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The Double Role of Architecture

The Critical and Therapeutic Potency of Unbuilt Utopias

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ABSTRACT

Born in periods of crises, utopias adopt a threefold structure: a critique of society, a spatial arrangement, and a new society sustained by this spatial arrangement. Accordingly, space and architecture are recognized as spatial levers to address crises and change societies. However, three problematic characteristics emerge from an analysis of past and contemporary utopias. First, utopias do not always advocate for new societal orders, as some tend to consolidate the existing ones. Second, they have evolved to be increasingly tangible. Third, while appearing as collective narratives, they are written by a single hand, allowing little variations. To address these issues and revitalize their critical potency, utopias could act as beacons rather than concrete projects, work on processes rather than goals, and build collective narratives rather than monologues. Eventually, the article illustrates architecture's twofold rationale: a means to physically build space and a critical tool to reflect on society.

KEYWORDS: *architecture, crises, utopias, society, spatial determinism*

Today more than ever there is no theory without utopia. Otherwise, a person is content to record what he sees before his eyes; he does not go too far—he keeps his eyes fixed on so-called —reality: he is a realist . . . but he does not think! There is no theory that neither explores a possibility nor tries to discover an orientation. The architects, like the town planners know this perfectly well. (Lefebvre 1968, 178)

Architecture and Utopias

Utopias and Spatial Determinism

The usual task of architects is to manufacture physical contexts, at a territorial, urban, and building scale, for humans to dwell in. But the work of architects also influences and molds the way our societies function through the shaping of space. As Harvey (2000) quotes a Greek saying, “we make the house and the house makes us.” This causal connection between (built) environment and social behavior is called spatial determinism. It is at the heart of the notion of utopia coined by Thomas More in the sixteenth century (More 1516).

Utopias have a very intricate tie with architecture. On the one hand, utopias are better, yet impossible places, generally created by adopting architectural images that are “both spectacular and indeterminate.” These architectural descriptions are used to convey a sense of reality and “convince one’s audience of utopia’s feasibility” (Picon 2017). On the other hand, the notion of utopia is intertwined with architecture through spatial determinism. The latter plays a central role as space is believed to be capable of shaping new societies (Marin 2016) within an imaginary world—“*idolum*” (Mumford 1922).

A Prospective Tool Produced as a Tryptic

Nowadays, the word “utopia” is overused and its original meaning is frequently compromised. It is often regarded as an insubstantial and fancy dream that does not question the values of our societies, even though it was originally forged with a genuine prospective potential. This prospective potential must still be recognized today as a fundamental asset to utopias. The prospective potency of utopias has always been essential in times of crises, providing alternative ways of



Figure 1. Iconophage: on the tyranny of images (collage by Hilaire Bramaud du Boucheron, Jérôme Daenens, Côme Morterol, Gaspar Lambé).

living and thinking the world. In fact, the cradles of utopias are eras of economic uncertainty, social upheaval, and political unrest (Messac 2008; Eaton 2001). In those troubled and changing times, humans turn to their imagination for means of escape that are inconceivable in their reality, to make “the world tolerable” (Mumford 1922, 11). In the abstract constructions of utopias, space is thought to have an “orthopaedic power” (Choay 2006) on an ill-functioning world. Indeed, a

series of utopias act as spatial tools to rectify the dysfunctions of societies in times of crises. In this regard, utopia acts as a stake to straighten the twisted tree of society (see fig. 2).

When Thomas More published *Utopia* in 1516, he established a new literary genre. More than that, it generated a tool to question society through three major characteristics. First, through the words of Hythloday, it provided a thorough critique of the English society of the time. Almost like a caricature, it shed light on the most relevant and dysfunctional aspects of society. This critical capacity is still inherent to utopian thinking (Heynen 2003). Second – and herein lies the originality of More’s novel (Choay 2006; Marin 2016)—it described a spatial configuration at various scales able to shelter a new social order. In this sense, utopia was projected as a “tightly organized spatial form” (Porter and Lukermann 1976). Third, these spatial constructions

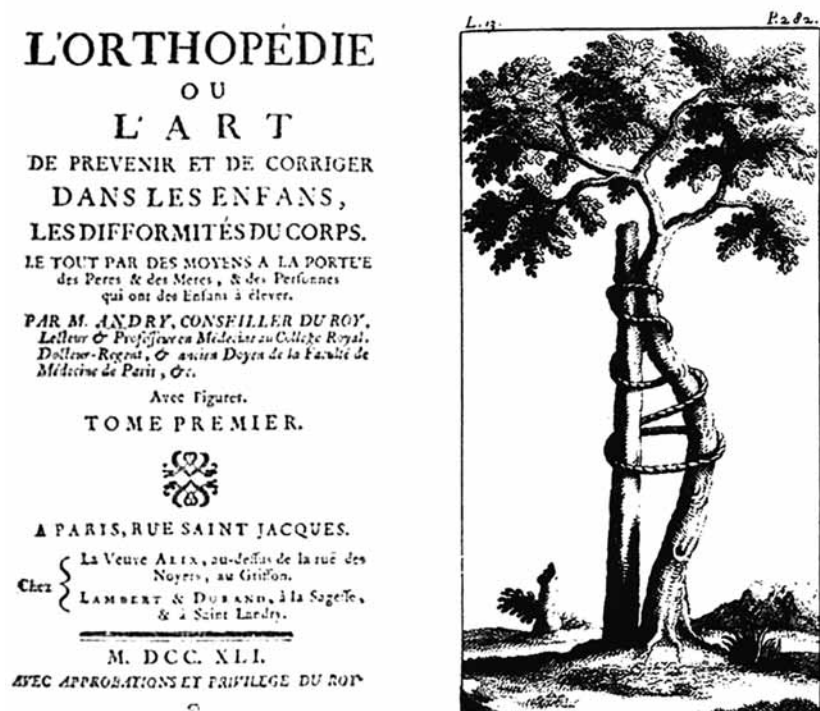


Figure 2. The orthopedic power of utopia as a stake to straighten the twisted tree of society (Andry, *L'Orthopédie, ou, l'Art de prévenir et corriger dans les enfans, les difformités du corps*, 1743).

support a new societal order that can be regarded as a critical inversion of the initial society. Hence, as the central argument of More's discourse—of any discourse for the first time in history (Choay 2006, 358)—space is acknowledged as having the capacity to modify the general order of the society that is criticized. Accordingly, utopias relate closely to the concept of *pharmakon* introduced by Plato, being at the same time the poison and the remedy.

Given this definition, utopias provide two different means to reflect on society (Desroche, Gabel, and Picon 2016). On the one hand, they contribute to a retrospective knowledge. Indeed, through a mirror effect, utopias shed light on the societies they criticize. Thanks to the critical inversion that utopias propose, one can better understand the society and the real world. On the other hand, utopias provide a tool for prospective action. Based on the strong conviction that space can modify social behaviors, utopias frame new and ideal societies through their spatial structures. Several authors (Choay 1979, 1980, 2006; Borsi 1997; Eaton 2001) have shed light on the recurring features of these spatial arrangements, such as a *tabula rasa*, isotropic space, primacy of institutions, intelligible geometrical order, universality, absence of evolution and the reference to the denounced society. But these authors omit several aspects relating to the orthopedic virtue of such arrangements, precluding the examination of utopias' contemporary operativeness.

Utopias to Face Our Contemporary Challenges?

Therefore, the goal of this article is to shed light on and further question the recurring traits of spatial utopias as prospective and critical tools to address today's social, political, economic, and ecological upheavals. If More was the first one in history to claim the corrective power of the built space (Choay 2006), this belief has become a leitmotiv for both utopian writers and architects. History, however, has taught us the many flaws of utopias, and their sclerotic character, where any evolution is excluded and the "dialectic of social process is repressed . . . perpetuating a happy stationary state" (Harvey 2000) leading to failure—dystopias (Banham 1976; Jean 1994).

Consequently, the central issue at stake is the following: Can space and more particularly architecture still be a lever to criticize and produce alternatives as past utopias assumed they could? Furthermore, as space seems to have the virtue to change and support another society, what are its specific features and how can one avoid the failures of the past? This specific insight

on the orthopedic power of space provides new significance for today's discipline of architecture and aims to revitalize the utopian tradition of critical attitude.

Investigating the Potency of Space in Past and Contemporary Utopias

Methodology

In order to put this question to the test, the research investigates past and students' proposals, dissecting how they are constituted, how they operate, and what kind of society they sustain.

First, past utopias are studied throughout history, using Habermas's milestones of modern ruptures as a guide. In this seminal work, Habermas (1984) elaborates on the concept of modernity "as the result of a transition from the old to the new" and points out several modern ruptures in the course of history, questioning the traditional social order. These pivotal moments of crises that tend to "mark the end of history" (Picon 2017) are precisely the eras identified by Messac (2008) as favorable to the emergence of the utopian genre. Based on this, the research focuses on five paradigmatic milestones: the Peloponnesian War, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution, and Modernism. In each case, a series of exemplary utopian proposals are analyzed and paralleled to the reality they emerged from, such as Plato's *Atlantis*, More's *Utopia*, Ledoux's *Arc-et-Senans*, Godin's *Familistère*, and Le Corbusier's *Contemporary City of Three Million Inhabitants*. The analysis is conducted from a spatial and a societal point of view.

Spatial structures of each proposal are analyzed via drawn comparison with similar graphic codes. In the case of written works such as *Utopia*, *Christianopolis*, *Critias*, and *Timaeus* (Platon -356a, -356b; Andreae 1619; More 1516)), utopian proposals remain literary compositions with very few or no illustrations. In these cases, the spatial utopias are carefully redrawn by isolating systematically all spatial descriptions in the texts. This exploratory spatial transposition is supplemented by previous attempts to redraw those written chimeras (Morrison 2015; Marin 2016; Eyler 2015). Some of these texts, like More's manuscript, are surprisingly accurate, leaving very little place for interpretation in the dimensions of the island or of the buildings, while

others display discrepancies, if not contradictions, in their descriptions (e.g., *Christianopolis* by Andreae). Drawn utopias, whether built or not, are also redrawn for the research following the same graphic codes in order to compare them objectively. These drawings are made at various scales: territory, city, community, and housing to encompass all the dimensions of human societies (see fig. 3).

Each utopia is situated in the context of crisis in which it was conceived: Plato's writing and the Peloponnesian wars and the decline of Athens, More's utopia and the corruption of the English society of the sixteenth century, Ledoux and the humanistic challenges, Fourier and the challenges of the working class, Le Corbusier and mass housing, and so on. Additionally, the utopias are systematically compared with the real spatial environment their authors lived in, revealing the ins and outs of both utopian and real spatial dispositions.

Second, to put the utopian tool to the test of modern-day problematics, utopias were developed by master's degree architecture students. As a first step, during a semester-long course, the students were familiarized with the concepts of utopia and spatial determinism. To explore these concepts, past utopias were presented following an identical structure (conditions of emergence, shortcomings of the society, utopian spatial model, and new fantasized society), analyzed, and discussed. Then, the students were briefed to produce a utopia, or a dystopia, based on More's original triad: critique—spatial model—new society. Students were assigned to work in groups of four in parallel with theoretical courses. Several moments of discussions were organized with the entire class to discuss the theme, the critique and the utopian proposals. The final work is assembled as a diptych. As a first step, students point out a dysfunctional aspect of our contemporary world. Then, they design a new spatial order to counterbalance this disorder. Each part of the diptych contains a four-page text and six images. The texts are a free description of the critique and of the utopian proposal. The images contain at least a collage, an axonometric representation and three views in plan. The proposals are organized at three scales: territory, city, and housing, drawing a parallel with the past utopias discussed in the course.

The same exercise was assigned to an average of eighty new students per year four years in a row (2016–20). The choice of the dysfunctional aspect of society is left to the discretion of the students. Nevertheless, the repetition of the exercise highlights persistent themes such as climate change, the role of

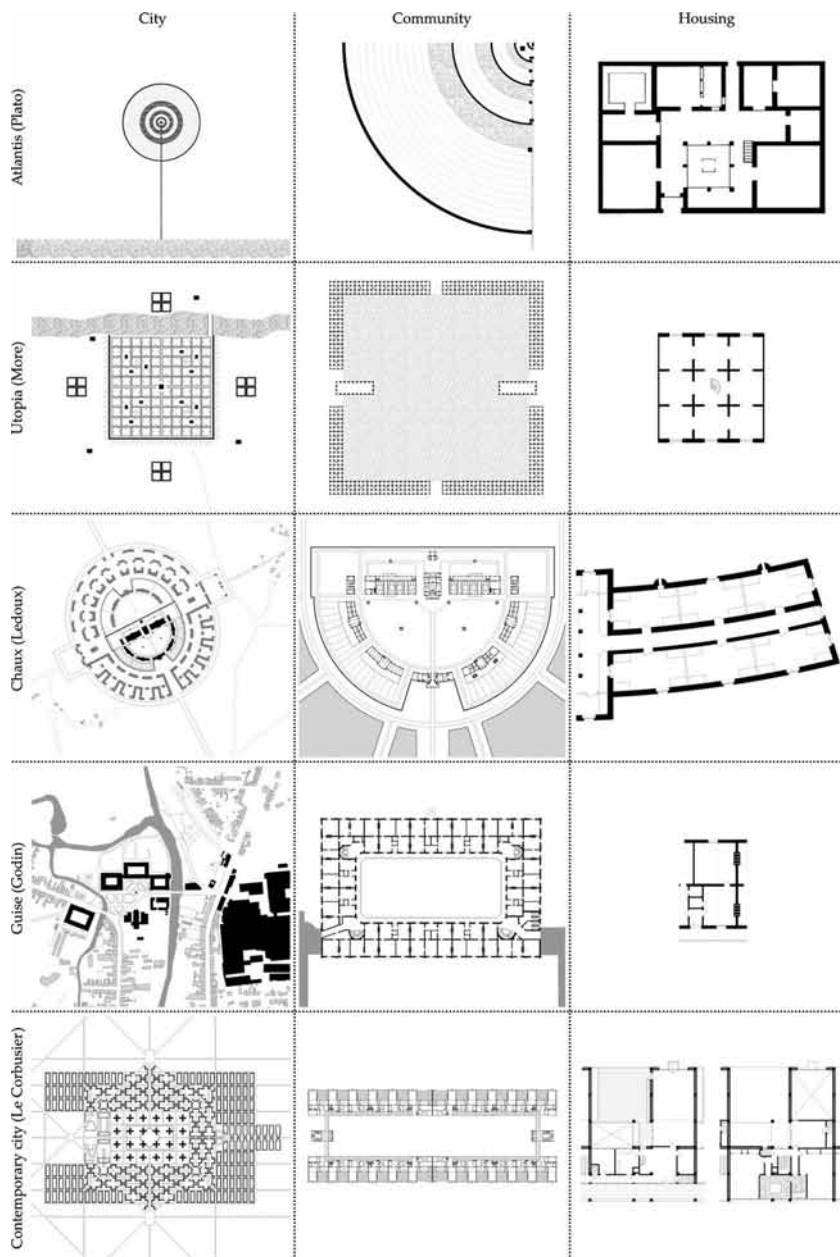


Figure 3. Comparison of historical utopias at three scales (drawings by the author).

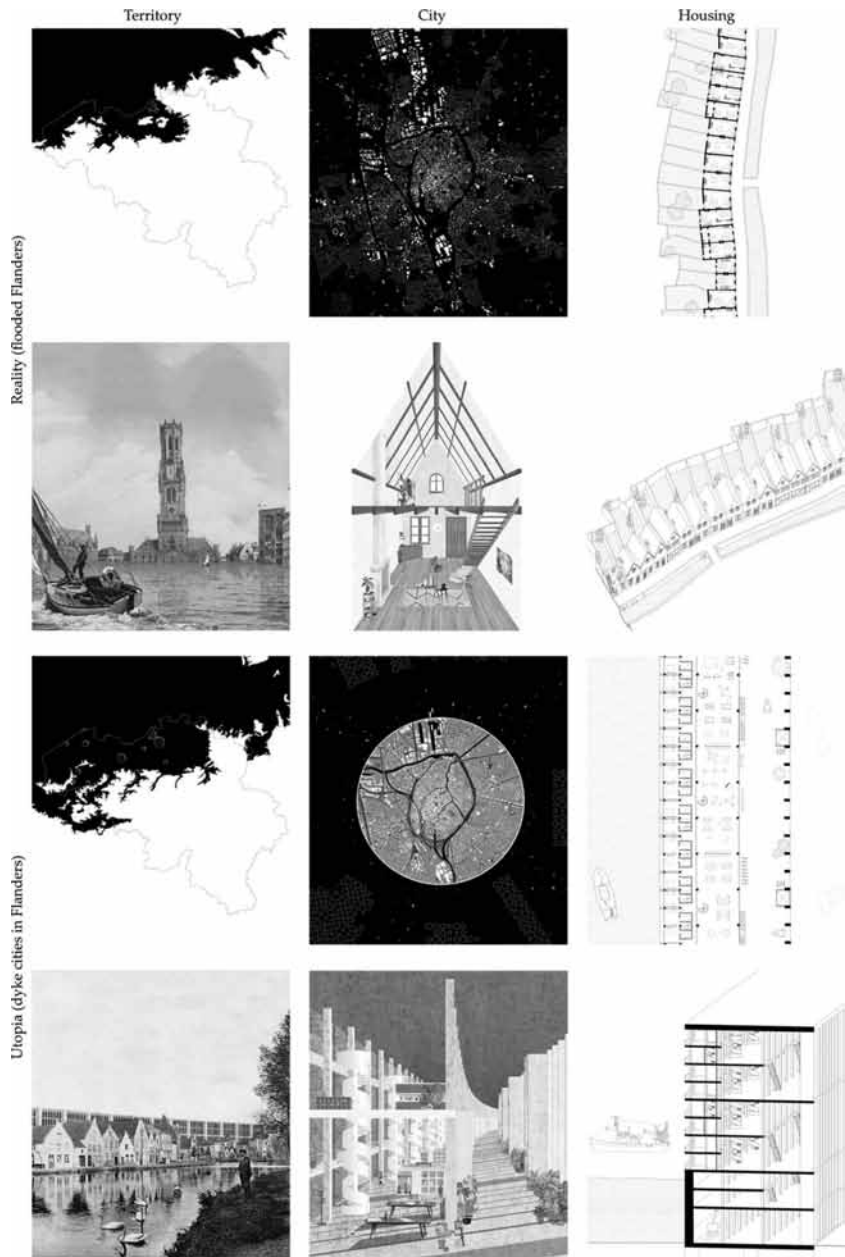


Figure 4. *Engloutie*: A critique and a utopian vision of flooded Flanders (drawings and collages by Henri de Fonvent, Olivier Gennart, Félix Mayaux, and Almudena Tenorio).

the automobile, prisons, uncontrolled urban sprawl, the meaning of heritage, and aging. Figure 4 illustrates such a student work on the theme of rising waters due to climate change. After a depiction of today's individualistic society unable to address as a group the challenges of climate change, the utopian proposal revolves around an age-old practice in the Low Countries: collectively built dykes. These new dykes, built around the main cities of Flanders provide protection to the old city centers while engendering a new habitat and new ways of living together. The dwelling conditions, inside and outside the dwellings, are depicted in collages, axonometric views as well as in two carefully written texts.

Model Space Constituents and Societal Consequences

Based on these two explorations, the spatial constituents of utopias as well as the social order they support are analyzed to understand their recurring features. Utopias are based on a common belief that space can affect and mold social practices. This conviction is evident in More's description, in which a systematic and replicable spatial system hosts an anti-individualistic society. On Utopia, all habitat structures are identical: territory is homogeneous, cities are replicable, and housing is undifferentiated. In addition, private ownership is banned and doors are unlockable.

The analysis of past and present utopias reveals similar goals. All of them display the seven traits highlighted by Françoise Choay (1980, 2006), which can be categorized into three properties. First, there is always a strong personal authorship to the utopian proposals; each is written or designed by an individual. Second, they describe a model society in opposition to the real historical society. Eventually—and the central feature of this specific research—this model society is supported and molded by a “model space” (Choay 1980).

Expanding on Choay's definition of the model space, repetitive spatial characteristics can be recorded in the utopias that were investigated. First, they all display a *tabula rasa*. Utopias tend to work from a clean sheet and exhibit this rupture from reality as a founding ambition. It is clear in many utopias where topography or reference to any prior settlement is excluded. Second, utopian space is isotropic. It does not relate to natural elements and could take place anywhere. Third, in most utopias, there is a strong primacy of institutions. These built elements embody, illustrate, and perpetuate the new social order. Fourth, rational order is essential in the spatial compositions.

Utopias are easy to grasp mentally by means of symmetry, repetitions or use of simple geometric forms. Fifth, utopias are universal. They display a spatial system that is replicable anywhere without any adaptation. Sixth, utopias are carved as perfect environments where time is frozen. In these perfect premises, no evolution is possible because it is simply not needed. Finally, utopias, while breaking away from reality, still utilize the known world as a backdrop. Strong references to the historical realities can be traced in all utopias.

In addition to these spatial features, utopias display a series of recurring societal values. First, most utopias prove not to be egalitarian. The majority of utopias have a model society with a clear hierarchy (even if it is sometimes determined by chance, as some utopian leaders are appointed by random draw). Second, all utopias obey a strict and often rigid rule. Whether progressive or not, this rule is not subject to exceptions, as if “imaginative free play was inextricably bound to the existence of authority and restrictive forms of governance” (Harvey 2000). Third, private property does not exist in most utopias. Indeed, it is widely seen as the cause of every evil in human societies and hence forbidden from a vast majority of utopias.

Three Limitations of Utopias

Some of the defining aspects of utopias listed above seem self-evident and have been studied by scholars (Marin 2016; Choay 1980, 2006; Mumford 1922; Kruft 1990; Servier 1979; Fishman 1979; Harvey 2000; Tafuri 1976; Desroche, Gabel, and Picon 2016). However, the case studies highlight three recurring characteristics that have not received much scientific attention: (1) the actual aim of utopias, (2) the desire to physically implement them, and (3) the paradoxical nature of the proposals. All three features seem to lead to dystopias. It is therefore essential to acknowledge these features before attempting to use utopias as a prospective tool once again.

The Aim of Utopias: Two Kinds of Directions

First, while the widespread idea about utopias is that they reassess the real world, a careful consideration proves otherwise (Borsi 1997). In reality, while all utopias provide a critique of their historic society, they do not systematically offer an escape. In some cases, instead of advocating radical changes in

society through space, utopias reinforce the existing social order. It is the case of the “degenerate utopias” (Marin 2016) that tend to “perpetuate the fetish of commodity culture rather than to critique it” (Harvey 2000).

Indeed, utopias elaborate proposals in two opposite directions from the initial critique.

On the one hand, according to received wisdom, utopias establish the spatial structures of a new social order. This is very obvious in More’s proposal. At the scale of the urban fabric, More’s proposal opposes in every way the traditional cities of his time: urban blocks are regular and permeable, plots are wide and well lit, housing is repetitive, constructed out of stone, and displays flat roofs, and so on. All these characteristics make More’s utopia the exact opposite of the world he was living in (see fig. 5). Furthermore, this spatial proposal molds a new society that contradicts all the attributes of More’s society. Similarly, in the early twentieth century, Le Corbusier, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Ebenezer Howard turned their backs on ancient cities to implement, through space, a new social order (Fishman 1979). Le Corbusier’s Plan Voisin for Paris is a clear illustration of this tendency.

In some cases, rather than creating a new order *ex nihilo*, the utopians tools are used to impose a foreign order on a society. The Paraguayan reductions built between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries illustrate this trend perfectly. In these cases, space was explicitly used to transform the habits

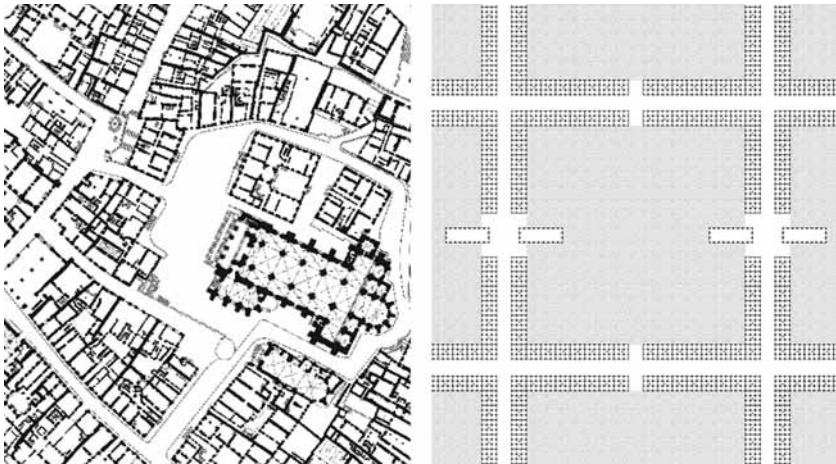


Figure 5. Urban fabric discrepancies between More’s proposal and Geneva’s medieval centre (André Corboz, *Atlas du territoire genevois*, 1993, drawing by the author).

of the Guarani societies to fit Jesuit intentions. As noted by Lévi-Strauss, this was a common lever among missionaries:

The Salesian missionaries were quick to realize that the surest way to convert the Bororo was to make them abandon their village in favor of one with the houses set out in parallel rows. Once they had been deprived of their bearings and were without the plan which acted as a confirmation of their native lore, the Indians soon lost any feeling for tradition; it was as if their social and religious systems were too complex to exist without the pattern which was embodied in the plan of the village and of which their awareness was constantly being refreshed by their everyday activities. (Lévi-Strauss 1955)

Space thus became a tool of dismantling traditional community living and kinships (see fig. 6).

On the other hand, a series of utopias do not seek to establish a new society but rather to reinforce the power in place. This is the case in Plato's writings about the primitive Athens in which he produces an ideal spatial setting for the existing society (Platon -356a, -356b). Claude-Nicolas Ledoux has a similar attitude in his design for the city of Chaux. Indeed, even if he planned to subversively humanize the French society of the time, his plan

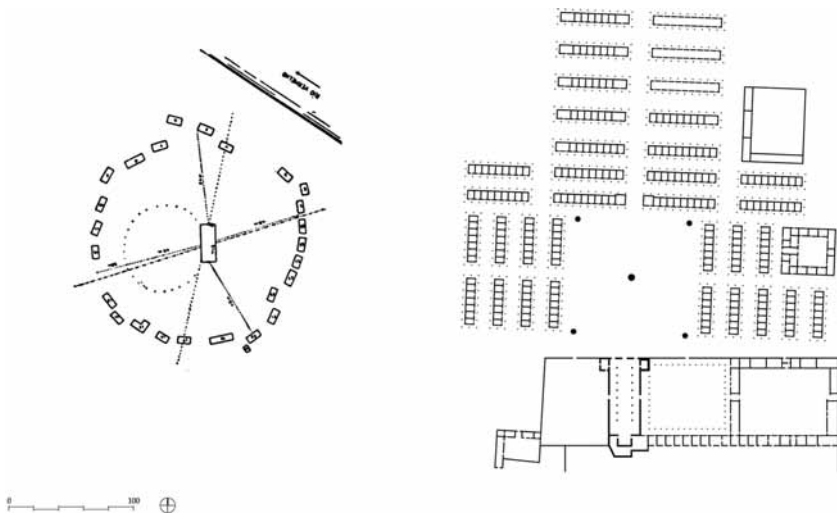


Figure 6. The Bororo village and San Ignacio Mini reduction in 1632 (Lévi-Strauss, *Contribution à l'étude de l'organisation sociale des Indiens Bororo*, 1936; drawing by the author).



Figure 7. Versailles' palace and Ledoux' city of Chaux (drawings by the author).

does not really challenge it but offers a spatial environment to reinforce it. In Ledoux's scheme, the monarchical power is placed at the center of the composition in the person of the Salines' director. It is directly supplemented and physically surrounded by the religious, civil, military, and juridical powers. In the Royal Saltworks, domestic housing is subordinated to and under the constant control of the director's house, just like the chamber of the king in Versailles controls France, which has been turned into a rationalized territory (see fig. 7). Ledoux was firmly convinced that architecture and architects could influence human behavior on any level, "political, moral, legislative, religious, governmental . . . being thus the rival of the Creator" (Eaton 2001). This use of space to embody, instruct, and perpetuate a social order is nothing new, as Victor Hugo reminds us with the construction of gothic cathedrals that were literally books of stone, loaded with meaning for an illiterate population.

Interestingly however, the parallel that can be drawn with the palace of Versailles is different from Fourier's Phalanstery. The latter, which also uses Versailles as a model, is a collectively owned and ruled spatial model where the center is no longer occupied by an authoritarian figure. On the contrary, the central building is a place for communal life, sheltering an observatory tower, refectories, library, carillon, and dovecote.

Today's greenwashing in architectural design is nothing different from this second trend, as the so-called green utopias tend to perpetuate the

existing order rather than critique it. In that sense, they are similar to the “degenerate utopias” of Louis Marin (2016).

Utopian Evolution: Toward an Immediate Revolution

Second, there is a genuine evolution in time in the desire to implement utopias in the real world. Picon describes this evolution as “alternation, alteration and alternative,” developing from a dream to an opposition and finally the taking of power (Desroche, Gabel, and Picon 2016).

In More’s inaugural utopia, there is clearly no ambition to implement the spatial model for real, as he declared, “However, there are many things in the Commonwealth of Utopia that I rather wish, than hope, to see followed in our government” (More 1516). In his mind, the proposal was meant to remain abstract and provide food for thought. This was continuously the case in pre-Renaissance and Renaissance proposals. However, utopian proposals progressively evolved into more concrete solutions, with a paroxysm in the early twentieth century, when utopias literally became the means to an end: attempting to revolutionize the entire society through space and effectively putting these ideas in practice. This evolution toward tangible projects for the entire society was gradual, from literal architectural proposals by Boullée and Ledoux in the Enlightenment to autarkic communities advocated by Fourier in the nineteenth century, engendering concrete implementations such as the Familistère in Guise (1859–84). Hence, utopias developed progressively from abstract proposals into the belief that “this is what gives our dreams audacity: they can come true” (Le Corbusier 1925). Eventually, when Le Corbusier designed the Contemporary City of Three Million Inhabitants, his intentions are far from abstract (see fig. 8). He really intends this city to be built as such and will maneuver accordingly in the following years to find a patron to make it possible. This trend was confirmed by Nikolai Berdyaev, quoted by Aldous Huxley in *Brave New World*:

Utopias are more realisable than those realist politics that are only the carefully calculated policies of office-holders, and towards utopias we are moving. But it is possible that a new age is already beginning, in which cultured and intelligent people will dream of ways to avoid ideal states and to get back to a society that is less perfect and more free. (Huxley 1932)

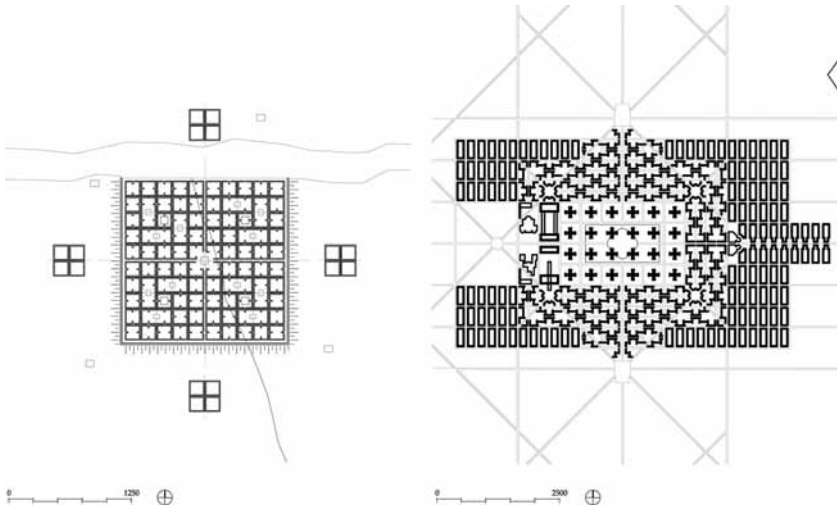


Figure 8. More, Amaurot, 1516—Le Corbusier, *Contemporary City of Three Million Inhabitants*, 1922 (drawings by the author).

Between Myth and Novel, a Paradox

Finally, every utopia is composed in a mythical mode, often referring to ancient legends and parables. However, there is a paradox in this specific genre. Indeed, while myths are collective and anonymous constructions, one of the main characteristics of utopias is that each is written by a single person. Utopias are therefore a paradoxical textual entity. This ambiguity is metaphorically illustrated by Hans Holbein in one of the first covers for More's novel, depicting the island of Utopia. At first glance, it bears all the characteristics of utopias mentioned above. It is presented as a remote island, cut away from the real world, providing the spatial contours of a new society. But interestingly, as noted by Roger-Michel Allemand (2005), the island itself exhibits a strange resemblance to the hemispheres of a human brain (see fig. 9).

What is supposed to be a collective narrative is actually a personal one. The corollary of this characteristic is that it leaves no room for personal variations, contextual adjustment, or time evolution. Utopias are set in a time of "eternal return, of recurrent ritual"; it is a fiction unable to evolve, where "the dialectics of social change is excluded" (Harvey 2000). Indeed, how could a single mind produce the complex variety and possible evolutions of human societies? This paradox often led to the creation of frozen societies unable to



Figure 9. Holbein, *Utopia*, 1516.

adapt to change, which was one of the major critiques of twentieth-century modernism.

Suggestions for Operative Utopias

In light of the analysis of the three shortcomings inherent to utopias, how can they still be operative today and useful to architects and spatial planners? Utopias can be levers for change, but in order to provide transformations that are both sustainable and positive, several suggestions can be made to avoid the limitations listed above.

Beacons: A Direction Rather than a Genuine Implementation

First, utopias were not initially created to physically modify our realities. Building on the role of architecture, Gio Ponti opposes “achievable thinking” and utopias, which rely on the very fact that they cannot be achieved. Utopias are unfeasible by definition “by choice or by default” (Borsi 1997, 10).

Hence, while using the means of architecture—projecting social relations through spatial thinking—utopia does not aim at modifying practically our physical world but rather acts as a beacon to provide guidance to our societies “upon the uncharted seas of the distant future” (Mumford 1922, 6). Relieved from the heavy duty of genuinely modifying our world, architects can then use utopias to provide a direction. Through the intricate relationship between spaces and uses, architects can use unbuilt utopias as guiding

lights to direct political and societal choices toward a positive future, and to part with their dysfunctions. Therefore, even though they are not physically built, utopias can have an impact on our realities. One important feature of these visionary beacons is their “blurriness.” The very fact that they are not detailed does not compromise their radical power and “prevents prescription” (Picon 2017).

As an example, the collage provided by a group of students working on a postatomic world is striking. While being blurry enough not to depict the exact path to take toward a world without atomic power, it acts as a guiding line to show us which direction to take (see fig. 10).

Processes: Changing the Means Rather than the Ends

Second, the process itself could be questioned. Indeed, utopias have often described perfect worlds by opposition to our dysfunctional ones. For many utopians, failing societies needed to be replaced by new, flawless ones. However, instead of thinking of the final goal—replacing society with an ideal one—another approach could focus on the means and the process of change.

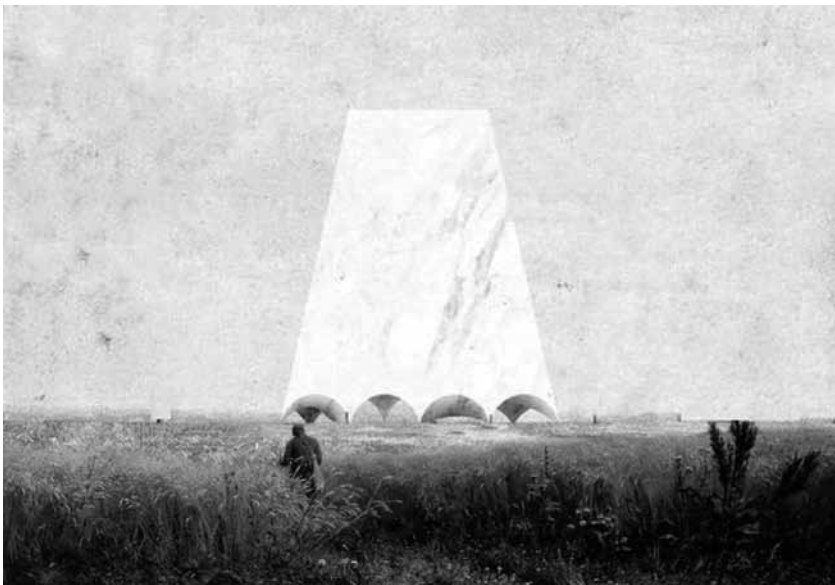


Figure 10. Les totems de l'atôme: illustrating a paradigmatic shift from a nuclear power society (collage by Vincent de Grave, Arnaud Rigolet and Laura Villeret).

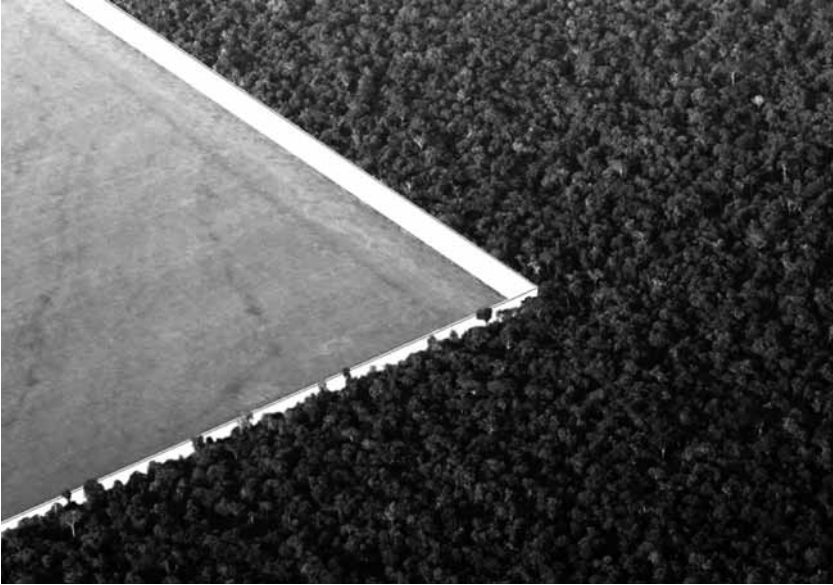


Figure 11. Déracinement: another way of exploiting our natural resources and preserving rainforests (collage by Dorine Dispa, Victoria Moulin, Eléonore Pauwels and Julie Toneguzzi).

Several students have worked accordingly. For many of them, the ambition is no longer to modify our world and its unparalleled comfort, but rather modify the means to achieve this level of comfort. In this vein, some have worked on the topic of deforestation, setting up a series of tools to allow farming while preserving pristine forestland (see fig. 11).

This “utopianism of process” (Harvey 2000) relates to the contemporary transition movement (Flory 2013; Hopkins 2008). Indeed, the ideology of this movement is to part from the “general debates on goals and meaning” and focus “primarily on transforming the actual means” (Chabot 2015, 53) in order to achieve these goals. Its cardinal principles encompass people’s empowerment through new habitat and bottom-up governing modes, the recognition of local relationships with both humans and territory (Magnaghi 2000; Scott 1998), resilient building techniques, among others. Interestingly, these grass-roots initiatives no longer question the implementation of a new order but examine alternative means for attaining our contemporary level of comfort and obtaining social and ecological justice. To this end, the transition movement could provide our societies with a new metanarrative (Lyotard 1984) that postmodernism was unable to deliver.

Collective Myths

Finally, one of utopias' defining features is their individual authorship. However interesting, this feature might also be the formula for its doom. Indeed, as mentioned above, a personal proposal is unable to encompass the world's complexity and evolution. Based on this observation, two questions arise: Can collective narrative emerge? Could it allow for evolution in time?

The contemporary revival of the concept of "Commons" relates directly to the idea of building a collective narrative. Coined by Ostrom in the late twentieth century (Ostrom 1996; Dardot and Laval 2014), it is based on the collective management of shared resources. Interestingly, it relates directly to one of Thomas More's criticisms of the English society of the sixteenth century: the advent of "enclosures" replacing the common management of the countryside (More 1516). Today, this renewal of the Commons can be explained by the gradual collapse of our Western welfare states.

In addition to this common narrative, faith in a perfect and forever frozen society is dead. There seems to be a general understanding that we should "do away with impotent and ineffectual myths" (Tafuri 1976) and that the ideal should tolerate change and nurture a high diversity of social relations and behaviors. This awareness can be observed for instance in the current trend to produce dwellings that allow for both diversity of lifestyles and evolution in time (Ledent, Salembier, and Vanneste 2019).

Building collective myths has been a general thread in the exercise posed to the students. Working in groups was not decided by chance but in this very perspective. Several students also explicitly addressed this issue, generating, for instance, a new myth to reinvent Europe without borders. Inspired by a quote from Raphaël Glucksmann "Europe needs to rebuild a collective mythology," the students' collage pictures a bull-like Zeus freeing Europe from its walls, under a famous quote from the Berlin Wall: "die mauer muss fallen!" (fig. 12).

Epilogue: The Importance of Architecture's Second Rationale

These considerations on utopia and its model space shed light on the role of architecture in facing today's challenges. Architecture, as a discipline, can influence society in two different ways.



Figure 12. *Limites*: Zeus breaking down country borders to free Europa (collage by Guillaume Berna, Charlotte Bovy, Mathieu Boxho and Emeric Le Bos).

On the one hand, architecture is a means to produce human habitat. Its immediate results are very tangible artifacts: buildings, infrastructure and public spaces. These artifacts create *de facto* the setting of society. On the other hand—and this is the central mechanism of utopias of spatial forms—through a consequential relationship between spaces and uses, architecture can be a tool for sociopolitical proposals. Beyond architecture’s conventional role, which is to manufacture space, utopias reveal another: architecture’s political and social influence by “staging an imaginary” (Marin 2016). Indeed, human history has generated utopias and, more important, “utopias have also made history” (Desroche, Gabel, and Picon 2016), being at the same time a “constructive and destructive force for change in our historical geography” (Harvey 2000). In this understanding, architecture is a means for alternative and critical thinking. Architectural images can spread within society, creating a lexical field that has “social imaginary significations,” enabling visions to “gain momentum” (Picon 2017). Le Corbusier was aware of this double role of architecture when he stated, “Architecture or Revolution” (Le Corbusier 1924), distinguishing two paths: one following the reality and another yearning to go beyond this reality.

Nevertheless, these two roles of architecture should not be confused. An amalgam between the second rationale of architecture and its first and very concrete motivation could lead to dystopias; “utopia—and ideology, as its foundational assumption—go into crisis when they are realised” (Tafari 1976). This was particularly the case in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when “utopian movements saw in architecture an effective tool for transforming reality” (Desroche, Gabel, and Picon 2016). Utopias should rather remain conceptual and abstract. Only then can they be a method to ponder and be operative on the real world. Provided this essential distinction between the two motives of architecture is observed, and given the three suggestions mentioned above, architecture, through utopian space could have an orthopedic value. This orthopedic character is operative through the critical thinking stimulated by utopias rather than through an effective transformation of reality.

For this reason, utopias remain pertinent and essential today, for as Anatole France reminds us,

The path [to the ideal] is demanding; but without the utopians of other times, men would still live in caves, miserable and naked. It was utopians who traced the lines of the first city. Out of generous dreams come beneficial realities. Utopia is the principle of all progress, and the essay into a better future. (Mumford 1922)

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