely Jane and Proctor. The fact that neither of these characters is presented as psychologically stable seems to suggest that the island is merely opposing two such characters to Maitland so that he can psychoanalyze himself and decide what is wrong with him. On the one hand, a girl full of guilt for something which happened in the past and with a strong resentment against society and successful people like Maitland. On the other hand, a poor, ageing, deformed acrobat who refuses to leave the security of the enclosure lest he should be humiliated again in life. Both Jane and Proctor have reached a tacit agreement which allows them to lead a life of mutual support as regards the basics.

This is the scenario Maitland has to accept and possibly overcome if he is ever to go back to his own world. Both Jane and Proctor help Maitland in their own way, which is often vindictive, humiliating and violent. For much of the time Maitland adopts a self-pitying attitude, and insists on being helped according to his expectations. During this period he is afraid of Proctor, whose strength and

unpredictability might end with his life at any moment. But he is also abused by resentful Jane, who can torture him physically (i.e. by giving him glycol to drink instead of water) and psychologically (i.e. by telling him repeatedly that she has called for help).

By the fourth day, Maitland's pain has receded in general and consists basically of a permanent headache. By then he begins to analyze his plight and decides to use some of his former life's skills to oppose these two freaks. As he cannot physically compete with either of them, he decides to use his cunning to humiliate them. And so he develops a sadomasochistic relationship with Proctor, whom he half-bribes with the wine he had in his car and with some money, and whom he submits by urinating on him (precisely what a police officer had done some time before). In the case of Jane, their relationship also has sadomasochistic undertones. With her, though, he does not use force but psychological torture. Maitland manages to redirect all her hate and resentment against her past life and so has her partially at his mercy. It is precisely this change of scenario which marks the turning point of Maitland's condition. The victim turns his self-pity into oppressing violence. Some days later, a repair vehicle happens to stop by. Proctor sees it but instead of calling for help he starts playing with the ropes much like he used to do on his trapeze. Eventually, Proctor gets himself killed as the driver accelerates and his body thuds against a pillar. Jane then decides to leave the island as she suspects the police will soon be around.

But the process of transference is not complete yet and so Maitland cannot leave the island. In a moment of mutual trust the girl offers to run for help. This time, though, Maitland, in full command of the circumstances, rejects her sincere proposal: "Jane, don't call for help. I'll leave the island, but I'll do it in my own time" (*idem*, 174). This remark serves as a turning point in Maitland's transference process. From his standpoint he watches the girl climb the

embankment of the feeder road, and to his great surprise “he realized that there was no secret pathway – she walked straight up the slope, picking her way along a succession of familiar foot-holds, the suitcase in a strong hand” (*ibidem*), which was one of his most recurrent obsessions. He then buries Proctor and begins to feel “a sense of gathering physical strength, as if unseen powers of his body had begun to discharge their long-stored energies (…) He was glad that both Proctor and the young woman had gone. Their presence had brought out unwelcome strains in his character, qualities irrelevant to the task of coming to terms with the island” (*idem*, 175). All in all, a problematic interpretation of the whole incident, as he assumes his real self is different from what he has revealed during the previous days. The remark becomes even thornier as we remember that during his feverish slumbers he even admitted: “I am the island” (*idem*, 131). By the end of the last chapter, “he lay calmly in the doorway of his pavilion, realizing that he was truly alone on the island. He would stay there until he could escape by his own efforts” (*idem*, 175). It is at this moment that the island confirms the role I assigned to it before. When Maitland admits that “in some ways the task he had set himself was meaningless. Already he felt no real need to leave the island, and this alone confirmed that he had established his dominion over it” (*idem*, 176), he is actually admitting that the transference process has been set in motion. What is not so clear, though, is whether he has obtained enough insight to face the decisions that leaving the island may entail. The final paragraph of the text could not be more ambiguous: “In a few hours it would be dusk. Maitland thought of Catherine and his son. He would be seeing them soon. When he had eaten it would be time to rest, and to plan his escape from the island” (*ibidem*). In other words: stage one in the transference process has been completed. The island has offered an oblique perspective and he has comprehended his situation. Stage two, unfortunately, still seems far away. He has learned how other people *live* on the

island, and, when necessary, *leave* the island. Maitland is willing to admit that. However, the very fact that he still wants to *escape* from the island seems to suggest that he is still a long way from his otherwise acknowledged need to come to terms with his own life.

Like a conventional psychoanalyst, the island listens, sporadically asks for more details, and then tries to portray a picture of an inner territory. Unfortunately, the island cannot offer certainties, grant happiness or do away with doubts.

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Clues to Utopia in W. H. Mallock's *The New Republic*

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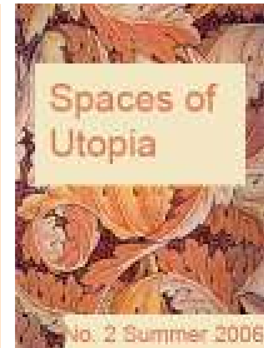

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Besides raising issues such as the role of conservative thought in relation to satire in nineteenth-century utopianism, this essay aims at a reflection on the complex topic of utopia and modernity, bearing in mind that W. H. Mallock's *The New Republic* contributes to oppose and criticize the modernization process in Victorian culture and society. I think the text can primarily be examined as a literary expression of a general feeling of discontent in Victorian society in spite of all its progress – progress, a concept that in England had come to possess "a curiously ambiguous emotive power" (Wiener 1992: 5).

The New Republic was first published in *Belgravia: An Illustrated London Magazine* between June and December 1876, and in two-volume book form in 1877. The work remained anonymous until the following year, when a New Edition in one volume was issued and the identity of the author was disclosed as being the 28-year-old William Hurrell Mallock, a graduate of Balliol College, Oxford.

In 1871 he had been awarded the Newdigate Prize for a rather bad poem on "The Isthmus of the Suez Canal", and his wit had already won him a reputation when he privately printed at Oxford, in 1872, *Everyman His Own Poet, or The Inspired Singer's Recipe Book*, a kind of manual on how to make

poems in the manner of well-known contemporaries. Tennyson, Browning, Swinburne, Morris and Arnold were among his chosen masters.

He must have enjoyed the experiment because he repeated this satirical methodology in his first novel. In fact, *The New Republic* achieved great popularity as a satire on late-Victorian intellectual life, being directed at specific issues, ideas, dogmas, and at the people who held them. The title was obviously inspired by Plato's *Republic*, a book which described "the meeting of a party of friends, who fell [to] discussing high topics" (Mallock 1975: 134), and Mallock's text intended to "hit upon the notion of constructing an ideal perfect state, in which of course justice would be lurking somewhere" (*idem*, 135).

It was considered a *roman-à-clef* in which some eminent Victorians were thinly disguised and therefore quickly recognized by the reader. Walter Pater, John Ruskin, Matthew Arnold and Thomas Henry Huxley were the personalities behind the characters 'Mr. Rose', 'Mr. Herbert', 'Mr. Luke' and 'Mr. Storks', respectively. The author also paid a reverse tribute to Benjamin Jowett, who appeared as 'Dr. Jenkinson'. In fact, since 1870, when Mallock became a student and Jowett was elected the Master of Balliol College and "the most famous university don of Victoria's reign, a national figure" (Ellis 1997: 283), they shared a strong dislike of each other. As for the "lovely" (Mallock 1975: 17) Mrs. Sinclair, she was based on Violet Fane, to whom the text was dedicated. She was a poetess and novelist of little ability but well known at the time for her fashionable lifestyle, and she was certainly more important to Mallock than she can be to us now.

Mallock himself identified the originals of many of his characters (see Davis 2004), but not all of them can be clearly recognized. This has opened the path to various suggestions (Lucas 1975: 16-29). Some characters may be the product of his imagination, others merely private individuals. On the one hand, Lord Allen is an idealized portrait of the English aristocrat. On the

other, it is not possible to say if the writer had anyone particularly in mind when he created Lady Ambrose, Lady Violet Gresham or Miss Prattle, for instance.

The New Republic; Or, Culture, Faith, and Philosophy in an English Country House brings together a group of people who meet for a weekend at a villa by the sea, trying to figure out the purpose of life. The book also needs to be set in the context of Britain in the 1870s and 1880s, a time of skepticism and unbelief. According to Mallock, "one can hear faith decaying" (*apud* Hoare 2005: 20), and his pessimism is visibly incorporated in the text when his Oxford friend, W. M. Hardinge, alias 'Mr. Leslie', addresses the assembled company: "I certainly think that our age in some ways could not possibly be worse. Nobody knows what to believe, and most people believe nothing" (Mallock 1975: 50). Dr. Jenkinson, however, tries to put the question in context:

> The age we live in is an age of change. And in all such ages there must be many things that, if we let them, will pain and puzzle us. But we mustn't let them. There have been many ages of change before our time, and there are sure to be many after it. Our age is not peculiar. (*idem*, 54)

In this excerpt from the text they were talking primarily about the decline in religion, but their remarks can be applied to the general spirit of the age, a time when "Culture replaced Christianity as the main agency responsible for keeping Anarchy at bay" (Fraser 1986: 5). Both the sense of spiritual, moral, social and political change and the fact that the foundations of the most serious convictions had been shattered were disturbing enough. The worst thing, though, was that the disintegration of opinion was so rapid that both wise and foolish men were equally ignorant when the close of the century dawned upon them. Mr. Allen made a categorical statement: "I know quite well how society is falling to pieces, and how all our notions of duty are becoming confused or lost" (Mallock 1975:127).

In fact, what was new about the mood of the last quarter of the century was not so much the perception of change, to which the Victorians had become accustomed, but the sense of "drifting on the current rather than controlling it", as Robin Gilmour puts it (Gilmour 1986: 149). Through Mr. Laurence, the characters realize they had been after all "talking a good deal about the signs of the times" (Mallock 1975: 233).

This reminds the reader of the debate on the 'Condition of England' question, which had lain dormant to some extent since the 1840s, and which had surfaced again in the 1880s with a new urgency as the mid-Victorian consensus started to fracture. Writers felt this to be a time of crisis:

> There was a widespread awareness that the social and intellectual problems inherited from the previous generation had not been solved, were perhaps insoluble, and had in any case to be confronted without the ethical idealism and moral energy available to their fathers. (Gilmour 1986: 151)

The cultural fragmentation of the period is reflected in its fiction, which displays a wide variety of form and subject-matter (see James 2006 and Kucich 2001). As the embodiment of attractive alternatives to Victorian England, some writings around the time of *The New Republic* work within the frame of Utopian fiction. Samuel Butler's *Erewhon*, published in 1872, is a satire, like *Gulliver's Travels*, and is one of the most unusual observations of what was wrong with Victorian society. *News from Nowhere* by William Morris (1891) is a utopia, a "compensatory dream" where society is as perfect as it can be (Pollard 1993: 455).

In the tradition of Plato's dialogues, the building of a new republic in Mallock's text is the product of an exchange of ideas. It is not an account of a fictional voyage to an imaginary country, as in More's *Utopia*, nor a dream where the main character plays the role of a time traveller to a perfect society which resulted from a socialist revolution, as in Morris's *News from Nowhere*. Neither is it a description of a world in which the ideas and customs of the

traveller's own society are inverted, as in Butler's *Erewhon*, although Mallock's text certainly shares a good sense of humour with it.

In his work on English fiction of the Victorian period, Michael Wheeler reminds the reader that "Morris's *News from Nowhere* also satirizes nineteenth-century society and its fiction, but from the quite different perspective of a perfect country of the future" (Wheeler 1990: 164). It should also be kept in mind that:

> Late Victorian romance is about extremes, presenting (…) "ideal existence" rather than the "facts of life", and sharp contrasts between black and white rather than shades of grey. (…) Utopian fiction of the late Victorian period (…) conveys a social or political argument by means of contrasts between the real world and an impossible "nowhere". (*idem*, 163)

The New Republic seems to transmit what Chris Coates has termed "a 'utopian tendency' to human nature, an innate drive to make the world a better place" (Coates 2001: 304). Over dinner, on a Saturday evening near the end of July, the host, Otho Laurence, says to his guests they should have a menu for the conversation, for he has always found it absurd "to be so particular as to the order of what we eat, and to have no order at all in what we talk about" (Mallock 1975: 9). They decide to begin the discussion with the topic 'The Aim of Life', followed by 'Town and Country', 'Society', 'Art and Literature', 'Love and Money', 'Riches and Civilisation', 'The Present', and lastly 'The Future'.

Different points of view are developed as the characters present arguments concerning the aim of life as being progress, life itself, or culture. Concrete references to utopia begin in Book II, chapter I, in the long sermon delivered to the congregation by Dr. Jenkinson on Sunday morning service:

> Any Utopia we might imagine would, if it were a thinkable one, be only our own age in a masquerading dress. For we cannot escape from our age, or add, except in a very small degree, anything that is really new to it. Nor need we wish to do so. Our age is for us the best age possible. We are its children, and it is our only true parent. But though we cannot alter our time at a stroke, so to speak, no, not even in imagination, we can all of us help to do so little by little, if we do cheerfully the duties that are set before us. (*idem*, 118)

Needless to say some of the listeners, mainly Mrs. Sinclair, Mr. Herbert, Mr. Leslie and even Mr. Stockton, strongly disagree with him on this doctrine that the world could not be better than it already is. Mr. Luke seems to reconcile both opinions:

> It is indeed the very essence of the cultured classes to be beyond their time (…). Unfortunately, (…) the dense ignorance of the world at large hampers and hinders such men as these, so that all that their teaching and their insight can do, is only to suggest a Utopia in the future, instead of leading to any reality in the present. (*idem*, 127-28)

However, after an increasingly heated exchange of opinions on the subject of progress, Mr. Herbert seems to deliberately defy Mr. Storks by putting forward a shocking standpoint: "The only hope for the present age lies in the possibility of some individual wiser than the rest getting the necessary power, and in the most arbitrary way possible putting a stop to this progress" (*idem*, 132). For the first time in the debate, the intervention of the working class is made necessary:

> I would collect an army of strong, serviceable, honest workmen, and send them to blow up Manchester, and Birmingham, and Liverpool, and Leeds, and Wolverhampton (…). I would destroy every railway, and nearly every steam-engine; and I would do a number of other things of a like sort, by way of preparing the ground for a better state of society. Indeed, so far am I from believing that an entirely different and better state of society is unthinkable, that I believe it to be not impracticable. (*idem*, 133-34)

Moreover, Mr. Herbert says he is actually founding a community – a Utopia, in fact – where he trusted the principles of order and justice might be realized. Any enlightened 19th century reader would of course recognize this initiative as corresponding to Ruskin's Guild of St George.

The "notions of life as it ought to be in a new Republic" (*idem*, 137) are specifically dealt with in the middle of the book (see Book II, chapters II and III). From the beginning, however, readers cannot avoid smiling at the whole idea of a comfortably settled, opulent group of people who want to construct a

utopia in one single beautiful afternoon. Furthermore, readers can hardly help themselves from laughing when they find out that the group realizes there is little prospect of achieving its goal because everyone has a different proposal for the imagined new Republic, and the way the characters find to solve the problem is for them to adopt a different approach to their discussion. Therefore, instead of thinking about the essence of a good society, they concentrate on getting rid of what is evil before introducing what is good. For the reader, this is certainly an original method of constructing a utopia.

Even then, the picture becomes too eclectic. For Mr. Laurence, the special qualities which make a perfect society are wit, knowledge, experience, and humour. Lady Ambrose fears the new society will be too bookish. Mr. Allen says: "What I should want in a Utopia would be something definite for the people to do, each in his own walk of life" (*idem*, 211). Mr. Herbert wants to hear more about the practical manifestations of happiness in the new Republic, and Dr. Jenkinson thinks they seemed "to have forgotten trade and business altogether" (*idem*, 280).

It is possible, though, to point out two specific suggestions for a utopian city. Mr. Rose would remove London to some kindlier site – for instance, to the south-west and to the sea-coast, "where the waves are blue, and where the air is calm and fine" (*idem*, 266). London could then be born anew, a dream which they could "make a reality, would circumstances only permit of it" (*idem*, 268).

For his part, Mr. Herbert is concerned, among other things, with the sanitary disposal of the dead in the city. He would have corpses turned into gas, which could be collected in small separate gasometers. The antithesis between physical and spiritual interpretations of death were dividing the Victorians, but Herbert says to his audience that if a dead friend's corpse turned into a gas-flame and disappeared before one's eyes, it would not matter whether this happened because "as your hearts would suggest to you,

it went to the Father, or (…) as your men of science would assert to you, it went simply – out" (*idem*, 350). This is a part which Michael Wheeler, in *Heaven, Hell, and the Victorians*, considers an "example of a grimly satiric treatment of the Victorian way of death" (Wheeler 1994: 226-27), adding this to the fact that "black humour can be therapeutic" (*idem*, 227).

Notions of progress and modern society are thus questioned in the fictitious dialogue written by Mallock, who is also the author of "such typical titles of the period" (Gilmour 1986: 151) as the satire *The New Paul and Virginia; or, Positivism on an Island* (1878) and the novels *Is Life Worth Living?* (1879), *A Romance of the Nineteenth Century* (1881), and *The Old Order Changes* (1886).

In later works, such as *The Limits of Pure Democracy*, published in 1917, Mallock shows clear conservative thinking, presenting political and economic arguments that could not appeal to liberals, socialists, and democrats in general. In *The New Republic*, in spite of his scepticism and implicit criticism of the British way of life in the last decades of the 19th century, he does not seem to be concerned with an explicit political commitment. Nevertheless, he expresses his preference for an oligarchy and his belief in the importance of the influence or authority of the capable few on the majority of people. Certainly his opinion would not have been very far from Miss Merton's: "I think an aristocracy, as a rule, must always be the best governors of men, for their ambitions, as a rule, are the only genuine ones" (Mallock 1975: 78).

The party he gathered in his work is representative of some sectors of 19th century British society that were concerned about the state of the world. As David Newsome remarks in *The Victorian World Picture*, "the rejection of Victorian standards tended to be confined to the upper classes and the intellectuals" (Newsome 1998: 255). Mallock uses his talent for parody and his dislike of political and religious liberalism even when he gives voice to a

futile social activism and a light-hearted class conscience: "Hardly a week passes without some new scandal", Lady Ambrose observes cheerfully in the text. "However, that sort of thing, I believe, is confined to us. The middle classes are all right – at least, one always hears so" (Mallock 1975: 126).

Further on in the text, the author uses a subtle device when he inserts a more violent criticism of the liberal middle-classes in a letter addressed by Laurence's uncle to him, and read aloud by him to the company:

> I had once hoped that the middle classes – that vast and useless body, who have neither the skill that produces their wealth, nor the taste that can enjoy it – might have proved themselves at least of some use, by preserving the traditions of a sound, respectable morality; (…) But no; they too are changed. (*idem*, 246-47)

This sense of hope and fear, interwoven with class conscience, was stressed by the Marxist historian A. L. Morton in his seminal work *The English Utopia*:

> Utopia is really the island which people thought or hoped or sometimes feared that the Britain of their day might presently become, and their thoughts were affected not only by the books they had read and the ideas with which they were familiar, but by what was going on in the real world about them, by the class they belonged to and by the part that class was playing and wanted to play in relation to other classes. (Morton 1978: 11)

As a matter of fact, it seems that, for Mallock, the essence of civilization was to be found in the aristocracy and nowhere else. Throughout the pages of *The New Republic*, the considerate, moderate, and witty Laurence, Leslie and Lord Allen stand for all that Mallock most admired in society, and they are shown in stark contrast to the arrogant, dogmatic, and humourless men of science that stand as a symbol of the modern interpretation of the universe.

Their discussion of an ideal Republic is used to formulate a number of brilliant parodies, and the book is useful as a document concerning the respect and relative disrespect with which Mallock treats his figures. Mr.

Herbert, i.e. Ruskin, for instance, is shown as rather theatrical, but is still evidently respected. According to Mr. Laurence, and as an echo of Mallock's own opinion, he was "almost the only man of these days for whom I feel a real reverence" (Mallock 1975: 16). In fact, his has been considered "the only portrait in that book which is not a caricature" (Armytage 1961: 289).

In the end only Mr. Herbert is to be trusted as the true voice of wisdom: "There can be no civilisation without order, and there can be no order without subordination" (Mallock 1975: 350). In his long last speech (*idem*, 342-59), he confesses his doubts, he assumes the weaknesses of men of ideas, and he undoes the house-party's sense of well-being. It must not be forgotten that Ruskin "typifies, sometimes in exaggerated form, many of the characteristics of the leading men of the age" (Pollard 1993: 24).

In *The New Republic*, Mallock brings together the champions of conflicting points of view so that they expose their own and each others' inadequacies (see *idem*, 29-30). Lady Ambrose's remark is therefore a very reasonable one: "How are we to build a castle in the air together, if we are all at cross purposes like this?" (Mallock 1975: 152).

Behind the wit which runs through the whole text lies one of the works which best describes the late nineteenth-century England sense of uncertainty. In *The Victorian Frame of Mind,* Walter Houghton states that "the combined effect of a dissolving tradition of thought and the new scientific conception of man and nature was to drive sensitive minds into the mood of ennui and frustration" (Houghton 1985: 71). This opinion can be complemented by Raymond Williams's idea that "we tend to look at the period 1880-1914 as a kind of interregnum" (Williams 1993a: 161) and with his own interpretation of Mallock's work:

> Mallock's *The New Republic* is as good a starting point for this period as could be found: not so much as a foretaste of what is to come but as a valediction to the period we are leaving. (Williams 1993b: 162)

Who then are the builders of utopia in Mallock's text? Certainly not the selfish middle-classes, nor the ignorant workers who nevertheless would be useful for blowing up the instruments of progress and establish the foundations for a new kind of society. The answer seems clear – the cultured men and women of 19th century Britain, that were willing to preserve the good established values in order to change for the better a world that, according to them, was changing for the worse. In fact, readers are not confronted with an actual utopian society, but with suggestions on how to build a utopia.

Consonant with utopian writing in general, *The New Republic* suggests a plausible scenario, and even creates what nowadays might be called a virtual world, not only because the fictional characters relate to actual people, but also because their speeches are extremely similar to those of the real persons who inspired them. Furthermore, Byron, Wordsworth, John Stuart Mill and Comte, among other real people, are alluded to in the text.

Re-reading *The New Republic* in the 21st century can simply be regarded as a way of getting in touch with some of the most prominent nineteenth-century authors, by means of the acute sarcastic portrait that Mallock makes of them. Today, as at the time when he wrote, a common reader is presented in a few pages with a compact version of their most characteristic theories.

In my opinion, Mallock's novel can also be seen from a different perspective. Inspired by the utopian topics discussed in the text, readers can feel challenged to outline their own arguments for and against an ideal, perfect, happy society, regardless of its practicability. In short, although it cannot be defined as a genuine utopian text, *The New Republic; Or, Culture, Faith, and Philosophy in an English Country House* provides unquestionable clues to utopia.

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Hythlodaeus' Female Heir:

Transformation of the Utopian / Dystopian Concept in Gioconda Belli's *Waslala. Memorial del Futuro* (1996)

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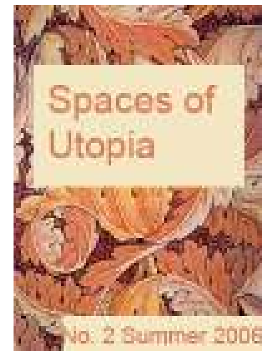

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NOPLACIA was once my name,
That is, a place where no one goes.
Plato's Republic now I claim
To match, or beat at its own game;
For that was just a myth in prose,
But what he wrote of, I became,
Of men, wealth, laws a solid frame,
A place where every wise man goes:
GOPLACIA is now my name.
(More 1965: 27)

In this motto preceding the first book of Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) the author not only introduces and explains the ambivalent nature of his neologism utopia for the first time, but also refers to antiquity and places his *Utopia* in the tradition of Plato's *Republic.* More states his intention of reviving Plato's mere philosophical construct of a not-place as a fictitious well-place thereby starting a literary game, a *ludum literarium* that can be seen as the starting point of the long tradition of the genre of literary utopia until now. As it is well known, the literary utopia has undergone decisive changes and variations since the 16th century, indeed: The static nature of the utopian societies of the early modern times has become as obsolete as the totalitarian concepts in the anti-utopias of the 20th century as for example in Samjatin's *My* (1920), Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) or Orwell's *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* (1949). But despite the ever so often proclaimed death of utopia the necessity of utopian thinking as a means

to envisage the future seems to be unbroken. The plethora and variety of literary utopias and dystopias in the 1980s and 1990s reflects the dialectics of utopian hope and dystopian pessimism in recent literature as well as the general need to criticise the world-wide political developments and the modernisation process in the real world.

With Gioconda Belli's *Waslala. Memorial del Futuro* I chose one literary example to show this transformation of the traditional utopian and dystopian concept. This paper is supposed to be a cross-reading of the 20th century novel with the classical pretext of early modern times intending to show that Belli takes up the thread of a literary game that More has already started then. When Don José in *Waslala* picks up the pun on the literary namesake of one of Belli's main characters by saying: "Qué cosas, ¿verdad? Se llama Raphael. El personaje de Tomás Moro, el que descubre la isla llamada Utopía, se llamaba Raphael también ..." (Belli, 1996: 41) [Strange, isn't it? He is called Raphael. The one in Thomas More, the one who discovered the island, was called the same ...],[1] Belli picks up the pun on More himself, on his text and his humanistic game. As More places his *Utopia* in the tradition of Plato's *Republic*, Belli places her novel in the tradition of More's *Utopia* overtly announcing the intention to de- and reconstruct it. Belli's text pays tribute to the origin of utopia in the Old World by relying on Thomas More's *Utopia* as a framework of motifs, ideas and characters. In its essence it's a revision and rewriting of the early modern times' "original" by the inclusion of a feminist, anti-capitalist and ecological perspective.

With the discovery of the so-called New World, colonisation and imperialism offered new possibilities of expansion and itinerary utopias such as More's *Utopia*, Campanella's *La Città del Sole* (1602/1623) or Bacon' s *Nova Atlantis* (1624) – to name but a few – imagined unreachable islands as an unspecified setting for their vision of the ideal state. But Belli is one of the authors of the 20th century who shows us that the former exotic paradise has

changed due to exploitation and abuse. The Empire is writing back now. Belli's *Waslala* opens a postcolonialist discourse and a dialogue with the political history of the Latin-American continent as well as with literary tradition.

Utopia, dystopia and anti-utopia always emerge in times of crisis and change reacting to contemporary conditions and criticising it by means of estrangement. More's *Utopia* critically comments the situation at the beginning of early modern times. The text is dialectically structured: In the first book the example of the Tallstorians serves as an alternative to the system of criminal justice in England; the examples of Nolandia and Happiland[2] serve as criticism of the politics of conquest of the European rulers. Raphael Hythlodaeus' report about the island of Utopia in the second book is the most extensive outline of an alternative society of all.

Similarly, in Belli's *Waslala* the process of modernisation and globalisation and the possible ecological and political effects it might have in the future is criticised from the perspective of a fictitious Latin-American country in a not too distant future. It shows the continuity of the struggle in Latin-America replacing the Spanish *conquistadores* by American and European capitalists and thereby deconstructing the connection between power and violence. Its general criticism of 20th century problems such as poverty, hunger, social disintegration and the effects of massive migration and war could not only be applied to different countries in Latin-America, but also to regions in some parts of Africa or Asia. But nevertheless, apart from that, the specific references in some parts of the novel to Nicaraguan politics in the 1990s, shortly after the defeat of the Sandinists at the general election, are only thinly disguised and the close connection to contemporary political debates in Nicaragua give the book an explosive political dimension.[3]

The frame of *Utopia* consists of a discussion between the Dutch humanist Peter Gilles or Petrus Ägidius, the traveller to Utopia called Raphael Hythlodaeus and the fictitious author and publisher of Raphael's report,

Thomas More. Fact and fiction, reality and imagination are consciously blurred here, autobiographical elements are mixed with fictional ones and none of the three participants in the discussion can be viewed as a merely fictional character. This narrative strategy is strengthened by the two letters preceding the first book in which the fictitious Thomas More explicitly emphasises that his *Utopia* is only a reproduction of Raphael's report:

> You knew that in this work I didn't have the problem of finding my own subject-matter and puzzling out a suitable form – all I had to do was repeat what Raphael told us. There was no need to bother very much about the wording, since his style wasn't particularly polished – the whole thing was improvised on the spur of the moment, (...). So the closer I could get to his simple, off-hand way of expressing himself, the closer I'd be to the truth, which in this case is all I'm worrying about, and all I ought to worry about. (More 1965: 29)

The fictitious Thomas More refuses the role of the author of the text hiding behind the function of a mere listener who has the primary aim to inform the readers about the characteristics of Utopia and the way of living of its inhabitants by means of Raphael's report: "My present plan is merely to repeat what he said about the laws and customs of Utopia. I must start by recording the conversation which led up to the first mention of that republic" (*idem*, 41). In the following conversation Raphael criticises harshly the contemporary social conditions in 16th century England thereby forcing the reader to relate his criticism to the description of the ideal world of Utopia. The overt contrast between the real and the ideal world makes the reader focus on the deficits of the contemporary society.

In contrast to that Belli abandons the concept of the fictitious author and publisher, but picks up More's play with fact and fiction and reverses it by adding two real author's notes at the end of the novel. Here she reveals the authentic background of the terrifying nuclear “accident” described in the novel: In September 1987 two people searching in the waste found a metal pipe at a waste disposal site in the Brazilian city Goiania:

> lo vendieron a un negociante de chatarra, que lo abrió a martillazos con la esperanza de vender el envase de plomo. En su interior encontró un fabuloso polvo azul que brillaba en la oscuridad. Fascinado por la novedad, regaló vasitos llenos del polvo a sus amigos y parientes. En el cumpleaños de una de ellas, un niña de seis años, pusieron el polvo sobre la mesa del comedor y apagaron las luces. (Belli 1996: 329)
>
> [They sold it to a scrap dealer who opened it with a hammer intending to sell the lead. Inside he found a strange blue powder glowing in the dark. Fascinated by this novelty he gave little bottles filled with the powder away as presents to his friends and relatives. At the birthday party of one of them, a six-year old girl, people spread it on the dining room table and turned off the light.][4]

Belli then quotes the Uruguayan author Eduardo Galeano who describes the incident in his article *Palabras qe quieren olvidar el olvidado* [*Words that want to forget fortgetfulness*] as following: "Quien se frota la piel, brilla de noche. Todo el barrio es una lámpara. El pobrerío, súbitamente rico de luz, está de fiesta" (*apud* Belli 1996: 330) [The ones who rub that powder on their skin are glowing in the dark. The whole quarter turns into a single lamp. The poor, suddenly rich of light are celebrating]. But the blue powder was cesium 137, radioactive material:

> Se contaminaron 129 personas; 20 fueron hospitalizadas con quemaduras, vómitos y otros efectos de la radiación. Siete murieron. Entre ellos, la niña del cumpleaños (...). (*ibidem)*
>
> [129 people were contaminated. 20 of them were taken to hospital with burns, nausea and other radiation injuries from the contamination. Seven of them died, amongst them the little birthday girl (…).]

That was the worst nuclear “accident” in Latin-America ever. It only happened one year after Tschernobyl. But as Galeano describes it: "Chernóbil resuena cada día en los oídos del mundo. De Goiania nunca más se supo. América Latina es noticia condenada al olvido" (*apud ibidem*). [Tschernobyl is still present every day. Almost nobody has heard of Goiania ever again. Latin-America is news condemned to oblivion.]

Whereas More uses what anachronistically could almost be called a metafictional and self-referential narrative strategy emphasising the conscious construction of the text to create space for his social and political criticism, Belli stresses the authentic roots of her text by means of this appendix for the same reason. Both authors therefore intend and create the same effect, Belli forcing the readers as well to relate the fictitious incidents described in her novel to contemporary reality.

Thus, whereas More contrasts the contemporary conditions with the outline of an ideal, perfect society, Belli's fictitious country called Faguas is presented at the "iconic register of the text"[5] as a terrifying dystopian vision of the future only extrapolating tendencies already existent today. This fictitious Latin-American country resembles contemporary Nicaragua in many respects, but Belli extends the characteristics of Faguas to a global metaphor for any Third World country today. Old polarities may have disappeared, but new structures of power have substituted the old ones. The gap between the privileged and the underprivileged, between the First and the Third World has widened. In Faguas centuries-old wars – having been started because of foreign intervention – endlessly circulate without obvious reasons destroying the country. Peace, social equality and economic balance don't exist. People are suffering because of epidemics, famine and poverty. Thinking back Don José can only remember vaguely when and how it all started:

> No le era posible definir con exactitud el momento en que el desarrollo de Faguas empezó a evolucionar y el país inició su retorno a la Edad Media, perdiendo sus contornos de nación y pasando a ser (…) reducidas a selvas, reservas forestales, a función de pulmón y basurero del mundo desarrollado que las explotó para sumirlas después en el olvido, en la miseria, condenándolas al ostracismo, a la categoría de *terras incognitas* (…). (Belli 1996: 23)
>
> [It wasn't possible to define the exact moment of degeneration when Faguas began to return to the Middle Ages losing its outline of a nation, not existing anymore (…) thrown back on its jungles and tropical forests, reduced to the function of the lung and the waste disposal site of the developed world exploiting them and then leaving them to oblivion and misery, banned to the offside, branded as terra incognita (…).]

The technologically highly developed First World tries to ignore and forget about countries such as Faguas only using them for their own profit and advantage. Technical innovations and inventions have made life very easy in the countries of the First World. By means of technology, automation and specialisation they have reached the utopian aim of More, Campanella and others to reduce working hours considerably and create human working conditions. But in an ironic dystopian reversal of the utopian ideal the reduction of working hours to a three-day week, the abundance of spare time and inactivity have only evoked boredom and the feeling of uselessness:

> Es absurdo. La robótica avanzó demasiado rápido. La gente no se ha podido adaptar todavía al ocio. Y si sumamos a eso el hecho de que la esperanza de vida se prolonga cada vez más, no es de extrañar que proliferen los viajes suicidas. (Belli 1996: 32)
>
> [It's absurd. The automation has developed too quickly. People are not able to adapt to idleness yet. And if one also takes into consideration the fact that the life expectation is prolonged more and more it is not surprising that suicide trips proliferate.]

A kind of death tourism – "[t]urismo de la muerte" (*ibidem*) – has become trendy. Ships packed with people who only want to die in peace leave the ports for a "crucero de lujo, sólo que no hay regreso" (*ibidem*), a luxury crusade without return. The painless collective death has become big business and the voyages are always sold out. Meanwhile on the other side of the planet people are struggling for survival and More's utopian ideal of a world without money has become dystopian reality as the plethora of wars has destroyed the economy and money hasn't much value any more.

In traditional utopian literature such as Thomas More's *Utopia* the "alternative world imagined by the author" (Moylan 1986: 36) is central to the text, "the idea" as Tom Moylan puts it, becomes "the hero" (*idem*, 37)[6] of the text:

> What in the realist novel would be considered "mere'" background setting becomes in traditional utopian writing the key element of the text. (…) [T]he utopian setting becomes the primary place for the text's exploration and exposure of the historical situation. The world as we live it in history is revealed or manifested in the world as we read it. The alternative world tends to absorb many of the actions and causations normally reserved for characters in a realist narrative. (Moylan 1986: 36, 37)

Therefore the extensive description of the political and economic structures of the ideal state, of religion and philosophy of the Utopians as well as the description of every aspect of daily life such as family structures, marriage, reproduction, education, etc. determine Raphael's report. Belli's *Waslala*, however, bears in many respects the characteristics of what Moylan has defined as critical utopia:

> (…) [T]he critical utopia at the level of the iconic register, in which the image of the alternative society is generated, breaks with previous utopias by presenting in much greater, almost balanced, detail both the utopian society and the original society against which the utopia is pitted as a revolutionary alternative. (Moylan 1986: 44)

Belli contrasts the dystopian reality of Faguas with the myth of the utopian enclave of Waslala, a supposingly existing utopian community, hidden somewhere in a time gap, and at the beginning of the novel no one seems to know any more how to get there. But Belli dismisses the black and white scheme of a bad society and its ideal alternative. The presentation of society at the iconic register of the text is much more differentiated with various communities existing within the dystopian society and the utopian community revealing itself as imperfect and with limitations.

In Faguas the state doesn't exist any more: The country is divided into two competing sides with conflicting values and aims: On the one, the privileged societal side there is the narratological transformation of More's 16th century landowners into the Espada brothers who control a big part of the country with their own army and keep the armed conflicts alive to secure their

power. Their business is based on the trade with arms and the export of drugs which are the invisible, but most important connections to the technologically highly developed world.

On the other, the underprivileged societal side there is the "20th century version of the poor" personified in the communards under the leadership of their female general Engracia living on a huge waste disposal site. Their strategies of survival are based on the adjustment to the requirements of international powers and the economy of waste reprocessing. In contrast to the Espada brothers and their violent dictatorship of terror and torture the communards strive for a peaceful life. Dependent on the international environmental authority they try to solve their conflicts by making arrangements.

Apart from those two big communities there is a co-existence of different little worlds and microcosms struggling for their existence in Faguas. One of them is the world behind the river, home of Don José and his granddaughter Melisandra. Don José, modelled on the great Nicaraguan poet José Coronel Urtecho, has been one of the founders of Waslala.[7] Belli intertextually refers here to the already described frame of *Utopia* consisting of the discussion between the Dutch humanist Peter Gilles, Raphael, and the fictitious Thomas More. They debate the question of how politics and moral can be combined in a state thereby going back to Plato's and Cicero's questions about the essence of justice and the possibility of the philosopher ruling the state. All these questions reappear in *Waslala* in a transformed shape extrapolated to the contemporary conditions of the 20th century. But Belli not only modernises this centuries-old debate thematically, she also reconstructs utopia on the self-referential generic level creating the character of Don José as one of a group of poets and philosophers who once wanted to make the impossible possible: To actually build More's *Utopia*, to bring it into existence and make it real. Thereby Belli actually tells us the story of the poet/philosopher becoming ruler of his or her

own state reviving Plato's and More's discourse and transforming their subject of theoretical mind games into political practice.

First Waslala is only a dream, a vision, the topic of many discussions of some intellectuals in Faguas. But when some of them become fugitives of yet another war they go out to search the Holy Grail, the Promised Land and actually find it: Waslala. The Arcadian idyll, the Garden of Eden is hidden in a time gap bearing all the features of the traditional Utopia such as isolation, selection and ideality and resembling More's utopian island in more than one respect. They actually build their own utopian paradise living in peace and happiness according to all the principles utopian visionaries of all ages have ever dreamt of: Freedom, democracy, equality, solidarity, respect, tolerance, non-materialism, etc. – a small world of male and female thinkers and writers as an experimental cell intended to be the germ for a new society in which the greed for power and money as well as violence, the bad in general would be eradicated.

Once the utopian model society is actually functioning, Don José goes back to get his family, but when he reaches the place where Waslala had been, it had disappeared – "Waslala había desaparecido" (Belli 1996: 65). He never finds it again and goes back to the world behind the river. Years later history repeats itself. His daughter and son-in-law have to escape from the totalitarian authorities and decide to make their way to Waslala leaving behind their little three- year-old daughter Melisandra. Nobody ever hears of them again.

The world behind the river is a remote, relatively safe and rural place, separated from the rest of Faguas, dominion of the old writer, of intellect and humanism. People rarely come here and the ones who do are either smugglers or curious adventurers. At the level of the discrete register, the level generating plot and character, there is a decisive change compared to the utopias of the

early modern times characterising *Waslala* according to one of the principles Tom Moylan coins as a critical utopia:

> In the new utopia, the primacy of societal alternatives over character and plot is reversed, and the alternative society and indeed the original society fall back as settings for the foregrounded political quest of the protagonist. The visitor becomes the hero, or in some cases the anti-hero. (…) [F]urthermore, in the critical utopia the more collective heroes of social transformation are presented off-center and usually as characters who are not dominant, white, heterosexual, chauvinist males but females, gay, non-white, and generally operating collectively. (Moylan 1986: 45)

More's set of literary figures discussing utopia in the garden – the locus amoenus – is transformed into an illustrious group of travellers arriving at Don José's hacienda, all of them having different motifs for their journey.

There is Raphael, the contemporary namesake of More's Hythlodaeus and not the only one in the novel with a telling name which is also a utopian tradition More starts. More's seafarer reporting from the hence unknown island is in *Waslala* transformed into an American journalist pretending to be on the search for Waslala but actually writing a story on Philin, the new mysterious drug supposingly produced in Faguas. There is also the contemporary version or rather ironic transformation of the Dutch humanist Peter Gilles into the lesbian Dutch couple Krista and Vera who are coming from a matriarchal community intending to adopt an orphan. Also part of the group are Morris, the black scientist who is responsible for the examination of the waste arriving in Faguas and therefore searching for toxic content with his artificial arm, Hermann, the German gold trader and Maclovio, the Argentinean storyteller who turns out to be a drug dealer.

Of course, most of them are more types than characters representing specific political positions and utopian strategies depending on the role they have got on the stage of the novel. In the tradition of the travel or seafarer story – we remember Hythlodaeus in More's *Utopia* is presented as a companion of Amerigo Vespucci – they all set out on a journey into the unknown that turns

out to be a literal Odyssey through various utopian or dystopian models or microcosms.

In contrast to More's static description of the Utopian society, "the visitor becomes the hero" in *Waslala*, indeed (Moylan 1986: 45); plot is foregrounded by Belli's effective genre blurring of utopian and dystopian narrative, quest narrative, adventure and travel novel, elements of crime story and fairy tale. Thereby the most obvious modernisation of More's *Utopia* can be seen in Belli's feminist revision of gender roles. Although showing some 'revolutionary' ideas compared to the contemporary society – such as the model of the extended family, communal meals etc. – More still outlines a patriarchal society. The patriarchal family is the social core of the society of the Utopians being hierarchically structured: "Each household (…) comes under the authority of the oldest male. Wives are subordinate to their husbands, children to their parents, and younger people generally to their elders" (More 1965: 80). Although women have access to education and are obliged to work and military service, they still have the same status of political immaturity as the children in Utopia. Equality of man and woman is not a utopian goal for More, patriarchal gender roles are not questioned. Ultimately, there are no equal rights and women are excluded from political processes and power. Belli, however, deconstructs the image of the patriarchal family by showing different ways of living together such as the homosexual couples, the matriarchal communities called "matrias" (Belli 1996: 33) or Engracia's communards. Moreover, Belli outlines three strong female protagonists: Melisandra as an educated female transfiguration of the beau sauvage, her mother, the utopian traveller, and especially Engracia, powerful mother figure and the leader of the muchachos of the waste dump. They represent different facets of femininity, but all of them are breaking with traditional rules and patriarchal roles striving for equal rights and gender equality.

There could be much more said about what I call the “implicit More” at the iconic and discrete level of Belli's text, not only concerning the feminist revision of gender roles, but also concerning sexuality and love being rewritten into tropes of utopian desire and utopian hope.

As in many literary utopias More discusses sexuality as a means of reproduction and therefore being important for the preservation of society. Reproduction is not as strictly regulated as in Plato or Campanella, but, of course, only thinkable in marriage: "Any boy or girl convicted of premarital intercourse is severely punished, and permanently disqualified from marrying (…)” (More 1965: 103). Sexual/physical attraction seems not only to be existent in Utopia, but also important as "[t]he prospective bride (…) is exhibited stark naked to the prospective bridegroom by a respectable married woman, and a suitable male chaperon shows the bridegroom naked to the bride" (*ibidem*). As in More’s own contemporary society love or even marrying because of love remains a matter that is not discussed.

Belli ironically plays with that topic when the founders of Waslala discuss the idea of giving up reproduction for a while to purify their little utopian community, but cannot find any consensus on that subject-matter. Instead, Belli openly presents heterosexuality as well as homosexuality as antithesis to the dystopian conditions surrounding the protagonists, as an element of power, passion and liberation. When Melisandra, Raphael and Morris reach the realm of Engracia, the already described tragic nuclear ‘accident’ finds its literary expression. The muchachos find some blue powder glowing in the dark, contained in an old machine for chemo therapy. Rubbing it on their skin they celebrate an archaic and anarchic feast with Engracia until Morris appears educating them about what they have done and the effects it will have. Raphael and Melisandra can only react with frantic love-making to the catastrophe trying to find consolation in each other’s arms. From the beginning they instantly feel connected with each other and at the end of the novel they represent the

almost too smooth personified ideal of sexual freedom and love unifying various dichotomous oppositions. And Morris, for example, motivated by despair and ultimate love for Engracia commits suicide contaminating himself voluntarily with the cesium to share Engracia's fate.

Belli uses this tragic incident to develop further the presentation of the different co-existing utopian strategies and concepts in the text. Condemned to death, Morris, Engracia and the muchachos finally dare the step of revolutionary change. With a bomb attack they commit suicide in the headquarters of the Espada brothers, eliminating the dictators and their centre of power at the same time. The concrete utopia, the liberation of Faguas presents itself as a reincarnation through death.

In the post-revolutionary situation of chaos, helplessness and hope the myth of Waslala is revived. Melisandra is becoming the bearer of utopian hope for a whole society. In the “classical” manner of the female quest narrative she transforms from utopian companion into traveller setting out to search for the lost utopian paradise and her lost parents at the same time. Her story therefore also becomes the daughter's tale in search of her lost mother which is, as Lacan puts it, also a journey into the realm of the imaginary.

Some of the characteristics I outline here are, of course, only reflecting the characteristics of the critical utopias of the 1960s and 1970s such as Russ' *Female Man* (1975) or Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) and, admittedly, *Waslala* has its limits at the generic level. But as I try to show, it is a highly intertextual text which steps into direct dialogue with the pretexts of its forefathers and thereby fulfils yet another of Tom Moylan's definitions of the critical utopias that they "(…) keep the utopian impulse alive by challenging it and deconstructing it within its very pages. (…) [I]n the twentieth century it has become necessary to destroy utopia in order to save it" (Moylan 1986: 46).

Melisandra magically finds Waslala and her mother as well only to realise that the former well-place has become a deserted place, a dead place and therefore a not-place. The Arcadian village is only a memory of itself. The ideal of actually constructing More's Utopia and bringing it alive has failed, women couldn't bear children there and the old poets and philosophers strangely wilted like flowers. They just faded away. So people left the former paradise. Melisandra's mother being the only one to be left behind trying to keep up the myth of Waslala for the outside world:

> La razón por la que yo sigo aquí es porque pienso que Waslala, como mito, como aspiración, justifica su existencia. Es más, considero que es imperativo que exista, que vuelva a ser, que continúe generando leyendas. Lo más grande de Waslala es que fuimos capaces de imaginarla, que fue la fantasía lo que, a la postre, la hizo funcionar. (Belli 1996: 319)
>
> [I stayed here, because I think that Waslala as myth, as hope justifies its existence. Moreover, I believe it must exist, it must come back into being, continue to create legends. The most important of Waslala is that we have been capable of imagining it, that it has been the imagination making it function at last.]

This of course is Belli's metafictional discussion of the highly disputed and criticised death of Utopia. The fading away of the old poets might be seen as a metafictional device that the founders/writers of utopia such as More, Campanella, Bacon, etc. and the static nature of their utopian concepts are dead. But she doesn't believe in the failure of utopia as an idea. When Melisandra asks her mother what to tell the people in the outside world, her mother advises her to tell them that Waslala really exists: "Waslala existe. El ideal existe. Fueron sus sueños los que hicieron realidad la existencia de Waslala. Sus aspiraciones la mantuvieron y mantendrán viva" (Belli 1996: 320). [Waslala exists. The ideal exists. It has been their dreams making the existence of Waslala real. Their aspirations keep it alive.]

The ambivalent open ending with Melisandra leaving her mother and Waslala behind suggests the necessity of the co-existence of different utopian concepts. Melisandra can only picture herself in the “real world” of Faguas

representing for her the possibility of the concrete utopia and therefore the future. But at the same time the Principle of Hope, the dream of the utopian Waslala represented by her mother has to be kept alive to make the survival of Faguas possible: "(…) la razón de ser de Waslala era ser Waslala, la utopía, el lugar que no era, que no podría ser el tiempo y el espacio habitual (…)" (*idem*, 321). [The reason of being for Waslala was to be Waslala, the utopia, the place that was or could not be the normal time and space.]

With the failure of the construction of Waslala Belli deconstructs and destroys utopia but she also reconstructs the utopian imagination and revives utopia as an idea. Waslala is demystified, but a new dream of its revival is already starting to grow. The appendix as a contemporary version of More's fictitious publisher's note, which strengthens that argumentation, appeals to the implicit reader to fill the gaps and reconstruct the utopian impulse.

Notes

[1] As Belli’s *Waslala* is not translated into English, the translation of this quotation as well as of all the following taken from Belli's novel are my own.

[2] I use the English terms used in the above cited edition. See Turner’s explanation of the origin of the names in the glossary (More 1965: 153, 154): Tallstoria is "the country of the *Polyleritae*", Nolandia equals the "*Achoriorum populus*" and Happiland the "*Macarenses*".

[3] For an explicit discussion of the reference to Nicaraguan politics see: Dröschner 2004: 160-163.

[4] Belli presents this paragraph as a quotation taken out of James Brooke's *New York Times* article "Tourism Springs from Toxic Waste" (3rd May, 1995, A6). She probably translated it from English into Spanish herself, but as I don’t have access to the article myself I cannot tell how much of it is paraphrase or actual translation of the quotation. I therefore used Belli’s text translating it back into English for better understanding, but my translation might differ from the original.

[5] I’m borrowing the term of the "iconic register of the text" as well as the later following term of the "discrete register" from Tom Moylan in the sense he uses and defines it in *Demand the Impossible*: "In examining the utopian text, three operations can be identified: the alternative society, the world, generated in what can be termed the iconic register of the text; the protagonist specific to utopias – that is, the visitor to the utopian society – dealt with in what can be termed the discrete register; and the ideological contestations in the text that brings the cultural artifact back to the contradictions of history” (Moylan 1986: 36).

[6] Moylan refers to Kingsley Amis here who states the same phenomenon in science fiction.

[7] Belli emphasizes the resemblance between her characters Don José and his wife Doña María and José Coronel Urtecho and María Kautz in the second note of her appendix (Belli 1996: 441).

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Self and the City:

Spanish Women Writing Utopian Dreams and Nightmares

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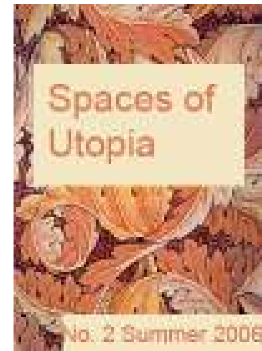

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> *Don't try to bury your pain: it will spread all over the earth, and under your feet; it will filter through the water which you will have to drink and it will poison your blood. The wounds will close, but there will always be scars, more or less visible, which will come back and trouble you when the weather changes, reminding you of their existence in your skin and also of the misfortune which caused them. And the memory of the misfortune will affect future decisions, it will create useless fears and persistent memories, and you will grow into a creature both dulled and cowardly. Why try to run away and leave behind the city of your fall? Is it in the vain hope that in another place, in a better climate, the scars will no longer hurt and the water you drink will be purer? All around you, the ruins of your life will arise because, no matter where you go, you will carry the city with you. There is no new land, no new sea; the life you have wasted will remain wasted wherever you go. I am twenty-two, and I speak with the voice of others.*
> (Etxebarria 1998: 19)[1]

The above passage – pessimistic though it might seem at first – “no new land, no new sea” out there, suggests that utopia is to be found within, if it is to be found at all. The self is not only psychically, socially and sexually produced by the outside, it also challenges and questions that outside in a constant effort to negotiate meanings: who am I? Where do I come from? Where am I going? The last line of the passage, “I am twenty-two, and I speak with the voice of others” points to an inherited, innate knowledge, a shared and intimate *knowing* weathered by life's experiences. The city – and the self's experience of the city – acknowledge the intricacies of identity: the mind and the city that controls, sees and measures all things, the city pleasures and aesthetics that speak to the senses, the hidden crimes and tensions that create fear and the abject which lurks in the unseen and unknown depths. Nevertheless, city dwellers do

not walk around the streets smiling and grimacing at all these pleasures and fears; their emotional expression is detached and seemingly indifferent to the narratives that the streets and buildings hold. Blank, distant looks, preoccupied by the day ahead and keeping to time commitments, add up to the reserved urban behaviour which Robert Park calls the city *state of mind* (Pile 2005:1). Indeed, there is little time in city life to stop and chat, or to stroll along the streets as the *flâneur* was wont to do. The city is framed within a very special concept of both time and space: its geographical limits expand horizontally across large areas of surface, rise vertically with the buildings and skyscrapers which literally scrape the sky, and the city depths reach down further than the roots of any tree, fingering a hidden underworld of transport communications, sewage systems, the dead and the long forgotten. Time is speed, time is money. Punctuality, rush hours, traffic lights, opening and closing times, all contribute to making city life a hectic life. Little wonder that the city clock imposes itself on the body clock, with the difference that the city never sleeps.

This article looks at four Spanish novels which depict the city as a psychogeographical space for the construction of identity. Two of the novels are recognisable as dystopias, two of them have certain utopian elements in them. All four are written by women and offer interesting debates on the relationship between the body and the city, and on language, sexuality and desire.

Dystopian Futures

Two of the novels depict futuristic dystopian societies. The first is Montserrat Julió's *Memòries d'un futur bàrbar* [Memories of a Barbaric Future], published in Catalan in the year of Franco's death (1975). The last page of the novel is dated 3rd March, 1974. Franco died on 20th November, 1975. The novel narrates the past experiences of a male gynaecologist in Barcelona, Joan [John] Garriga. The year is 2023, the city is in ruins, the birth rate has dropped

to zero and the whole planet is becoming depopulated as he sits at his old Olympia typewriter and writes about the past to a world with no future. If "in the beginning was the word", it follows that, at the end of time, there will be no word. As humans die and decay and civilization collapses, language too fades away. The last page of Garriga's typed memoirs is dotted with blanks: the letters A, S, T are missing. He knows he is one of the last human beings on a sterile planet but, in spite of this, he writes his memoirs, describing the gradual death of humanity, the ensuing political chaos, the loss of love and solidarity and the knowledge of apocalypse. The novel begins with the news that a series of biological mutations have caused all mammals to become sterile. No more babies are being born and this brings about the closure of all industries, banks, schools, and transport. Everything comes to a halt. Food becomes the substitute for money, people leave the cities and go back to the land, if they can find transport. The frontiers between one country and another disappear and passports are no longer needed. Governments fall and nothing is as it was. The abject, as Kristeva defines it, is that which dwells on the borders between the *I* and the *not I*, which disturbs the social, and linguistic order, creates a space of ambiguity which is then occupied by a strangeness and a sense of the uncanny (Kristeva 1982).

Julió's futuristic dystopia creates that space of decay and destruction before regeneration can begin – if at all. In this sense, the novel portrays the atmosphere in Spain prior to Franco's death. It took him almost one year to die whilst medical specialists, priests, and politicians tried to delay the decaying process for as long as they could. Time stood still in all the cities, towns and villages throughout the country. Each hour, on the hour, all radio stations tuned in to the latest "official" medical report, and people stopped to listen: some ready to celebrate with a bottle of champagne, some to mourn, some fearful of what the future might bring. Death and dying, and an end to forty years'

dictatorship are all reflected in the novel in many ways. As a gynaecologist, Joan Garriga's job is to help in pregnancies and birthing, to introduce the newly-born into life. When faced with death, however, the sight of a rotting male cadaver brings about a paralysis of his body and the loss of his voice:

> On top of a platform which resembled a burial mound, a corpse awaited burial. The flesh was shrunken, the skin wizened. Withered flowers covered in dust lay around the platform as well as some iron candlesticks in which only the wicks remained (…). A host of insects fed upon the dead body and eye sockets accommodated a new form of life: a crawling mass of larvae and pupae which were about to burst (…). Accustomed as I am to contemplating the repulsive, yet, when I came face to face with death so suddenly, I tried to scream but my voice was strangled with fear, and when I wanted to run, my legs wouldn't carry me. (Julió 1975: 144)

The abject, the dead body which *has fallen* (cadaver comes from *cadere*: to fall) destabilizes the boundaries between his own living self and this dead other. All that was once human has been reduced to food for the insects which live off, and thrive on, the dead flesh. The body has lain there for quite some time and will probably not be buried at all. The burned-down candles tell him that his own time is also running out. Little wonder that he is paralysed by fear, silenced by this sight. "In abjection", writes Kristeva, "revolt is completely within being. Within the being of language". Unlike hysteria, the subject of abjection is involved in the production of culture within the symbolic order and "[i]ts symptom is the rejection and reconstruction of languages" (Kristeva 1982: 45).

The city (in this case, Barcelona) is reduced to ruins and gradually becomes an empty shell, devoid of life, the streets covered in refuse and dust, cars, buses and trains stranded, their drivers dead or dying, and the nameplates of banks, administration and council buildings become meaningless words. With no babies being born, there are no schools and no marriages. The dissolution of the nuclear family brings about the downfall of the capitalist system, but in the anarchy that follows there is little hope of a new order being set up. The novel ends in a similar vein to Mary Shelley's dystopian

novel *The Last Man* (1826), with Garriga, typing his last words whilst being aware that no words have been invented to describe an "apocalyptic emotion" (Julió 1975:17). The structures of society and language, as he knew them, collapse and give way to negative emotions brought on by his own impotence and a series of losses: the loss of his daughter, his girlfriend Laura, the loss of his job, his "adopted" son Jordi, the death of his mother and the death of his friend, Gunnar.

The second dystopia takes place in the far future in New York and Paris: the year is 2069. Written by Gabriela Bustelo, *Planeta Hembra* [Female Planet] was published in 2001, and describes the future of the planet ruled by the neoliberalist XX Party. Thatcherite [sic!] women rule with fists of steel, control the media, abolish all family systems, prohibit heterosexual encounters, eliminate books and the written word, eradicate historical memory, and secretly work towards the death of man (all men). Does all this sound familiar? Bustelo did a degree in English literature in Madrid and there are clear influences of Orwell and Huxley in her novel. In this role-reversal dystopian society, men organize a commando (el Commando H) in an attempt to topple the female government. The all-male opposition party XY joins forces with the all-women XX to seek out the rebels and eliminate them.

The novel begins with a scene from a 20th century (heterosexual) porno movie. Baez, one of the leading ladies, is disgusted by what she sees and is ordered by President Eckart to find out the rebel Commando group who are circulating the images on telescreens. To do this she has to liaise with Graf, who is party leader of XY. Baez and Graf eventually become dissidents themselves by falling in love, having a heterosexual relationship, and realizing that this, indeed was "perfection, passion, completeness, peace" (Bustelo 2001: 212).

The bodies described in this futuristic society are smooth, athletic, strong and healthy. Fascist in their perfection, they are contained, controlled, pure and clinically clean. All imperfections and excesses are modified genetically. The women do not menstruate, they do not bear children, their bodies bear no scars of life's experiences. Their hairdos are their only marker of difference. Pleasure, if it exists at all, is momentary and fleeting, and always contained. The popular Relaxation Centres offer orgasm on demand at a regulated time of 173 seconds. Sex is sex and sexual desire is relieved mechanically. At one point, a man from the XY party attempts to explain to a young girl from the XX party the concepts of love (which is an obsolete, historical concept) and sexual pleasure.

> – You are still young – the Man continued –. And you won't have any experience in this matter. But you must know what an orgasm is.
> – It is the climax of sexual pleasure which produces local modifications like hyperemia and congestion, and general modifications such as tachycardia, tachypnea, a rise in the blood pressure and a spreading of pleasure – said Dillon solemnly. (Bustelo 2001: 171)

Each citizen dwells in an individual sterile cubicle, full of gadgets, smooth walls, and everything in perfect functioning order. Their bodies mirror their living quarters in absolute synchronicity. Order and self-containment allow no space for excess, the abject or the marginalized. Thus, the surface world in the city of New York is visibly under control, but the underworld is also inhabited: by the people of the tunnels, "the homeless, the forgotten, the Others" and by the headquarters of the terrorist group, Commando H, who live "in the hidden bowels" of the city (Bustelo 2001: 154).

All citizens are periodically checked for any form of dissidence which is eradicated immediately by operating on the brain. Dillon (perhaps her name renders homage to the Dillon bookshop) is a young dissident who has managed to hack into the government-controlled computer system to retrieve censored material in the form of ten books, ten films and ten records. Thus armed with "historical memory" of a kind, she escapes with Graf and Baez after civil war

breaks out between the men and women. This war is a result of their illicit romance. Both XX and XY have access to nuclear bombs, and they use them. A nuclear explosion destroys the planet Earth which the three just manage to escape from, as they travel off on their way to the planet Andromeda, where a new world awaits them.

In a critical review of Bustelo's utopian/dystopian novel in *El País* (16th July, 2001), the author claims that she does not want her readers to see her as machista, homophobic or misogynistic. "I've always been a feminist, but now I see myself as a post or neo feminist, certainly not a fundamentalist". When challenged on the question of "political correctness", she answers that her intention was "to write a thought-provoking and politically incorrect novel" because she believed the time had come "to revise all those old feminist (or feminine) attitudes which have their origin in the politics of the sixties" (Mora 2001: 34). The novel is written in a racy, street-language style. It incorporates slang, Anglicisms and many invented words. Bustelo claims that her book critiques the uniform politics of globalisation, the disappearance of culture, the "terrifying" [*ínfame*] use of technology and the death of love, but her objectives do not come over so clearly to the reader. While I write this (June, 2005), supporters and representatives of the Church and the conservative Popular Party in Spain are demonstrating in Madrid against the present socialist government's law which will grant gay and heterosexual couples the same rights in marriage and adoption. The protest banners the demonstrators are carrying claim that the new law will bring about a destruction of all human values: love will be lost, the family (read: the nuclear family) will be lost, and so many children will be deprived of a mother and a father. "My mother is not called Ramón", one banner angrily declares.

Is Bustelo's *Planeta Hembra* feminist or not? Is it written with irony (as she suggests) or is there an underlying conservatism in her futuristic vision?

Clearly, role-reversal societies are doomed from the start because they lock individuals into dichotomies and seem to play out the man/woman, master/slave, mind/body predicament which makes this kind of novel "foreseeable"... and somewhat monotonous to read. Utopia, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. The underlying ideologies of the novel seem to suggest a nostalgia for past gender politics rather than a sympathy for alternative lifestyles.

The City Within

The last two novels I would like to discuss are written in a more realistic mode but are groundbreaking in ways the other two are not. "No matter where you go, you will always carry the city within you" – this quote from Lucía Etxebarria's *Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes* (published 1998, Premio Nadal, 1998) runs through the novel as a leitmotiv. The novel is interestingly summarized on the back cover like this:

> Three women: Cat, a convinced lesbian; Mónica, a compulsive man-eater, and Beatriz, who considers that love has no gender. Three moments in the life of one woman: her childhood, shut up in a claustrophobic home and under family pressures; her adolescence, a permanent escape forward, and her youth as a sentimental exile, tinged with the nostalgia of her hometown. And two cities: Edinburgh, sombre and vertical, and Madrid, horizontal and bright, both contribute to this original novel on love for friends, for the family and for lovers.

Beatriz runs away from Madrid, from her tortured experiences of the underworld: drugs, discos, a murder and a passionate lesbian love to the city of Edinburgh, where she studies literature, moves in with Cat (Caitlin), and meets Ralph. Cat and Ralph become her lovers in this city of tears, of "chiaroscuros", of Jekyll & Hyde closes, of secret chambers and gender transgressions:

> I became fifteen and stopped going to mass. I became eighteen and kissed Mónica. Then I set off for Edinburgh. There I shaved off my hair and bought army boots. In the streets, no one could tell whether I was a boy or girl. This was the last transgression. The last transgression.

> Each delicate detail of my body can be interpreted or reinterpreted, depending on whether I wanted to be a woman or a person. My vagina can be the gateway of pleasure or of life. My breasts, a fountain of milk or erotic zones. My pierced belly button can be an advert or a sign of a future connection between my life and another's who will be dependent on me. My body, with a foetus inside – will it be full of life or simply invaded, deformed and destroyed? (Etxebarria 2002: 214).

Beatriz's body is mapped out as home, a landscape, a sign, and a country. It is also a site of desire, of eroticism, of pleasure. Thus, her body interacts with the environment, both giving and receiving, mapping out and colonizing, becoming both object and agent.

Elizabeth Grosz discusses the two most pervasive models which define the interrelation of bodies and cities. The first sees the city being produced by the body and reflecting it. The second sees a parallelism between the body and the city as, for example, the body and the state, where the head of state is the king and the body represents the people. She rejects both models because they are based on humanist concepts of the self and the world, in which the self is given, and subordinates the body to the mind. This position retains, and locks the self, into the structure of binary opposites. Grosz proposes a third model by adapting Derrida's reading of *Chora*. This opens up a whole range of alternatives through the destabilizing of the self, absolute truths and transcendental signifiers. The feminine connotations of Chora (no definite article, according to Derrida!) have also become the basis of the theoretical writings of Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray, among many others. Chora can be translated by notions of place, site, location, city, region, country. It is also that which contains, and is contained by, at the same time. It is the site of subversion of the symbolic order of language, refusing to read desire as lack, and proposing a new mode of inhabiting space. The following passage from Etxebarria's novel suggests this way forward in an attempt to escape the tedious binaries:

> Academically speaking, I should write that when Ralph and I made love it was he who possessed me, who took me. But actually, it was me who did this, it was me who took him into myself, because he entered me. I felt him as an Other, indecipherable and complementary to time. If I received him within me, I thought he would make me complete. Heaven and Earth, Light and Dark, Life and Death, Chaos and Order. I wouldn't have to ask constantly who I really was. (Etxebarria 2002: 215)

Beatriz's desire to know is bound up with the memories that Madrid and Edinburgh imprint on her body and the bodies of her lovers and this dialogic relationship between bodies and cities is expressed in her story-telling. Narratives of fear and loss, of nostalgia and yearning, of love and desire:

> I write on a keyboard, a portable computer I bought in Edinburgh just before returning. The twenty-something letters of the alphabet embrace each other to form words; they lovingly offer each other the warmth that I lacked. All that I am, what solidly or precariously defines me and supports me, returns at the moment of writing. I only know how to be sincere in front of the keyboard. I miss the life I had in the same way I missed Madrid when I was in Edinburgh. Maybe it was a lie. Maybe it was memory, religion or art. When I close my eyes, I imagine the greenish-blue eyes of Cat, capable of inventing reality at every moment. A two-coloured reality like them [her eyes], a space and a time more deserving of me. (…) The reality I write of comes from another time, another landscape, other days; (…) it leads me through the hours in which we kissed, passing through labyrinths walled in by her curves, echoing with her voice. I pass through her corridors and turn round her corners, and arrive right at the hidden centre of her lack. I descend into the deepest and blackest regions, where my leaving becomes more and more infinite and her staying becomes more and more profound. The earth exhales a sweet perfume. (*idem*, 55)

Women writers in Spain may not be producing social blueprints for utopia but, in accordance with the times, they are exploring desire, language, sexuality and alternative lifestyles in very exciting ways and many of their novels have a utopian aspect to them. Spain used to have the lowest birth-rate in Europe, now it is on the rise again, thanks to immigration, adoption policies, and certain changes made in legislation regarding maternity/paternity leave and divorce laws. The novel with which I close this paper, *La edad secreta* [The Secret Age] by Eugenia Rico, published in 2004, is a highly original and sensitive utopian narrative. It begins with a quote from Picasso "Yo no busco, encuentro" [I do not search, I find]. A woman leaves her home in Madrid, a ruined marriage, and drives off in her car, picks up a hitch-hiker who is 20 years

younger than she is and sets off on a journey with him through small Spanish villages and the motorways of Europe. She had previously been told she had terminal cancer and was then informed that it had been an error; she had been given someone else's files. Thus, this is also a journey from death to life. The "Secret Age" of the title refers to two utopian spaces: first, a new imaginary time-space which challenges rational and chronological time whilst retaining it as a reality. This is explained at the beginning of the novel when the narrator claims that everyone is of the same age – not the years experienced in the past but those we have left to live in the future. Secondly, the Secret Age is also the age, or era, of the Neanderthals, people who mysteriously disappeared some 30,000 years ago. This Secret Age links the remote past to a present and a utopian future through a map of Nauchipán (the imaginary land of the Neanderthals) which the young hitchhiker carries around with him. The map on the manuscript becomes a country of somewhere else which draws both travellers together and offers them a common goal. Their first kiss brings them the recognition that "the abyss between their souls is there, the infinite distance between two tongues, the precipice between their mouths" (Rico 2004: 28). They are both well aware that history is written on their lips but are too wrapped up in each other to stop and read it. Each lover traces the map of somewhere else on the other's body. The utopian imagination in this novel exists in its deconstruction of time: futures, pasts, presents are brought together in the bodies of the two lovers, distanced in age by twenty years, he bringing her the history and map of Nauchipán with him, and she bringing to him her own special history of Spain:

> My grandmother was born in the Middle Ages and my mother passed through the 19th century to the 21st in the time it took me to come out of my nappies and go to school. (…)
> Now princesses marry while they are pregnant, lesbian aristocrats become artificially inseminated by gay friends and modern couples neither marry nor have kids. From being the most backward country in Europe, we now shock the world with our films, our gay neighbourhoods and our self-confidence. (*idem*, 123)

We are all made of time, writes Octavio Paz, and there is no escaping time unless it is through love. Love alone is simultaneously conscious of death and of transforming the momentary into the eternal. Even the most tragic love will offer the experience of one instance of otherworldly joy, given to lovers when they glimpse the beyond …, that somewhere else which becomes a here and a now, "where nothing changes and where everything is as it really *is*" (Paz 2001:213).

Nauchipán does not exist. Or maybe it does. The (nameless) lover says he might even have invented it in order to make her (also nameless) fall in love. Or maybe not. Catherine Belsey writes that:

> We want what we don't have – and there is a good deal of that from any perspective. But desire is the metonym of a discontent which envisages utopia, a continuing restlessness that motivates change, whether for better or worse. (Belsey 1994: 209)

and, perhaps, Julia Kristeva would answer with:

> (…) if all utopias seem attainable today, if modern life is about to achieve them, perhaps we should try to avoid them in order to recover a non-utopic society, less perfect and more free … But how can one be free without some sort of utopia, some sort of strangeness? Let us therefore be of nowhere, but without forgetting that we are somewhere… (Kristeva 1991: 117)

Note

[1] All passages cited from the Spanish novels, including the quote from Octavio Paz, are my translations.

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Orbiston: The First British Owenite Community 1825-28

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Orbiston sprang indirectly from Robert Owen’s vision of communities or “villages of unity and mutual co-operation” stretching from pole to pole.[1] Although Orbiston, near Motherwell, Scotland, was not by any means unique, it was one of the earliest experiments in Owenite co-operation among workers in Britain. There the theories of the New System were tried for the first time outside New Lanark by a band of enthusiasts and displaced workers, victims of the post-Napoleonic War depression in Britain. Like Owen those who backed the scheme were concerned with the problems of contemporary distress and what could be done to solve them.[2]

Indeed social distress and threat of disorder caused such alarm among the landed gentry of Lanark county that in 1820 they looked to Owen for help. Most, no doubt, had read the view of Dr Henry Macnab, reporting on New Lanark and Owen’s ideas, that the “great aims of the benevolent views of Mr Owen are the employment, instruction and comfort of the labouring classes and of the poor (…) the education and universal happiness of mankind” (Macnab 1819: 125). Owen relished the opportunity presented by the request to investigate local conditions and make proposals. This he duly did in his most significant economic thesis, the *Report to the County of Lanark*, presented to the Commissioners of Supply on May 1, 1820:

> Mr Owen of New Lanark attended this meeting and communicated a plan he had formed for ameliorating the condition of the working classes of Society; and pointing out the best practical modes of employing the working classes in order that public distress might be essentially relieved; and containing a recommendation to the Heritors and Farmers to give such employment in the meantime by the spade and otherwise to the peaceable and industrious labourers as their means might afford. (Commisioners 1820: 387-8)

The Report was remitted to a sub-committee under the chairmanship of Sir James Stewart-Denham of Coltness (friend and neighbour of Archibald James Hamilton of Dalzell), which "embraced an early opportunity of hearing Mr Owen at great length upon the nature and details of the Plan recommended by him for the relief of the distress of the country" (Owen 1821: Appendix, 63).

Further consideration was given to Owen's scheme at another meeting on November 16. Stewart-Denham's report was hesitant in "recommending a system which, in many of its prominent features, is acknowledged by Mr Owen himself to be at variance with those principles which are sanctioned by the most enlightened political economists of the age", but it concluded with a glowing report of New Lanark and Owen's achievements, "which instead of involving any pecuniary sacrifice [sic], are found to operate beneficially in a commercial point of view" (*idem*, 65). Philanthropy which paid profits would interest even the least socially motivated.

The meeting then heard of "a proposal by a respectable gentleman of the County, for granting a lease of ground sufficient for the purpose of making a trial of the Plan":

> With a view to facilitate the formation of an Establishment on Mr Owen's Plan, which would supersede the necessity of erecting a Bridewell for the County, Mr A.J. Hamilton Yr of Dalzell, submits a proposal to let 500-700 acres of land, proper for this purpose (…) Mr Hamilton is willing, being assisted by the Author of the Plan, to superintend the whole, without charge to the County. (*idem*, 66)

A sketch map showing the proposed community near Motherwell, resembled the agricultural and manufacturing villages earlier advocated by

Owen in *Relief for the Manufacturing Poor* (1817). Although enthusiastic about Hamilton's offer, Owen, not surprisingly, rejected any similarity between his proposed community and a gaol.

A petition to Parliament in favour of Owen's Report and Plan was rejected, and his 'quadrangular paradises' were subjected to some ridicule. Although the Commissioners for Lanark in turn rejected the scheme, Owen found a staunch supporter in Hamilton, and together they resolved to try a model community on the Dalzell estate at Motherwell. Capital to set up the community was to be raised by 2,000 shares of £25 and as soon as 1,500 had been subscribed operations were to begin. Owen and Hamilton would oversee a Committee of Management, but eventually, when initial capital had been repaid, the worker-members of the community would have full management of their own affairs.

The Motherwell Scheme attracted some interest nationally including the support in 1822 of the Owenite British and Foreign Philanthropic Society, whose aim was a trial of Owen's scheme. It issued a prospectus on the proposed community, with a list of subscribers (accounting for nearly half the £100,000 sought by Owen) including Owen himself, Hamilton, James Morrison of London, Henry Jones (a retired naval officer), General Robert Brown of County Wexford, Captain Robert O'Brien (another Irish landowner), Abram Combe, John Maxwell MP, Henry Brougham MP and William Falla, the advocate of spade husbandry. A distinguished gathering in London on June 1, 1822 heard Owen say that the community would form a model for others, and would train suitable individuals on the principles of the New System to act as promoters of future communities. Owen was at last convinced that his vision would soon become a reality, but his hopes were dashed later in the year by the failure of the B & FPS to back their enthusiasm with capital.[3] His attempts during 1822-23 to gain support of the elites in Ireland resulted in a massive propaganda campaign, but little action.[4]

Never doubting the ultimate launching of the community, Owen purchased land from Hamilton's father, which he later sold back to Hamilton as the site for the community. But Owen was committed still further to spreading the gospel of the New System, involved in partnership and other difficulties at New Lanark, and, more significantly for the community movement in Britain, had by summer 1824 set his sights on the purchase of New Harmony. Motherwell was soon forgotten. The way was clear for Hamilton and Combe at Orbiston.

Of the founders Archibald James Hamilton (1793-1834) was typical of the military and ex-military individuals attracted to Owen. But he was more forthright in his views. "It was a singular coincidence", Hamilton wrote, "that I should be born in a year which would so determine my future feelings and opinions". So for someone of his class he had radical views saying that his "useless education and commissioned service" with the Dragoons and Scots Greys in the Peninsular War and at Waterloo had left him disillusioned with the establishment and with the accepted order of society. After his army service he settled at home to oversee the family estate, and began to take an increasing interest in local and national affairs.

Owen's New View had a profound influence on Hamilton (the two had first met in 1816) and, like Combe, he became an ardent disciple. He translated his social opinions into practical schemes aimed at relieving local unemployment in Dalzell, including intensive agriculture (as advocated by William Falla, the horticulturalist, whose ideas Owen adopted) and cottage industries. In many ways Hamilton was the typical, paternalist Scottish landowner, with interests in his estate, parish schools and poor relief, dabbling also in economic developments, such as coal mining, turnpikes and railways. But he departed from the norm in his fervent adoption of Owenism and his criticism in 1820 of the formation of volunteer regiments to quell the Radical uprising in and around Glasgow.

Abram Combe (1785-1827) was a man of entirely different background. Son of a prosperous Edinburgh brewer, Combe was apprenticed in the leather-tanning trade and by 1807 owned a successful tannery. He quickly established himself in Edinburgh society joining his brothers George (the phrenologist, who thought Owen's 'bump of benevolence' the largest he had encountered) and Andrew (a highly regarded physiologist). George and another brother, William, later became involved in the affairs of Orbiston following Abram's untimely death in 1827.

Combe first met Owen in 1820, visited New Lanark and like Hamilton became a firm convert to Owenism after reading the New View. A year later he met Hamilton, resident in Edinburgh, to attend classes in the university. Their first joint effort was the Edinburgh Practical Society, a co-operative group (mostly composed of skilled operatives) with an eventual membership of 500 families. Like Orbiston it had strong moral and self-help motives and its members had to pledge abstention from alcohol, tobacco and swearing. A society store and school were run on the lines of those at New Lanark, but within a year it had failed as a result of the misappropriation of funds by the storekeeper. According to Hamilton the personnel were badly selected and he urged that members of future Owenite communities should 'be possessed of more than ordinary knowledge' (another significant Owenite mantra).

Combe also tried community formation in his tan-yard (1822), with a profit-sharing scheme. This, too, was soon abandoned and Combe turned to writing about Owenism. During 1822-25 he produced numerous pamphlets advocating the adoption of community building and expounding his own economic and religious ideas. Somewhat at odds with general Owenite views was his *Religious Creed of the New System* (1824) which developed his own peculiar form of deism, 'Divine Revelation'. More interesting was a statement of his economic outlook in *The Sphere for Joint Stock Companies* (1825), containing details of the proposed community at Orbiston.[5]

Such was the enthusiasm of Orbiston's promoters in spring 1825 that building operations had begun before the legal and financial arrangements were completed. The site of 291 acres on the Dalzell estate near the river Calder, "all arable and of excellent quality", was formally acquired from General John Hamilton by the Orbiston Company on May 13, 1825. The articles of agreement signed earlier (March 18) set the capital at £50,000 in 200 shares of £250 and designated Abram Combe trustee. Several of the original subscribers to the Motherwell Scheme immediately took shares in Orbiston, and using the paid-up share capital and land as securities, Combe borrowed on bond nearly £20,000 of which the Scottish Union Insurance Company in Edinburgh loaned £12,000.[6]

Orbiston resembled the design advocated by Owen in *Relief for the Poor* and *Report to the County of Lanark*. The symmetrical, barrack-like, central block was to be 4 storeys high and intended for community use, housing kitchens, dining rooms (to accommodate 800 people), drawing rooms, ball-room, lecture hall and library. The wings on either side were to provide private living quarters for the communitarians, with special accommodation for the children. Initial construction was under way by March 1825, the first phase being the north wing.

Six months later, on October 17, a meeting of the shareholders (or 'proprietors') was held in one of the finished apartments. Combe reported that 125 shares had been taken up and that expenses to date totalled over £5,000. After examining progress, several shareholders offered to double their investment, although they decided to postpone work on the central block and concentrate efforts on building workshops nearby. "The meeting", Combe wrote, "expressed themselves satisfied with the way the work was conducted; and I was unanimously confirmed Trustee for the Company; and Henry Jones and J[oseph] Applegarth were appointed Auditors" (*Orbiston Register* Nov 10, 1825).

News of Orbiston soon spread and even before the north wing was completed, Combe had numerous applications. The first to arrive were a group

of handloom weavers from Hamilton; they were shown over the buildings, selected their rooms and enrolled as tenants. A number of builders also lived in the partly-completed wing during the winter of 1825-26, but large-scale occupation did not begin until the spring. Apart from the obvious financial difficulties the main item of discussion at the proprietors' meeting on March 18, 1826 was the selection and role of future members. The meeting agreed "to sanction the immediate introduction of the system of Union and Mutual Co-operation" and that "individuals who could agree to co-operate, might have management of their own affairs" (*Orbiston Register* Mar 30, 1826). Following the meeting, Combe presided over a conference of existing and future communitarians. He undertook to become a member himself, act as supervisor and read the regulations, 13 in all, similar to those of the Edinburgh Practical Society but laying greater emphasis on equality and co-operation.

The decision to introduce co-operation was a momentous one. Much of the enthusiasm for mutual co-operation came from Combe and Hamilton, who were at that stage entirely responsible for the community. Orbiston did not have the official backing of Robert Owen, and to his credit Combe pointed this out categorically in January 1826. However, Owen's absence did little to encourage public enthusiasm and some of the reports were hardly laudatory. Orbiston Community, like Owen's take-over of Harmony, had been planned in haste and with similar confusion (*Orbiston Register* Jan 12, 1826).

On April 9, 1826 the builders departed and members of the new community moved in. At once the problem of unselected personnel (so obvious at New Harmony) became clear. "A worse selection of individuals", Combe wrote, "men, women and children, could scarcely have been made – a population made up for the most part of the worst part of Society". There were about 100 workers, who had simply been accepted into the community as they applied, and some had come to avoid the evils of the Old System, "rather than to seek the advantages of the New" (*Orbiston Register* Aug 19, 1827).

There was confusion and disagreement from the start. Although the first week was devoted to the allocation of accommodation and making the building habitable, a number approached Combe on the Saturday, demanding their week's wages. The ignorance of Old Society, which Owen had forecast in Relief for the Poor as being one of the greatest barriers to the introduction of the New, was already evident. At a general meeting Combe stated that "Labour was the source of all Wealth" and attempted to explain "other of the prevailing notions which puzzle the unlearned". He pointed out the advantages of the New System: everyone would work to supply a common stock and the unskilled would be trained as necessary; each would put a value per hour on his or her labour, which would be verified by an elected committee; and each could draw from the common stock what he or she had earned. These proposals were "unanimously agreed" to but, Combe remarked, "fell to the ground like a dead letter" (*ibidem*).

During the first months there was only limited co-operation. Communal dining facilities were rejected by the majority of members, who "began to look to themselves in the Old Way". "The New System appeared altogether inferior to the Old, that nothing but the refusal of their husbands to accompany them, prevented the wives from setting out to Old Society". Gardening was more successful, and members planted fruit and vegetables, dug ditches and laid paths. Combe himself tried to set an example by working with the spade, but overcome by physical effort and worry about the community, he became ill and was forced to hurry to Edinburgh to seek medical advice. The affairs of the infant community during summer 1826 were left in the hands of Henry Jones, a former supporter of the B & FPS and subscriber.

While Combe was absent, John Gray, the Owenite theoretician, visited Orbiston. His impressions were not encouraging and O'Brien also expressed reservations. He insisted that the only way to improve the situation was to replace the existing community members "with a selection of respectable and

well-conditioned persons". When Combe returned, he found things "at sixes and sevens", but "expressed himself as satisfied with the class of people gathered together". The New Society had so far been a failure because "the individuals would work for wages, but they could not comprehend the idea of working for the produce of their own labour". Members seemed unwilling to promote mutual co-operation and Combe was thus forced to re-organise the community and its workforce (much as occurred at New Harmony) (*ibidem*).[7]

Although there was general apathy, there were a number of more educated members who were anxious to try the New System. A group of skilled workers formed a foundry using an old mill for their workshop. Combe was delighted with this success. Some members thought, however, that preferential treatment was given to the foundry promoters, and seemed prepared to force the issue of Combe's interference in affairs. Combe asserted that "he would not remain the nominal head of the experiment, and at the same time have its affairs conducted in a manner which he would not approve". The arguments were momentarily settled and the community agreed that Combe should have "sole direction" of activities (again comparable to Owen's position at New Harmony).

Increasing numbers of workers at Orbiston began to show some willingness to join in mutual co-operation and several new departments were created, including horticulture, agriculture, building and artisans. Clearly, however, there was little enthusiasm, though Combe admitted that experiment was the only path to ultimate success.

Closing his eyes to the disarray, Combe recorded his dreams for the future of Orbiston Community. He hoped that a house could be rented in Edinburgh or Glasgow for the benefit of members and a cottage acquired on the coast so that they could "enjoy daily the beautiful and romantic rides for which the West Highlands are so famed". He was even more optimistic when he wrote:

> The Community at Exeter, which is now building under the direction of Jasper Vesey, will be ready to receive any of our members, as we should certainly be to receive any of them. The Community near Cork, of which Wm Thompson has sent us particulars, will have the same feeling. Besides those in Britain and Ireland, we have our friends of Harmony in Indiana – for a disciple of the New System will always be at home among his brethren. (*Orbiston Register* Aug 26, 1826)

In August when Combe again left due to ill health, the community was split into two camps – a majority in favour of co-operation and equal distribution, and a minority (mostly skilled craftsmen) who wanted to maintain the status quo. Thus Orbiston lost its leader at a critical point, and this forced some reorganisation of affairs. During September and October Hamilton assumed nominal leadership and soon found himself in a difficult position. He faced growing agitation for equality and co-operation on one hand, and reluctance of the foundry company and several shareholders on the other. Hamilton thought "the sooner the tenants acted as a body the better", and they could then take full control of the community.

After extended negotiations a meeting of the proprietors on October 17 agreed to lease the land and buildings to the members. The shareholders were to be paid 5 per cent interest on their capital and have rights of access to accounts and influence expenditure. Each member had to be re-elected, agree to maintain the regulations and swear belief in the doctrine "that man is the creature of circumstances and that character is formed for and not by the individuals, as taught in the writings of Mr Owen". Although the legal transfer of the property had still to be concluded, the members could assume management with ostensible equality and co-operation (*Orbiston Register* Oct 17 and Nov 1, 1826).

A provisional committee, elected earlier, was confirmed at a tenants' meeting on October 19: President, Abram Combe; Superintendents of Departments, Miss Whitwell (formerly of New Lanark), Alexander Campbell, John Hutton, John Lambe, Edward Simpson; and Elected Representatives,

Messrs Cameron, Fenner, Foster, Hamilton, Kirkpatrick, Reid, Rogers, Sheddon, Wigg and Wilson. Each department for domestic arrangements, education, horticulture, agriculture, mechanics and artisans had its own superintendent, who was to keep accounts of production and expenditure and presently weekly reports. The individual worker would be credited at the community store with the value of his or her production. Weekly meetings of the Governing Committee would likewise supervise all community affairs and examine the reports of all trades and departments (*Orbiston Register* Nov 1, 1826).

As winter drew in, it became increasingly obvious that Combe was unlikely ever to see the fruits of his labours at Orbiston. In the December issue of the *Register* he wrote, "the idea of witnessing the improvements made by the Community at Orbiston, since I left it, is now even more than I can raise a hope to". His brother William was elected to the new office of Vice-President to act on his behalf.

Shortly after William Combe's arrival, the Governing Committee produced a detailed outline of proposals for the future. There were to be eight departments and every member would belong to one of them: store or bazaar; domestic; police; lodgers; education; agriculture; mechanics; and artisans. Although merely a statement of intent, the proposals envisaged a high degree of community action and co-operation, and described the role of each department. The nucleus was the store, which was to provide raw materials, food and clothes. The horticultural and agricultural departments would provide the store with grain, fruit and vegetables. The store would function for the benefit of the whole community and members could draw goods to the extent of their earnings. The domestic department was responsible for day-to-day supervision of kitchens, dining-rooms, bake house, wash house, children's dormitories and mess-rooms. The police department had "to provide for due

order throughout the building" and also prevent (as at New Lanark) "drunkenness, quarrelling or rioting" (*Orbiston Register* Dec 27, 1826).

The educational provision at Orbiston (for both children and adults) was modest, but successful enough considering the short life of the community. The schools were run jointly by Catherine Whitwell and Alexander Campbell, assisted for a time by Applegarth. Apparently a striking figure, Whitwell, sister of the Owenite architect, Stedman Whitwell, was a teacher at New Lanark and had devised the famous visual aids for the institute and school. Campbell was a joiner who had embraced trade unionism and co-operation as an alternative to capitalism. Applegarth had also taught at New Lanark and was one of the few individuals we know who later proceeded to New Harmony. Subjects included reading, writing and arithmetic, supplemented by history, geography, dancing and music. Discipline seems to have been lax and truancy was a major problem, which is surprising since at least one contemporary noted that at New Lanark "the system was one of severe discipline, but of real and solid usefulness". Adult education at Orbiston included debating, lectures, music, dancing and drama, mainly promoted by Catherine Whitwell.[8]

The three important productive departments – Agriculture, Mechanics and Artisans – employed the majority. Agriculture made a significant contribution and was one of the most successful ventures. The mechanics' department included the foundry company (who were nominally independent), joiners, carpenters, plumbers, glaziers, stone-cutters, masons, nailers and slaters. The artisans' department also indicated the wide variety of skills attracted to Orbiston: printers, book-binders, tailors, watch-makers, spinners and weavers, wood-workers, and also a sub-section of female needle workers. These artisans, under the leadership of Henry Kirkpatrick (printer of the Register), were undoubtedly the most united in community. But indeed, the minority who had opposed community of property were confined to the agricultural department and the enterprising foundry company. Both were highly

independent, kept separate accounts, and attended few meetings of the Governing Committee.

Favourable reports came from various departments at the beginning of 1827. Farming operations had been fairly successful, the artisans and foundry were doing well, and masons, joiners and carpenters busied themselves in extending farm buildings and erecting a saw mill (driven by the foundry waterwheel). Weavers and shoemakers, printers and bookbinders undertook work for Old Society at competitive rates. Some indication of the many skills available at Orbiston is illustrated in the advertisement placard issued in autumn 1826.[9] However, despite the successes of some departments, it soon became obvious that all was not well.

Growing financial difficulties were exploited by several of the shareholders who had never been firmly committed to co-operation and community action. O'Brien and Jones both spread "dismal forebodings" among members and other shareholders. Combe, by contrast, wrote with optimism to Hamilton that he could not "conceive any possible way of turning capital to better account than the one we have adopted", perhaps forgetting that Hamilton had committed a large part of his personal fortune to the community.[10] Shortage of ready capital was strikingly apparent by March 1827, which writing to Hamilton, William Combe explained.

The community had accumulated substantial debts, and demands were now being made – mostly small bills and interest payments – amounting to nearly £2,000. He thought they could hold out till harvest time, when "most of the demands would cease". Hamilton and Abram Combe came to the rescue at once with bonds and ready cash, which temporarily saved Orbiston from bankruptcy. Affairs were still far from bright, though William Combe reported that "a good feeling prevails among the community", and the majority of the members were anxious to be in the fields. As it transpired, this was the last harvest at Orbiston.[11]

Rumours and counter-rumours precipitated loss of confidence amongst communitarians. Some began to complain about conditions and lack of security. Even those who had continued to operate on capitalist lines began to feel the pinch, and some of the foundry operatives were first to leave (all of them consistent opponents of equal distribution). By midsummer the financial situation was desperate, and it was clear that the demise of the community was not far off. The general economic climate was such that the bondholders had been pressing for realisation of their assets for months. In a last bid to save the community, the Governing Committee (under William Combe) investigated the running of every department to see if productivity could be improved and economies made. The result was the abandonment of equal distribution and co-operation. Instead, a piece-rate system was introduced, and members were urged to make every effort to save the community.

Individual enterprise did little to retrieve the lost fortunes of Orbiston. Members continued to grumble, and many left during the summer to return to Old Society. The last hope of saving Orbiston vanished when news of Abram Combe's death was received on August 11. An appeal was at once made to Hamilton to take charge, but ill health prevented him from doing so. He thought in any case that his help would merely postpone the ultimate collapse, for the members would do little for themselves:

> It would also be against the spirit of the System, as every individual in such a Society should feel himself interested in its success. By mutual and combined exertions they should work out their own social salvation; but this has never been exemplified in the members of Orbiston Community.[12]

Only the harvest maintained the dwindling membership during the autumn of 1827. The last edition of the *Register* (September 19, 1827) related the sad tale of the finances and gave an appreciation of Abram Combe. The end came in December, when William Combe, pressed to the utmost by one of the bondholders for full repayment, was finally forced to close Orbiston.

Practically all members returned to Old Society, though a handful stayed on to work the land on behalf of the shareholders, including Alexander Paul (former Secretary) who was later appointed factor and trustee on the sequestered estate. The aftermath of Orbiston was a series of protracted legal wranglings in the courts, but the end for the community came on that chill December day when an Owenite experiment was abandoned.

In a sad letter to Owen, Hamilton outlined the tragedy of Orbiston. Hamilton thought that too many members of Orbiston were near their friends in Old Society, and like so many of them, lazy and addicted to drink. “The experiment at Orbiston”, he later wrote, “was no fair test of Pantisocraty [sic]” .[13]

After the collapse of the community Campbell and Sheddon (as partners of the foundry company) were prosecuted by one of the many creditors and found themselves in jail. Campbell wrote to Owen (who had only recently returned from the US) acclaiming the virtues of the New System. “I can only say for myself that the whole of the proceedings at Orbiston has tended to conform my mind stronger both as to the practicability and utility of your system over the present arrangement of Society.” Equal distribution, he admitted, had been a failure, and Friendly Society legislation could have been used to give confidence to the members. He felt that the failure of Orbiston would “prevent for a long time other capitalists from embarking in the like speculations”, and that limited capital would similarly deter the labouring classes from forming their own communities.

Bankruptcy of both the Orbiston Company and its off-shoot, the Orbiston Foundry Company, was quickly established, but settlement of the affairs was not finally completed until 1831. The land was sold to Cecilia Douglass, who owned a neighbouring estate, for £15,050, and in the division of the assets only one creditor was paid in full. The shareholders, including the Combes, Hamilton, Morgan and the Rathbones of Liverpool, lost all their investment.

The various participants had mixed fortunes. Hamilton settled down on his estate and continued to take an interest in local affairs. William Combe went to the US (supposedly to join New Harmony, although there is no record of him there), where one of his brothers noted “he displayed the same want of energy as he did on this side of the Atlantic”.[14] Campbell, who played a leading role at Orbiston, became an untiring propagandist of Owenism as a travelling lecturer and than as a co-operator. Alexander Paul expressed a desire to cross the Atlantic “to find out comfort and happiness in mutual co-operation”. Typically most of the other confirmed Owenites reappeared later in trade union, radical, Owenite and Chartist circles. But the majority merged into Old Society again – as if Orbiston had never existed.

As an experiment in pantisocracy Orbiston was a failure. Yet its demise does not seem to have discouraged Owen, for in Autumn 1828 he wrote to Hamilton with his usual flowing enthusiasm:

> It will gratify you to learn that the good cause is progressing substantially in all countries, and that your exertions, although not crowned with immediate success at Orbiston, have contributed essentially to make the principles known, and to prepare the way for their practice in many places.[15]

For Owen, at least, the great experiment was just that, a test of his ideas and the basis for future community projects.

Notes

[1] On the background to Owen’s community schemes see Harrison 1969; Garnett 1972; Claeys 1993; Royle 1998; Donnachie 2000.
[2] On Orbiston specifically, see Donnachie 1971.
[3] On the Motherwell Scheme, see Harrison 1969: 28-9; Donnachie 1971: 137-140.
[4] On the Irish tour see Donnachie 2000: 190-95.
[5] On Hamilton and Combe see Harrison 1969: 26-32, 103-5; Donnachie 1971: 140-45.
[6] North Lanarkshire Archives, Motherwell Heritage Centre, Scotland, Hamilton Papers, List of Subscribers, May 27, 1827; National Archives of Scotland, Edinburgh, Court of Session, EP 58, Ranking and Sale of Orbiston, Mar 11, 1831.

[7] On New Harmony see Donnachie 2000: 219-49.
[8] Further research is being undertaken on Whitwell, an interesting figure in Owenism.
[9] Hamilton Papers, W.Combe to Hamilton, Mar 4, 1827;and W.Falla to Hamilton, Aug 16 ,1826.
[10] Hamilton Papers, A. Combe to Hamilton: Feb 19, 1827.
[11] Hamilton Papers, W. Combe to Hamilton, Mar 14, 1827.
[12] Hamilton Papers, Hamilton's Memoir (Mss.) "The soldier and the citizen of the World".
[13] Co-operative Union, Owen Collection, Hamilton to Owen, Sept 8, 1828; 'The Soldier and Citizen'.
[14] Hamilton Coll., Paul to Hamilton, Aug 17, 1829.
[15] *Idem,* Owen to Hamilton, Oct 14, 1828.

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Owen and Fourier: **Collusion and Collision**

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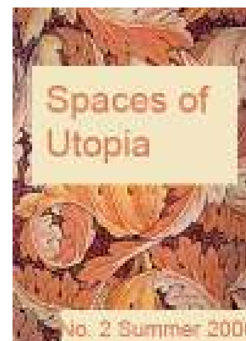

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The *New Moral World* (13 March 1841) wrote that Owen and Fourier had both given hope to suffering nations and invited them to have confidence in each of them and that in a period of political anarchy and social despair, it was of paramount importance to establish which of the two was the true Messiah towards whom the cries for help of Humanity rose.

We shall certainly not elect the true Messiah, nor bring an answer to the controversies to which the *New Moral World* largely opened its pages.

We shall try and relate here how Owen and Fourier tried to meet, at Fourier's instigation. Both their theories had the same aim: human happiness, *hic* and *nunc*, yet they took different paths and decidedly remained divergent on a fundamental point: the analysis of human nature.

Their paths started from the same point: a strong criticism of civilisation went towards the same horizon: how to free Humanity from the yoke of society and drew the labyrinth of happiness into which they shut themselves while trying to give us the keys.

A rich literary exchange started between Owen and Fourier, owenists and fourierists, an exchange that in the second half of the 20th century drew the

attention of Richard Pankhurst, “Fourierism in Britain”, Jacques Gans, “Relations entre socialistes de France et d’Angleterre au début du XIX” and Henri Desroche, “Owenisme et utopies françaises”. These paths left traces that went as far as the USA and across the world to create ‘global harmony’.

Owen and Fourier belonged to the famous triad that Engels named the Utopian Socialists together with Saint Simon, as opposed to the Scientific Socialists he claimed to be with Marx. Fourier strongly insisted on his being scientific from the beginning and hated the word utopian. Engels and Marx’s early works are directly inspired by those who advocated love, peace and harmony. Saint Simon was translated by the owenist J. E. Smith, Fourier and Owen by Hugh Doherty. The London Cooperative Society published a translation of Fourier in 1828.

Fourier made the first step, having become acquainted with Owen’s projects through the *Revue Encyclopédique*, written by Jullien de Paris, a former babouvist. Jullien de Paris had come to New Lanark in 1822 and published an article enhancing Owen. He wrote that “Great Britain and particularly Scotland are, in Europe, amongst those privileged countries where it is possible and permitted to work at human happiness, where many individual thoughts and public acts have something to do with the well-being of all social classes” (Paris 1923). He gave an idyllic description of New Lanark which he said was the obvious sign of a higher degree of civilisation. The description he gave of New Lanark was very akin to that Fourier gave of the Phalanstère. Both were situated in hilly places crossed by a river, proper to varied cultures, not too far from a large town. Jullien de Paris was convinced that the metamorphosis operated by Owen at New Lanark was a precious witness of the primitive kindness of human nature.

Thus intrigued by New Lanark, Fourier wished to meet Owen whom he perhaps considered as his double, although New Lanark was real and the

Phalanstère only dreamt of. Moreover, Owen's and Fourier's biographies shared similar elements. They both had left their families early and started as apprentices, both were autodidacts, but Owen investing 20 pounds, soon became the director of a cotton mill when he was 20, while Fourier who had borrowed 100 pounds, tried commercial business and failed, hence hated commerce and money, and soon retired in Bugey, where he came from, to sit at his table and write down a theory he had very early elaborated. In 1820, Fourier wrote:

> Our century is on the look-out for a discovery that we have a premonition of, and that is even sensed by the English: the theory of Association (…). They chase after it heartily. One of them, Robert Owen, has introduced himself to Emperor Alexander, as being the inventor of a very new method in that matter. Here is a proof that he has not even touched the theory lightly: they are 2.400 people, with no success. If he really knew about this new science, he would need no more than the fourth of that number. An association in "degré simple" (simple degree) may be successful with only 400 people, in "degré mixte" (mixed degree) with 800 and in "degré composé" (combined degree) with 1.200. However, despite his jabbering, Robert Owen can be praised for facing such a useful problem. But when I'll make my proposals to England I shall only ask for the fourth of the people confided to Owen. He has been struggling to try for three years. I'll only need three months. (Fourier 1820: manuscript 10 AS 14 25)

In 1822, in the introduction he wrote to his *Traité de l'Association domestique,* Fourier praised Owen's initiative and yet already made some reservations. But he was still looking for collusion:

> It is customary in Europe that England takes the initiative of useful enterprises and that France only comes on the stage only after the English have given the impulse (…) Robert Owen is the first who has put his research on Association into practice. His enterprise is praiseworthy (…) I could point out thirty mistakes in the mechanism of human passions. I prefer to praise what is praiseworthy. I notice with pleasure that the English agree with the fundamental principle of domestic economy: to operate on great numbers of people (…) They will learn in this book what marvels can be made by a reunion of five hundred unequal men, women, children associated according to the wish of nature, according to the methods determined by the arithmetics of passionate attraction. (Fourier 1966-69: 7-8)

Although he still hoped for a collusion, Fourier had already hinted at the subject of their collision: the theory of passionate attraction which was the fundamental principle of his own system.

In 1823, Fourier, learning through the *Revue Encyclopédique* that Owen wished to establish a community at Motherwell in Scotland, wrote to Owen, offering him his services and sent him a sample of his *Nouveau Monde Industriel*. In 1823 Fourier met Anna Doyle Wheeler, an Irish feminist who was close to the owenists and had just established herself in Paris. She was attracted by Fourier's ideas and tried to make Fourier and Owen meet. This did not work, but she introduced Fourier to some owenists, which nourished Fourier's hope.

In 1824, Fourier wrote to Owen and made a last attempt to convince him that he should use passionate attraction in his cooperative villages and collaborate to establish a Phalanx. He joined two samples of his *Traité*. Owen did not read French. Philip Skene translated their letters. Owen refused Fourier's proposals, having no use of Fourier's ideas as he himself was looking for a community to apply his own ideas. Thus Fourier received an ironical reply written in fourierist terms whose parody he did not see. He thus went on offering Owen his help, showing him that Motherwell was bound to fail if he did not apply the theory of passionate attraction.

We know through his biographer Charles Pellarin that Fourier hoped England would help him to put his theory into practice and be better known in France. He is said to have had one of his articles translated in English, to pretend that he had been published in England, before presenting it to a reluctant French magazine. Owen never replied to Fourier.

In 1825, he is still very enthusiastic about Owen's success in America and still hopes to influence the new owenist society, the London cooperative society. But his hopes are disproportionate. In August 1825, Philip Skene gives Fourier two translations of Owen's works which Fourier does not appreciate and finds contrary to the principles of industrial attraction and harmonious passions. Fourier seems

disappointed and writes in 1827 that when in 1822 he praised Owen's intentions, he was far from suspecting that he was in fact working at ridiculising the idea of association. As a result of Owen's muteness, when in 1827 some owenists tried to get in touch with him, Fourier did not reply. In 1831, Fourier published in Paris: *Pièges et charlatanismes des deux sectes Owen et Saint-Simon.*

Fourier and Owen never met until 1837, shortly before Fourier's death, at a banquet organised by the socialists when Owen came to Paris. They probably did not talk to each other as no trace has been left. Owen did not mention it in the letter he wrote the next day: "The majority of the French", he said, "are disgusted by the present system, a great revolution is absolutely necessary, but no one knows how to do it without immense sufferings as a consequence. This is the great problem I must solve for all nations".[1]

Owen came to France in 1848 hoping to find a possibility for the realisation of his ideas. He had been advised to do so by some of his disciples. Owenist communities had failed in England and in the United States. On April 10th, Owen spoke before the members of the Société Fraternelle Centrale founded by Cabet. He also published two dialogues: Robert Owen, France and the world and a dialogue on the social system. Nothing that he had already spoken of.

Owen and Fourier asserted they were the pioneers of a new type of society. They were convinced that the regeneration of humanity could only be the work of a genius imposing his ideas upon the herd. Their strength lay in their understanding that the masses were exploited.

Both condemned the industrial civilisation for being irrational and creating deep misery. Owen addresses the poor in terms that remind us of Thomas More's analysis. Laws are inadequate: they should not condemn those who rob bread because they cannot afford to buy some. Everyone should be able to buy bread.

Fourier even imagined a social minimum, together with a sexual minimum for everyone.

Fourier makes a negative analysis of the 1789 revolution, too violent and unable to bring happiness: he proves that nothing is possible in civilisation, that any promise of freedom is hijacked by those who have made it once they have power because there has never been a true analysis of the deep causes of evil that condemn man to slavery. The French Revolution could have led to social harmony, had the leaders given justice to wage-earners and to women by recognising their natural rights.

For Fourier and Owen, revolution can only be made through reason, not through violence. Contrary to other romantics, like Carlyle for instance, they did not turn towards the primitive community as a model nor towards the golden age. Revolution was synonymous with evolution. Only a rational and fair system would help us come out of chaos and darkness. Owen and Fourier were convinced they had invented a system that would start a new era.

Owen and Fourier agreed on many points although Owen was a capitalist and Fourier was only a 'philosopher'. They agreed on the necessity of a new economical order providing a remedy to waste, due to anarchical production. For them, cooperation must replace competition: such is the basis of association. They aimed at creating autonomous associative communities and thought once some of them had succeeded they would naturally expand all over the world, i.e. globalise.

Work

They both insisted that work was an absolute right. Fourier was disappointed that there were still too many privileges in France and the right to work was not really applied. Owen advised France to give work to all her children if France wished to get rid of pauperism. He was very much concerned with the conditions of work as

we know. Although a capitalist he did much to improve the conditions in New Lanark. In 1830 he had created the “Equitable labour Exchange Bazaars”.

Fourier had a very new and original conception of work: according to the laws of passionate attraction, Fourier conceives work as pleasurable. He knows that it is a token of productivity. No work is compulsory in the phalanx. One chooses to do what one enjoys doing: moreover Fourier, being far ahead in that matter, imagines that one can find pleasure in different kinds of work, therefore he is allowed to work for 2 hours at some activity, then change for another activity. But this is not compulsory. Being in harmony with the other members of the community and therefore with himself, the individual finds pleasure in working and is therefore efficient. In the phalanx, there is a Labour Exchange too.

Money

Owen thought of replacing money by “work tokens”. In the Phalanx, Fourier opens an account to each member from early age. The benefice made is shared out according to the capital each member has invested in the Phalanx, and according to his talent and work. The association being built on the laws of passionate attraction there will never be conflicts due to personal interests. He also thought of work tokens.

Owen and Fourier shared with Saint Simon the idea of a political Europe. Although Saint Simon thought of the British parliament as a model for the European parliament, Owen and Fourier have confidence in France. Europe for them is only one step in the conquest of the Globe. They speak of the problems we are still trying to solve: unemployment, the right to work, concertation, peace, and how to change politics and invent new forms of sociability.

Yet, Owen and Fourier seriously diverged on the definition of man's nature. In the *Dialogue between France, Owen and the World* (1848), Owen wrote that the circumstances had allowed him to penetrate a few fundamental truths on man's nature.

Owen believed that a proper education and good working conditions would make good and happy men. He believed in the malleability of human nature. Man is the product of his milieu and family history. In order to 'civilise' the poor, he hoped to correct and improve them by offering them conditions favourable to their well-being and as a consequence to the well-being of society.

He introduced Rousseau's and Pestolazzi's ideas on education which he applied for both sexes. Education was financed by the benefits made by the cooperative village. Yet, despite all the improvements he made, Owen tended to mix up education and indoctrination.

Fourier reproached him with his dogmatism, severe discipline and civilised moral standards that encouraged virtue for virtue itself, although Owen, like Fourier, did not believe in the original sin.

Fourier preferred virtue allied to the pleasure of the senses. He had written to Skene (17 September 1824) that Motherwell was a dangerous experience that could provoke a return to a feudal system, if the monarchs realised the advantages offered by the cooperative village: progress, benefice, savings, disciplined and restrained people, they would apply the same regime to workers in towns and civilisation would then reach its 4th phase when the people are collectively enslaved.

Fourier was very diffident about the 18th-century philosophers whom he considered too inspired by Socrates and Plato, i.e. by those who wish to reduce man to abstract immaterial pleasure and wish man to be a soul without a body.

According to Fourier, Evil comes from our fettered passions. The Declaration of Human Rights, says Fourier, has only been a declaration of intentions, unable to modify and improve the real.

If we want to progress, we must forget that we have been taught and invent new relationships established not on abstract and empty unequal people principles but on our secret life, on our passions, on an effective counter moral. Equality then means graduated inequalities. Fourier reproached Owen with egalising people's natures. In that sense equality becomes a social poison. He wished to gather people unequal in fortune, character, interests, passions, and allow each individual to personal development without hurting the mass. This was the only means to reach collective harmony, to improve production and benefice. Such was, very quickly summed up, the basis of the theory of passionate attraction which aimed at using positive and negative human passions without restraining them.

Long before Marx and Freud, Fourier has understood that human nature is the product of a dialectic between man and his milieu. In his *New Amorous World* Fourier goes even further: he dreams of a cult of voluptuous pleasure.

Fourier identified 12 passions in man's nature to which he added a 13th passion: Uniteism, that is the pleasure to reconcile one's happiness with that of the group: the exact opposite of civilised selfishness. The Phalanx is a living system in which all is combined to reach personal and collective harmony.

Owen wanted to purge human nature of its dissonances, Fourier wished to integrate them.

Note

[1] Quoted in Gans 1964: Robert Owen à Paris en 1937, *Actualité de l'histoire* nº 30, 1960.

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Utopia and the Socialist Project

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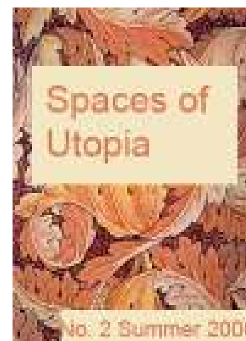

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The propositions I contest in this paper are taken from T. Kenyon’s 1989 book: *Utopian Communism and Political Thought in Early Modern England*. They are the following:

(1) “Marx and Engels undoubtedly contributed to the development of a pejorative view of [utopianism]” (Kenyon 1989: 19);

(2) Marx and Engels “failed to distinguish the categories of *means* and *ends* within utopianism” (*ibidem*).

I shall argue that both these propositions are false. I shall attempt to show that not only did Marx praise (rather than disparage) his socialist predecessors but also that in characterising their achievements as utopian, he had a clear understanding of the relationship between the means and ends of the socialist project. I shall discuss Marx’s critique of Robert Owen’s perception of these means and ends in order to illustrate this point – in particular the role of political economy as a means to realising the end of establishing a classless society.

My aims for the paper are therefore: firstly, to test the hypothesis that Marx’s assessment of the unviability of projects for human liberation is based on objective theoretical criteria. These are philosophical and economic.

Secondly, I aim to develop an interpretation of Marx's concept of utopia as a partial understanding of – or solution to – a universal or global problem. I derive this from the work of the Hungarian Marxist philosopher, Istvan Meszaros.

Finally, I aim to prepare the ground for a rehabilitation of the distinction Engels makes between science and utopia.

This paper is part of a grander project. This is to interrogate a consensus that Marx's conception of the socialist project is – in itself – utopian.[1] My ambition is to develop a Marxist understanding of utopianism in general and utopian socialism in particular.[2]

My stipulative definition of "utopianism" is the following: Utopianism is the doctrine that a society of free individuals can be established on the basis of a partial understanding of social and economic reality world-wide.[3]

This definition will no doubt change as the project develops.

The argument of the paper is in three parts. In the first part I examine evidence for the pejorative view. I contest the notion that Marx was opposed to speculative thinking. I challenge the idea that Marx's criterion for judging the unviability of the means to socialism of his Owenite predecessors was subjective.

The second part of the paper examines philosophical criteria for Marx's examination of means and ends within utopianism. I mention briefly aspects of Marx's essentialist, holistic and dialectical method. I discuss Meszaros's understanding of partiality and I give the examples of nationalism and Owen's views on education as examples of partiality.

The third part examines economic criteria for the examination of means and ends within utopianism. I discuss the ends shared by Marx and Owen and how they differed on means. I discuss the example of the Owenite labour-theory of money as an example of a partial understanding of means. I argue that Marx showed that this has an effect on ends and the nature of the socialist goal itself.

The Pejorative View

The first interpretation of the pejorative view of utopianism holds that imaginative speculation on the nature of a socialist alternative to capitalism is dangerous and contrary to Marxist doctrine. Speculation is, as Kenyon puts it, divorced “from the workings of history, from mankind's immediate condition, and effectively from ‘reality’” (Kenyon 1989: 19). Socialists should therefore avoid it.

Evidence for this interpretation can be found in Marx and Engels’ use of “fantastic” when they criticised Owen, Saint Simon and Fourier in the *Communist Manifesto.* A declamatory tone can be read into the manifesto and the word “fantastic” appears to have an emotive meaning – one of disapproval or condemnation.

Fantasy is a product of the imagination. The suggestion is that an imaginary world is subjective. There is no possibility of realisation of this in objective social reality. The contention is that Marx and Engels disapproved of the use of the imagination to speculate about socialism. Thus Marx and Engels described social experiments inspired by Owen, Fourier and Cabet as “castles in the air” (Marx / Engels 1978: 499).

Steven Lukes adopts this interpretation in his 1984 article on *Marxism and Utopianism.* Lukes states that Marx and Engels criticised the early socialists for “drawing up utopian *blueprints*” and that “they saw the very project of speculating about the ideal society as ‘utopian’” (Lukes 1984: 157). Lukes suggests that Marx, Engels and their followers – such as Kautsky, Lenin and Trotsky, were opposed in principle to what Vincent Geoghegan has called the “utopian disposition, a utopian impulse or mentality (…) grounded in the human capacity, and need, for fantasy” (Geoghegan 1987: 2).

The problems with this interpretation are well-known. Firstly, far from disparaging Owen, Saint Simon and Fourier's socialism, Marx not only praised and commended aspects of their doctrines but also, as Lukes states, "synthesised and incorporated" them into their own understanding (Lukes 1984: 156).[4]

Secondly, Marx clearly speculated on the nature of a non-market classless society and the possibility of realising this in the present. Speculation involves the exercise of the imagination. As a follower of Hegel, he recognised speculation is an essential aspect of the intellectual labour process.[5] Speculation is involved in the creation of theory. It is an activity that generates ideas of where current tendencies and trends might lead.

Setting imaginative goals and creating blueprints to guide action are not only a necessary feature of democratic planning but, for Marx, an essential aspect of understanding history, intentionality and human consciousness. If Marx was opposed to blueprints, then it seems strange that he chose the figure of the architect – and her or his use of the imagination – to exemplify what he thought is distinctively human in the labour process.[6]

Both Marx and Engels used their speculative imaginations to describe the non-market society of the future. They had clear conceptions of the socialist project both as viable goal and means. For Marx, the goal of the socialist project is the emergence of free individuality and the recovery of human sociality from the effects of exploitation and oppression.[7]

Marx argued that the socialist project needs certain objective conditions for the goal of free individuality to be realised.[8] The means to establishing these conditions are well known. They involve, on the one hand, the formation of a global non-market classless society and, on the other hand, the creation of a class of producers whose interests coincide with those of the majority of the world's population. The assumption is that workers create the world's wealth and that

through their formation into a class, they become the only class with a future – the only class that has no interest in reproducing class relations.[9]

The leaders of the Second International had similar perceptions of socialist means and ends to Marx and Engels's. The French scholar Marc Angenot claims to have analysed eighty examples of literature in French and German produced by intellectuals active within the European socialist movement from 1889-1914. He describes these as "detailed blueprints and precise visions of the post-revolutionary society" (Angenot 2000: 98).

He notes that it was Eduard Bernstein, the founder of modern social democracy, and opponent of revolutionary social change, who as Angenot puts it: "loathed speculating about the future" (*idem*, 99).[10] In his 1899 book *The Presuppositions of Socialism,* Bernstein argued that Marx forbade socialists from using their imagination to speculate about the socialist goal and that to do so was utopian and antipathetic to the cause of workers' liberation.[11]

If Marx did not conceive of all forms of the exercise of the speculative imagination about the socialist future as utopian, the question arises of how he distinguished between non-utopian speculations and utopian ones.

The easiest answer is that Marx thought speculation on ends and means he approved of were viable, practical and realisable. They were therefore non-utopian. Speculation on means and ends he did not like were unviable, unrealisable, and impractical. They were utopian. Basically, someone who thought of her or himself as a socialist but who disagreed with Marx risked being disparaged as a utopian. This is a second version of the pejorative view.

According to Mannheim, such disapproval corresponds to the ideology of the representatives of a ruling order. Rulers label all challenges to their rule as utopian "from their point of view" (*apud* Geoghegan 1987: 6). Judgements of viability, possibility and practicality are relative to a set of ideas that function

exclusively to articulate the interests of certain individuals or groups either already in power or aspiring to take power. These judgements are subjective and unrelated to any notion of objective reality or universal criteria. As Geoghegan puts it, they are "dreams masquerading as an attack on dreaming" (*ibidem*).

A recent example might be a scientist I heard on the radio who was critical of a committee set up to examine the disposal of nuclear waste. He thought the committee was wasting time. Much time had been spent talking about whether it was viable to put nuclear waste in rockets and send the rockets to the sun. In his opinion, the proposal was obviously unviable and he was highly disparaging of scientists on the committee who had taken the proposal seriously.

From this scientist's "point of view" – from the authority of his knowledge as a scientist and a citizen – sending rockets full of nuclear waste to the sun is an impractical means of disposal.

The radio report presented the disagreement between the committee and the dissident scientist as a difference of subjective opinion. There was no mention of any objective criteria for judging whether the method of disposal was viable or unviable.

It is possible to imagine a range of reasons. One could be scientific. For example, there might be a law of nature that made it impossible for a rocket to get to the sun.

Another could be moral. There might be too great a health & safety risk for the people working on putting nuclear waste in rockets or the risk of a rocket carrying nuclear waste falling back to earth is not worth taking.

Yet another might be economic. No government or private company might want to invest in the research and development of such a programme because the financial return on the investment might be too small.

None of these questions were raised in the radio news report. Yet in order to have an informed opinion of the viability of the proposal the question of the criteria being used needs to be raised.

If questions of the viability of proposed scientific (and political and economic) projects are reduced to the subjectivity of particular group or individual interests in a struggle for power or influence – as Mannheim suggests – then public discussion of objective criteria – necessary for a democratically organised decision process – can be ignored.

Philosophical Criteria for the Assessment of the Means and Ends of Utopianism

Are there any criteria by which it is possible to judge whether a particular speculation concerning the relationship between means and ends is utopian or not? Are some dreams realisable and others not? Marx clearly thought there were. He used philosophical and economic criteria to argue this point.

An analogy is the idea of teleportation. Teleportation is a speculative and imaginative idea. It would be wonderful to say “beam me up Scotty” and be transported immediately across the expanse of space.

Whether, as a goal, teleportation is realisable depends on philosophical and scientific criteria and, as far as I know, there are good reasons for thinking that, however desirable the goals of teleportation might be, they cannot be realised with our present understanding of the existing laws of nature.

Likewise, the goal of combining the best features of the market and socialist planning might be a desirable and imaginable goal for many individuals and social groups but unviable for good philosophical and economic reasons.[12] Put differently, Marx used philosophical criteria for assessing the ends and means of utopianism. These were objective.

My starting point here is a quotation from Marx's *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right.* Marx writes of the struggle for German liberation in 1843 that:

> It is not radical revolution or universal human emancipation which is a utopian dream for Germany; it is the partial, merely political revolution which leaves the pillars of the building standing. (Marx 1992: 253)

Istvan Meszaros states in his 1970 book *Marx's Theory of Alienation* that Marx's insight here is enormously important methodologically. It offers a "key to understanding the nature of Utopianism as the inflation of *partiality* into *pseudo-universality*" (Meszaros 1970: 75).

In this case the partiality was a form of political action that excluded economic understanding and transformation. In effect, Marx thought that, in order to engage with the socialist project, a moral position that condemns the way in which particular people are enslaved, brutalised, and oppressed is necessary but not sufficient.

Political action inspired by the goal of ending all forms of oppression, exploitation and degradation is similarly necessary but insufficient.

An understanding of the economic causes of these phenomena and how they impact on people globally is necessary. Economic categories of explanation with universal instantiation such as labour, commodity, value, and capital are required for a global perspective on the task of liberation. Explanations of capitalism that have a partial understanding of its nature will produce partial programmes for liberation. Partial forms of anti-capitalism and perceptions alternatives to it will be utopian.

This interpretation of Marx contrasts partiality with universality. It is concerned with categories informing the understanding. However Meszaros also opposes a partial to a global form of movement. This is movement within an

evolving social totality. It is an ontological opposition and Meszaros contrasts this with Marx's method in the following:

> Utopianism is, by contrast, necessarily inherent in all attempts which offer merely partial *remedies* to *global* problems. (*idem*, 297)

Here the focus is on global problems caused by contradictions within the social totality.

For Marx, the chief global problem is, of course, the social form that human social labour takes within a commodity-capitalist society. As Scott Meikle has shown, Marx and Hegel were Aristotelian essentialists.[13] Marx was concerned to discover the laws that govern the birth, maturation, development, decline, and passing away of social forms of human labour and their supersession by new forms. These social forms include different methods of the extraction of surplus labour.

The law of the normal life of the entity of essence is the law of the unfolding of its contradiction. In the process of transition from one social form to another there will be an interaction between the contradictions of the social form that is declining and dying and the contradictions of the newly emergent social form. Ontological partiality is therefore an expression of the interaction between the contradiction between the objective potentialities of the emergent form and a subjective awareness of these potentialities.

The global problem for socialists is the subordination of human labour power to the accumulation of capital. Contradictions between forms of exchange and use value generate global crises on a regular basis.[14] These cause systemic global misery and impoverishment to both high and low paid workers. However, these contradictions also create the technological and social conditions for the resolution of the problem globally.

Solutions that ignore the global character of the social problem are, according to Meszaros's interpretation of Marx, partial and therefore utopian. These include solutions at a local or national level. They include solutions limited to exclusively political, exclusively economic, or exclusively educational projects. They include solutions that promote the interests of a particular oppressed or exploited group to the exclusion of others.[15]

The global problem Marx addressed in 1843 when he wrote *The Jewish Question* and the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* was that of human emancipation. He criticised strategies of national, religious and ethnic liberation that focused on politics to the exclusion of other spheres of social action as a partial means and therefore utopian.

Marx argued that political action aimed at securing civil liberties for Jews and for a unified independent state for Germans – however noble and inspiring – would not solve the problem of liberation for these groups as individuals. Jews and Germans are humans oppressed in ways other than on the basis of their nationality, religion or ethnicity alone – the most obvious of which is their economic oppression as workers. This is an oppression which has a global character. Within this interpretation, nationalism – especially the nationalism of the oppressed – is a utopian political doctrine.

Meszaros restates this interpretation when discussing Owen's plans for workers' liberation. Owen realised, according to Meszaros, the fact that employers regard employees as "mere instruments of gain" and that, in a capitalist society, human relationships are subordinated to profit-seeking. This is a cause of workers' economic misery. However, through an adequate socialist education – Owen thought – everyone would come to realise that employers no longer needed to inflict misery on their employees.[16]

Meszaros argues that Owen's position is utopian because it is partial. It is not that Meszaros thinks socialist education is unimportant or that the socialist project can take place without education. He thinks socialist education is an integral and crucial means to the realisation of the emergent proletarian collectivity, the establishment of a classless society and the struggle for free individuality. However, it is insufficient and requires other conditions in order for the project to be completed.[17]

Owen's position was utopian, according to Meszaros, because Owen recommended education as a universal solution to the dual problem of workers' alienation and capitalists' hostility to socialism. Owen was correct to notice that socialist education is an important means to achieving the goal of a classless society, but – for good historical and intellectual reasons – he was unable to recognise that it is only part of the project. An exclusive focus on education makes the goal of workers' liberation unrealisable.

Economic Criteria for the Assessment of the Means and Ends of Utopianism

Marx's essentialist and dialectical social science can be distinguished from the scientific aspirations of his predecessors. One reason is that one of Marx's claims to have developed a social science rests upon a holistic rather than an empiricist method. This starts from an analysis of the social whole rather than observable events.[18] It attempts to identify law-like phenomena within an evolving social totality.[19] Despite disagreeing with their method, Marx recognised that Smith and Ricardo had made serious attempts to theorise the laws underlying the phenomena of a capitalist economy.

However, Marx did not recognise that his socialist predecessors had made any such intellectual contribution. This is clear if one compares Marx's conception of the socialist project with Owen's. Both Owen and Marx recognised the potential

that machinery has for liberating workers from economic compulsion. Moreover, although Owen's notion of planning was paternalist and Marx's democratic, they both had a conception of a planned classless society as an alternative to capitalism. In Owen's case this was the negative goal of ending misery and degradation for workers.[20] In Marx's case this was the positive goal of free individuality – a goal which is, of course, inclusive of Owen's.

Marx and Owen, however, differed on the means of achieving a planned classless society. They had different notions of the role of social science in the transition to socialism. Owen's notion of a social science was what he called "the science of the influence of circumstances over the whole conduct, character, and proceedings of the human race" (Owen 1991: 278). Gregory Claeys has shown that this is a combination of utilitarian moral philosophy stressing individuals' natural sociability (as developed by Scottish moral and social theorists such as Adam Smith) with necessitarianism derived from Godwin's appropriation of Joseph Priestley's materialist determinism. Claeys states that the first premise of Ownenite necessitarianism is that "character was formed *for* rather than by the individual" (Claeys 1989: 115).

This differs from Marx's position that free will is compatible with determinism. Marx's notion of free will is that it consists in the consciousness of necessity. It was derived from German idealism.[21] It informed his criticism of eighteenth century materialism in the third *Theses on Feuerbach.*[22] This form of one-sided materialism characterised Owen's social science.

Marx and Owen's relationship to classical political economy was different. Marx investigated the laws which regulate labour within capitalism. Owen used it to give moral justification for his social experiments. Claeys discusses the influence of labour theories of value, property, and production on Owen and suggests that when Owen presented his economic thinking in the *Report to the County of Lanark*

in 1820, he might have borrowed insights on labour as the standard of value from Smith.[23] Within the Marxist tradition, Rubin states that Owenite economics took over the notion that labour is the sole source of value from Ricardo. Owen's followers, such as William Thompson, John Gray and John Bray, turned it into a moral postulate substituting the doctrine of the "worker's right to the full product of labour" for a theoretical conception of value. Rubin states that this was a step backwards to the normative way that thinkers of the Middle Ages had posed the question of value (Rubin 1979: 348).[24] Following Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas had condemned the sinfulness of usurer's and merchant capital or of "buying cheap to sell dear".[25]

Owen claimed to have studied political economy for thirty years before he wrote his *Report,* however he made no contribution to the development of its theory. Claeys has stated that Owenism was neither a form of "economic discourse, a variety of political economy or for that matter a moral philosophy or anthropology alone" (Claeys 1987: 56). Rather, Owen used the notion of labour as the source of value to underpin the moral basis of his plans for realising a classless society.

At the heart of these plans was the imperative that money be abolished as gold and silver. Money must take the form of labour notes. This involved equal exchanges between the amount of labour-time performed and the amount of labour-time embodied within a commodity.[26] As it is well known, Owen became an advocate of various labour-for-labour experiments including labour exchanges, and a national bank based on labour notes (Claeys 1987: 56). These experiments and reforms were based on what Roman Rosdolsky has called the labour-money theory (Rosdolsky 1977: Ch. 4, 99-108).

Marx addressed this theory both in his preliminary studies for *Capital*, and in his polemic with Proudhon. He suggested that Proudhon had made no further

theoretical advance on economic ideas originally put forward by Owen and his followers (Marx 1978: 64-72). Marx subjected the economic means for realising the socialist project put forward by Owenites to a thorough critical analysis in the *Grundrisse.* This critique formed an important part of the development of his own theory of money as the universal equivalent of the value of all commodities in production, consumption, distribution and exchange.

The aim of Marx's critique was to show that the labour-theory was utopian in a double sense. Firstly, it was a partial understanding of the nature of money. Secondly, labour exchanges and a central exchange bank for social planning were unviable means of abolishing money. He argued these experiments were limited exclusively to one of the aspects of the regulation of working time in the global economy through the law of value. This is distribution through circulation. As long as the commodity form dominates the labour process in the spheres of production and consumption, Marx argued, then market forces would destroy such experiments.[27]

The experiments were partial in that they attempted to undermine the law of value in only one aspect of its operation. By implication, the only practicable way of abolishing money and the law of value, Marx argued, would be to remove all aspects of the mode of production from its global form as commodity and value, including labour power itself. The only means to achieving this end could be the global movement of workers towards the collective appropriation of the means of production including machinery, raw materials and labour. Workers, as a class, liberate their labour power at the same time as liberating the products of labour from their value form as money, wages and capital.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I have argued that Marx's critique of utopianism was inspired by the historical imperative of providing a social scientific explanation of the causes of human degradation, brutality and slavery. The theories of history, the human condition and political economy he developed enable socialists to ground their speculations on the future society in categories that have global instantiation. These include alienation, atomisation, the extraction of surplus, and abstract and concrete labour. Marx did not disparage speculations on how alienated social forms of human labour could be superseded, nor on the means to realise the goal of free individuality within a classless society. His critique of utopianism was not therefore pejorative. If his followers have made it so requires explanation. I guess the climate of defeat after 1917 and Cold War terror might have a role to play in this.

Following Meszaros on the early Marx, and Marx's own critique of Owenite socialism, I have argued that Marx had philosophical and economic criteria for assessing the relation between means and ends in utopianism. Not only was he able to distinguish between the two but he used a dialectical method to understand their relationship. Thus the poles of the contradiction between the subjective and objective within utopianism interact and pull it apart. Historically these changes in goals and means brought into being what are now understood to be the Stalinist and social democratic projects, both of which, it is arguable, have proved to be utopian.[28]

Notes

[1] My interest in this topic began four years ago when I was asked to write a review of *The Faber Book of Utopias* edited by John Carey. A friend suggested that I read *Necessary and Unnecessary Utopias* – the 2000 edition of the *Socialist Register*. I found out that scholars and commentators of different political orientation and opinion are in agreement that the socialist project is utopian. People who are hostile and dismissive and people who are sympathetic and critically engaged both agree that socialism is a utopian doctrine. See Geras 2000: 41-54. Geras asserts that the goal of socialism "is, and (…) always has been utopian, including its most influential version to date, namely Marxism" (*idem*, 41).

[2] By "Marxist", I mean "inspired and informed by Marx's writings". This, of course, includes selective reference to other scholars and activists who have been similarly inspired and informed by Marx's intellectual achievements. My influences therefore include the writings of academic Marxists active within the English speaking world such as Hillel Ticktin, Bertell Ollman and Istvan Meszaros – all of whom have had articles published in the journal *Critique.*

[3] The stage of my inquiry is preliminary. My guess is that pro-market criticism such as that developed by the Austrian school of economists and philosophers, including, Bohm Bawerk, von Mises, Hayek and Popper used a definition something similar to my own in order to characterise Marx as a utopian.

[4] Lukes argues that Marx's criticisms of his predecessors are an inconsistent form of "anti-utopian utopianism" – the anti-utopian element of which has not only "totally failed to bring social and political imagination to bear upon real-life problems" but has also been responsible for stalinism and "the destruction of the very ideal of communism as an object worthy of allegiance or even serious attention" (Lukes 1984: 166). Lukes suggests that Marx's criticisms of his predecessors and his blindness to the utopian nature of his own project was the cause of both the emergence of one of the most inhumane regimes in history and an abhorrence of the Marxist perception of the socialist project amongst the contemporary intelligentsia. Lukes comes close here to reproducing Karl Popper's position that Marx's ideas are responsible for modern totalitarianism.

[5] "By this ['speculation' in common life] we only mean (…) that the subject-matter of such speculations, though in the first place only subjective, must not remain so, but be realised or translated into objectivity" (Hegel 1975: 120).

[6] "We presuppose labour in a form that stamps it as exclusively human. A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality" (Marx 1946: 157).

[7] "Free individuality, based on the universal development of individuals and on their subordination of their communal, social productivity as their social wealth, is the third stage" (Marx 1973: 158). "Communism is the act of positing as the negation of the negation, and is therefore a real phase, necessary for the next period of historical development, in the emancipation and recovery of mankind" (Marx 1992: 358). I assume that Marx did not distinguish between the concepts of "socialism" and "communism" and understood them to be interchangeable terms.

[8] Ticktin lists seven "material preconditions": first, the victory of socialism in the advanced capitalist countries; second, robots making robots; third, relative abundance; fourth, the progressive reduction of necessary labour-time; fifth, the distribution of goods on a free basis; sixth, the abolition of banks and insurance companies; seventh, the end of wasteful production including unemployment, arms production and bureaucratic forms of management and control. See Ticktin 1993b: 149-153. All of these are necessary conditions for the establishment of a classless society. The first condition presupposes the formation of a political and economic collectivity from the class of individuals that alienate their labour power. The six others would also, no doubt, form part of the transitional programme and policies of this emergent form.

[9] "The communist revolution (…) does away with *labour*, and abolishes the rule of all classes with the classes themselves, because it is carried through by the class which no longer counts as a class in society, is not recognised as a class, and is in itself the expression of the dissolution of all classes, nationalities, etc. within present society" (Marx / Engels 1970: 94).

[10] Angenot mentions works by Bebel, Kautsky, Jaures and Vandervelde as the most prominent of those leaders that produced "detailed blueprints of the 'collectivist' society that was to succeed the – supposedly imminent – proletarian revolution and the collapse of capitalism" (Angenot 2000: 98).

[11] "Bernstein was (…) not justified in invoking Marx's authority for his views" (Kolakowski 1978: 109). Kolakowski states that Marx did not want socialists to "limit their horizons to urgent or immediately attainable ends, but only that their aims (…) should be based on observation of real historical tendencies and not arbitrary imaginings of a perfect world". He mentions certain "premisses" that Marx thought "made socialism possible and even necessary" (*ibidem*). I shall discuss some of these below. I prefer "partial" to "arbitrary" and "non-market" to "perfect" to characterise utopias.

[12] See Ollman 1998, for a thorough discussion of this issue.

[13] "Marx has arrived at his starting point, and he has done so through a critical appropriation of Hegel. He has Hegel's dialectical process of history in which, through a series of stages each with its own 'principle' or law, an essence undergoes changes that realise its potentialities." This essence is human labour and its various social forms. See Meikle 1985: 48.

[14] For Marx's theory of crisis, see Kennedy 1998. Also Ticktin 1993a.

[15] Thus today, Marxists tend to argue that movements for women, black, gay or national liberation are utopian if they promote partial solutions to their oppression and ignore the connection with the global struggle for freedom from economic oppression and for a classless society.

[16] "It is confidently expected that the period is at hand, when man, through ignorance, shall not much longer inflict unnecessary misery on man; because the mass of mankind will become enlightened, and will clearly discern that by his acting they will inevitably create misery to themselves" (*apud* Meszaros 1970: 296).

[17] "The task of transcending the capitalistically alienated social relations of production must be conceived in the global framework of a socialist educational strategy. The latter, however, should not be confused with some form of educational utopianism" (Meszaros 1970: 290).

[18] "Mutual interaction takes place between the different moments [of consumption and production]. This is the case with every organic whole" (Marx 1973: 100). See also Gould 1978.

[19] "The totality as it appears in the head, as a totality of thoughts, (…) the subject society, must always be kept in mind as the presupposition" (Marx 1973: 101-102).

[20] "The science may be truly called one whereby ignorance, poverty, crime, and misery, may be prevented; and will indeed open a new era to the human race; one in which real happiness will commence, and perpetually go on increasing through every succeeding generation" (Owen 1991: 280).

[21] "The usual definition of freedom, which is taken from Hegel, is that freedom is the recognition of necessity. In other words, the understanding of nature and society creates the scope for human freedom because mankind can utilise both the forces of nature and its own talents to create a society adequate to itself" (Ticktin 1993b: 145).

[22] "The materialist doctrine concerning the changing of circumstances and upbringing forgets that circumstances are changed by men and that it is essential to educate the educator himself" (Marx 1970: 121).

[23] "According to Owen's new conception – which could have been derived from Smith or any number of other sources – articles had originally exchanged according to the value or amount of labour contained within them" (Claeys 1987).

[24] Owen studied Ricardo when attending McCulloch's lectures "shortly before he had left for New Harmony" in 1824 (Claeys 1987: 53).

[25] "Whosoever buys a thing (…) in order that he may gain by selling it again unchanged and as he bought it, that man is of the buyers and sellers who are cast forth from God's temple" (*apud* Rubin 1979: 35). See also Claeys 1987: 2-9. Claeys accounts for Owenite moralism – what he calls the "principle of just transfer" – differently. He states "it represented a reversion to an anthropological concept of how exchange worked in primitive societies rather than revival of the subversive views of any earlier theorists" (*idem*, 189). This again suggests an origin in Smith's assumption that in a society of simple commodity producers exchange takes place according to equal amounts of embodied labour-time.

[26] Other advantages of "introducing a natural standard of value, and abandoning an artificial one" include the improvement of human nature, the end of poverty, the end of bargaining over prices, free trade between nations, and expanded domestic markets (Owen 1991: 256-257). Owen was therefore the founder of the doctrine that the market is compatible with socialism. This is noted by McNally 1993: Ch.4, 104-138. He states that Owen and his followers were "the first market socialists" (*idem*, 4).

[27] Thus he argues that labour-money would be unable to deal with a rise in the productivity of labour; that there would be no way of distinguishing and resolving the antagonism between value and price; and that a central exchange bank would have to have a despotic control over all spheres of production, consumption and distribution as general buyer and seller of all commodities. See Rosdolsky 1977: 99-108.

[28] "Dialectical materialism does not know dualism between means and end. The end flows naturally from the historical movement. Organically the means are subordinated to the end. The immediate end becomes the means for a further end. In his play *Franz von Sickingen,* Ferdinand Lassalle puts the following words into the mouth of one of the heroes:

> Do not only show the goal, show the path as well.
> For so closely interwoven with one another are path and goal
> That a change in one means a change in the other,
> And a different path gives rise to a different goal" (Trotsky 1992: 49-50).

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Are We Ready for Brave New Worlds?

Aristoi and the Society of the Spectacle

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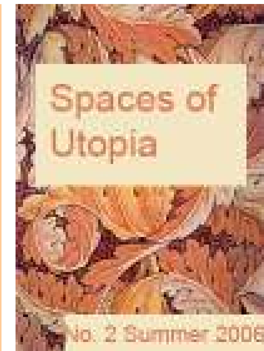

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> *But certainly for the present age, which prefers the sign to the thing signified, the copy to the original, representation to reality, the appearance to the essence (…) illusion only is sacred, truth profane. Nay, sacredness is held to be enhanced in proportion as truth decreases and illusion increases, so that the highest degree of illusion comes to be the highest degree of sacredness.*
> (Feuerbach, Preface to the second edition of *The Essence of Christianity* quoted by Debord in *Society of the Spectacle*)

Utopias as well as dystopias have always been a major concern for narratives written in the style of cyberpunk. Cyberpunk became especially significant in the 80s with the classic (now the "bible" of cyberpunk) *Neuromancer* by William Gibson. This visionary novel predicted the existence of the Internet and many of the high-technology inventions we use nowadays. Like Gibson's *Neuromancer*, *Aristoi* by Walter Jon Williams also depicts a futuristic society of supermen. Cyberpunk narratives are allegories and extrapolate us from the established system of values, which is the case of *Aristoi*. The word taken from Greek signifies "the best" and therefore the Aristoi are perfect human beings or cyborgs who survived the destruction of the Earth and developed a totally mechanised society, a society which Guy Debord would define as the *Society of the Spectacle*. If one reads this Debord's text which was published in 1967, one can become absolutely struck by his vision and the extent to which his prediction has become or is still becoming true for modern societies. It wonderfully describes the society envisaged by Williams. The novel asks why

the advances in technology have not made us perfect, more humane, happier citizens. As the novel illustrates, the villains and egoists abound.

In this short treatise I pose two questions the answers to which remain open and these are the following: “Are we Ready for Brave New Worlds?” and “Does utopia have to do with the creation of a new, better, more advanced society and perfect people or rather a recreation of old traditions in new environments?”. For Williams, utopia has to do with electronic or cybernetic advances. However, he seems to be rather sceptical about our possibilities of creating some utopian worlds. Let us see why.

Various theories of cyberculture claim that technology causes social change. It is not that societies simply adapt to, or accept, technological changes but they certainly evolve. Discourse constructs and subjects individuals, but how does the discourse of technology shape postcapitalist societies? The language of the protagonists is cybernetics, which might as well be redefined as metalinguistics. Since cybernetics deals with the principles of technology and communication the study of behavioural patterns becomes important. Thus, the Aristoi would ask the following questions when applying technology to their lives: “what do we do?” or “what can we do and to what extent?”. Since numerous systems in the living, social and technological environments might be understood in this way, cybernetics can be applied to transcend many traditional disciplinary boundaries and we might use some concepts to reshape our understanding of the world or the society we live in. Following Larry Richards, we might understand it as a new “ dynamic set of ideas, a dynamics that is realized in dialogue among humans” (Richards 1987) and it might be inspiring not only for people interested in electronics but also for those focused on sociology, psychology, science, art or politics.

The relations among the protagonists of the Society of the Spectacle are characterised by a dichotomy. It is a dichotomy between reality and its copy represented as an electronic image. Reality is a complex entity since it is split

into two simultaneous worlds: Persepolis[1] – the real, physical place, also called "The Realized World" – and the world of cyberspace referred to as the dream "Persepolis", "Hyperlogos" or "Logarchy" (Williams 1992), which is dominated by appearance and abstraction, and can be accessed through a special machine called the oneirochronon. Thus, in the world of the Aristoi everything and everybody has their virtual equivalent. The existence of two equally meaningful realities results in "the schizophrenic subjectivity" (Bell 2001) with images playing a vital role and vision becoming one of the most developed of all the senses. In the light of Debord's way of thinking we might infer that the society "(…) where modern conditions of production prevail, all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles" (Debord) or "unrealities" (Williams 1992). The oneirochronic reality becomes sacred and "(…) the true is the moment of the false" (Debord). "Everything that was directly lived has now moved away into a representation" or – if we use Baudrillard's terminology – a simulacrum (see Baudrillard 1998: 166-84). Most of the novel takes place in Persepolis – simulacrum. Debord would define it as a "pseudo-world", a "pseudo-nature" where nature becomes an artefact of the human will or "the world of the autonomous image (…). The spectacle in general (…)" (Debord). In the dream Persepolis images become real beings and are represented by skiagenos of each of the Aristoi. Skiagenos, the word is taken from Greek again, is a virtual representation of the people participating in the oneirochronon. The paradox of this type of society is that although it is based on illusions it "has become actual, materially translated". It is "(…) not a supplement to the real world, an additional decoration. It is the heart of the unrealism of the real society" (Debord).

In this electronic utopia where Marshal McLuhan-type computers are seen as an extension of human beings, the Aristoi use nanotechnology to manipulate both their minds and bodies, there are no mortal diseases and the only cause of their death is "breakdown". They die because they simply cease

to function. They can live hundreds of years and they all have microchips built into their skulls to access cyberspace. They all exemplify the highest and therefore the privileged rank of “humanity” because they are good in nature, strong-willed and extremely intelligent. In this mechanised world the motto is “Science and Discipline” with the stability and measured progress brought to humanity by the Aristoi. Ruled and chosen by Pan Wengong who has the right to choose the best of his inferiors and give them the name of “Aristos” at a special graduation ceremony, the Aristoi are responsible for the progress of the two remaining classes Demos and Theráp_ns. They all live in a happy galactic order till the moment when the main protagonist, Gabriel, discovers that one of them has been murdered in strange circumstances. Gabriel becomes sceptical about the goodness of his race and finds out that the whole system is insecure and failing.

Not only is the reality in Persepolis a complex entity, the Aristoi are all complex beings and they are all composed of various selves called “daimones”. Daimones are limited personalities which, in other words, might be understood as different parts or aspects of one personality. Some of them are extremely intelligent and good, some are bad or even psychopaths. “Technotopians” (Bell 2001) can talk to their daimones and use their knowledge and power whenever they need it. The split of personality into various selves undermines the Cartesian concept claiming that our human identities are fixed, stable and unified. Nevertheless, it is important to point out that it is not identity which has been rejected but rather certain theories of identity. Fast changing technology and information systems produce identities in constant flux. Thus, identity becomes destabilised and decentred. In the world manipulated by the media and consumerism the term “identification” rather than “identity” suggested by David Bell (2001) might prove more effective as it includes discovery and recognition as well as multiplicity. Such a view does two things: it offers us a critical view of all identities revealing the importance of a historical context of

their creation and it emphasises their arbitrary, subjective and transitory character. As Bell suggests, "it returns identities to the world of human beings, revealing their openness and contingency" (Bell 2001:136). And secondly, such a point of view makes human agency not only possible but also essential. "For if (…) identities are made in history, and in relations of power, they can also be remade. Identities then can be seen as sites of contestation" (*idem*, 137). In the Society of the Spectacle we become the other, we construct our personality through exclusion; and who we are is defined by who we are not.

In this postmodern spectacle, protagonists become bodiless actors and as R. U. Sirius once highlighted, "[w]e are less and less creatures of flesh, bone, and blood (…); we are more and more creatures of mind-zapping bits and bytes moving around at the speed of light" (Bell 2001: 137). Many critics have noted that it is impossible to leave "the meat" behind because our lives are lived through our bodies. When in cyberspace the Aristoi still remain embodied, however, they express themselves in new ways. Along with Bell we can talk about oneirochronic bodies as "cyberbodies", "techno-bodies" or "tech-nobodies" (Bell 2001) and therefore, we can talk about "prostheticisation" (*idem*) or "cyborgisation" (Gray 2001) of our bodies. This cultural disembodiment is portrayed when the Aristoi play mere objects, animals, monsters, samurais, kings or just remain who they really are. Gabriel, endowed with very good programming skills, tries to be represented as he really looks; he might be compared to ronin – cybernetic samurai. Trained in wushu (a mixture of martial arts and acrobatics) and fond of Chinese Buddhism he uses both as defence or meditation. I read Gabriel as someone who is extremely handsome and sexually attractive: a mixture of Bruce Lee and Brad Pitt!

Like all the other Aristoi, Gabriel built his own technological utopia called Illyricum, where he is worshipped like a god. He has access to everything and controls all the data as well as the people of his territory. The Foucauldian idea of enforcing discipline through the panopticon becomes a reality. Gabriel

represents an all-seeing institution that monitors his followers who end up policing themselves. This “super-panopticon” is characterised by “database surveillance” (Poster 1995) and computer technology. And as Mark Poster once suggested: “Databases are discourse (…) because they effect a constitution of the subject. In its electronic form, the database is perfectly transferable in space, indefinitely preservable in time; it may last forever everywhere. (…) The database is a discourse of pure writing that directly amplifies the power of its owner/user” (Poster 1995: 235).

Towards the middle of the novel Gabriel discovers that the utopian world of the Aristoi fails and it is because one of them, called Saigo, built a secret world for his own purposes. Whereas Gabriel’s utopia is based on the idea of protection and safety, Saigo’s world is much more traumatic and egoistic (a good definition for “capitalist”, I would say). He creates a dystopia where suffering, exploitation, poverty, hatred and hostility prevail among its inhabitants. Saigo and his followers believe that life is not based on affection only but has to do with making mistakes, killing, hating or destroying. He sees the Aristoi as part of the process only because they are too perfect and represent just one of the possible steps in humanity’s evolution.

Perhaps this “bad versus good” approach concerning the creation of futuristic worlds is too extreme. However, through the use of stereotypes Williams reminds us that when living in a society constant choices are to be made and sometimes a dichotomous vision of things might in fact provoke us to reconsider and rethink some of the values on which we base our existence. Since the computerisation of our lives means disrespecting nature to a significant degree, Williams juxtaposes such an attitude with references to Chinese culture and tradition, especially songs and poems – and this, I believe, deserves special attention and consideration too. Chinese culture has always interpreted life as a circle in a strong relationship with nature. Many centuries ago, one of the prominent Chinese thinkers, Lao Tse, suggested in one of his

best and extremely profound works known as *Tao Te King* (also spelled as Lao Tzu and *Tao Te Ching*) that, if human beings are left alone and are not subjected to the control of institutions, they tend to be happy and live in harmony with nature as well as with one another. We kill ourselves when we kill nature. So, answering the questions I asked at the beginning, any "healthy" society in order to bring up a "healthy" individual must try to maintain a balance between technological progress and the preservation of nature and tradition regardless of how difficult it is to be put into practice. Furthermore, as Dalai Lama in his *Ethics for the New Millennium* suggests, more and more people feel lonely, confused, anxious or depressed in the mechanised world and it is because they lack basic ethical or spiritual principles. So when incorporating technology into our everyday lives I certainly believe it is high time we called for an ethical and spiritual revolution.

I have recently read an article in the Polish magazine "Polityka" which claims that the West has gone too far and has become overdependent on computer technology. The article warns of the dangers of the Internet on young people. One young surfer interviewed admits that: "(…) playing games creates confusion in adolescent users who begin to think that life is like a game. If you die, you can get a new life and such an attitude more often than not results in young criminals underestimating the importance of life in general. Life is not a game, game is not life, unfortunately" (Winnicka 2005; my translation).[2]

Notes

[1] Here Williams refers to the ancient capital of the Persian Empire that was ruled by the Achaemenid dynasty before its conquest by Alexander the great.

[2] "Jacek zwraca uwag_, ze gry powoduj_ odrealnienie m_odzie_y, której si_ wydaje potem, _e w _yciu tak jak w grze. Jak si_ umiera, to mo_na mie_ nowe _ycie i st_d te_ jest takie niskie poszanowanie dla _ycia innych u m_odocianych przest_pców. _ycie to nie gra, gra to nie _ycie, niestety".

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Better than the Book: Fritz Lang's Interpretation of Thea von Harbou's *Metropolis*

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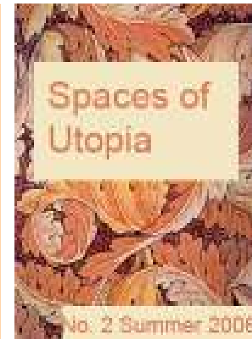

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The focus of my paper is to examine Thea von Harbou's *Metropolis*, one of many screen plays she wrote which became the basis for masterpieces reinvented by her creative genius husband, Fritz Lang. For my title, because a screenplay is a written form of the play and therefore book-like, I have taken the liberty to use the term "book" for both the screenplay *Metropolis* she wrote in 1924 and the novel *Metropolis* she wrote in 1926. I am particularly interested in what Lang did not include in his classic film *Metropolis* rather than what he did include, although I plan to discuss key features as well as some of the censored portions of the film to reinforce my thesis. Fritz Lang revealed to one of his interviewers, Henry Hart, in 1956 that he "had done considerable work on the [*Metropolis*] script", but he "took no credit for it. The script credit went to my wife [Thea von Harbou]" (Grant 2003: 13-15). Von Harbou's novel appeared one year prior to the release of Lang's film. Even though von Harbou was identified as the screenwriter in the film, Lang called her a "scenarist" in an interview years later (*ibidem*).

Perhaps, due to the multiple changes Fritz Lang made of von Harbou's original screenplay, she may have thought that her original message: "The mediator between brain [capital] and hand [working class] must be the heart" (Ott

1986: 80) was not fully incorporated in his film. In fact, Lang gave the stock Communist disparagement of *Metropolis* when he repudiated *Metropolis*' thesis that "just as the heart mediates between the brain and the hand, so the tenderer emotions will mediate between a proletariat and a managerial oligarchy of the future" (Grant 2003: 14).

It should be noted that *Metropolis* is identified in Tom Gunning's *The Films of Fritz Lang* as "the albatross around Lang's neck, condemned, or at least partially condemned, by critics and film-makers" (Gunning 2000: 52). Gunning assiduously strives to find justification for *Metropolis*'*s* longevity; he identifies *Metropolis* as a film "received as a postmodernist work in the 1980s" (*idem,* 52-53). According to Gunning, postmodernists possessed "a new sensibility" which "embraced [*Metropolis*'*s*] blend of kitsch and monumentality, mechanical sexuality and over–the-top melodrama", as well as powerful political critique matched by utopian reconciliation (*idem*, 53). Gunning did not mention the dramatic changes Lang incorporated into von Harbou's script to make it more appealing to the mass audiences. For example, the final intertitle spoken by Maria to Freder immediately before the final scene enables the Master of Metropolis, his father, Joh Fredersen,[1] to join hands in a mutual handshake with Grot, the Workers' foreman, succinctly states, "There can be no understanding between the hands and the brain unless the heart acts as mediator" (Lang *Metropolis* film, 2002). Lang changed von Harbou's more biblically referential ending statement, "For the knowledge had come upon them that it was day, that the invulnerable transformation of darkness into light was becoming consummate, in its greatness, in its kindliness, over the world" (Lang 1973: 131). Lang positioned the actors to show the reconciliation that was "enabled by the heart, Freder, the Mediator, between the head, Joh Fredersen, mega-industrialist, and the hand, Grot, the workers' foreman. Gunning identified the ending as "cartoon solutions" (Gunning

2000: 53), perhaps implying the unrealistic utopian implications; however, Gunning did not deny that all scenes were conveyed through exquisite sets and masterful visual style (Murray 1990: 100-101). Gunning pointed out that:

> In the postmodernist context, *Metropolis*'*s* contradictions could be seen, not as an inherent flaw, but as the sign of a work divided against itself (a fissure attributable, claimed many, to the Harbou/Lang collaboration – with the good due to Lang and the bad to his Nazi wife). (Gunning 2000: 53)

Perhaps the over-explicit, highly literal nature of *Metropolis* is what makes many viewers, trained to hunt out subtle meanings and internal symbols, so uncomfortable (*idem*, 56).

It is the condemnation by German censors and the additional cuts made specifically by playwright Channing Pollock and others in the American version to which Lang responded when he spoke poorly of his film *Metropolis* during several different interviews (see Grant 2003: xi). Even though the film originally was over budget when it was released,[2] more than a quarter of the film was drastically cut by Universum Film Aktiengesellschaft [Ufa] for its international release and for its secondary release in Germany (Gunning 2000: 53). Just two days after the Ufa's executive committee had been formed in 1927, it acted to remove intertitles from *Metropolis* that committee members judged to "promote 'Bolshevism' and to have communist connotations" (Murray 1990: 63). Since there was no copy of the original release preserved, my paper is based predominantly on cuts made for the American distribution of the film in which the original German cuts had already been completed (Gunning 2000: 53). Luckily the von Harbou's script provides an idea of what is missing since the original film was never duplicated. Some of the American cuts were restored when the film was shown a second time in Germany after its financial failure in America (Bergfelder *et al*. 2002: 132-133).

In a 1975 interview with Gene D. Phillips, Lang admitted that "after [he] finished *Metropolis* [he] didn't much care for it" (see Grant 2003: 180). Lang realized that even with all of his editing of von Harbou's script, her message "The heart must be the go-between of the head [symbolically representing capital] and the hands [symbolically representing labor]" (see *ibidem*) is not the exclusive answer to solve social problems. He saw both the film and book as being philosophically muddled (Lang 1973: 10). Von Harbou did not have the reconciliation scene in her novel. In fact, Lang totally omitted the third woman whom von Harbou included in her novel, Fredersen's estranged mother who has always opposed her son's work. In von Harbou's *Metropolis*, it is Hel's letter entrusted to Fredersen's mother that is used as the finale. Hel wrote a biblical phrase, "I am with you always, and until the end of the world" which Fredersen repeats as if it were stressing its apocalyptic prescience: "Until the end of the world… until the end of the world" (Gunning 2000: 83). Lang even stated more strongly that [he] "thought the worker moving the hand of the giant dial in *Metropolis* was "too stupid and simplistic an image for a man working in a dehumanizing, mechanized society" (see Grant 2003: 181). Years later the general public argued with Lang's self-assessment of *Metropolis*. After reassessing his imagery, he realized the prescience of the dial-moving segment when he saw a similar activity while watching astronauts on television. He saw them "lying down in their cockpit constantly working dials just like the workers in [his] film" (see *ibidem*).

Though the spirit of the film was high during the depiction of the dramatic love story progressing through *Metropolis*, perhaps Lang envisioned the truncated version as a diminishing of 'spirit' from his film. Lang claimed that the technology of motion pictures must have 'spirit,' a meaning, a significance. This was a common claim by German technicians and engineers from the Weimar into the Third Reich. German technology was identified as superior to other nations because it was

based on spiritual values (Herf 1984: 18). Even when Hollywood producers were enticing German film talent to work in the United States and most journalists emphasized Germany's gratitude for U.S. assistance, they bemoaned the consequences for the German film industry. One headline on 9 January 1926 reflected the concern of the diminishing spirit inherent in German cinema by posing the question: "Amerikanisierung der Ufa?" ["Americanization of Ufa?"] (Bergfelder *et al*. 2002: 133).

Lang's initial assessment of his film does not correlate with others such as the accolades in an anonymous American industrialist's letter revering the film's message correlating head and heart (Grant 2003: 14-15). As a director, Lang disliked theorizing about cinema. In various interviews, Lang frequently stated that there are "no theories" for film making and that he had "none to offer" (see *idem*, xi). However, Lang does claim in some interviews that he was influenced by expressionism. In fact, Fritz Lang's last silent film is a highly stylized, architecturally striking classic of the German Expressionist movement. I find it fascinating that though he denies being an expressionist, and especially that he claims he didn't "know the difference between an expressionist and a non-expressionist *mise-en-scène* [productions]" (see *idem*, xii). I think it is also interesting that he feels his cinematic creations should belong to the realists. This may be evident in his assessment of his work. For example, he never repudiated the sets and décor of *Metropolis*, only the film's subject matter. He especially stresses this in a Godard interview in which he stated that he "produces what [he] feels" (see *ibidem*) and he uses psychology in his understanding of characterization (Lang 2002: DVD). This dramatically reflects Rudolf Kurtz's initial definition of expressionism in his book, *Expressionismus und Film*. Kurtz defines expressionists as using "*Die Psychologen, Astheitker Historiker des Begriffs*" [psychology, aesthetics and

history as concepts] and "*Nuchternen Definitionen*" [somber definitions] (Kurtz 1965: 9).

Instead of stimulating critical thought and encouraging audiences to contemplate democratic forms of social interaction, expressionist-style films drew attention away from everyday reality, focused it on psychological phenomena, and promoted an irrational, conservative, and sometimes even apocalyptic world view. *Metropolis* seems to have benefited from Lang's previous film making experience. In *Metropolis*, Lang fused the expressionist concepts of obedience to a strong authoritarian figure, as in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, (Lang 1919: DVD) with the revolutionary activity as seen in Dr. Mabuse, der Spieler (Lang 1922: DVD). Lang also focused on the duality between modern science and occultism, the science of the medieval ages which was incorporated in the Rotwang's laboratory that contained everything from retorts and vacuum lines to pentagrams and a witch ball suspended from the ceiling over the transformation table (Lang 2002: DVD). Even the "young people", with whom Lang frequently spoke, explained their appreciation for his message in *Metropolis*. They told him that they "all hate the establishment" and "our computerized society" because "it has no heart" (see Grant 2003: 180).

In Thea von Harbou's 1924 screen play revised by Lang, as well as her novelized version in 1926, Freder, the protagonist, needs some motivating factor to wrench him from his golden life as the heir apparent, male child of the New Tower of Babel's Director, Joh Fredersen. Von Harbau presented Freder as high born, privileged golden child who partied with the other wealthy youth. Lang focused on the duality of human nature which fascinated him. For example, in order to depict the dual nature of men, Lang juxtaposed the working class with the privileged class. The dual implication of the intertitle, "The Day Shift" is used to show first, von Harbou's "living food [that] came pushing along in masses…Men, men, men – all in the same uniform, from throat to ankle in dark linen, bare feet in the same

hard shoes, hair tightly pressed down by the same black caps" (Lang 1973: 20). While von Harbou insisted that [workers] "planted their feet forward, but did not walk" (*idem*, 20-21), Lang used his artistic acumen, as indicated in his stage directions, to depict the day-shift filing in "at a rapid shambling walk, while the out-going shift comes slowly out at half speed" (*idem*, 20). Von Harbou named the never-stopping Heart machine, the Pater Noster, a name Lang uses for most of the machinery used to run Metropolis. One of the multiple film cuts was the intertitle, "Deep as the workmen's city lay underground, so high above it towered the Masterman Stadium, gift of John Masterman, the richest man in Metropolis" (*idem*, 22). Again this cut reflects the negative implications of capitalism and therefore undesirable for the American audiences, according to the censors.

Included with the cutting of this intertitle are the scenes connected with the complete foot race of what von Harbou identified as the "Club of the Sons" (*ibidem*). Von Harbou wrote of the "Club" as "more a district than a house" and a place that "embraced theatres, picture-palaces, lecture-rooms and a library" as well as race tracks, a stadium and the famous 'Eternal Gardens'" (*ibidem*), all that remains of this notion on film are the scenes from the Eternal Garden, a few clips from the race track and the men's club where *die falsche Maria* [the false Maria] dances (Keiner 1984: 91). One of the very short segments of the "Club", the race has some of the intertitles such as "But athletics were not the only diversion of gilded youth in Metropolis" omitted (Lang 1973: 23). Just the brief view of the freely racing, white-silk clad, young men makes the viewer aware of the separation between the oppressed, darkly dressed working-class men, walking head bent in the "bowels of the earth" physically and visually contrasts with the frolicking work-free men in the New Tower of Babel.

Just as the men are presented in terms of contradiction, so too are the women. To emphasize his observation of human duality, Lang introduces multiple

layers of contrast. We first view the working oppressed men and then we see scenes of the relaxing privileged men. In contrast, we first view the women of the privileged class men whom von Harbou identifies as “handsome well-trained female servants” (Lang 1973: 25). I find it interesting that Lang has many women vying for Freder’s attention whom Lang depicts as Freder’s social equals while von Harbou identifies the women as being commodities for the “Sons” rather than individuals from the same social status. While von Harbou’s women in the Eternal Garden were dressed “With their bewildering costume, their painted faces and their eyemasks”, Lang altered their resemblance to von Harbou’s “delicate dolls of porcelain and brocade, devised by a master hand, not purchasable but rather delightful presents” and lightened their wardrobe fabric to a more gossamer effect (*idem*, 24). By doing so, he added an element of raw sexuality, presenting some of the girls’ bare backs to the camera and including some “naked breasts covered by a diaphanous shawl” (*ibidem*) to add an element of duality soon to be witnessed even more dramatically by the audience between the girls in the Eternal City and to quote von Harbou, “the austere countenance of the Virgin. The sweet countenance of the mother” (*idem*, 27). Lang interprets von Harbou’s description of Maria’s “deadly severity of purity” (*ibidem*) with a costume featuring a large white collared, simple dress which is not described by von Harbou. The style of the dress is Puritan with front closure bodice.[3]

To accentuate the duality of men, Lang uses some of von Harbou’s description of women frolicking around Freder in the “Club of the Sons”. This is an important image to show the various levels of desirability. Before Freder begins his quest for Maria, he is shown as someone desirable by other women as well as compatible to other men. Furthermore, Freder is given the emotional quality associated with the heart as seen by many gestures in which he places his hand or hands on his heart to indicate his feelings. I find it interesting that several scenes

with Freder engaged in water play with the Eternal Garden women were expunged from the film. These segments were more theatrical than essential for the message of the film, even though water symbolically has implications of purification.

As an enhancement to von Harbou's screenplay, in Lang's film, the social divisions, which were visually emphasized, dramatically illustrated the split between the upper class "brains" of the city or the mental aspect and the lower class "brawn" of the city or the physical part which has predictably evolved by script's futuristic year 2000. One group of people, those above ground, retains only their brains, while another, those people who live below ground level, in the Worker's City, uses only their muscles. These extremes are geographically and pictorially presented with views of the rulers cavorting freely in pleasure gardens on the surface following scenes of the drudge worker columns shuffling, heads hanging, to and from their boring, strenuous jobs. The contrasts offer stark images of Man's duality. Maria functioned as an Eve in the Eternal Garden, bringing knowledge to the privileged "Sons" of what von Harbou identifies as "little ghost-like skeletons, covered with faded rags and smocks" (Lang 1973: 26). The dichotomy between the sheltered wonderkind sons of the mega industrialists contrasted with the reality of the effect of their fathers' empire on the children spawned by the masses of workers below. It is Maria who brings the two types of men together showing them as "brothers"; they are complementary parts of a single organism (Lang 1997: 10-11).

Because of Maria's first-hand knowledge of the horrors experienced by the working class, she understood the "truth" of the city and enlightened Freder by introducing him to the below-ground laborers who made the huge Metropolis function. Von Harbou's vision of casting the character of Maria as a political force in her screenplay was reduced in Lang's film to envisioning Maria as a shepherd of

children and a preacher of “truth”. As Maria stands in the doorway of the Club of the Sons, the Major-domo and the servants [“flunkeys” as they are identified by Lang (*idem*, 29)] surround Maria and the defenseless children. All we see is Maria turning and retreating through the large art deco doors of the Eternal Garden. Here there are a few intertitles that have been cut by either Ufa or American censors. One intertitles holds Freder’s question to the Major domo, “Who was that?” and the Major domo’s dismissive response, “Just the daughter of a worker”. Perhaps the implication of a worker’s daughter seeking to equalize the “sons” seemed too reflective of Communism for the censors. Later when her mechanical clone is created, the female image becomes a diabolically deadly fem-fatal. It seems to me that by having the false Maria initially wear the same white collar Puritan dress worn by the true Maria, implies that the duality of a woman’s nature lies below the surface of her clothes.

In von Harbou’s epigram to her novelized version of *Metropolis*, she clarifies that her tale is not “intended as a simple prognostication of the future, but as a figural commentary on the present” (Gunning 2000: 53). The action in the novel takes place in 2026 AD, although the actual date is omitted (or has been cut) in the film. Von Harbou stipulates that “This book is not of today or of the future. It tells of no place (…) It has a moral grown on the pillar of understanding” (Von Harbou 1963: iii). Since she specifically mentions “no place”, perhaps she views *Metropolis* as a utopian community; however, I view *Metropolis* as the allegory of the future triumph of the machine. Even though the workers are incited to sabotage the “Great Machines”, the ending implies a continuation of the city whose pulse is measured by the throbbing of Pater Noster machine. Von Harbou’s novel had a more intricate drama-horror theme with a strong female heroine, Maria. The biblical tale of the Tower of Babel retold to the workers underground by Maria functions primarily as a political parable about class and power divisions,

introducing Maria's central theme, "one of the oldest in the history of allegory", according to Tom Gunning, "the city-state as a human body, with workers conceived as 'hands' and planners as 'brains'" (Gunning 2000: 57). The key point alludes to the basically Communistic premise of a required workforce; however, in *Metropolis*, the laborers do not understand the city architects' noble motives, and only experience the pain of their own enslavement. This is not the Marxist-Leninist version of a classless society in which capitalism is overthrown by a working-class revolution that gives ownership and control of wealth and property to the state (Encarta Internet). In contrast, the city architects' lack of awareness of the workers' suffering is briefly recognized through the two desperate groups' communication, as a breakdown of the primal word 'Babel' into opposed meanings for each class. Von Harbou expatiated in her novel:

> "Babel!" shouted one, meaning: Divinity, Coronation, Eternal Triumph!
> "Babel!" shouted the other meaning: Hell, Slavery, Eternal Damnation!
> (Von Harbou 1963: 66)

Only "Babel!" appears on the intertitle placard. But Lang uses trick photography to make the word appear to either look like it is oozing sweat or possibly blood. Through his cinematography, Lang was able to ingeniously present an interpretation of a word that took von Harbou several pages to elucidate.

In Lang's film, he dramatized von Harbou's re-reading of the Tower of Babel and depicted the breakdown of the unity of labor. The powerful image of the workers revolting and surging up the stairs toward the speaker reflects the ironic antithesis Lang's visualization of von Harbou's slogan inscribed above the future city: "Great is the World and its Creator. And Great is Man" (Von Harbou 1963: 66). Von Harbou never questions the division of labor, in her screen play or her novel; she deems it "natural" that the "hands" and the "brains" have different tasks. Many of these allegorical figures were commonplace conceptions of Weimar

culture which was deeply embroiled in a debate on the nature of technology and political power. Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West* declared that the center of the "artificial and complicated realm of the Machine is the organizer and manager. The mind, not the hand, holds it together" (Gunning 2000: 64). The idea that the working classes simply needed to be informed of the planners' ideals to become contented, predicts the role of propaganda as a major agent of social change and consensus. Like the biblical triangle between man/ woman and the snake, von Harbou uses a male/female triangle of Rotwang, Hel [Rotwang's former lover who was won over by Fredersen and became his wife] and Fredersen to instigate the fall of *Metropolis* and another male/female relationship of Freder and Maria to rebuild the city. Even though many of the cuts involved the female role, just enough was included to tantalize a male/female interest in *Metropolis*, the film. In an interview with Jean-Luc Godard, the French movie director, Lang called himself a romantic and stipulated that his definition did not mean sentimentalism. He saw romanticism as a key to which to view a film through the director's heart, his desires, and everything the director loves (see Lang 1963: DVD).

One prescient and chilling part of von Harbou's screen play deals with a worker, who like other workers in *Metropolis*, is identified with a number.[4] Several of the scenes with Georg, worker 11811, were deleted from the film. Intertitles including "Why was my son allowed to go into the machine rooms?" spoken by Fredersen to his secretary, Josephat, and "Why did you go down there?" spoken by Fredersen to Freder, were omitted perhaps because they illustrate the enormous chasm between the supervisors and the workers. The communist overtones implying all men can be equalized are evident in a series of cut scenes including the intertitles, "It was their hands that built this city of yours, Father". Spoken to Fredersen by Freder and the father's response, "But where do the hands belong in your scheme?". Also Fredersen's oppressive response to his own

question, "In their proper place – the depths" implies anti-entrepreneurialism which is the antithesis of capitalism. Freder switches clothes with 11811, thus elevating the male worker to golden son status and reducing himself to worker status. Unlike with Lang's treatment of different personalities of Maria in the same dress, the cliché "clothes make the man" is appropriate for the scene with Georg and Freder. Ironically, Freder who represents the moneyed upper class cannot resolve the inequitable state of *Metropolis* because his father attempts to confine him in his quarters. Therefore, Freder has to send a representative worker as his spokesperson. The Marxian theory in which the class of industrial workers' only asset is the labor they sell to an employer is refuted in this scene; however, two scenes later, 11811 disobeys Freder's request to go to a trusted employee, Josephat's apartment, when Georg finds money in Freder's pockets. Instead of listening to Freder's directions, Georg takes a diversion and goes to Yoshiwara's,[5] a decadent "Sons" Club. If Joh Fredersen, Freder's father, had not acted like the autocrat, spying on his own son, 11811 would not have been caught by Slim, Joh's spy. All of the spying scenes with Slim following 11811 were expunged from the film. Perhaps the implication for using subversive methods such as spying to keep children (or others) in their proper place was not approved by the American audiences. Another intertitle, "What will you do if they turn against you some day?" was expunged from the American film. The fear was that such insinuations could cause unrest among workers. One intertitle that was altered, with the meaning left intact was Joh Fredersen telling Josephat "You are dismissed. Go to the G bank for the balance of your wages". The "You are dismissed" sentence was removed in the American version. Perhaps the economic times would have made the harsh reality too uncomfortable to achieve entertainment value.

Because the role for Maria was profoundly reduced in the film, the female actress who played Maria also was the voice of "The Machine Man", "Death", and

"The Seven Deadly Sins". My conjecture is that this was not an accidental casting. As Gayle Fornataro illustrated in "Beyond Utopia: An Exploration of Gendered Textual Spaces and Political Ideals", the feminist and/or psychoanalytic analysis of utopia seems anything but ideal. Fornataro argues that "women's relation to language in a patriarchal symbolic system" aims at the concept that utopias focus on the "exclusion of female difference and desire" by "abjecting the semiotic[6] aspect of language, which alone enables their expression". This is reflected in *Metropolis* as well. For example, after Rotwang transforms Maria into the Machine Man that is incorrectly translated from *Maschinenmensch* [Machine Human], the robot becomes a fully functioning automation which can be programmed to perform a variety of human tasks, while its appearance can be synthesized to resemble any human being. One inflammatory intertitle omitted from the American film states "The copy is perfect. Now go down to the workers and undo Maria's teaching; stir them up to criminal acts". Lang illustrates mob hysteria but with the many scene cuts, the film blends the true Maria with the false Maria. Freder, after chasing to Rotwang's house and hearing Maria cry out, confronts Rotwang with "Where is Maria?". While von Harbou describes one of the scenes with detailed description of Maria being found by Freder in Fredersen's arms about to kiss him, only the word/ name "Maria" appears on three additional intertitle placards. Because utopias are structured around specifically masculine desire and imagery, the female fem-fatal is an appropriate antagonist. Lang depicts this as the "robot's brazen gaze" and this scene eventually results in Freder's collapse.

It is interesting to note that the scenes depicting the highly sexually charged lascivious dance performed in a nearly nude costume by the false Maria in the guise of the Whore of Babylon in the Yoshiwara Club with the lecherous, leering fathers and sons vying for her attention are included in the film; however, scenes with Hel,[7] the woman who embodies Rotwang's wife, Fredersen's lover, and

Freder's mother were expunged. Apparently the name "Hel" was thought to be too sensitive to expose American audiences to. In fact, Lang's interpretation of von Harbou's *Metropolis* reflects a powerfully masculine reading of her screenplay. Even though there is a strong female in the film, Lang suggests that the struggle with industrialization is a male issue that is merely enunciated and exacerbated by Maria and her mechanical clone. It is not too divergent from Plato's construct regarding "utopia" as emphatically and undeniably a masculine concept, a masculine dream based upon an exclusively masculine form of desire, with no place for woman. Utopia means "no where", and according to Plato, women are no where in it. It is my conjecture that because Lang was using his wife's screenplay, the female character, albeit reduced in dimension, remained in the film. While von Harbou emphasized the false Maria's skill as inciting lust "in every soul in the room", Lang used the robot Maria's dance to appear as part of Freder's delusions. To further emphasize the disillusionment of Freder, Lang included the intertitles "Joh Fredersen is looking for an excuse to use violence against the workers" followed by "Maria, you always pleaded for peace – but now the robot in your likeness has been commanded to incite the workers to violence"; however, they were omitted in the American version because they may have fomented worker unrest and precipitated violence.

Another violent image that von Harbou included and Lang enhanced is the "grotesque figure of Death". Von Harbou had Death swing "his scythe" and cause "a rain of stars" to pour "down from the sky" (Lang 1973: 90), while Lang included figures of the Seven Deadly Sins and choreographed their movements from the Catacombs to interaction with each other and back to the Catacombs where the true Maria professed her philosophy and where false Maria fomented unrest. Apparently the image of Death wielding its instrument of destruction did not offend the sensibilities of the American audience, according to Pollock, but the statue of

the scientist's dead lover who left him to marry the Master of Metropolis and lost her life giving birth to the Master's son was too offensive to include in the expurgated version.

Lang finds it difficult to conceive of a man who has everything, really understanding a man who has very little (see Grant 2003: 180). Perhaps if Lang wrote the script alone, C.A. Rotwang, the creative scientific genius, Joh, the industrialist genius, and Freder, the next-generation genius, would have been the only characters in the film; however, because von Harbou wrote her screenplay featuring a strong female, Maria, Lang included her as the catalyst and lust interest necessary to enable Freder's transform from an idle rich "Son" to the heart of the mediation between the head and the hand. Rather than keeping her in the role of von Harbou's firebrand orator and socially-conscious thinker, Lang enhanced the sexuality of the false Maria. For the benefit of film sales, it is common knowledge that sex sells; however, none of the lusty scenes of the men leering at the false Maria's exotic dance were kept in the American version. The conundrum that presents itself is that if women need to find a new direction, and a visionary director such as Lang is providing a visual vehicle for a female's screen play, von Harbou's in this instance, the masculine interpretation of a woman's work leads to a possible assessment that unless a woman is continuously behind the camera lens, it seems that feminist utopia is an impossible contradiction in terms. Another difficulty was as Gunning mentioned:

> Von Harbou does not truly seem capable of thinking through (or accepting) any of the scenarios offered by her material: the resolution of the Oedipal complex, the Christian sacrifice, or the workers' revolution. Instead, imagery of breakdown and chaos dominate. (Gunning 2000: 71)

Even with the implication that women did not get a fair presentation in Lang's *Metropolis*, Lang was able to take von Harbou's screenplay and take

scenes such as the near final scene where "Rotwang climbed up the ladder, dragging the girl with him, in his arms" and actually depict the drama involved in the male character treating a female character as if she were a commodity available for his possession. The issue of children is also interesting in *Metropolis*. The intertitle "Joh Fredersen's son has saved your children" was amended to "Your children have been saved". Perhaps there was some question of Fredersen's motives for reconciliation if those negotiating would think that the only reason Fredersen wanted to settle the dispute between capital and labor was so that others would react to "Save my son!" as a repayment for Freder saving their children.

Metropolis is a film that though possibly cohesive in its original form, became fertile ground for censorship on many levels. Lang's "high art" of the film "raises the artistic stakes a few notches" (Bergfelder *et al*. 2002: 65). Even though Metropolis now only exists in a version which distorts Fritz Lang's and Thea von Harbou's original intentions; compared to the premiered version, the content has been changed in places beyond recognition. Kracauer attributes the censorship and massive editing of *Metropolis* to its role as a "youth film" that "affirms fixation to authoritarian behavior precisely by stressing rebellion against it" (Kracauer 2004: 162). Furthermore, Kracauer stated that Thea von Harbou, "was not only sensitive to all undercurrents of the time, but indiscriminately passed on whatever happened to haunt her imagination. *Metropolis* was rich in subterranean content that, like contraband, had crossed the borders of consciousness without being questioned" (*idem*, 163).

Reconstructed versions of the film have been deduced from the script, as well as the censorship notes for the first version and the surviving original score by Gottfried Huppertz. While von Harbou focused on the more problematic tendencies and a melodramatic treatise on capital and labor in both her screenplay

and her subsequent novel, Lang developed his trademark style apart from von Harbou and he always insisted on his own vision of cinema and claimed he never adapted to popular tastes (Bergfelder *et al*. 2002: 223). Also, Lang was able to utilize his considerable directing skill as well as his art and architecture background to mold a film whose remaining scenes are so carefully recorded that it endures as a classic in spite of all the cuts from various quarters that have excised von Harbou's the central conflict depicting the rivalry between the inventor, Rotwang, and the tyrant of Metropolis, Joh Fredersen, for Hel, whom they both loved (Aurich *et al*. 2001: 118-119). In von Harou's screenplay, Maria, acting on an appeal from the Workers' wives, calls on Freder to be a mediator. Lang, however, has the all women except Maria retreat totally into the underground and background so that the final scene has the men looking on as Maria entreats Freder's help to unite the trinity, bringing together the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit of the Worker. The intertitle states:

> Head and hands want to join together, but they don't have the heart to do it. Oh Mediator, show them the way to each other.

Freder, the child who caused so much pain to Rotwang, death to Hel and hope for Fredersen, emerges as Mediator at the heart of the film's metaphorical plot which continues to keep its figurative finger on the pulse of popular interest.

Notes

[1] It was common practice for film makers to "borrow" from other commercially successful films since the audiences liked to view not only the same stars in different pictures, but similar themes as well; therefore, Kaiser's billionaire in his Gas Trilogy: Die Korall, Gas I and Gas II (1917-20) may have been an influence on the creation of Joh Fredersen. According to Fredrick W. Ott, "The purifying power of sacrifice, the belief that through destruction a new humanity will arise and the prophetic dream of brotherly love, all set forth in Lang's film, bear a strong resemblance to the work of the playwright George Kaiser" (Ott 1986: 76).

[2] The overspent budget drove UFS into the red and ultimately into financial dependence on Hollywood corporations according to Gunning's "Metropolis: The Dance of Death: The Allegory of the Machine" in *The Films of Fritz Lang* (Gunning 2000: 53).

[3] Puritan clothing for women had the bodice buttoned all the way up the front, whereas Lang's design had the bodice laced which later added a more alluring look to the false Maria as she gyrated with various gestures.

[4] This is chilling since this is the method which Hitler employed fifteen years after this film was shown. Numerical identification of concentration camp victims took away their names and tattooed numbers on their forearms, thus removing their humanity and reducing them to machines.

[5] Yoshiwara means Good Luck Meadow and was a famous red-light district established in Edo in the early 17th century; an area that is more camouflaged, but where sexual services are obtainable, still exists in present-day Tokyo, Japan.

[6] The term "semiotic" was coined by Julia Kristeva to mean the facet of language that is oriented and structured around the mother's body.

[7] Several sources are indicated for the name Hel. Hel (realm), the realm of the dead in Norse mythology and Hel (being), daughter of Loki, ruler of Hel Hel, Poland, a town.

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Socio-political Utopianism and the Demands of the 21st Century

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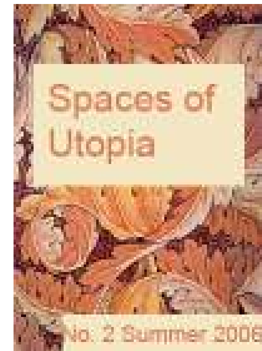

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I.

If we trusted the seismograph of current trends, we would concede that the political utopia has left its future behind by now. Already in 1985, Jürgen Habermas declared the "crisis of the welfare state and the exhaustion of utopian energies" (Habermas 1985: 141 ff). Four years later, a few weeks after the opening of the borders between East and West Germany, Günter Kunert mercilessly rebuffed the utopia of a democratic socialism. Instead of being inspired by this utopia, "after forty years of wretchedness, the impatient majority reaches for the obvious: the bananas at super markets". Utopian dreams seem nothing else than the expression of discontent with industrial civilization. But its mechanism, that is functionality, productivity and consumption, cracked all variants of the ideal of collectivism that feeds utopia. "In that, the mammoth machinery, which contemporary socialism is turning into, a 'free association of free people' is nothing other than an evening club or a traditional association where one reads the *Communist Manifesto* together to prevent waking up" (Kunert 1989: S. 33).

In March 1990 Hans Magnus Enzensberger celebrated the spontaneous unification of East and West Germany, brought about by the masses, as evidence that there is only one possibility left to talk about political utopias: in the form of a literary obituary. The masses have, according to Enzensberger,

crossed the border on November 9 and thus rocked the waves in Germany. “With the pace of a deserter, not the millennium but everyday life dawned upon us that does not need a prophet” (Enzensberger 1992: 74). What Enzensberger seems to say is that the lack of utopian impulse in the changes in East Germany revealed only that which had been hushed up for such a long time: that utopian thought is not a constant factor in human anthropology. He argues that a specific product of European thought had been exported to other countries since Antiquity, but this should not deter from the fact that “from the stone age to the Meso-American and Asian civilizations, thousands of human societies survived without utopias”. It would be of utmost significance when Europeans would give up the *idée fixe* of utopia but we could not, according to Enzensberger, talk about a ‘loss’. What would be sacrificed would be first of all “the fatal moments of utopian thought: expansionist megalomania, the demand for totalitarianism, finality and novelty” (*idem*, S. 69).

It would be wrong if one ignored the truth embedded in this obituary of the political utopia. As much as its blueprints were taken over by social reality during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, its disenchantment progressed. In fact, the classical tradition of utopian thought has shaped modern civilization more than seems apparent at first sight. Therefore, whoever stigmatises Campanella’s *City of the Sun* as a precursor to totalitarianism, should consider that he also pre-empted that which spread through the democratic Western hemisphere. “Chronometers and weather vanes play an important role in his state, things that mark an increasing regulation of time, control and behaviour in the Renaissance and that are characteristic for the age of trains and factories” (Gustafson 1985: 286). In Morus’ *Utopia*, forests are cut down on a large scale as they stand in the way of human progress. Human’s relationship to nature is completely instrumental, as is reflected in the geometric structure of the utopian

city: it anticipates the technological functionality of architecture and urban planning that nowadays is part of everyday world civilization.

This relates to the fact that the committed defenders of industrial capitalism, actually the spokespersons for the so-called “technocratic conservatism”, could openly or implicitly relate to the premises of nineteenth-century utopian thought (see Saage 1991: 95 ff.) They saw in the “rigid” structures of the hierarchical world of work that characterised quite a few utopian blueprints of the Industrial Revolution, an “order of life” that was more stable than the pre-industrial feudal society. The ending of class-warfare, indicative of the absolute dominance of productivity – a classical principle of nineteenth-century utopian thought – was confirmed in the social partnership of highly industrialised Western countries after WWII. The conviction of utopians that due to the increasingly complex division of labour dependencies within the respective production levels would increase was confirmed as the inevitable emergence of “economic pressures” and socio-technological “superstructures”.

These utopian blueprints of technocratic standardisation also shaped Soviet societies. They too stood under the spell of infinite quantitative economic growth and an unbroken confidence in the universal possibilities of technology of which nineteenth-century utopianists expected the solution to all emancipatory problems. But the Soviet socialists came closer to the classical utopian thought of Plato and Morus than any capitalist countries of the West. Although Friedrich Engels rejected any “recipes for the cook-shop of the future”, a strand within Marxist tradition, especially the Bolsheviks, dismissed this anti-utopian iconoclasm. This was emphatically described by Johannes R. Becher, who wrote in 1942:

> I have to be grateful to the Soviet Union for everything that I owe life; an elevated life. This is *Vita Nuova*, the other or the new life, which all poets of all times have dreamt, the birth of the “Kingdom of Man”, blueprint and building site of a dawning epoch of Man after millennia of idolatry and the twilight of the gods, the timely realisation of Plato’s rationalistic state, of Campanella’s *City of the Sun*, the dream of the “perfect man” or the “Utopia” of Thomas More. (Lukács *et al.* 1936: 25)

Becher's now farcical 'salute by a German poet to the Soviet Union' cannot distract from the fact that it is based on an accurate premise. The societies of the Soviet and the classical utopian model assumed that the ideal society can only be realized if politics took precedence over economy, bureaucracy and party discipline over individual civic and human rights, collectivism over personal spontaneity and creativity, surveillance and regimentation over self-determination and, finally, isolationism – skilfully symbolized in the 'Iron Curtain' – took precedence over unobstructed freedom of movement. Other structural features need to be added. The Communist Party that had claimed the monopoly of truth and politics modelled its utopian blueprint on the philosopher class of the Platonic *Politeia* and its heirs in the elite classes of early modern utopias. The self-appointed 'Avant-garde of the Proletariat' – as the actual motivating force of historical progress – founds its justification of power not in principles of democracy, but, similarly to eighteenth-century utopians, in a philosophy of history. And finally, the vision of the 'new man' is also an essential element of the classical utopian tradition. Trotzki refers to it when he wrote in 1924 that in the perfected socialism, the common man is elevated to the level of Aristotle, Goethe and Marx (Trotzki 1968: 215).

But why has this etatist-authoritarian line within utopian thought come to its end with the collapse of the Soviet-type societies? In addition to many historical reasons of internal and external political nature, there are explanations that are specifically grounded in the model of the authoritarian utopia. I want to identify three aspects: 1) A system that grants a small elite the monopoly of truth and policy is incapable to react to new challenges innovatively as new doctrines and findings are often articulated by minorities outside of the established state apparatus. 2) In a state where all individual civic and human rights are repressed, the talents of millions of people will

necessarily vanish. The result is a cultural, scientific and especially economic stagnation as exemplified in the former Soviet Union. 3) A society which is based on the regimentation of the majority of the population and which destroys the individual liberty through a gigantic surveillance system delegitimatizes its political power. The moment the order is momentarily disrupted by mass actions and demonstrations, the complete system collapses as we witnessed in 1989 and 1991.

II.

There is no doubt: the end of the authoritarian-etatist utopia is irrevocable. Even if dictatorships are established that refer back to Campanella's *City of the Sun*, they will not be able to offer that which is so characteristic of utopian thought: hope. On the other hand, I would argue that utopian thought has not completely been discredited by the collapse of state socialism in Europe because the set of problems that created utopias since Thomas More are still existent. I believe that it is wrong to equate utopianism with either ideal communities or future dystopian scenarios. Equally important to the utopian blueprint is the socio-political context that creates utopias. As they constructively create counter worlds with the aid of secularized reason, political utopias are essentially reactive. Since Thomas More, utopias have responded to contemporary crises in social, and nowadays even global contexts.

The utopianists of the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods reacted to the arbitrariness of absolutism, to the privileges of rank and to the exploitation of human work by feudalism and early capitalism. Nineteenth and twentieth-century utopias have retorted constructively to the social miseries of the Industrial Revolution. Since the early 1920's the so-called 'black' utopias have defined themselves as visionary warnings about the looming totalitarianism in East and West. Modern utopianism after WWII was greatly

inspired by the increasing destruction of the natural environment by technology and industrialisation with mass consumerism in the highly developed countries of the Northern hemisphere that accepts the pauperization of the southern hemisphere and the still-existing oppression of women. Thus, to put it provocatively, the set of problems that created utopias since Thomas More are still existent. However, globalization has transformed them even in comparison to the early 20th century so that the solutions of classical utopianism, especially 19th century utopianism, will necessarily fail. Today, utopian thought needs to create a new profile. But what is its uniqueness made of?

I have already discussed the outdated elements of utopia. Their failure was announced long before the collapse of the Soviet model of society. Already in 1967, M.I. Finley pointed out that utopian thought could only liberate itself from its paralysis if it broke with its past and would adapt to the new needs of human society of the second half of the 20th century (Finley 1967: 29 f.). This demand has been – at least partially- fulfilled. I categorized the fundamental revisions of the original utopian paradigm in Skinner's *Walden Two*, Huxley's *Island*, LeGuin's *The Dispossessed* and Callenbach's *Ecotopia* as 'postmaterialist'. I suggest that despite their differences in envisioning alternative futures, they all share similar structural characteristics.

First of all, they set great store by a far-reaching decentralisation of political and economic institutions to allow a greater share for all in the formation of the commonwealth. Then, science and technology are separated from the necessity of unchecked economic growth. Science and technology are furthered selectively and only then, if they are compatible with sustainability. In addition, physical labour is elevated to such an extent that it seems equal at least to intellectual work. At the same time, the strict division between work and leisure is dissolved. Concepts of self-determined work replace disciplining hierarchies of work. Moreover, one can detect a tendency towards the

renunciation of consumerism. The revalorization of sexual and artistic needs replace the predominance of conspicuous consumption. Also, more importance is given to the emancipation of women than ever in classical utopianism. And last but not least, postmaterial utopianism dissociates itself from a progressivist philosophy of history and its materialist essence that enforces the dominance of nature through technology.

The weak points of postmaterial utopianism in terms of political science are easily named. As pointed out above, postmaterial blueprints aim to allow a possibly direct share of citizens in the political and economic decision processes by decentralizing institutions on all levels of society. However, there is no indication that a mass society, uncoupled from global markets, without, for instance, large-scale enterprises with centralising superstructures, can survive. Also, it is not clear how postmaterialist utopianism can achieve majority votes given the hegemony of possessive individualism. On the other hand, it would be wrong to reject them as mere escapist utopias. Their pragmatic elements have long left the esoteric exclusivity of literary escapism behind, as the 1991 report authorised by the 'Club of Rome', *The Global Revolution,* has plainly shown (Spiegel 1991).

Is it at all possible to connect the members of the 'Club of Rome', whom Richard von Weizsäcker called 'the conscience of humanity', with utopian discourse? Those who have read the report will not deny that we have to answer in the affirmative. The authors of the report and contemporary utopias share the principle that the world, as it is, cannot be projected in its mere factuality. This corresponds to the conviction that the future is essentially indeterminate. Thus, humans have to decide for themselves what they mean by 'the good life' and how they want to attain it. The authors of the 'Club of Rome' report agree with the great utopian writers that the mere extrapolation of existing trends is no realistic answer to contemporary problems (Spiegel 1991:

11). They demand explicitly "a vision of the world, in which we like to live" (*idem*, 10f, 65). Elsewhere they admit their "utopian" quality (*idem*, 33).

At the same time, the authors confirm another essential to the utopian paradigm. If the future is indeterminate, then we need realms of thought and fantasy that are unburdened by political and social responsibility or the enforcing of specific interests. Only then it seems possible to conceive future scenarios that are more than the mere projection of contemporary conditions (see Bermbach 1992). This conviction frames the distinctiveness of the 'Club of Rome'. Because "its members (…) represent a diversity of cultures, ideologies, professions and industries", the 'Club of Rome' creates free spaces that are unfettered by immediate political objectives (Spiegel 1991: 6). And finally, the authors of the report have banked on a resource that had been the fundament of the utopian alternative. It is not by accident that the authors see their report as a "call to global solidarity" and they also indicate that the project only has a chance if it meets people that cling to secularized reason as their final reference point (*idem*, 128).

III.

Although there are important overlaps between the 'Club of Rome' report and the formal structure of the early modern utopia, it is also evident that the report breaks away from the fundamentals of the authoritarian-etatist tradition of utopian discourse since Thomas More. This tradition configured solidarity as an expression of collective reason, which did not seek or only partially seek to balance collectivism with the unalienable rights of the individual. In accordance with postmaterialist utopias, the authors of the 'Club of Rome' report demand a form of solidarity that does not quench but indeed generates the well-understood self-interest of the individual. The aim is to make egotism a powerful ally of solidarity. This objective could be achieved as we are not only

talking about our own survival but about the survival of our children and grand children (*idem*, 129). The universalist values that spring from such a novel concept of solidarity make a further break with the anti-individualist ideal of social homogeneity of the classical utopian tradition. They comprise not only liberty but individual human rights and personal responsibility (*idem*, 124). At the same time, they denounce another correlation of utopian anti-individualism: equalizing egalitarianism (*idem*, 33f).

But it is not only this intellectual foundation that relates the 'Club of Rome' report to the postmaterialist orientation of contemporary utopian thought. Both also agree in the representation of the contemporary. Many (however not all) classical utopianists believed that material poverty and exploitation could be ended by replacing a free economy by a centralised, planned economy that would regulate the production and distributions from 'above'. In opposition, the 'Club of Rome' report assumes that we cannot give up the effectiveness of a free economy as a social institution that organises human productivity to satisfy human needs (*idem*, 16). Its importance to the preservation of economic vitality and innovation is indisputable (*idem*, 33). But nevertheless, with all utopianists, the authors highlight the limits of the market economy. If this type of economy is fixed merely on the short-term satisfaction of needs or the maximization of profit, then one cannot establish long-term mechanisms (*idem*, 14, 30) that are based on the preservation of energy, the environment, fairness and basic research (*idem*, 16).

Furthermore, such an economic system is determined by the perspective of infinite economic growth that has resulted in counterproductive effects that need to be fought (*idem*, 120). The report suggests that in an economic system "that is based on the motivating force of conspicuous consumption and the ready availability of credits, the general expectation remains that wealth and material prosperity will constantly increase" (*ibidem*). In short: The authors of

the ‘Club of Rome’ report do not plead for the abolition of market economy but for the normative restriction of such an economic system. In the context of anti-trust, anti-dumping and price-protection laws, credit controls as well as codes of business practice, the authors demand “clear ethical principles that are established by society but with which industry and commerce can live, though with compromises” (*idem*, 128).

However, the report does not only indicate the “limits of market economy” in tackling the global problems of humanity. Perhaps more importantly, it agrees with the postmaterialist reassessment of the essential triad of ‘science and technology’, ‘work’ and ‘human needs’. To the same effect, the authors of the ‘Club of Rome’ report “fit in with the needs of the moment to apply technology to the needs of humanity and shape it so that it contributes to the general and lasting welfare of all peoples of today and future generations and that it submits itself to a holistic, global, even cosmic awareness” (*idem*, 121). Thus, a very clear rule emerges from the increasing CO_2 concentration and the greenhouse effect, the desiccation of the Ukrainian breadbasket and the American Midwest to the, until now, unthinkable German flood disasters of the summer 2002: “The economical and efficient use of energy and the development of sustainable energy sources are tasks that need to be tackled immediately if the disruption of industrial production and individual suffering is to be avoided” (*idem*, 36).

The ‘Club of Rome’s’ report also agrees with the postmaterialist utopian discourse on the re-evaluation of work. The organisation of alienated work following the example of military discipline and hierarchical authorities of command, that were admired by the great utopians such as Campanella, Saint-Simon or Bellamy, is replaced by the concept of self-determined work as Fourier suggested in the 19th century. Problems such as long-term unemployment resulting from the automation of factory and office work can only

be solved through the even distribution of work through reduction of working hours. With shorter working hours, it is possible to introduce "measures to create socially necessary occupations on a voluntary basis" (*idem*, 47). If the increasing leisure time can be used creatively and satisfactorily, then, so the authors of the 'Club of Rome' report, "a Golden Age is dawning where machines are working for us, instead of dominating us" (*ibidem*).

And finally, the essential principle to renounce consumerism unites the report with postmaterialist utopian thought. It is only possible to have a sustainable global society of the future if we "change the extravagant life style of industrial countries – and slow down consumerism – changes that would be enforced anyway given the requirements of environmental production" (*idem*, 128). Even if the authors do not subscribe to zero-growth – the South needs quantitative, the North qualitative, economic growth –, it is not acceptable in the long run that the average usage of energy and natural resources in the Northern hemisphere is 40 times higher – in some extreme cases even 100 times – than in the undeveloped countries in the South. "This disproportion does not only reflect social inequality but it suggests the degree to which the exploitation of nature has been perfected", especially then if one adds together individual consumerism with the "criminal waste of human, material and energy resources for military purposes" (*idem*, 33).

However, not only the 'system of human needs' and its correspondent, technology and work, relate to the postmaterialist utopian paradigm. It is also the political system that is relevant in its essential structures. Actually, a critique of the parliamentary democracy has run like a red thread through modern utopian tradition since at least the 19th century. This is where the authors of the 'Club of Rome' report pick up the threads when they question if representative democracy is able to correct global maldevelopment. Governments, according to the criticism, that are forced to act under the pressure of the next elections,

only concentrate on immediate problems. They ignore those concerns that seem less pressing, but are generally of fundamental importance (*idem*, 14). “In its current form”, states the report, “democracy is not adequately suited to solve our immediate concerns. The complex and technological nature of many of today’s problems does not permit elected representatives to make competent decisions at the right time” (*idem*, 69). It is not in Parliament but in the media where generally informed discussions about the important political, economic and social problems are taking place (*ibidem*). The interest of parties to maintain their power base is so strong that the gap between public opinion and elected representatives is increasing. We have to be aware that “democracy is hollowed out and restricted” (*ibidem*). In short: The answer to the question if the new world in which we find ourselves is governable is “probably not with the existing structures and attitudes” (*idem*, 70).

In the context of a global threat to humanity, does not such an analysis legitimate the return of a utopian state such as Campanella’s *City of the Sun*? Does not such an analysis justify a utopian *Leviathan,* who, in the name of the survival of humanity, installs an iron dictatorship over the individual needs? It is conspicuous that the ‘Club of Rome’ report excludes such alternatives. Instead, like the classical postmaterialist utopias, its authors bank on a wide-ranging decentralization of political systems. “In the contemporary world, the decision making cannot be the monopoly of governments and ministerial departments who work in a vacuum anyway”. Many partners must be part of the process: trade and industry, research institutes, scientists, NGOs and private organisations (*idem*, 104). This pluralistic approach is complemented by a fundamentally democratic corrective that has already established itself as a central motif of the postmaterialist utopian paradigm. A dynamic world, states the report, needs “a sensitive nervous system at the basis, not only to

guarantee a possibly wide-ranging input, but to assure that all citizens identify with the common process of governing" (*idem*, 105).

First and foremost, the authority that the authors of the 'Club of Rome' report associates with a "vision of a world in which we like to live", largely echoes postmaterialist utopian thought. It is not a progressivist philosophy of history that is expected to execute the vision: a simple plea to the existentialist interest of humanity to secure its own survival replaces the appeal to a "historical necessity". And even the vision of the "global society" itself, in which the contemporary maldevelopments on a global scale need to be corrected, is indeterminate. It has the status of a regulative principle, not a closed system, that determines life in its minute details. In many ways, the 'Club of Rome' report goes beyond the horizon of a postmaterialist utopia. It is perhaps even more utopian. In the fictional blueprints of Huxley, Callenbach and Le Guin are elements that are alien to utopian thinking as they refer back to myths of nature or ideas of religious totality.

In Huxley's Island-Utopia, the European, classical, anti-individualist ideal of harmony is essentially modified. Its regulative principles, bound to securalized reason, are replaced by the ideal of transcendental holism, influenced by Buddhism, clearly breaks with the rationalism of Enlightenment thought of the early modern period. In Callenbach's *Ecotopia*, individual spirituality results from the relationship with nature: Here, spirituality echoes Native American rites that worship nature in small shrines spread around the country. After all, the self is nothing else than a derivative of a holistic myth of nature that generated it and where it will return to. A similar belief is proposed in LeGuin's *The Dispossessed*. In as much as the Cartesian division of subject-object is replaced in favour of a holistic understanding of nature that includes humans, the ground is cut from under the idea of the independent self as autonomous rational being. "There are souls", says LeGuin's hero, "whose

umbilicus was never cut. They will never separate from the universe. They do not see death as an enemy but look forward to decompose, so that new life can grow from them" (Le Guin 1974: 158).

Compared with this, the analyses and visions of the 'Club of Rome's' report never leave the domain of rational viability. To simplify it, it would be possible to say that the report strives for that which the future of political utopianism makes possible: to use the method of securalized reason to demand strategies for a world that is still threatened by nuclear holocaust, by environmental destruction and climate catastrophes of the global kind, by the exploitation of non-renewable raw materials, the dominance of irrational governments in form of new nationalism and religious fundamentalism, as well as an unchecked population explosion in undeveloped countries.

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