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Introduction

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We live in a time of multiplicity of crises. The first crisis is an ecological crisis resulting from the overexploitation of natural resources and the subsequent acceleration of climate change. This is a crisis in which the overreaching growth of the capitalist mode of production disrupts the Earth's natural regenerative cycles, reactualizing the old Marxist concept of the 'metabolic rift,' that is, the irreparable rupture in the interdependent process of social metabolism between humanity and the Earth (Foster et al. 2010; Saito 2023). The second crisis is an economic crisis marked by extreme wealth concentration and systemic inequality. Due to the constant pursuit of economic growth, the economy feels increasingly 'mad' (Harvey 2017), while the money of already wealthy people grows faster than the wages of those who work for a living, concentrating wealth among the top percent of the world population (Piketty 2020). Finally, there is a sociopolitical crisis unfolding as democratic institutions erode, giving way to right-wing authoritarianism and identity-based social conflict. In a neoliberal configuration of political life, democratic values are subordinated to market rationality (Brown 2019) while emotions such as fear and resentment bind individuals into antagonistic communities (Ahmed 2014).

The effects of these crises are not evenly distributed among the population. The most catastrophic consequences tend to fall disproportionately on the least privileged. The consequences of the ecological crisis, for instance, are distributed along lines of class and geography. The economic crisis similarly sharpens divisions between those who own capital and those who depend on selling their labour, that is, between the rich and the poor. And the sociopolitical crisis intensifies these fractures further, thereby degrading democracy itself and resorting to brute force, such as war, when democracy fails. Rather than converging into a shared response, these crises amplify global divisions. The result of that is a certain paradox, which we could name the paradox of the common: even

though we all live in the same world, we do not share a world in common. Even though we are all bound by the singular reality of a shared planet, we increasingly fail to inhabit a shared world. In a fragmented world, we have lost the ability to imagine a common world capable of overcoming the crises threatening all living creatures.

The following issue of *Anthropos* seeks to overcome the paradox of the common by exploring different foundations of utopian thinking and its relevance for contemporary philosophical thought. In a sense, the volume follows Lewis Mumford's (1922, 307) famous assertion that 'our most important task at the present moment is to build castles in the air.' However, this call for utopia should not be interpreted as a form of escapism, but rather as a demand to expand the horizons of the possible. Utopias, in Mumford's sense, are understood as tools that enable communities to transcend their institutional settings and consider alternative ways of ordering their collective lives. The task of 'building castles in the air' is not a speculative, imaginal exercise but a form of envisaging alternative social frameworks, visions, and lifeways that serve as vital tools for concrete social transformation. Imagination, therefore, does not stand in opposition to reality; it is a precondition for its transformation. Utopias are not escapist illusions but necessary instruments of a critique: they unsettle the apparent inevitability of the present and open a space in which alternatives can be imagined.

This reading of utopias is also reflected in contemporary theory, which increasingly frames utopia as a rigorous, critical, and methodological practice. As Ruth Levitas (2013) argues, utopia is best understood not as a fixed blueprint of an ideal society but as a method that enables the imaginary reconstitution of existing society, opening a space in which the limits of the present can be interrogated and transformed. The core of utopia is 'the desire for being otherwise, individually and collectively, subjectively and objectively' (p. xi). In a similar way, Fredric Jameson (2010) emphasizes that utopia does not offer ready-made solutions but rather functions as a diagnostic tool, revealing the structural constraints that render alternatives seemingly impossible while simultaneously pointing beyond them. For him, utopia 'is not a representation but an operation calculated to disclose the limits of our own imagination of the future, the lines beyond which we do not seem able to go in imagining changes in our own society and world (except in the direction of dystopia and catastrophe)' (Jameson 2010, 23). Jameson suggests that utopian projects matter because they push us to examine our assumptions and reveal the limits

of our imagination. In doing so, they help place the present in a historical context, opening the way to envision alternative futures.

Building on this theoretical foundation, this thematic issue of *Anthropos* provides a space for authors to explore the concept of utopia as it has emerged through various philosophical traditions. In the following pages, utopia is explored through a diverse range of philosophical approaches, including Marxism, critical theory, feminist, and decolonial studies. Rather than offering a unified definition, these perspectives collectively reveal the richness and tension within utopian thinking. Beyond these diverse approaches, the authors are united by two core concerns: the challenge of conceptualizing a radically egalitarian time and space accessible to all, and the fundamental conviction that, in regard to the contemporary situation, utopia remains a thinkable and necessary horizon. This issue serves as an invitation to reconsider the boundaries of the possible, suggesting that the paradox of the common can only be resolved by reclaiming the right to think beyond it.

The special section of the issue brings together seven contributions. In 'Between Marx and Fourier: Walter Benjamin and the Utopian Reconfiguration of History,' Christos Kalpakidis revisits Walter Benjamin's engagement with Charles Fourier to recover an overlooked utopian strand in his work and advance a renewed understanding of Marxism. A different perspective is offered by 'Weed Utopia: Potentiality, Negation and the Material Imagination of Earth in *The Right to Be Lazy*,' in which Anna Enström draws on John Knight's installation while engaging with Paul Lafargue and Gaston Bachelard to rethink laziness as a form of negation that sustains potentiality within the present. Turning to feminist thought, 'Spatialities of the Otherwise: Cities, Lands, and Territories Vaster Than Empires in Feminist Political Utopias,' sees Federica Castelli explore the intersections between feminist utopian writing and political philosophy, foregrounding space as a constitutive dimension of feminist possibility. In 'Longing for the South: Camus, Relative Utopia, and the Logic of Abstraction,' Ana Ilievska reads Albert Camus alongside Konstantin Miladinov and his poem 'T'ga za Jug.' The temporal dimensions of utopia are examined by Riccardo Valenti in 'Saving the Future Without Forgetting the Past: Crisis, Transmission, and Temporal Sense.' Drawing on Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, and Waldenfels, Valenti argues that utopia, dystopia, and retrotopia reflect a crisis in the transmission of meaning rather than mere visions of what is to come. Chiara Musolino complements this in 'Unfolding Temporalities: How Utopias Inte-

grate Time in Eighteenth-Century France,' where she demonstrates how French utopian thought integrates non-linear time, challenging the dominant view that the genre is exclusively future-oriented. Finally, Jovita Pristovšek's 'Entangled Futures: Utopianism, White Supremacy, and Radical Futurity' exposes classical utopia as a tool of colonial governance and racial dispossession. In its place, she proposes 'entangled futures,' a fractured field of world-making where decolonial and Indigenous temporalities challenge the universalist limits of Western humanism.

In addition to the thematic section, the issue also includes two articles outside its scope. In her article 'Make the Friendship Bracelets: From Parasocial Attachment to Horizontal Reciprocity in Taylor Swift Fandom,' Eva Vrtačič analyses how the exchange of bracelets among fans operates as a gift economy shaped by parasociality and platform capitalism, transforming inaccessible celebrity reciprocity into horizontal fan-to-fan exchange and a moral economy of belonging. In the last article of the issue, 'Psychometric Characteristics of the Slovenian Adaptation of the Eating Disorder Examination Questionnaire (EDE-Q): Factor Structure and Internal Consistency,' authors Nina Zorjan and Saša Kranjc examine the factor structure, internal consistency, and validity of the Slovenian adaptation of the EDE-Q, demonstrating that it is a reliable and valid instrument for assessing core symptoms of eating disorders and maladaptive eating patterns in adult populations. The issue concludes with a 'Miscellanea' section, including Lea Kuhar's review of Nina Rismal's book *The Ends of Utopian Thinking in Critical Theory* and Bojana Jovičević's report from a conference 'Fichte: Determination, Intersubjectivity and the State.'

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Filozofija in utopično mišljenje
Philosophy and Utopian Thinking

Between Marx and Fourier: Walter Benjamin and the Utopian Reconfiguration of History

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Abstract. This article reinterprets Walter Benjamin's philosophy of history by foregrounding his engagement with Charles Fourier as central rather than marginal. It argues that Benjamin's use of Fourier's utopian 'wish-images' introduces an anticipatory dimension often overlooked in scholarship dominated by themes of catastrophe and rupture. Fourier's hedonistic materialism – centred on passions, pleasure, and transformed relations to labour and nature – provides Benjamin with conceptual tools to expand historical materialism beyond economic critique toward imagination, sensuousness, and happiness. By situating Benjamin between Marx and Fourier, the article reveals how he reconfigures Marxism to integrate utopian projection with materialist analysis. Fourier's images are interpreted not as naïve fantasies but as historically grounded expressions of collective desires embedded in capitalist modernity. Ultimately, the study proposes a 'utopian materialism' in which critique and anticipation are inseparable, offering a framework for understanding emancipation as both structural transformation and the liberation of everyday life and human capacities.

Key Words: Walter Benjamin, utopia, Charles Fourier, historical materialism, Karl Marx

Med Marxom in Fourierjem: Walter Benjamin in utopična rekonfiguracija zgodovine

Povzetek. Pričujoči članek na novo interpretira filozofijo zgodovine Walterja Benjamina tako, da v ospredje postavi njegov odnos do Charlesa Fourierja kot osrednji, ne pa marginalni element. Trdi, da Benjamina uporaba Fourierjevih utopičnih »podob želja« uvaža antipatorno dimenzijo, ki je v raziskavah, zaznamovanih s temami katastrofe in preloma, pogosto spregledana. Fourierjev hedonistični materializem – osredotočen na strasti, užitek ter preoblikovane odnose

do dela in narave – Benjaminu nudi konceptualna orodja za razširitev zgodovinskega materializma onkraj ekonomske kritike, proti imaginaciji, čutnosti in sreči. S tem ko članek umešča Benjamina med Marxa in Fourierja, razkriva, kako ta preoblikuje marksizem z integracijo utopične projekcije in materialistične analize. Fourierjeve podobe niso razumljene kot naivne fantazije, temveč kot zgodovinsko utemeljeni izrazi kolektivnih želja, vgrajenih v kapitalistično modernost. Na koncu študija predlaga »utopični materializem«, v katerem sta kritika in anticipacija neločljivi ter ponujata okvir za razumevanje emancipacije kot strukturne preobrazbe in osvoboditve vsakdanjega življenja ter človeških zmožnosti.

Ključne besede: Walter Benjamin, utopija, Charles Fourier, zgodovinski materializem, Karl Marx

Introduction

Over the last decades, scholarship on Walter Benjamin's philosophy has been dominated by a focus on Thesis IX of *On the Concept of History*, with its stark image of the Angel of History propelled backward into the future by the storm of progress (Benjamin 2003, 392–393). This image has shaped an entire discourse in critical theory that aligns Benjamin with catastrophe and melancholy, but also with historical rupture. Influential interpretations – such as those by Susan Buck-Morss (1989), Giorgio Agamben (2005), and Jacques Derrida (1994) – have emphasized Benjamin's critique of progress, his account of historical violence, and the impossibility of redemptive continuity within linear time. While this interpretive focus has generated important insights, it has also fostered a significant blind spot. The nearby Thesis XI, in which Benjamin invokes Charles Fourier's fantastical images – seas of lemonade, tamed beasts, and new celestial bodies – is often treated as a curiosity, an eccentric embellishment, or an ironic aside (Benjamin 2003, 395; Iakovou 2021, 154). Yet these images are not merely whimsical fantasies. As Benjamin reads them, they are materially saturated *wish-images*: speculative projections that emerge from concrete experiences of labour, nature, technology, and everyday life in nineteenth-century capitalism. Fourier's transformed seas and animals condense desires for a non-dominating relation to nature, liberated productive activity, and sensuous abundance – desires that arise from the very contradictions of bourgeois civilization. In this sense, their 'fantastical' character does not signal abstraction from material reality, but rather an imaginative reworking of it. Benjamin thus po-

sitions Fourier not as an eccentric dreamer, but as a deliberate intervention into the conceptual architecture of historical materialism. If the Angel captures the paralysis induced by catastrophic accumulation, Fourier introduces a radically different temporal modality: the anticipatory imagination of a transformed world grounded in material life.

This article will argue that Benjamin's invocation of Fourier opens a dimension of his thought marginalized in the secondary literature. Instead of reinforcing the binary of catastrophe versus progress – an opposition structuring both historicist and anti-historicist readings (see Löwy 2005; Wolin 1994) – Fourier introduces a third register that is neither regression nor teleological advancement. This is the register of utopian anticipation, understood in a materialist sense as the historically immanent possibility of another world. Benjamin's strategic recentring of Fourier contributes to a reconfiguration of Marxism that challenges both the orthodox narrative of the passage from 'utopian' to 'scientific' socialism (Engels 1970, 41–53; Abensour 2016, 29–30) and the contemporary tendency to read Benjamin exclusively in terms of violence, loss, and leftist melancholy.

Re-examining Benjamin's dialogue with Fourier thus reveals a rarely acknowledged dimension of Benjamin's thought: an affirmative, sensuous, and even joyous register that complements the dominant reception. Crucially, what is at stake here is not a reconstruction of Fourier's self-understanding as such, but rather Fourier *as he is read and mobilized by Benjamin*. Benjamin's depiction of Fourier as a thinker of what he calls 'hedonistic materialism' – that is, a materialism centred on passions, pleasures, and transformed relations to nature – provides him with conceptual resources for thinking emancipation beyond both capitalist instrumentality and the asceticism of certain Marxist traditions (Fourier 1971). These elements do not function as a simple inversion of catastrophe, but as a structurally analogous counterpart: just as catastrophe exposes the destructive logic of progress, Fourier's sensuous and pleasurable images disclose suppressed possibilities of happiness embedded within the present. Second, situating Benjamin 'between Marx and Fourier,' as Klosowski (2014) had already hinted at, illuminates Marx's own complex engagement with Fourier's thought. Marx's scattered but significant reflections indicate an appreciation of Fourier's 'colossal conception of man' as an anticipatory insight into human capacities deformed by capitalist society (Marx and Engels 1978, 160). At the same time, Marx's criticisms of Fourier highlight important tensions and limits that Benjamin does not simply inherit but actively transforms (Iakovou 2021, 155–157).

The article proceeds as follows. The second section reviews the scholarship that has marginalized Fourier within Benjamin studies and outlines the consequences of this omission. The third section analyses Fourier's 'hedonistic materialism' to elucidate how Fourier's theory of passions, labour, and nature constitutes a concrete, materially grounded utopianism. The fourth section examines Marx's reception of Fourier – both appreciative and critical – to clarify the conceptual terrain Benjamin inherits. The fifth section investigates Benjamin's explicit and implicit uses of Fourier across *The Arcades Project* (Benjamin 1999), the 1935 and 1939 Exposés, and *On the Concept of History* (Benjamin n. d.; first published in 1940), showing how Fourier becomes central to Benjamin's project. The sixth section argues that Benjamin's appropriation of Fourier enables a reconfiguration of Marxism that restores imagination, sensuousness, and happiness to emancipatory politics. The conclusion explores the contemporary relevance of this reconfigured Marxism for navigating the dual crises of dystopian fatalism and nostalgic retrotopia (Bauman 2017). By bringing Fourier's presence to the conceptual centre of Benjamin's 'anthropological messianism' (Greiert 2018, 22), this study demonstrates that Benjamin's thought contains not only a theory of catastrophe but also an underexamined utopian dimension. This dimension does not represent a retreat from materialist critique, but rather its expansion into affective, anthropological, and imaginative registers (Khatib 2017). By locating Benjamin between Marx and Fourier, the article proposes a methodological reorientation of Marxism – one that refuses to treat scientific analysis and utopian projection as mutually exclusive, and instead understands them as indispensable, interrelated moments of a critical theory adequate to emancipatory struggles.

The 'Silencing' of Fourier

Despite the prominence granted to Charles Fourier in *The Arcades Project* and Thesis XI of *On the Concept of History*, the secondary literature on Benjamin has tended to minimize or disregard the significance of this reference. This omission reflects broader intellectual habits shaped by the long shadow of Friedrich Engels's *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, which established a generative but restrictive binary between 'utopian' and 'scientific' socialism (1970, 41–53). Historically, this distinction functioned to demarcate Marxism from its predecessors by relegating figures such as Fourier to a pre-Marxian stage – valuable as critique, but theoretically superseded. In this sense, the present argument initially con-

cerns Fourier's place within the Marxist tradition inherited by Benjamin, rather than a direct polemic against contemporary interpreters. At the same time, the Engelsian schema has exerted a more diffuse afterlife in later Benjamin scholarship. While contemporary thinkers such as Buck-Morss, Agamben, and Derrida do not simply reproduce Engels's critique of utopian naïveté, their interpretive emphasis often converges on a different but structurally analogous marginalization of Fourier. Within the canonical opposition between catastrophe and progress, Fourier's appearance in Benjamin's work is frequently read as ironic, nostalgic, or peripheral rather than as theoretically generative (Wolin 1994, 63–72). Thus, although the mechanisms differ, both the Engelsian narrative and its later reception contribute to sidelining Fourier's significance.

The dominance of Thesis IX in Benjamin scholarship reinforces this tendency, albeit in a distinct way. The Angel of History has become one of the most frequently cited images in twentieth-century theory and is often treated as the paradigmatic expression of Benjamin's stance toward history (Benjamin 2003, 392–393). The angel's backward gaze, the storm of progress, and the piling wreckage have shaped interpretations that privilege themes of historical catastrophe, violence, messianic interruption, and the impossibility of reconciliation within linear time. In influential readings by Buck-Morss (1989), Agamben (2005), and Derrida (1994), Benjamin's philosophy of history is primarily mobilized to articulate experiences of loss, mourning, and political impasse. While these interpretations have yielded important insights, their cumulative effect has been to overdetermine Benjamin's thought through the lens of negativity. In this sense, contemporary readers have become 'captured' by the tragic and catastrophic aspects of Benjamin's work. The affirmative moments that concern happiness, joy, play, and transformed relations with nature – most explicitly articulated through Benjamin's engagement with Fourier – tend to recede into the background or to be treated as marginal curiosities. This selective emphasis does not amount to a misreading, but it does narrow the horizon of what counts as genuinely Benjaminian. The near-exclusive preoccupation with catastrophe effaces the extent to which Benjamin's historical materialism also insists on anticipation, sensuous fulfillment, and the utopian content of collective desires. Fourier's presence in Thesis XI, far from being decorative, is thus one of the clearest indications of Benjamin's commitment to an anticipatory imagination grounded in materialist critique.

Furthermore, the neglect of Fourier obscures a key methodological

feature of *The Arcades Project*. Fourier appears not only in Thesis XI but throughout the convolutes, especially Convolute W, where Benjamin treats Fourier as a privileged figure for understanding the ‘wish-images’ of the nineteenth century (Benjamin 1999, 1154–1162). Fourier’s phalansteries, his reorganized domestic arrangements, his theory of passions, and his reimaginings of nature are tightly interwoven with Benjamin’s account of modernity and its dialectical images (Buck-Morss 1989, 112–118). To ignore Fourier is therefore not a trivial oversight but a substantive interpretive distortion. The consequence is a critical literature that reinforces a false dichotomy between Benjaminian negativity (exemplified by the Angel) and Fourierist fantasy (treated as marginal). Lost in this dichotomy is Benjamin’s insight that Fourier’s anticipatory images are historically embedded articulations of collective desires and thus legitimate objects of materialist analysis. In this sense, Fourier provides Benjamin with a model for understanding utopia not as transcendent ideal but as immanent potentiality – ‘pregnant with the future,’ to borrow Fourier’s famous formulation (Fourier 1971, 84).

Recovering Fourier’s significance within Benjamin’s thought is therefore not merely an exegetical task but a theoretical one: it allows us to understand Benjamin’s messianic materialism as a project that integrates memory and hope, catastrophe and desire, mourning and anticipation.

Fourier’s Hedonistic Materialism: Passions, Pleasure, and Imagination

Charles Fourier occupies a peculiar and often misunderstood position in the history of socialist thought. While later Marxist traditions frequently dismissed him as a naïve dreamer or an extravagant utopian (Abensour 2016, 29–30), his work is grounded in a distinctive and systematically articulated materialism that links the organization of society to the structure of human passions (Fourier 1971, 54–61). This materialism should not be confused with Engels’s retrospective classification of Fourier as a ‘utopian socialist,’ which tends to obscure rather than illuminate Fourier’s theoretical commitments. Rather, Fourier’s materialism emerges from his attempt to treat passions, labour, and nature as real, causally efficacious forces whose organization determines social harmony or disorder. Fourier’s materialism has two closely related dimensions: sensualism and naturalism. Sensualism treats the passions not as moral inclinations or subjective states, but as constitutive forces of human life. Naturalism grounds social transformation in the laws and tendencies of nature rather

than in speculative philosophy or moral ideals. This dual orientation produces what Benjamin later describes as an ‘anthropological’ or ‘hedonistic’ materialism (Benjamin 1999, 628–633), a framework in which the critique of civilization and the anticipation of a new social order are inseparable aspects of a single theoretical project (pp. 1154–1157).

At the core of Fourier’s anthropology lies the claim that human beings are constituted by their passions. Passions are neither moral obstacles to be overcome nor irrational impulses to be disciplined; they are the natural organs of the human being, analogous to physiological organs (Fourier 1971, 54–61). This analogy is not merely illustrative. By comparing passions to bodily organs, Fourier emphasizes their materiality and functional necessity: passions are not representations or ideals, but embodied forces that demand expression and coordination. Just as organs perform specific functions within a living body, passions perform determinate roles within the social body. Their repression therefore does not refine human nature but mutilates it. Fourier’s critique is directed not against civilization as such, but against what he calls ‘civilization’ in the specific sense of modern commercial-bourgeois society. This form of society demands moderation, asceticism, self-denial, and the systematic repression of desire, celebrating these repressions as moral virtues (pp. 84–89). For Fourier, such repression is neither ethical nor rational; it is pathological. A harmonious society must instead be organized around the free development and coordination of passions, whose ‘sole tendency,’ Fourier insists, ‘is toward concord and social unity’ (p. 57). This conception situates Fourier within a materialist tradition not because he celebrates pleasure as such, but because he treats passions as natural forces whose organization produces concrete social effects. Like La Mettrie and d’Holbach, Fourier rejects moral and metaphysical abstractions in favour of a causal analysis of human behaviour rooted in nature (La Mettrie 1996, 7–9; d’Holbach 1970, 35–40). Social disharmony is thus not a moral failing but the result of misguided social organization. Materialism here means that social relations are explained by the real organization of bodies, desires, labour, and environments – not by ideals, norms, or transcendental principles.

Fourier’s critique of speculative philosophy follows from his naturalist commitments. Philosophy, he claims, has failed for millennia because it constructs systems of moral, political, and metaphysical norms detached from the empirical study of nature and human desire (Fourier 1971, 82–86). Philosophers, in Fourier’s view, attempt to legislate for na-

ture rather than learn from it; their abstractions justify existing social structures, reproduce inequalities, and suppress passions in the name of harmony or rationality. For Fourier, as for d'Holbach, any true social science must begin from the natural properties of human beings and the empirical conditions in which they live (d'Holbach 1970, 35–40). Only by observing the passions, needs, and inclinations of individuals can one construct a social order that brings those elements into harmony. Thus, Fourier's utopianism is not a speculative projection of ideals but an attempt to imagine a new society from a naturalistic understanding of human desire (Fourier 1971, 54–61; Benjamin 1999, 1156).

A distinctive feature of Fourier's thought is the elevation of pleasure – especially sensual pleasure – to the status of a social and cosmological principle. Pleasure is not a byproduct of a well-ordered society but its foundation. 'Sensual pleasure,' Fourier writes, 'is the only weapon God can use to control us and bring us to carry out his designs' (Fourier 1971, 55). This provocative formulation expresses Fourier's belief that attraction, not coercion, is the true principle of social order. Benjamin recognized the materialist significance of this claim. In *Convolute W* of *The Arcades Project*, he observes that Fourier treats happiness as an object of scientific calculation, embedded in everyday practices such as cooking, dress, and leisure (Benjamin 1999, 1158–1160). Barthes's description of Fourier's 'culinary metaphysics' captures this insight: pleasure has 'recipes like any pudding' (Barthes 1974, 125). The metaphor of the recipe should not be understood idealistically, as a fixed form imposed on matter, but practically, as a form of embodied know-how. A recipe is materialist insofar as it presupposes repetition, variation, experimentation, and sensuous engagement with concrete materials. Pleasure, for Fourier, is not an abstract ideal but a reproducible, socially organized practice.

This emphasis on pleasure challenges the ascetic underpinnings of both bourgeois morality and certain forms of socialist thought. Fourier rejects the valorisation of discipline, sacrifice, and productivity that characterizes capitalist and early socialist ideologies alike (Fourier 1971, 84–89). Instead, he insists that true social harmony arises when individuals pursue their passions in ways that align with the collective good. Pleasure is not merely a private experience but a social force capable of generating cooperation, creativity, and abundance (Fourier 1967, 137–145; Iakovou 2021, 155). Fourier's theory of labour follows directly from his anthropology of passions. In 'civilization,' labour is alienating because it is organized in opposition to the passions: it is repetitive, coerced, and dis-

connected from personal inclinations (Fourier 1971, 84–86). Fourier envisions a society in which labour becomes a site of pleasure, self-expression, and social connection. He calls this mode of activity *travail passionné* – passionate labour (Fourier 1967, 137–145). In Fourier’s system, individuals choose tasks that correspond to their innate inclinations and abilities. Work is organized into small groups (series and groups) that cultivate emulation and cooperation rather than competition. Agricultural and domestic tasks are reimagined as collective activities animated by shared enthusiasm and aesthetic enjoyment (pp. 148–156). Although Fourier’s vision can appear fantastical – he claims, for example, that even earth-moving will become easy once passions are properly aligned – it reflects an attempt to reconceive the relation between desire and productive activity (pp. 140–145). To anticipate the next section: while Marx appreciated Fourier’s attempt to identify the ‘colossal conception of man’ implicit in transformed labour (Marx and Engels 1978, 160), he criticized Fourier’s belief that all labour could be rendered pleasurable, remarking in the *Grundrisse* that ‘labour cannot become play, as Fourier would like’ (Marx 1973, 488). Nevertheless, Fourier’s effort to integrate desire into labour anticipates Marx’s later reflections on overcoming the rigid separation between labour time and free time (pp. 708–710). Thus, Fourier’s somewhat ‘speculative’ remarks do not negate the theoretical significance of his attempt to derive social transformation from a new anthropology of work.

Fourier’s most famous utopian images concern transformed nature: oceans turning to lemonade, new celestial bodies emerging, animals adopting cooperative habits (Fourier 1967, 155–164). These images are often dismissed as whimsical exaggerations, but Benjamin insists that they express a serious critique of capitalist modernity. They articulate a vision of nature freed from domination, scarcity, and antagonism (Benjamin 1999, 119). This is not a return to a lost natural harmony, nor a purely technological conquest of nature. Rather, Fourier imagines a co-transformation of human passions, social organization, and natural processes. When passions are liberated and coordinated through non-alienated labour, nature itself responds differently – not magically, but relationally. Nature in Fourier’s system is neither inert matter nor a passive resource. It is an active participant in social life, whose potentialities are either suppressed or enabled by human organization. The transformation of nature thus results from a reorganization of social relations, not from moral reform or technological domination alone. In

this sense, Fourier's utopia is evolutionary rather than restorative: it involves the unfolding of latent possibilities through new forms of collective practice.

This reciprocal relation contrasts sharply with the capitalist view of nature as an object to be exploited and mastered. Fourier's transformed nature is not merely symbolic but serves as a critique of economic and scientific ideologies that reduce nature to a resource (Iakovou 2021, 75). Iakovou observes that Fourier's natural utopianism challenges two dominant narratives of modernity: the narrative of technological mastery and the narrative of moral renunciation (pp. 74–76). Against both, Fourier asserts a conception of nature that is animated, responsive, and generous. This conception will provide Benjamin with a vocabulary for articulating a non-instrumental relation to nature, one that resonates with his broader critique of capitalist notions of progress and domination (Benjamin 1999, 6; 119). This understanding allows us to see why Fourier's utopia is materialist rather than idealist. Unlike Thomas More's *Utopia*, which presents a juridical and normative model imposed on society, Fourier's utopia is rooted in the contradictions of the present and emerges from its latent possibilities (Bloch 1986, 146–147) and operates through causal mechanisms: passions, labour arrangements, architectural forms, and collective practices. His phalansteries are not abstract ideals but mediating institutions that reorganize existing social forms – domestic life, agriculture, cooperation – so as to align passions with production and nature (Fourier 1967, 155–164). They function as experimental environments in which new relations between humans and nature can emerge (pp. 155–164). In that sense, Fourier repeatedly insists that the 'present is pregnant with the future,' and that the crises of civilization will eventually force a transition toward a society organized according to the passions (Fourier 1971, 84–89).

Benjamin was acutely attuned to this aspect of Fourier's thought. He recognized that Fourier's utopia, while speculative in its imagery, was grounded in a material analysis of social tendencies. This combination of critique and utopian anticipation – rooted in everyday practices, architectural forms, and technological innovations – makes Fourier a key figure in Benjamin's theory of historical possibility (Benjamin 1999, 1154–1162; Buck-Morss 1989, 112–118). Fourier's hedonistic materialism thus appears in Benjamin's work not as an eccentric aside, but as a central resource for rethinking the relationship between nature, labour, pleasure, and social transformation.

Marx and Fourier

In this section, I will discuss the relationship between Marx and Fourier, which is marked by a notable ambivalence. Fourier's analyses of passions, social organization, and the critique of civilization informed Marx's early reflections on alienation and human nature (Marx and Engels 1978, 66–125; Fourier 1971, 54–90). At the same time, Marx rejected Fourier's belief that social harmony could be achieved through the organization of passions alone, and he criticized Fourier's conception of labour and class as insufficiently historical (Marx 1973, 488; Marx and Engels 1978, 160–164). Understanding this tension is central to interpreting Benjamin's strategic positioning of Fourier within a Marxist constellation, because Benjamin retrieves the aspects of Fourier that Marx valued while reframing Fourier's limitations through his own theory of historical time (Benjamin 1999, 1154–1162; Benjamin 2003, 392–397).

Marx's earliest references to Fourier are notably appreciative. In *The German Ideology*, Marx cites Fourier as a thinker who grasped a 'colossal conception of man' made possible by transformed social relations (Marx and Engels 1978, 160). This formulation is crucial: Marx recognizes in Fourier not merely a critic of bourgeois morality, but a theorist attentive to latent human capacities suppressed by existing social structures. Fourier's insistence that passions are systematically mutilated under 'civilization' resonates with Marx's own claim that capitalism estranges human beings from their species-being (Ger. *Gattungswesen*). While Fourier's category of 'civilization' does not map directly onto Marx's concept of capitalism, both designate historically specific social formations in which human capacities are distorted by alienated social relations. Marx's 1866 letter to Ludwig Kugelmann reinforces this perspective. There Marx distinguishes Fourier (and Owen) from figures like Proudhon, whom he derides as a 'petty-bourgeois utopian.' By contrast, Fourier and Owen are praised for offering 'the presentiment and visionary expression of a new world' (Marx and Engels 1978, 79). For Marx, Fourier's utopian imagination is not an evasion of material critique but a speculative anticipation of human capacities unrealizable within capitalist society. This appreciation is grounded in Fourier's materialist anthropology. Fourier attempted to reconfigure social relations on the basis of passions and through the sublation of the contradictions of bourgeois society (Fourier 1971, 54–61), a method Marx found far more concrete than Proudhon's metaphysical moralizing (Marx 1976, 171–173).

Nevertheless, Marx's engagement with Fourier must be situated alongside the decisive influence of Hegel and Feuerbach on his early thought. Fourier does not replace Hegel as the primary interlocutor in Marx's theory of alienation; rather, Fourier contributes a complementary perspective that emphasizes the mutilation of passions, sensuous life, and everyday practices. In this sense, Fourier's analyses resonate with Marx's critique of alienated labour without providing its dialectical framework. Marx's concept of alienation emerges from a synthesis of Hegelian dialectics, Feuerbachian anthropology, and materialist critique, within which Fourier's insights function as an anticipatory and experiential supplement rather than a foundational source. This is particularly evident in Marx's analyses of labour and social reproduction. Fourier's insistence that passions are deformed under 'civilization' parallels Marx's claim that labour becomes alienated when it is compelled, external, and disconnected from self-realization (Marx and Engels 1978, 74–81). Both thinkers identify modern production as a system that represses natural inclinations and imposes artificial moral imperatives. Fourier's critiques of the family, domestic life, and sexuality also anticipate Marx's later analyses of the bourgeois family in *The Communist Manifesto* (Marx and Engels 1978, 168–172).

Fourier's assertion that 'the extension of the privileges of women is the basic measure of all social progress' anticipates Marx's recognition of gendered domination as a structural feature of bourgeois society. Fourier's critique of commercial society – including speculative finance, competitive bankruptcy, and the irrationality of free competition – also finds echoes in Marx's analyses of circulation, credit, and crisis tendencies (Marx 1976, 247–257; Fourier 1971, 86–90).

Despite these affinities, Marx articulated decisive critiques that demarcate his socialism from Fourier's utopian projections to the point that Marxism has been taken to function as a machine of exclusion of utopia (Abensour 2016, 30). As already discussed, Fourier's belief that labour can be transformed into pleasure (Fr. *travail passionné*) is a distinctive feature of his thought (Fourier 1971, 54–61). For Fourier, properly organized passions render even arduous labour enjoyable. Marx, however, argues in the *Grundrisse* that 'labour cannot become play, as Fourier would like' (Marx 1973, 488). Marx's objection is not to pleasure *per se* but to Fourier's abstraction of labour from its historically specific form under capitalism. Marx distinguishes between labour as self-realizing productive activity and labour as coerced necessity (Marx and Engels 1978, 69). Fourier, for

Marx, collapses these distinctions, imagining a society in which all labour becomes pleasurable without addressing the complex transformations required to abolish alienated labour. For example, Fourier's elevation of agricultural labour as paradigmatic leads him to generalize agricultural rhythms to all forms of work, thereby ignoring the specificity of different labour processes. For Marx, this amounts to a hypostatization detached from historical development which must be criticized.

Marx also objects to Fourier's insufficient grounding of social transformation in class struggle. Fourier's system envisions harmony through rational organization of passions, not through proletarian self-emancipation. In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels (1978, 184–185) argue that utopians like Fourier 'appeal to society at large,' including the ruling classes, instead of locating transformation in the revolutionary activity of the proletariat. Fourier's future society retains classes while redistributing pleasures, which Marx sees as an idealized extension of bourgeois categories rather than their abolition. Fourier's (1971, 58–60) own admission that the wealthy would continue to enjoy more refined pleasures in the future order underscores this limitation. Finally, Marx criticizes Fourier's ahistorical method. The latter treats passions as transhistorical and views social harmony as the unmediated realization of natural inclinations. For Marx, human nature is historically constituted and needs and desires are constitutively shaped by relations of production (Marx 1973, 83–85). In the 1844 *Manuscripts*, Fourier's negation of alienation appears as abstract rather than determinate (Marx and Engels 1978, 90–91), since he imagines abolishing private property by expanding access to pleasures, but leaves intact many economic categories structuring capitalist relations. Thus, Marx warns (Marx and Engels 1978, 90) that Fourier risks transforming socialism into 'the vulgar realization of private property.'

Despite these critiques, Marx's enduring appreciation for Fourier suggests that he perceived in Fourier a genuine materialist impulse. Unlike other utopians, Fourier grounded his critique in empirical realities: commercial practices, gender relations, urban life, and the organization of labour (Fourier 1971, 54–90). Marx (Marx and Engels 1978, 109–111) recognized that Fourier's utopianism, for all its excesses, emphasized that socialism must transform everyday life, not merely production or the state. Fourier's commitment to women's liberation, communal living, and the sensuous dimensions of daily existence anticipates Marx's later claims concerning communism that the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all (Marx and Engels 1978, 160–161).

The tension between Marx's appreciation and critique creates the conceptual opening that Benjamin exploits. Benjamin does not situate Fourier as a superseded precursor but as a co-constitutive figure in a constellation that reveals the full range of possibilities within historical materialism (Benjamin 1999, 1155–1157). Whereas Marx criticized Fourier for projecting harmony without antagonism, Benjamin reads Fourier's utopian images as wish-images embedded in the nineteenth century that reveal desires and suppressed potentials of bourgeois society (pp. 3–4). Fourier's utopia is not a blueprint for an abstract utopia but an index of collective imagination under capitalism – a diagnostic tool revealing what capitalist society desires but cannot realize: transformed labour, liberated passions, and a non-dominating relation to nature (Benjamin 1999, 14–15; Fourier 1971, 87). By placing Fourier alongside Marx, Benjamin recovers the anticipatory dimension of Marx's own thought, including Marx's belief that communism entails the unfolding of human capacities not yet realized within capitalism (Marx 1973, 488). In this sense, Benjamin can be seen to reverse the narrative established by Engels (Engels 1970, 41–53). Rather than viewing Fourier as naïve and superseded, Benjamin restores Fourier as an important thinker in the critique of capitalist society and an indispensable resource for articulating the utopian horizon of Marxism.

Between Marx and Fourier

As already noted, Walter Benjamin's engagement with Charles Fourier is extensive, systematic, and central to *The Arcades Project*, yet its significance has long been underestimated. This section reconstructs Benjamin's engagement with Marx and Fourier across three domains: his analysis of the nineteenth century in *The Arcades Project*, his reflections on technology and collective imagination in the 1935 and 1939 Exposés, and his philosophical reconfiguration of historical time in *On the Concept of History*. Across these domains, Fourier becomes indispensable for understanding Benjamin's materialist method, especially his analysis of wish-images, his uncovering of latent possibilities within the past, and his articulation of an alternative temporality grounded in desire and anticipation rather than linear progress or catastrophe.

Fourier appears throughout *The Arcades Project*, but his presence is most concentrated and philosophically elaborated in Convolute W ('Fourier, or the Arcades'). Benjamin does not treat Fourier as a historical curiosity; rather, he interprets him as a theorist who captures the utopian energies of the nineteenth century and crystallizes them into

images (Benjamin 1999, 1154–1162). These images – Benjamin’s famed wish-images (Ger. *Wunschbilder*) – are central to his theory of modernity. Wish-images express collective desires that arise from the contradictions of bourgeois society and imagine a transformed world using the materials at hand (Benjamin 1999, 4–5; Buck-Morss 1989, 112–118). Fourier’s visions function as such exemplary wish-images because they translate social contradictions into utopian yet historically grounded projections: ‘Civilization is the suppression of passions,’ Benjamin quotes from Fourier, and Fourier’s utopia answers by imagining a society in which passions are liberated, coordinated, and harmonized (Benjamin 1999, 1158; Fourier 1971, 54–61). Fourier’s anticipatory images reveal for Benjamin the desires suppressed by capitalist discipline and the ascetic ethos of bourgeois morality.

His interest in Fourier also extends to the architectural dimension of utopian imagination. Fourier’s meticulously designed phalansteries – communal structures that reorganize work, domestic life, and sociability – resonate with the nineteenth-century arcades that Benjamin takes as his central object of study. Both embody collective fantasies of social coordination, abundance, and comfort (Benjamin 1999, 1154–1157; Buck-Morss 1989, 116). By placing phalansteries alongside the arcades, Benjamin situates utopian imagination at the heart of modern architectural and technological forms, showing how these forms register the desires and contradictions of the bourgeois century. In both Fourier and Benjamin, architecture is not merely background but a medium of historical experience. Fourier’s phalanstery is the spatial crystallization of his anthropology of passions: a site where cooperative labour, communal life, and sensuous pleasure intersect (Fourier 1967, 137–145). Similarly, Benjamin’s arcades – structures of glass and iron – are transitional spaces where commerce, leisure, and collective dreaming converge (Benjamin 1999, 3–4). Benjamin’s juxtaposition of these architectural forms underscores his methodological commitment to reading history through space. Fourier’s phalanstery is not a transcendent ideal but a material projection of transformed social relations. Likewise, the arcade is not simply a marketplace but a site in which collective dream-images take shape (Benjamin 1999, 10–13). Fourier’s utopian architecture anticipates the modern organization of domestic and collective life, revealing latent possibilities embedded in the built environment of the nineteenth century. This architectural affinity supports Benjamin’s broader argument that utopia must be read as an immanent feature of social reality: not an abstract ideal im-

posed from without, but a latent potential disclosed through a dialectical reading of historical forms (Benjamin 1999, 460; Bloch 1986, 146–147).

Benjamin's 1935 and 1939 *Exposés* further clarify his interpretation of Fourier. In these summaries of the *Arcades*, Fourier appears primarily in relation to technology, nature, and collective desire. Benjamin highlights Fourier's fantastical images – seas of lemonade, domesticated animals, new moons – not to criticize their extravagance but to interpret them as expressions of a desire to reconcile nature and technology (Benjamin 1999, 5–6). This reconciliation is not achieved through greater technological domination of nature, but through a transformation of the social ends and organization of technique itself: technology is redirected from profit, extraction, and mastery toward the satisfaction of collective needs and the expansion of sensuous life. In other words, for Fourier (as Benjamin reads him), nature and technology can enter into a non-antagonistic relation only when labour and the passions are reorganized such that technique collaborates with natural processes instead of subordinating them. For Benjamin, Fourier's visions reveal a longing for a non-dominating relation to nature, which contrasts sharply with capitalist ideology and technological mastery. In capitalist modernity, technology intensifies exploitation, accelerates the domination of nature, and subordinates sensuous life to commodity production (pp. 14–17). Fourier, by contrast, imagines a world in which technology collaborates with natural processes, augmenting rather than subjugating them (Fourier 1967, 152–160). Benjamin famously describes Fourier's nature transformations as 'the ecstasies of technology' (*die Ekstasen der Technik*), a formulation that indicates Fourier's desire not to regress to pre-industrial simplicity but to reconcile nature and technique through the liberation of passions (Benjamin 1999, 6). Fourier thus reveals the utopian content of technological development – its capacity to serve collective needs and desires – which capitalism represses. This critique aligns Fourier with Benjamin's broader intention 'to explode the continuum of history' and reveal unrealized possibilities buried within the present (Benjamin 2003, 395). Fourier's central role in Benjamin's philosophy of history becomes explicit in Thesis XI of *On the Concept of History*. Whereas Thesis IX presents the catastrophic temporal experience of the oppressed, embodied in the Angel of History, Thesis XI introduces a countervailing modality: the anticipatory, utopian energy embedded in the present (p. 395). Benjamin cites Fourier's visions of transformed nature as exemplary anticipatory images that disclose possibilities latent in the present moment. Fourier's utopia

thus illuminates Benjamin's image of the 'chips of Messianic time' embedded within the now – moments in which unrealized futures flicker into visibility (p. 397). These images articulate a future-oriented temporality that does not rely on teleology but emerges from within the contradictions of the present (Khatib 2017). Fourier exemplifies a form of historical imagination that perceives the world not only as wreckage (Angel/Thesis ix) but as pregnant with unrealized potential (Fourier/Thesis xi).

Benjamin's engagement with Fourier furthermore reorganizes the relationship between happiness, class struggle, and political action. In much of Marxist tradition, happiness appears secondary to structural analysis or class conflict. Yet Benjamin insists that happiness is a central category of historical experience and political desire (Benjamin 1999, 1174). He writes in the *Arcades* (p. 1184): 'The order of the day is to discover in the space of history the potentialities for happiness.' Fourier becomes the theorist who elevates happiness to political relevance. His conception of pleasure as a social principle – grounded in passions, collective activity, and transformed relations to nature – provides Benjamin with an anthropological dimension often marginalized in Marxist theory (Fourier 1971, 54–61). Fourier reveals that the stakes of class struggle are not merely the abolition of exploitation but the reconfiguration of everyday life, sensuous experience, and desire. Benjamin interprets Fourier's utopia not as an alternative to class struggle but as its affective horizon: the concrete content of what emancipation could mean (Khatib 2017). This emphasis aligns Benjamin with the broader Marxist humanist tradition – especially Marx's notion that communism entails the full development of human powers and capacities (Marx and Engels 1978, 109–111). But Benjamin's engagement with Fourier sharpens his critique of progress and the latent historicism in Marxism. Bourgeois and Social Democratic ideologies treat progress as linear, inevitable, and technologically driven (Benjamin 2003, 392–395). Fourier reveals the ideological nature of this myth by offering a qualitatively different conception of historical transformation. Where capitalist progress intensifies domination, Fourier's utopia imagines technological development aligned with human flourishing, communal life, and liberated desire (Fourier 1967, 152–160). Fourier's images are attempts to reclaim technology from domination and reintegrate it into a non-instrumental conception of life (Benjamin 1999, 6; Buck-Morss 1989, 118). Fourier thus helps Benjamin articulate a concept of technological possibility grounded in collective needs rather than capitalist accumulation and linear progression.

Finally, Fourier proves critical for Benjamin's methodological reflections. Benjamin's method of constellation involves juxtaposing heterogeneous historical elements – texts, images, architectural forms – to reveal the tensions and desires embedded within them (Benjamin 1999, 460). In *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin uses montage to assemble Fourier's images alongside advertising slogans, architectural innovations, and bourgeois fantasies. Fourier's utopia becomes a diagnostic tool that helps reveal the dreamworlds of capitalist modernity (Benjamin 1999, 3–6). Fourier's visions are not quoted for their eccentric excess but integrated as indispensable components of the nineteenth century's collective imagination. One of Benjamin's most distinctive contributions is his insistence that historical consciousness must be oriented toward the not-yet – a temporal category elaborated most explicitly by Ernst Bloch (Bloch 1986, 1–12). Fourier becomes, for Benjamin, the paradigmatic figure of anticipatory consciousness: his utopian projections articulate desires and possibilities suppressed by capitalist rationality. While Bloch develops the category of the 'not-yet-conscious,' Benjamin embeds this anticipatory orientation directly within his materialist method (Bloch 1986, 76–90; Benjamin 1999, 1164–1165). Fourier's images reveal the desires that animate historical actors and provide a vocabulary for articulating possibilities beyond the frameworks of progress or catastrophe. He provides Benjamin with the conceptual tools to understand utopia as an immanent possibility within capitalist modernity – a possibility that must be seized, not predicted.

Reconfiguring Marxism via Fourier: Toward a Utopian Materialism

Benjamin's engagement with Fourier has far-reaching consequences for the understanding of Marxism itself. By positioning Fourier as Marx's interlocutor rather than as his prehistory, Benjamin reopens questions foreclosed by the dominant narrative of the development from 'utopian' to 'scientific' socialism, as codified by Engels (Engels 1970, 41–53). The latter's canonical distinction framed Fourier as a representative of speculative, pre-scientific utopian idealism, valuable primarily as a historical precursor but theoretically surpassed by Marx's materialist method. Benjamin challenges this dichotomy not by rejecting Marx's materialist analysis of capitalist economic relations but by demonstrating that materialist critique requires a utopian dimension – an anticipatory orientation grounded in the desires, affects, and latent possibilities embedded within the present (Benjamin 1999, 1154–1162; (Benjamin 2003, 395–397),

so that it does not regress into determinism and positivism. Fourier thus becomes crucial for Benjamin's attempt to 'reconfigure' the anthropological dimension of Marxism: to recover its imaginative and sensuous registers alongside its critique of political economy.

For Benjamin (2003, 396–397), the task of historical materialism is twofold: to reveal the structures of domination and to uncover the latent possibilities for emancipation embedded within those structures. Fourier's anticipatory images exemplify this second task. They articulate historically embedded expressions of collective desire that reveal both the contradictions of the present and the possibilities it contains (Benjamin 1999, 3–5; Buck-Morss 1989, 112–118). Without the anticipatory dimension, historical materialism risks degenerating into fatalism, technocratic rationalism, or a mere chronicle of suffering – precisely the dangers Benjamin (2003, 392–395) identifies in Social Democratic progressivism and historicist accounts of empty time. This is why Benjamin, according to Khatib (2017), insists that the task of the materialist historian is experimental, yet normatively guided, since without some sort of anticipation of the classless society, there will only be a historical forgery of the past.

Central to Benjamin's reconfiguration of Marxism is the claim that imagination itself is a material force. Imagination does not operate outside history, nor does it function as a purely ideal projection; rather, it crystallizes desires that emerge from concrete social contradictions (Benjamin 1999, 1157–1160; Bloch 1986, 76–90). Fourier becomes exemplary in this respect. His utopian images arise from the tensions of commercial society – alienated labour, repressed passions, ecological degradation, and fragmented communal life (Fourier 1971, 54–90; Iakovou 2021, 74–76). For Benjamin, such images are material phenomena insofar as they condense social practices, technological forms, and collective experiences into sensuous representations. They are not detached fantasies but historically situated expressions of how social life is lived, desired, and imagined. In this way, wish-images serve as mediating figures between individual experience and social form, allowing materialist analysis to grasp not only structures of domination but also the desires that animate historical actors. This is why Benjamin can move from images to a material analysis of social forms without abandoning materialism. Wish-images register how social relations are experienced affectively and imaginatively; they reveal what capitalist society produces in distorted or repressed form. Fourier's descriptions of transformed labour, liberated passions, harmonious relations with nature – thus function as diagnostic

tools: they disclose what capitalism structurally cannot realize, while remaining anchored in its material conditions. In this sense, they illuminate the ‘not-yet’ embedded in the present – a category that resonates with, but remains distinct from, Bloch’s theory of the *Noch-nicht-Bewusst* (Ger.). Whereas Bloch approaches anticipation primarily as a phenomenology of hope, Benjamin embeds it within the analysis of social and historical forms themselves (Benjamin 1999, 1164–1165).

As noted, Benjamin’s reading of Fourier expands the anthropological horizon of Marxism. Fourier insists that passions, sensual pleasures, and happiness are not secondary or decorative aspects of social life but foundational components of any emancipated society (Fourier 1971, 54–61). This challenges reductionist versions of socialism that focus primarily on production, distribution, or state organization. Fourier’s utopian anthropology foregrounds the transformation of everyday life, domestic arrangements, and interpersonal relations – domains often neglected in both classical and orthodox Marxism (Greiert 2018, 22–23). This anthropological emphasis resonates with Marx’s own scattered reflections on the ‘full development of human powers’ as the aim of communism (Marx and Engels 1978, 160–161). In *The German Ideology*, Marx imagines a society in which individuals cultivate multiple capacities and engage in diverse forms of activity (‘hunting in the morning, fishing in the afternoon ...’), a vision that echoes Fourier’s belief that human passions flourish under conditions of social harmony (Marx and Engels 1978, 159–160). Benjamin retrieves this anthropological dimension and integrates it with Fourier’s sensuous materialism. For Benjamin, an adequate Marxism must include these dimensions, because the political struggle is ultimately aimed at transforming the conditions of human experience itself.

In that sense, Benjamin’s constellation of Marx and Fourier can be seen to respond to contemporary political and cultural tendencies. Modern crises – economic inequality, ecological collapse, social fragmentation, and technological acceleration – have produced two widespread ideological responses: dystopian fatalism and retrotopian nostalgia (Bauman 2017, 5–22). Dystopian narratives imagine the future as inevitable decline or catastrophe; retrotopian narratives idealize a lost past and seek solace in restoration. Fourier, as interpreted by Benjamin, offers an alternative. Fourier’s visionary utopianism reveals that the future is not exhausted by catastrophe or regression. Instead, the present contains latent possibilities for transformed social relations, technological developments oriented toward need rather than profit, and harmonious relations between humans

and nature (Fourier 1967, 152–160; Benjamin 1999, 6). Fourier's utopian imagination thus counters the fatalistic worldview that sees no alternative to capitalist modernity. Fourier's images are historically embedded responses to the crises of the nineteenth century – crises that structurally resemble those of our own time (Buck-Morss 1989, 116–118). Benjamin's retrieval of Fourier culminates in what can be called a utopian materialism. This is neither utopianism detached from material conditions nor materialism stripped of imagination. Rather, it is a form of historical materialism that recognizes the dual necessity of critique and anticipation (Benjamin 1999, 1154–1162; Benjamin 2003, 395–397).

A Marxism adequate to modern crises must therefore integrate the critique of domination with the imaginative projection of transformed social relations, refusing the impoverished conception of politics that confines itself to analysis without envisioning alternatives. It must incorporate sensuality, pleasure, and happiness into its understanding of emancipation, recognizing – against both capitalist asceticism and certain reductively economic strands of Marxism – that liberation concerns the transformation of everyday life no less than the restructuring of production. Such a Marxism must also acknowledge technology as a site of utopian possibility rather than merely an instrument of domination, discerning within technological development those latent potentials that capitalist rationality suppresses but does not extinguish. Finally, it must orient itself toward the 'chips of Messianic time' embedded within the present, the fragments of unrealized possibility that illuminate history as a field of struggle and anticipation rather than a linear progression or a closed catastrophe (Benjamin 2003, 397). Benjamin's retrieval of Fourier restores to historical materialism a dimension often marginalized in its later development: one that embraces not only necessity but possibility, not only critique but hope.

Conclusion

To conclude: Benjamin's engagement with Charles Fourier – most explicitly in *On the Concept of History*, the *Arcades Project*, and the 1935/1939 Exposés – reveals a dimension of Benjamin's thought that has long remained obscured by the dominance of the centrality of the Angel of History. Fourier's appearance in Thesis x1, far from an eccentric aside, restores an underexamined register: the utopian, anticipatory, and sensuous dimension of historical materialism. This article has argued that Fourier occupies a central place in Benjamin's reconstruction of Marxism. Fourier's

hedonistic materialism – his theory of passions, his affirmation of pleasure, his conception of passionate labour (Fr. *travail passionné*), and his projection of a transformed relationship with nature – enables us to re-think emancipation beyond capitalist domination and the ascetic tendencies within certain strands of Marxism (Fourier 1971, 54–90). Fourier's visions illuminate the 'wish-images' of the nineteenth century: expressions of collective desire embedded in everyday life, architecture, and emerging technologies (Benjamin 1999, 3–5, 1154–1162). These images are not escapist fantasies but historically saturated anticipations of what capitalist society suppresses yet simultaneously produces as desire. Marx's own complex engagement with Fourier provides the historical backdrop for Benjamin's intervention. Marx's praise for Fourier's 'colossal conception of man' (Marx and Engels 1978, 160) and his recognition of Fourier's visionary grasp of human capacities indicate that Fourier cannot be relegated to the museum of utopian obscurity. At the same time, Marx's critiques of Fourier – concerning labour, historical mediation, and class antagonism (Marx 1973, 611–612; Marx 1976, 284–290) – mark theoretical tensions that Benjamin does not simply inherit, but actively reframes.

In doing so, Benjamin retrieves the anticipatory dimension of Fourier's thought without adopting its systematic architecture. Fourier's images are transformed into sites of dialectical intelligibility: constellations in which past desires, present contradictions, and unrealized possibilities are brought into tension. In this Benjaminian sense, dialectics does not designate a formal method or a set of conceptual tools, but a mode of historical reading. *Dialectical images* are not instruments applied to history; they are historical phenomena that, when read dialectically, disclose the contradictions and latent potentials of their time. A *dialectical reading* names the critical orientation that allows such images to become legible as condensations of domination and hope at once.

From this perspective, Benjamin's constellation of Marx and Fourier challenges the canonical Engelsian narrative that opposes 'utopian' and 'scientific' socialism (Engels 1970, 41–53). Benjamin shows that utopian anticipation and materialist critique are not antithetical but mutually constitutive. Fourier's anticipatory imagination reveals the desires and potentials immanent in the present; Marx's critique of political economy explains the structures that repress and distort them. Benjamin's own theory of history requires both dimensions: the memory of past suffering and the anticipation of future possibility (Benjamin 2003, 397; Iakovou 2021, 73–80).

Such a reconfigured Marxism carries profound contemporary relevance. In an era marked by ecological devastation, social fragmentation, resurgent authoritarianism, and widespread pessimism, political imagination is often constrained by dystopian fatalism or retrotopian nostalgia (Bauman 2017, 5–22). Fourier's utopian projections, as read by Benjamin, offer a third path: a model of anticipatory hope rooted in materialist critique. They reveal that the future remains 'shot through with chips of Messianic time' (Benjamin 2003, 397). Benjamin's reading of Fourier thus provides a theoretical resource for envisioning emancipatory futures grounded in desire, sensuousness, and happiness – dimensions essential to any adequate conception of human flourishing. A Marxism informed by Fourier is therefore a utopian materialism, one that integrates critique and imagination, necessity and possibility, memory and anticipation. Benjamin's engagement with Fourier shows that emancipation requires not only the abolition of domination but also the liberation of passions, the transformation of everyday life, and the reconfiguration of the relation between humans, technology, and nature.

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Weed Utopia: Potentiality, Negation and the Material Imagination of Earth in *The Right to Be Lazy*

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Abstract. This article examines John Knight's installation *The Right to Be Lazy* as a material and conceptual articulation of utopia grounded in negation, ecological processes, and imagination. Drawing on Paul Lafargue's critique of labour, Gaston Bachelard's theory of material imagination, and Ernst Bloch's notion of the 'not-yet,' the text reconceptualizes laziness not as inactivity but as a productive suspension of instrumental action. The unmanaged growth of weeds within a controlled garden setting becomes a model for utopian potential embedded in the present, revealing alternative temporalities and modes of perception. By foregrounding soil, roots, and spontaneous vegetation, the article argues that material processes themselves harbour anticipatory, world-making capacities. Laziness thus emerges as a political and aesthetic practice that interrupts capitalist imperatives of productivity and immediacy. Ultimately, the essay positions 'weed utopia' as a form of immanent critique, where negation, imagination, and ecological vitality converge to reopen possibilities for collective transformation.

Key Words: utopia, laziness, material imagination, negation, weeds

Utopija plevela: potencialnost, negacija in materialna imaginacija Zemlje

Povzetek. Pričujoči članek obravnava instalacijo Johna Knighta *The Right to Be Lazy* kot materialno in konceptualno artikulacijo utopije, utemeljene v negaciji, ekoloških procesih in imaginaciji. Opirajoč se na kritiko dela Paula Lafargua, teorijo materialne imaginacije Gastona Bachelarda ter Blochov pojem »še ne«, besedilo na novo opredeli lenobo ne kot neaktivnost, temveč kot produktivno suspenzijo instrumentalnega delovanja. Nenadzorovana rast plevela v okviru nadzorovanega vrtnega prostora postane model utopičnega potenciala, vgrajenega v sedanost, ki razkriva alternativne temporalnosti in načine zaznavanja.

S poudarjanjem tal, korenin in spontane vegetacije članek trdi, da materialni procesi sami vsebujejo anticipatorne, svetotvorne zmožnosti. Lenoba se tako kaže kot politična in estetska praksa, ki prekinja kapitalistične imperitive produktivnosti in neposrednosti. Na koncu esej »plevelno utopijo« opredeli kot obliko imanentne kritike, v kateri se negacija, imaginacija in ekološka vitalnost združujejo ter ponovno odpirajo možnosti za kolektivno preobrazbo.

Ključne besede: utopija, lenoba, materialna imaginacija, negacija, plevel

[F]ar from idleness being the root of all evil, it is rather the only true good.

Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or* (1959, 285)

Introduction

In the park in front of the main building of the Hamburger Bahnhof – Nationalgalerie der Gegenwart in Berlin, there is a large circular planting. In keeping with the strict geometry of the park's French formal garden design, its outer edge is lined with small boxwood topiary balls enclosed by a low square-cut hedge. Inside, however, a great variety of plants and bushy weeds are left to grow freely. Despite what many visitors over the years have initially assumed, the thicket of brambles and wild flowers within the confines of the paved courtyard is not a result of the museum's negligence in maintaining the garden. Rather, the stipulation that the museum gardener may only tend to the trimmed boxwood formations is part of John Knight's (1945–) permanent installation *The Right to Be Lazy* (2007/2009–ongoing). As a result of the decision not to intervene with fertilizers, weed control, or pruning, Knight's negative intervention is subject only to the effects of time and the changing seasons. The strong visual contrast between the free vegetal processes of growth and decay and the tightly regulated grid of the surrounding planned order mirrors a fundamental distinction in the history of definitions of utopia: between one that seeks a hidden possibility and one that pursues a hidden necessity. This essay is concerned with the former understanding: utopia as attentiveness to crossroads within what already exists rather than as an ideal blueprint for a single road.¹

¹ Such an understanding of utopia, in dialogue with a conception of art as having the capacity to articulate perspectives for a future beyond the impasses of the present – grounded in the reactivation of shared capacities – resonates with traditions in critical theory. In

Knight's work directly references one of the first socio-political critiques of conceptions of labour, which is also one of the first explicit texts on laziness: *The Right to Be Lazy* (1883) by the French Cuban-born political writer Paul Lafargue. Drawing inspiration from the *otium*² of classical antiquity, Lafargue refutes both the capitalist notion of labour power as commodity and the socialist attempt to achieve equality through the expansion of wage labour, rather than its limitation or abolition. At the core of Lafargue's alternative to work as 'modern slavery' (Lafargue 1883, 61) – sustained not only by capitalist conformity but also by the 'disastrous dogma' of socialist work ethic – lies the call to move beyond the conception of man as producer and master of nature, even if this shift, via the implementation of a three-hour working day, is to be achieved through technology. Lafargue sardonically depicts the utopian regime of laziness through vivid descriptions of grotesque theatrical performances in which the now-superfluous leaders and legislators of bourgeois institutions, freed from their useless chores and compulsive overconsumption, take centre stage. Although presented humorously, Lafargue does not view his anti-labour utopia as itself fantastic but as an object of practical intervention – the refusal of work functions as a practice of negation that responds directly to existing conditions such as inequality, overproduction, and the impoverishment of collective life. Laziness thus becomes a form of social critique whose genesis lies in the immanent ferment of social conflicts between the dominant and the dominated. Thereby, La-

particular, it aligns with Herbert Marcuse's argument in *The Aesthetic Dimension* (1978) that art's autonomy constitutes a mode of negation operating through aesthetic form as estrangement, re-presentation, and sensuous fiction, whereby reality is simultaneously exposed, displaced, and transcended: 'The truth of art,' Marcuse (1978, 9) writes, 'lies in its power to break the monopoly of established reality (i.e., of those who established it) to define what is real.' In this sense, art's creation of 'that other reality within the established one – the cosmos of hope' (p. 52) does not project a separate utopian elsewhere, but makes perceptible the underlying divergences within the present itself, where alternative paths already begin to take shape. This negation is non-identical to political praxis, yet it both anticipates and preserves past possibilities of the 'horizon of change (liberation)' (p. xi). As will be made clear in the subsequent sections, art, following Marcuse, is understood as 'committed to an emancipation of sensibility, imagination, and reason in all spheres of subjectivity and objectivity' (p. 9). In this sense, the essay can be situated within the contemporary renaissance of Marcuse's thought.

² A Latin term with a range of meanings, *otium* denotes leisure time devoted to self-fulfilment, including virtuous and intellectual pursuits as well as play, eating, and rest. It stands in opposition to *negotium*, meaning 'busyness' or the obligations of public and economic life.

fargue dissolves the opposition between concrete realism and practice, on the one hand, and the models of ideal perfection which are commonly associated with utopia, on the other.

Anchoring Lafargue's juxtaposition of laziness and utopia in relation to the above-mentioned ecological fragment of the wild flora of Berlin's urban commons, I draw on Gaston Bachelard's (1983) notion of 'material imagination,' along with his analyses of the images and dreams associated with the earth and its soil (2002; 2011). By distilling earth as an element of both activity and will (the seed, modelling with one's hands) and repose (the grave), as well as a figure of the temporal coexistence of past, present, and future, I relocate Bachelard's analysis of the elemental substance of poetic images from literary forms to Knight's installation. This shift allows me to demonstrate the utopian power of material imagination. As a condensation of earth's paradoxical quality, recapped with the prepositions *against* and *in* (Bachelard 2011, 2), Bachelard identifies the dynamic image of the root: at once a penetrating and sustaining force, situated at the threshold between the elements of earth and air, as well as between generative forms of life and worlds of dying.³ Constituting a fundamental feature of Knight's rewilded plot, roots are central to my articulation of utopia as a 'no-place,' understood through Ernst Bloch's concept of 'Not-Yet-Being,'⁴ and its integration with the specific mode of relational negation embodied by plants designated as 'weeds' (*Unkraut*).

Since the plants in the untended section of the planting are both in continuous photosynthetic activity and enter into ever-new choreogra-

³ 'Taken as a *dynamic image*, the root also has the most diverse of powers. It is both a power to uphold – to hold up – and a power to terebrate – to bore down. On the confines of two worlds, of air and of earth, the image of the root comes paradoxically to life in two directions ... [Either] our dreams are of a root that carries the earth's sap skyward or of one that is at work among and for the dead' (Bachelard 2011, 213).

⁴ '[The] imagination of the utopian function is distinguished from mere fantasizing precisely by the fact that only the former has in its favour a Not-Yet-Being of an expectable kind, i.e. does not play around and get lost in an Empty-Possible, but psychologically anticipates a Real-Possible' (Bloch 1996, 144). Helpful for my understanding of Bloch's concept of utopia is William M. Paris's recent development of Bloch's thought, which specifies its temporal and political implications through the lens of racial domination, defined as the fragmentation of social time by one group over another (Paris 2025, 19). In particular, Paris's emphasis on Bloch's notion of concrete utopia – understood as a critical practice that exposes and contests the social organization of time – clarifies utopia as a struggle to open the present to crossroads of alternative futures that have been systematically foreclosed.

phies of decomposition and fermentation, laziness in Knight's work is not reducible to doing nothing. Rather, like the weed, it sustains a form of potentiality through negation, critically illuminating the conditions for imagining how things might be otherwise – that mode of world-making perception characteristic of the hidden utopian impulse accompanying political thought.

The Boxwood Hedge: The Garden and Imagination Within Business-as-Usual

Before turning to the material imagination and its utopian potential as an aesthetic form of emancipation, it is useful to zoom-out from Hamburger Bahnhof and situate its garden within a broader societal landscape marked by ecological exhaustion, infospheric acceleration, and eroding democratic institutions. These crises can be understood as intertwined effects of the neoliberal imperative of perpetual activation (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005): a regime of constant responsiveness which, on a psycho-emotional level, has installed a paradoxically static state of busyness that absorbs energy and attention while foreclosing the temporal, political, and imaginative space required for a structural change of the status quo. Bojana Kunst (2015) transposes this diagnosis to the field of artistic labour, showing how the same imperatives of activation and productivity engulf contemporary artistic practice. Here, the demand for flexibility and self-mobilization is inseparable from the production of subjectivity itself. Within this context, she argues that practices of withdrawal and laziness may function as genuinely political gestures, insofar as they interrupt the order of compulsory activity and counter the forms of pseudo-activity that sustain it (Kunst 2015, 7, 58). The persistence of continuous activity thereby characterizes an economic condition reproduced at the level of subjectivity through deeper ideological and affective processes. Alenka Zupančič (2024) theorizes this psychodynamic of Western societies as one of disavowal: a condition in which both individuals and society know what is going wrong, yet act as if nothing can be done. Disavowal names an ideological and psychoanalytic mechanism, a perverse form of reason, that allows facts and evidence to be fully acknowledged while simultaneously neutralizing their demand for radical changes in life and behaviour.⁵ Serving as an intellectual basis for

⁵ 'Perverse disavowal is [...] an individual mass phenomenon. It is the pinnacle of individuality, of individualism, however widespread and in this sense "universal"' (Zupančič

both conspiracy thinking and mainstream ‘business-as-usual’ attitudes, disavowal – as a functional mode of social reproduction rather than an individual failure of awareness – maintains capitalist structures precisely by acknowledging their destructiveness. The result, Zupančič argues, is a political and existential vacuum sustained by immediacy, also one of the defining features of perpetual activation. Drawing on Anna Kornbluh’s (2023) identification of immediacy as the cultural form of late capitalism, Zupančič describes it as particularly dangerous insofar as it has ‘permeated all forms of the social and hence has effectively dismantled the social as a form’ (Zupančič 2024, 126).

Alberto Toscano (2023, x) invokes the Gramscian concept of the *interregnum* to similarly characterize our era as one of stagnation: a period marked by economic, ecological, cultural, and psychological ‘morbid symptoms,’ in which the old world of neoliberal capitalism is dying while the new cannot yet be born. In such a condition, the very concept of the future becomes trapped within economic imperatives of growth and expansion and can therefore be said to be cancelled, as Franco ‘Bifo’ Berardi (2011) has argued. Important to my argument is that both Berardi (2011, e.g. 12, 17, 165) and Zupančič (2024, 12), although with different emphasis, identify imagination as a critical faculty essential to the possibility of genuine change through social collectivity. Imagination, crucial to overcome the stagnation of busyness, is likewise fundamental to Bloch’s concept of hope, understood as an anticipatory objective-subjective force operating within material reality.⁶ This anticipatory force is decisive for Bloch’s concept of utopia, which partly appears in the subjunctive, as the potential of what might have been. A surplus of unrealized struggles and unsatisfied longings for emancipation, utopia persists as an implicit knowledge of social dysfunctions, sedimented in everyday experience and expressed in the yearnings of daydreams (Bloch 1996, 149–150). Even ruling ideologies thus contain a utopian surplus: cultural and spiritual traces of the not-yet-realized that exceed, and can ultimately refute, the social realities

2024, 122). Its typical form is summarized in the expression: ‘I know very well, but all the same ...’ (p. 25).

⁶ ‘[H]ope goes out of itself [...] it looks in the world itself for what can help the world; this can be found’ (Bloch 1996, 3, 12). Imagination implies the possibility of engagement, a becoming which is also part of the dynamics of doing. It is productive and belongs to the domain of reality; art, as a material outcome, proves this. Art may thus be understood as ‘a cipher of the authentic’ (p. 219). As noted above, Marcuse (1978, 52) describes art’s creation as ‘the cosmos of hope.’

that produced them. Ideology and its utopian excess grow out of the same historical soil and consequently jointly permeate the conceptual formations of a particular age. Beyond symbols and ideals, Bloch regards art as a privileged site where such still-unfulfilled possibilities become perceptible.⁷ In this sense, utopia – as a figure of multiplicity within what appears unalterably the same – operates less as an abstract objective than as a piercing investigation of the possible in the present. As discussed by Ruth Levitas (2013), it functions methodologically as a critical standard through which existing conditions can be judged and transformed. Anticipating my discussions of the root and Knight's gesture of 'letting be' as a form of negation that resists the compulsions of immediacy and control, Fredric Jameson's definition of utopia as a 'representational mediation of radical difference' is instructive (Jameson 2005, xii). As Zupančič likewise argues, loosening the grip of disavowal requires reintroducing negativity – interruptions that reopen difference – into the regime of immediacy (Zupančič 2024, 126).

In this sense, utopia – as a critical mode of world-making perception – bears a close affinity to the garden that, both as a figure, a place, and a practice, mediates temporal experiences of growth such as delay, hold, duration, and spontaneity. Situated between art and nature, conscious design and wild contingency, the actual and the possible, the garden both articulates and unsettles fundamental distinctions. Between inside and outside, the now-here and the not-yet-nowhere, it epitomizes an ambiguous space in which ineffable dimensions of the present can emerge. An emblematic example of this dynamic is found in Leibniz, who turns to the garden to demonstrate the hidden inner richness of things. In its boundlessness combined with openness toward the endless, Leibniz's garden becomes a figure for the infinite differentiation of matter.⁸ Read through this

⁷ '[E]very great work of art, besides its manifest essence, is also carried towards a *latency of its coming side*, that is: towards the contents of a future which had not yet appeared in its time, in fact ultimately towards the contents of an as yet unknown final state' (Bloch 1996, 98). See also Bloch (1988, 37): '[I]deological *surplus arises according to the Utopian function in the formation of ideology and above this ideology*. Thus, great art or great philosophy is not only its time manifested in images and ideas, but it is also *the journey of its time and the concerns of its time if it is anything at all*, manifested in images and ideas. From this vantage point, it is new for its time. From the vantage point of all times, it is that which is not yet fulfilled.'

⁸ 'Each portion of matter may be conceived as like a garden full of plants and like a pond full of fishes. But each branch of every plant, each member of every animal, each drop of

lens of delimitation and unrealized potential, the analogy between utopia and the garden leads back to the aesthetic workings of material imagination in Bachelard: a receptive and non-automated imagination that resists perceptual habits reducing reality to functional and measurable forms, and instead reopens experience to ambiguity, potentiality, and becoming. The overgrown brushwood within the static hedge in *The Right to Be Lazy* materializes laziness as a seedbed of negation of such forms as given. As Lafargue already noted, it is only in laziness – out of which ‘sentiments of pride and independence’ arise – that ideas and forms of culture opposing the current order’s perverted modes of enjoyment, such as overconsumption, can take root (Lafargue 1883, Chapt. 2). The next section demonstrates the literal force of Lafargue’s claim that the time released when humans are able to pursue their capacities for their own sake, rather than as instruments of production, enables the old earth to ‘feel a new universe leaping within her’ (p. 56). This phrase resonates with particular intensity in Knight’s garden installation, as it forges a connection between our dystopian present, the utopian power of material imagination, and the spontaneity of weeds.

The Prepositions of the Imagination of Dark Earth: Undoing Perception and Lazy Duration

Adopting a grassroots perspective on Knight’s work, I turn to the narrative claims that *The Right to Be Lazy* assigns to the materiality of the earth’s soil itself. Through the concept of material imagination, the soil emerges as both a site of repose and a site of potential formation. Coined in Bachelard’s writings on the origins of dreams and imagination in the four elements and their compounds (Bachelard 1968; 1983; 1988; 2002; 2011), the concept of material imagination encompasses an elementary experience in the most original sense and refers to a multitude of relations between mind and world. It denotes the imagination’s dreams about matter itself as well as the crucial role that the inherent properties of fire, water, air, and earth play for the imagination more generally – shaping internal figurative worlds together with their materialisations in literature and art. Material imagination has an antagonistic counterpoint and a collaborative partner in the so-called formal imagination. While the latter is stimulated by the new and amused by the rational compositions related to variation and surprise, the former connects – often through uncon-

its liquid parts is also some such garden or pond’ (Leibniz 1898, §67, 256).

scious associations – with the eternal and original (Bachelard 1983, 1).⁹ Even the most fluid dream, Bachelard argues, carries within it ‘elements that are stable, dense, slow, and fertile’ (p. 2) – a kind of material weight or force that, next to its formal components, must be acknowledged if an artwork is to emerge. Material imagination gives rise to forms that are always already ‘internal.’¹⁰ The creation of an artwork is dependent on dreams finding their matter – a process that substantializes an ‘interest’ and thus allows dreams to enter into ‘the realm of values’ (p. 3).¹¹

Dreams and images of inner reality likewise originate in the surrounding matter – both imagined and perceived – rather than in discrete objects.¹² One can only dream deeply with matter, since its images transcend the perception of immediately recognizable objects by issuing an insistent call to their deconstruction. This key characteristic enables material imagery to disintegrate objects fixed and differentiated by, for example, their visual features or established conceptual meanings. As Bachelard exemplifies with a brief meditation on Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando*, a horse and an oak appear diverse and unrelated when considered formally or logically – that is, according to their objective classification as species or their respective roles within human productive activity (Bachelard 2002, 52; 2011, 233). Viewed elementally, however, they are united by their shared power over the material imagination. Their connection through the material image of hardness, in turn, sustains the expansion of a constellation of further images that ‘no logician could find legitimate’ (Bachelard 2002, 52). Where logical sequence requires acceptance of an object’s function and meaning within a given system, material imagination opens the possibility of undoing – or transcending – such ordered perception (of objects).

It is in this context that Bachelard (2002, 2) refutes what he calls a ‘cul-

⁹ The contrasts in movement and transformative force between formal and material imagination is exemplified by the difference between the blossoming of spring and the cycles of the seasons.

¹⁰ The very process of material imagination is described in earthy terms: ‘In the depths of matter there grows an obscure vegetation; black flowers bloom in matter’s darkness. They already possess a velvety touch, a formula for perfume’ (Bachelard 1983, 1–2).

¹¹ A common misconception, Bachelard notes, is to associate dreams primarily with a state of relaxation, thereby overlooking those dreams of focused action that he calls ‘dreams of will’ (Bachelard 2002, 3).

¹² ‘It is when we dream of this interiority that we dream of the repose of being, of a deep-rooted repose, a repose that has *intensity*’ (Bachelard 2011, 3).

ture of realism,' which insists on 'the primacy of the real' and the imperative to 'see well.' Against this doctrine, he affirms the foundational importance of the creative (productive) imagination, arguing that imagined images are not mere reproductions of perception but constitute a distinct psychological category. The ability to recall or recombine past perceptions, often called 'reiterative imagination' should, he claims, be relocated to the domains of perception and memory, not treated as true imagination. Conversely, material imagination operates according to an 'unreality principle,' which is as psychologically powerful as the reality principle that governs social adaptation. This unreality principle enables the invention of new images by loosening imagination from the recall of past sensory data – that is, from perceiving objects as already determined by fixed meanings. In doing so, it opens modes of experience that are not bound to empirical verification.¹³ Thus, for Bachelard, the essence of imagination proper is productive: it creates worlds rather than reproducing them. From this perspective, dreaming is not escapism but a fundamental mode of thought that resists the dominance of the given and expands the horizon of what can be conceived and felt.¹⁴ Before the spectacle of the elements, Bachelard (2002, 1) declares, 'the reverie which seeks substance beneath ephemeral appearance is in no way obstructed by reality.'¹⁵

The generative and deconstructive capacity of material imagination and the projecting nature of its images is central for understanding how Knight's work promotes laziness as a condition of utopian, radical negativity: a mode of critical suspension that reactivates matter and reality

¹³ In this sense, Bachelard's notion of an unreality principle is structurally – if perhaps unexpectedly – similar to the principle of estrangement that, according to Marcuse, characterizes the world of art. It is only through this estrangement, inherent in art's contradiction of given social relations, that art can communicate truths that are not expressible in any other language (Marcuse 1978, 10). There is thus, Marcuse writes, 'a subversion of experience proper to art' that entails 'the rebellion against the established reality principle' (p. 39).

¹⁴ 'The *real cause of the flow of images* is, in fact, the *imagined cause*. I would like to make use here of the duality of functions referred to in some of my previous books and say that the *function of the unreal* is the function that truly dynamizes the psyche, while the *function of the real* serves to halt, inhibit, and *reduce* images so as to give them the sole value of a sign' (Bachelard 2011, 60).

¹⁵ And further: 'Only by redoubling our attention may we then discover the predictive nature of images, the way that an image may *precede* perception, initiating an adventure in perception' (Bachelard 2002, 3).

as reservoirs of unrealized possibility. In *The Right to Be Lazy*, the anarchic mash-up of roots, seeds, and stems emphasizes the soil's potentiality – what might grow next spring, what will survive the winter – thereby foregrounding earth as the exemplary element of the material imagination's critical-productive capacity. Insofar as it opens new perspectives of the will, Bachelard (2002, 37–38) highlights the earth's soil as an oneiric archetype of worldbuilding force. Material imagination brings forth images that add abundance and opulence to what formal imagination would otherwise reduce to the mere perception of objects. By loosening the grip of rational, object-oriented perception, this transcendence constitutes a vital aspect of utopian thought, understood in line with Bloch's conception of hope as an anticipatory force immanent to the present and oriented toward the not-yet (Bloch 1996, e.g. 113). In earth, past and future segments coexist, opening experience to the subjunctive mode – as the persistence of what might have been and what could still become. It is from within this layered temporality that utopian consciousness emerges as a sensibility for noticing and responding to latent directions within the present, through which difference and alternative forms of life may begin to take shape (Paris 2025, 48–49).

By centring the earth's soil – and material imagination itself – as a resource for multiplicity and difference within a prevailing homogenous order, Knight's artistic gesture materially and descriptively reiterates what Rahel Jaeggi (2018) identifies as the paradox at the heart of critical theory: how to think from within a form of life while resisting it, or how to articulate critique from the very conditions that sustain it. This paradox of moving *against* and *in* capitalism finds a parallel in what Bachelard calls the earth's prepositions – *against* and *in* – which organize his two volumes on the imagination of the earth into a diptych of activity and repose.¹⁶ *Earth and the Reveries of Will* (Bachelard 2002) investigates an imagination marked by the preposition *against*: an active engagement with matter that invites processing, kneading, extracting, and constructing.¹⁷ Here, earth appears as the partner of the will, defined by resistance within a dialectic of hard and soft – mud as the original substance, and the 'cogito of

¹⁶ 'My first study of earthen imagination, marked as it was by the preposition *against*, must therefore now be supplemented by a study of images that are marked by the preposition *in*' (Bachelard 2011, 2).

¹⁷ 'The resistant world lifts us out of our static reality, beyond ourselves [...] representing both aid and obstacle' (Bachelard 2002, 14).

kneading' as the paradigm of formative action (Bachelard 2002, 7–8, 59). By contrast, *Earth and the Reveries of Repose* (Bachelard 2011) turns to an imagination marked by the preposition *in*: dream-flows of involution and a desire to see the invisible that return us to shelter, depth, and intimacy, fostering images of refuge and withdrawal.

Simultaneously resistance and refuge, aid and obstacle, the earth thus awakens both an 'activist imagination' – a will that, while dreaming, gives a future to its actions (Bachelard 2011, 1) – and an imagination of repose and withdrawal that suspends action instrumental to the present order. It is this doubleness of earthly matter that allows the negation enacted by *The Right to Be Lazy* to exceed a mere reiteration of Lafargue's demand for reduced working hours. Rather than symbolically illustrating a critique of work ideology – the specific form of life that is wage labour – by returning the gardeners their time, Knight's intervention refracts Lafargue's programmatic critique to encompass a meta-critique of the very conditions and limits of critique under the present form of life (Jaeggi 2018, xii). As a presentation rather than a representation, materializing both the prepositions of the earth's imagination and the dilemma of critical theory itself, *The Right to Be Lazy* opens the indefinite time of laziness as a space of possibility. Laziness thus names a duration;¹⁸ a radical mode of attention grounded in curiosity through which imagination is loosened from instrumental ends and the utopian not-yet can be sensed.

The Literal Radicalism of Weed Utopia

Before concluding with a brief note on art and laziness, I turn to weeds, which, in contrast to the cultivated plantings elsewhere in the Hamburger Bahnhof garden, occupy the roundabout. Across history, plants of this ever-changing assemblage have repeatedly shifted status – from medicinal herb to food source to unwanted outlaw. Species found in the roundabout, such as goldenrod, tree of heaven and dandelion,¹⁹ have continu-

¹⁸ In his essay on how Marcel Duchamp's (1887–1968) artistic practice enacts an active refusal of labour, authorship, and productivity – anticipating contemporary forms of cognitive capitalism while simultaneously resisting their capture – Maurizio Lazzarato (2014, 17) describes lazy action as an exploration of the present as 'duration, possibility, and event'. Understood in this way, lazy duration withdraws from uniform, one-directional clock time and instead opens a temporality that – like the root – extends in more than one direction at once.

¹⁹ A complete inventory identifying all the plants growing in the roundabout is planned by the museum for spring 2026.

ally crossed the thin boundary between cultivation and the wild, both materially and conceptually. As nature writer Richard Mabey (2012, 5) notes: ‘The definition *is* the weed’s cultural story.’ Weeds are thus defined not by essence but by situation, since any plant can become flora non grata once it obstructs a desired plan. Weediness is a trait that emerges from the interplay between a plant’s biological disposition and its capacity for opportunistic adaptation (p. 267). Thriving where root systems are disturbed and long-established chemical balances disrupted, weeds flourish alongside human activity, evolving symbiotically with patterns of settlement, migration, and cultivation (p. 12).²⁰ Although habitually perceived foremost as invaders, weeds carry an ancestral presence as part of the deep ecological heritage of a place, over which buildings and formal plantings are comparatively ephemeral. At once dependent on human disturbance of nature and stubbornly subversive of imposed order (p. 20), they occupy an ambiguous position: biologically resilient, ecologically reparative, and resistant to enclosure.

As climate change and war displace plants from their ecological comfort zones, weeds increasingly occupy the resulting botanical vacuum. Their spread reflects the economic, cultural, and environmental histories sedimented in the soil. Able to stabilize shattered ground and to persist in the most hostile environments – cracks in walls, infrastructural margins, battlefields, and bombed cities – weeds have often assumed a leading role in fictions of sudden social collapse. Their innate disposition to be ‘in the wrong place,’ favouring crossroads of circulation and transport routes, and other intensely traversed sites, renders them biological figures of non-compliance and endurance. As emblems of contingency, mobility, and latent potentiality, the tendency to weediness in a plant is materially analogous to both Bachelard’s ‘dreams of will’ and Bloch’s day-dreams of utopian consciousness, where imagination is understood as a predicative, future-oriented force immanent to matter. Bound to specific conditions yet prone to exceed them, weeds constitute a botanical surplus that disrupts the logic of optimized habitats. In a manner akin to Bachelard’s unreality principle, they break from the primacy of the real, opening possibilities of growth that arise within, yet are not confined by, the given. Resonating with Bloch’s utopian surplus of a not-yet, they are non-synchronous: emerging from concrete historical situations while simultaneously estranging what appears natural or inevitable. Survivors

²⁰ A trait reflected in the German word *Beikraut*, synonym for *Unkraut*.

of future turmoil, they insist on interruption and persistence, opening cracks in ‘common sense’ through which the possibility of things being otherwise is sustained. In this sense, the weed – *Unkraut*, a champion of no-place – materializes negation within the present.

For Bloch (1996, e.g. 12), hope is not a subjective attitude but, as a principle, a real, latent force embedded in concrete material tendencies. The concrete, accordingly, is not immediate givenness but the outcome of a process that unites opposites while remaining open to futurity; the abstract, by contrast, is that which has been severed from process (e.g. pp. 145–146, 157, 197). Derived from *concretus* – from *con-crescere*, to grow together – the concrete names an ongoing movement of condensation and becoming, a logic enacted with particular clarity by weedy growth. Echoing Bachelard’s account of the root as growing simultaneously downward and upward – thereby uniting earth and air, the real and the ideal, material persistence and anticipatory drive – utopian consciousness oscillates between what Bloch calls its two poles: the dark moment and open adequacy (p. 315), that is, a deep immersion in the contradictions of the present coupled with an orientation toward real possibilities of alternative forms of life. By uniting the tacit knowledge of dreaming (air) with objective analysis of the social (earth), concrete utopia exists only in and through its own becoming – it both is and is not yet. Its seeds, scattered throughout everyday life, must be grasped at their roots and radicalized if they are to enter history as transformative forces.

Few plants are as closely associated with their roots as weeds – a fact familiar well beyond farmers and gardeners. This rootedness concentrates the earth’s paradoxical qualities of activity and repose. As Bachelard (2011, 212–213) writes, the root itself is a contradiction made visible: negation ‘brought about by a thing’ itself – a living dead, both pliable and resistant.²¹ ‘Root,’ Bachelard continues, is an inductive concept that dreams in us, a subterranean life felt deep within (pp. 214–215). Through its integrating force and its connotation of ‘upheaval’ it is what enables us to go ‘to the root (*radix*)’ of things.²² The weed condenses this ‘radicality,’ figuring a form of immanent critique of the dominant form of life: a persistence

²¹ ‘The root is always a discovery and is more dreamed than seen. It causes surprise when we discover it, for is it not both rock and hair, a pliable filament and a piece of hard wood? The root provides us with an example of contradictions in things [...] Here, negation is brought about by thing’ (Bachelard 2011, 213).

²² As Toscano (2023, 53) notes, few terms are more ambivalent in political vocabulary than *radicalism*. Marx’s well-known formulation – ‘To be radical is to grasp the root of the

within the present that draws nourishment from what is and what was in order to grow toward what is not yet.

The Art of Laziness – Lazy Art

Previous sections of this essay have shown that the consequence of Knight's lazy gesture of 'letting be' is not stagnant vegetation. Rather, the non-work of allowing weediness to endure renders the actively tended surroundings of conventional gardening as if caught in an eternal stand-still. This vegetal persistence is the chlorophyll manifestation of the released curiosity that opens space for artistic making, critical contemplation, and acts of conscience that Lafargue (1883, 57) invokes in the plea that summarizes his project: 'O Laziness, mother of the arts and noble virtues, be thou the balm of human anguish!'

In Lafargue, laziness negates work as a fundamental element in the grammar of society and counters the imaginative atrophy produced by the work ethic. In Knight's *The Right to Be Lazy*, however, laziness addresses yet another dimension of non-work. It is not only from the perspective of the absent gardener that the installation establishes a sluggish rhythm of duration. For the 'free' visiting viewer – employees on a break, unemployed flâneurs, vacationing tourists, and others – the plot's return to cyclical time and submission to the whims of weather induce a slowed mode of perception, attentive to the coexistence of multiple forms of life and temporalities: the interweaving of past and future seasons in rotting leaves and stalks, abandoned and inhabited rat nests, dormant root fragments, budding flowers, buzzing insects, dewdrops, and spider webs. Whereas the surrounding manicured garden beds offer instant visual legibility, the plot resists the gratification of such an overview. Here, the gaze is compelled to wander, linger, and burrow, binding imagina-

matter. But, for man, the root is man himself' (Marx n.d.; first published in 1844) – already signals this ambiguity, which resonates with Bachelard's (2011, 213) account of the root as a figure of double directionality: 'For the root, the darkest earth [is also] a mirror that gives every aerial reality its double in an image beneath the earth.' Read together with Marx's (n.d.) claim that '[i]t is not enough for thought to strive for realization, reality must itself strive towards thought,' radical critique appears as a reciprocal movement between material conditions and thought. In this sense – and here it is clear how closely Bloch (1996, 5) follows Marx whose 'work marks the turning-point in the process of concrete venturing beyond becoming conscious' – the realization of utopia is not the application of an external ideal but the articulation of contradictions immanent to reality itself: its seeds must already be present in material and social relations, since it is through these contradictions that reality generates the ideas and forces capable of transforming it.

tion to the materiality of soil and earth. By disrupting the predictability of cultivated form, the plot's dense maze of decomposition and generation makes palpable what, following Bachelard, could be called the 'fermenting'²³ potential of the present to harbour and initiate imagination's utopian possibilities – its projective, world-forming capacity.

Through its spontaneous growth, the circular flower bed becomes an ideal site for practicing the lazy art of observation, one that combines indefinite duration with precise attention. This mode of lingering, open-ended attention reflects the workings of the material imagination as it reorients perception away from its reductive, automated habits of functionalism, instead reopening experience to the ambiguity of new, logically 'illegitimate' connections between images. Here, the soil emerges not merely as a mute backdrop for vegetal life but as a source of unforeseen images and dreams oscillating between activity and suspension, resistance and refuge. The lazy temporality of observation is also analogous to utopian consciousness in Bloch, which – by rejecting the metaphysical dichotomies of real and ideal, present and future – functions as a regulative awareness of an ideal nowhere that nonetheless exists concretely within the present. The gardener's dictum of inaction, which constitutes the negative intervention of the installation, grants life and the living their own time. In this respect, the weed utopia enacted by Knight's presentation stands in contrast both to the future-oriented acceleration associated with modernism and to contemporary culture's fixation on immediacy, whose static motto of 'living for the day' exemplifies a form of hope subsumed under economic reductionism in consumer capitalism. Giving room to more and other lives, *The Right to Be Lazy* invites a digging into the present form of life in order to inquire into its latent potential for other forms of living. Thereby it also affirms that life continues through change, and that beyond the routines of work-oriented life lies an opening onto another everyday.

While Lafargue understood technology as the historical facilitator of laziness, Knight's ecological implementation of his thesis instead frames laziness as a Luddite refusal of the technological regimes that today structure our all-encompassing exploitation.²⁴ Laziness thus emerges as a form

²³ 'Decomposition and fermentation, two distinctly different *material temporalities*, work matter dialectically like systole and diastole work the heart' (Bachelard 2002, 67).

²⁴ See, for example, Shoshana Zuboff (2019) on surveillance capitalism as a new economic order in which tech companies claim human experience as free raw material for data

of immanent negativity: a suspension of instrumental action that disrupts the flows of everyday practices that sustain the present order, and in doing so, exercises a critique of the material conditions for critique itself. In addition, Knight's own artistic laziness – very much in a Duchampian manner – thwarts any stable producer identity and points toward a re-conversion of subjectivity and its ability to act (Lazzarato 2014, 7); as an ethical-political principle concentrated in process, laziness – as argued also by Kunst (2015, 192) – opens space for new ways of living time (including for the artist).²⁵

extraction, prediction, and behavioural modification. See also Byung-Chul Han (2017) on how neoliberal technologies produce self-exploitation rather than repression. Particularly resonant with the concept of laziness, see Jonathan Crary (2013) on how digital capitalism erodes non-productive time – sleep, rest, and reverie.

²⁵ By privileging laziness and play through strategies such as the readymade – identified by Lazzarato (2014, 19) as a 'lazy technique' insofar as it requires 'no virtuosity, no special know-how, no productive activity, and no manual labour' – Duchamp suspended artistic intention and undermined the demand that subjectivity be continuously creative and productive. Against the contemporary figure of the artist as neoliberal 'human capital,' whose apparent freedom remains bound to entrepreneurial apparatuses of power (p. 6), Duchamp's laziness opens a temporal space of non-work, duration, and potentiality. For Lazzarato, this makes Duchamp's practice a model of immanent political resistance, in which laziness operates as an ethical-political principle capable of reconfiguring how life and time are lived beyond capitalist value production – a description highly relevant to Knight's garden. In this sense, Knight's 'lazy technique' also resonates conceptually with Mladen Stilinović's *The Artist at Work* (1978), a photographic series depicting the artist asleep in bed and presenting this state as the act of 'working.' By equating sleep and inactivity with artistic labour, Stilinović ironizes both capitalist and socialist representations of work and workers, proposing laziness as a political and aesthetic refusal of productivity, discipline, and the ideological demands placed on the artist. For a reflection on entropy as an aesthetic principle of social critique in Stilinović's practice – literally applicable to Knight's work between October and March – see Groys (2014). Stilinović further plays a decisive role in Kunst's development of laziness as a critical response within her broader analysis of artistic labour under contemporary capitalism. She argues that contemporary artistic work – especially in performance – is structurally aligned with post-Fordist capitalism, since both rely on the production of subjectivity, sociality, and flexibility (Kunst 2015, 13, 42, 176, 191). This produces a paradox: artists are embedded in capitalist modes of value production, yet simultaneously seek to create critical or political art (p. 1). Drawing on Stilinović's (2011) manifesto 'In Praise of Laziness' (first published 1993), Kunst (2015, 183) interprets laziness as a strategy for negotiating this contradiction, in which 'mistakes, minimum effort, coincidence, duration, passivity' function as forms of resistance within work itself. 'Doing less,' she argues, can operate as a radical gesture that interrupts the demand for constant activity and value production, shifting artistic work away from the perfection of production toward life itself (p. 192). By designating an excess linked to unrealized potentiality, laziness in Kunst can be read as a utopian kernel in accordance

While its uselessness cannot be fully conceptualized within any ideological system, laziness is nevertheless essential. In this respect, it bears a certain affinity with the slothiness of the aesthetic itself in its Kantian articulation – namely, the definition of art as a doing without effecting²⁶ and of aesthetic pleasure as a protracted lingering arising from the free play of understanding and imagination which ‘strengthens and reproduces itself’ (Kant 2000, §12, 107). Neither dependent on knowledge nor technique, laziness and art alike function as both abilities and disabilities.²⁷ In line with Giorgio Agamben’s (1999, 201) characterization of art as potentiality conserved and preserved in actuality, another aspect of the reciprocity between laziness and art thus emerges: what exists potentially does so only in relation to its own incapacity, and it is precisely through this relation that potentiality becomes ability or power (p. 184).²⁸

To summarize, *The Right to Be Lazy* functions as a zone of a re-constitutive presence of utopian traces (Bloch 1996, 189) – a zone of imaginative intensity concentrating the process of utopian imagination as suspended expectancy within the sensuous experience of materiality. Comprising a cross-section of Berlin’s urban commons, the flora in the circular planting further instantiates hope as a social common, beyond its privatized form of individual liberation. I take this to be what Kierkegaard has in mind when praising laziness as the devil’s pillow:²⁹ its function as a generative space for imagination and curiosity that opposes the, to speak with Zupančič, ‘individual mass phenomenon’ of the ethically numb-

with the understanding of utopia in this essay: it reconfigures the relationship between art, work, and life by defying late capitalist demands for constant visibility and efficiency, thereby opening up alternative forms of living beyond exploitation (p. 178). However, as argued by Josefine Wikström (2016), this claim introduces a tension in Kunst’s argument: while she repeatedly maintains that artistic work lies at the centre of capitalist value production (e.g. Kunst 2015, 176), her account of laziness as a site of relative freedom presupposes that artistic labour is not fully subsumed in the same way as other forms of labour. The critical potential attributed to laziness thus appears to depend precisely on the partial autonomy that her broader diagnosis tends to understate.

²⁶ ‘Art is distinguished from **nature** as doing (*facere*) is from acting or producing [*Wirken*] in general (*agere*), and the product or consequence of the former is distinguished as a **work** (*opus*) from the latter as an effect [*Wirkung*] (effectus)’ (Kant 2000, §43, 182).

²⁷ ‘Only that which one does not immediately have the skill to do even if one knows it completely belongs to that extent to art’ (Kant 2000, §43, 183).

²⁸ I am indebted to Jonatan Habib Engqvist and Lars-Erik Hjertström Lappalainen for drawing attention to this point (2018).

²⁹ ‘*Otium est pulvinar diaboli*’ (Kierkegaard 1959, 285).

ing and distracting mindless busyness. By introducing a non-immediate mode of experience, its indefinite duration resists the pressure to be constantly useful, efficient, and active. The chorus of leaves of many species rustling gently in the wind thus tell of the subject's capacity – as a shared capacity, one that can only be exercised collectively – to demobilize the demands of ideology and to live differently in the here and now of the communal.

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Spatialities of the Otherwise: Cities, Lands, and Territories Vaster than Empires in Feminist Political Utopias

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Abstract. This paper explores the intersections between feminist utopian writing and feminist political philosophy, foregrounding space as a constitutive dimension of feminist possibility. Drawing on relational ontologies, it argues that space is not a neutral material given, but a product of power, narrative, and imagination that both enables and constrains self-determination and intersubjective relations. Moving beyond the dualistic modern subject, the paper traces how feminist thought reframes otherness as interdependence and liminality – a vision embodied by Le Guin’s character Osden in ‘Vaster than Empires and More Slow.’ Through a comparative reading of four literary works – Christine de Pizan’s *La Cité des Dames*, Gilman’s *Herland*, and Le Guin’s *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Dispossessed* – the paper examines how feminist utopias rewrite political and spatial concepts such as map, border, nation, and empire, producing porous, ambiguous, and relational spaces.

Key Words: feminisms, utopia, space, relational ontologies, feminist philosophy

Prostorske dimenzije drugačnosti: mesta, dežele in ozemlja, obsežnejša od imperijev, v feminističnih političnih utopijah

Povzetek. Članek raziskuje presečišča med feminističnim utopičnim pisanjem in feministično politično filozofijo, pri čemer v ospredje postavlja prostor kot konstitutivno dimenzijo feminističnih možnosti. Ob opiranju na relacijske ontologije utemeljuje, da prostor ni nevtralna materialna danost, temveč produkt moči, naracije in domišljije, ki hkrati omogoča in omejuje samoodločbo ter medosebne odnose. S premikom onkraj dualističnega modernega subjekta članek sledi načinu, kako feministična misel redefinira drugost kot soodvisnost in

liminalnost – vizijo, ki jo uteleša lik Osden v delu Ursule K. Le Guin 'Vaster than Empires and More Slow.' Skozi primerjalno branje štirih literarnih del – *La Cité des Dames* (Mesto dam) Christine de Pizan, *Herland* (Njena dežela) Charlotte Perkins Gilman ter *The Left Hand of Darkness* (Leva roka teme) in *The Dispossessed* (Mož praznih rok) Ursule K. Le Guin – članek preučuje, kako feministične utopije na novo izpisujejo politične in prostorske koncepte, kot so zemljevid, meja, narod in imperij, ter pri tem ustvarjajo porozne, ambivalentne in relacijske prostore.

Ključne besede: feminizmi, utopija, prostor, relacijske ontologije, feministična filozofija

Introduction

This text aims to demonstrate the connections between women's utopian imagination and feminist political philosophies, highlighting the role of space in the construction of feminist *otherwise*s. In these pages, space is not understood merely as a material given but as the product of lines of forces, powers, and narratives, feeding on and reproducing imaginaries that guide (and sometimes hinder) possibilities for social interaction and political self-determination. Similarly, the paper follows the feminist definition of politics as something broader than institutions or governments: a plural and shared space of relationships, dialogue, practices, and changes, rooted in the human condition.

The intertwining of politics and imagination occurs not only in action but also within a specific spatial context. Space reveals its political nature in feminist utopias as something alive which acts and contributes to either reproducing or shattering social visions and political ideologies. They do so in a manner opposed to classical utopias, by embracing complexity, avoiding clear-cut dichotomies such as inside/outside, good/bad, us/them, highlighting the ambiguity of utopia itself. In this sense, the paper overlays feminist political-philosophical visions onto literary texts, demonstrating how they convey imaginations that give rise to diverse political frames, symbols, and genealogies, and it fosters a dialogue between feminist political philosophy and symbolic-literary narratives.

What kind of space is the space for the 'ambiguous utopia' rooted in feminist relational ontologies? To answer this question, the text first reinterprets the link between utopia and politics from a feminist perspective, pinpointing its power and its profound ambiguities and contradictions, leading us toward ambiguous utopias, *ustopias*, or *mixtopias*. Drawing on

relational ontologies rather than fixed conceptions of the human, these utopias propose a reconfiguration of the relationship with otherness – a central concern within feminist political thought – that moves beyond the mechanistic and dualistic frameworks of the modern subject. This reframing invites recognition of the other as *liminalien* and opens toward a renewed understanding of the entanglement between bodies and matter. Within this theoretical horizon, Osden, the protagonist of Ursula K. Le Guin's 'Vaster than Empires and More Slow,' emerges as a figuration of this alternative relational mode, embodying feminist conceptualizations of otherness as interdependence and complexity.

This approach is confronted with three levels of spatiality and four feminist literary works: the City, with Christine de Pizan's *La Cité des Dames*, the Land, with Gilman's *Herland*, and finally worlds and planets, with Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Dispossessed*. These works were selected to demonstrate how various levels of spatial organization (city, nation, world) intertwine with political utopias that embody the relational dimension of feminist political ontologies, and what outcomes this connection of non-dichotomous and non-anthropocentric spatiality and relationality produces. The aim is to show how feminist utopias intertwine with the spatial dimension in a unique way, rewriting the meaning of terms such as map, nation, border, and empire. The spaces of feminist utopias are open, even when separated; they are spaces of unpacified alliances, body-territories. They are spaces 'vaster than the empire,' than its colonizing, conquering mentality.

Feminist Imagination and Ambiguous Utopias

Imagination can be intended as a political act: a radical gesture opening up to the *otherwise*, a transcendence of what is given, fuelling that desire for community and for social relationships that politics requires. Using imagination – far from being an escape from reality – focuses the gaze on society, its hierarchies and power structures. Introducing *The Left Hand of Darkness* in 1976, Ursula K. Le Guin describes the purpose and goal of science fiction storytelling, explaining that science fiction writers are expected to employ a scientific method and outcomes to draw conclusions about the future, often involving the extinction of human freedom or life itself, based on elements of our present. But extrapolation is not the only method available. The aim cannot and must not be to predict the future, but rather to describe our reality, our present world. And, as we shall see, it *must* not prescribe. At the same time, we can consider utopias as politi-

cal because they act as implicit critiques of the civilisations in which they arise (Mumford 1922) and represent an attempt to explore the social possibilities that political and social institutions overlook or suppress. They arise from imbalance. At times, the term ‘utopia’ may come to overlap with ‘science fiction’ in this text. These are obviously distinct and specific fields, yet they share a common drive toward imagining what might be *otherwise* and *elsewhere*. And, in the realm of feminist imagination, utopia and science fiction have often intertwined, yet without overlapping. Rather, their encounter has acted as a reagent, revealing limits and contradictions that would otherwise remain hidden or implicit.

Multiple sites of articulation emerge between feminist, transfeminist, and queer movements and the operations of imagination of otherwise worlds, encompassing both utopian and dystopian imaginaries. The mobilisation of the *mythos* and practices of counter-memories constitutes a central epistemic and political strategy within feminist theoretical frameworks devoted to the invention of new figurations of just societies. As Hilary Rose (1994, 228) pointed out, the fundamental link between science fiction and feminism lies in the passionate urgency to imagine a new world, for which we are fighting. In this context, the exchange between feminist theory and fiction has always been deeply bidirectional (Montalti 2025, 195), as the former takes the latter as a support for critical reflection and analysis, sharing themes, methods, and social and political expectations; in this sense, Donna Haraway is maybe the best-known example of the fertility of this union (Montalti 2025, 195; see Haraway 1985).

‘Feminist utopianism [...] has traditionally been a tactic of (radical branches of) feminism to explore theory in and through fiction’ (Sargisson 1996, 4). Adopting a critical view of society, politics, history, philosophy, and science based on feminist issues – such as the difference between power and politics, gender relations, bodies, health, and reproductive rights – feminist imagination pinpoints other ways of experiencing and relating to otherness(es), pointing to a departure from the anthropocentric and phallogocentric perspective. From the ‘eccentric’ positioning of female subjects (de Lauretis 1990), women’s utopian and imaginative writings have focused on a perspective that breaks down the divisions between normal and abnormal, human and machine, male and female, nature and culture, where the boundaries between ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ disappear.

These narratives are instruments of deconstruction but also of alliances and contingent configurations, acting as antidotes to the identitarian and

ideological drifts of political utopia. The feminist approach highlights the contradictions and risks of utopian thinking, especially with regard to its exclusionary and prescriptive tendencies. Classical Utopia can lead to important political contradictions that feminist science fiction and its *ambiguous utopias* (Le Guin 1975) seem to circumvent, since they do not aim to describe perfect, conflict-free, better societies, and do not aspire to them. Classical utopia, in fact, removes conflict from the scene and imagines a harmonious society, which, in the end, turns into violent, despotic, and totalitarian experiences (Tursi 2018). It *prescribes* political structures where each subject becomes a microcell of the social organism, closed off in their own individual privacy (Tursi 2018). Classical Utopia requires remaining isolated from any contact and protected from conquest. Believing in Utopia, realising it, means deciding who and what should find space in the society to come. Drawing a line. Crystallising the human in a given form. Revolutionary political movements and utopian imagination share a challenge that leads them to similar contradictions: creating something new threatens the existing; preserving it leads to the elimination of alternatives, counteroffensives, and counter-revolutions. Thus, political utopias can turn into massacres, genocides, and totalitarian regimes. The utopias of some are the dystopias of others; every utopia closes the field of possibility. ‘To lock out, to lock in, the same act,’ comments Shevek in the first pages of *The Dispossessed* (Le Guin 1975, 9). Utopia is a two-faced, ambiguous concept, like the wall in the opening lines of the same novel: ‘There was a wall [...] Like all walls it was ambiguous, two-faced. What was inside it and what was outside it depended upon which side of it you were on’ (p. 1). It is like the city of Omelas, which Le Guin wrote about in ‘The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas’ in 1973: a perfect city, where everyone is happy, even though they know that this stability and prosperity depends on a child imprisoned in a basement, horribly mistreated.

Le Guin constantly confronts us with the limits of utopia and the costs of utopian action (Misserville 2024, 28), showing how one can only ‘aspire’ to utopia in its characteristics of imperfection and ambiguity. For these reasons, many feminist authors depart from the clear polarization between utopia and dystopia: Ursula Le Guin speaks of *ambiguous utopia*, Margaret Atwood speaks of *ustopia* (‘the imagined perfect society and its opposite,’ because ‘each contains a latent version of the other’ (Atwood 2012, 66)), while others speak of *mixtopia* (Misserville 2020), a concept that aims to transcend the real/imaginary and utopia/dystopia dichotomy

towards the imagination of new discursive practices to be materially implemented in our daily lives (Raso 2024, 561).

Utopia is *an uninhabitable place*, as Le Guin explains in her essay 'A Non-Euclidean View of California as a Cold Place to Be' (1983): 'as soon as we reach it, it ceases to be utopia.' It is a rational endeavour, a project of Reason, which risks turning into a dangerous scenario. 'It seems that the utopian imagination is trapped, like capitalism and industrialism and the human population, in a one-way future consisting only of growth,' she points out (Le Guin 1983). But another kind of utopia is possible: instead of a 'yang utopia' – a bright, dry, clear, strong, decisive, active, aggressive, direct, progressive, creative, expansive, unstoppable, and warm journey – she invites us to think of a 'yin utopia' – dark, wet, weak, yielding, passive, participatory, circular, cyclical, peaceful, nourishing, retracting, folding, and cold (Le Guin 1983); avoiding immutability, crystallization, and the static and self-limiting ideals of utopias; avoiding the absolute rational overcoming of reality, and instead addressing the contradictions of existence. Feminist utopias do not set out detailed plans for a perfect society (Sargisson 1996, 2). Feminist utopias conceive of utopia on new foundations, knowing that if a utopia puts an end to the possibility of change, if it closes, then utopia is the death of politics (p. 3). So, feminist utopia is open-ended and indeterminate (p. 51). Against the desire for a blueprint, feminist utopias are intended as a process, a non-static desire that works to change the present rather than programme a future (p. 52). They are tactics of estrangement, stretching concepts to the limit, anticipating the possibility of radically different 'nows,' operating in the political present, not in a desired future (Sargisson 1996).

Relational Ontologies

Feminist utopias move beyond the idea of a fixed human nature. This idea often appears in the state of nature theories of contractualist philosophers and nourishes philosophical visions of ideal societies. It is rooted in the imposture of the masculine as the universal subject, and creates the illusion that it is possible to achieve good for all, permanently. Human is seen as a cohesive, sovereign subject; rational, dominating passions, bodies, animals, and environments. Feminisms emphasize a relational ontology of embodied subjectivities. They challenge this Western Subject's presumed sovereignty, considering humans as not self-sufficient, formed by complex collectivities, as composite assemblages marked by cohabitation and co-constitution.

In Le Guin's story 'Vaster than Empires and More Slow' (1971), the intergalactic spaceship 'Gum' – 'puppy' in Cetian – sets off to explore new worlds and lands on planet 4470. The scientists who make up almost the entire crew are the prelude to the colonization of that new land. A land to be discovered, studied, and *colonized*. Hard sciences, soft sciences, social sciences, technical sciences. Scientists, engineers, biologists, psychologists. And then there is Osden, neuroatypical, who is capable of connecting with the inscrutable (Ferrante 2019, 160). Osden 'the sensor,' a hyper-empathetic subject. He is not an expert in any discipline, but he feels the emotions of others, is endlessly traversed by the sensations of others. He recognizes the planet as a sentient creature responding to the violence of its colonizers with hostility, making itself inhospitable and dangerous.

Through Osden, the story focuses on the relationship with otherness as interdependence, listening, and connection. In the novel, he chooses to 'let go,' to trust in the relationship with otherness, whereas Harfex, the scientist, with his rational, dichotomous, phallogocentric vision, will try to reduce the Other to himself, to anthropocentric logic, ultimately dying of fear. However, the novel resists a clear-cut dichotomy. Osden is not a one-dimensional figure: he possesses his own idiosyncrasies and feels anger and disgust toward his colleagues. Le Guin consistently avoids crafting wholly 'good' characters, favouring instead ambivalent and ambiguous ones – much as she does with her utopias.

For Harfex, difference is classification, oppression, exploitation of the other; conflict before connection. Bodies do *function* according to logic; they have a purpose, they must be put to work. Osden, on the other hand, sees otherness as the difference that allows us to perceive ourselves, where connection does not become psychologization, manipulation, paternalism: as a non-rational, tactile, mucous bond. On the one hand, we find a dichotomous view of difference, rooted in comparison, categorization, and hierarchization; on the other, interdependence and connection: a situated and embodied dynamic, not irenic, anthropocentric, nor rational, recognizing agency in otherness. Following Harfex, knowledge is organization, classification, possession, and anthropocentric reduction; following Osden, knowledge is intimacy, balance, connection, unassimilability, and mutual contamination. Together with Osden, we explore the possibility of empathy as a form of truth.

Osden critiques anthropocentrism, which even in relating to the Other reduces it to human logic, denying its alterity and agency. Anthropomorphization thus becomes a way of avoiding confrontation with the

other's unassimilability, a dynamic typical of the Western patriarchal symbolic horizon, where women, nature, animals, and the body are constructed as an 'Other' that is functional to and reabsorbed by the Self (Irigaray 1974). His relational experience resonates with feminist theories of human–non-human entanglement (e.g. Haraway, Tsing, Barad), which emphasize complexity, co-creation, and interpenetration in opposition to Enlightenment and capitalist paradigms that position Man above a discursively constructed Nature. These approaches challenge a mechanistic, dualistic worldview – grounded in Cartesian separations of mind and body – in which Nature is domesticated for human and capitalist progress and Man is elevated as an exceptional, rational being detached from the rest of the living world. This posture aims at liberating relationships rather than domination, and to a coming together in horizontal and transversal alliances based on affinity and trust rather than hierarchical lines of class, sex, species, and race (Balzano 2019).

Judith Butler and Adriana Cavarero have both focused on this relational ontology undermining the sovereign subject of modernity mentioned above, replacing it with an open subjectivity, always caught in a relation (Cavarero 2007; 2013; Butler 2004; 2009; 2015). For feminist politics, subjects are embodied. As such, they are relational, exposed to others, to care as well as to violence. They are vulnerable, far from the muscular, superhuman dreams of the modern philosophical subject. The relationship between vulnerability, care, and power, as Osden highlights, can be conflictual and overwhelming. Similarly, resonance is not adherence or incorporation, but a space of connection without synthesis, since difference is a clear space that cannot be resolved (Irigaray 1974; 1984).

Writing about the Other, explains Liana Borghi, implies change, transformation, and the recognition that the other cannot ever be an alien, but is rather a *liminalien* ('liminalieno'): equal and different, similar and dissimilar, with all the dangers that this relationship of recognizing oneself in the other can entail (Borghi 2023, 40). Scientist Laura Tripaldi helps us understand this relationship as an 'interface': a material, hybrid region where interaction with matter is relational rather than controlling, generating open-ended creative potential (Tripaldi 2021). The interface is not a separating line but a thick, dynamic zone in which bodies intermingle without losing their identity, producing unpredictable behaviours and outcomes that cannot be determined in advance. The relationship between bodies and matter is unpredictable, unexpected, deep-rooted, and emotional (Caleo 2021). Encountering, the opposition between Self

and Other disappears, as do hierarchical and identity-based dichotomies. Othernesses meet: their relation is neither control nor passivity. Not a clash for recognition, a struggle based on the Hegelian master-slave dialectic, which feminisms rejected (Lonzi 1970; Rivolta Femminile 1970); rather, it is a relationship of hybridization and mutual redefinition.

Spatialities of the Otherwise: The City of Ladies

Feminist movements have highlighted how our relationship with space, the way we are educated to it, the way we move through it, and the emotions that accompany us in space, are highly political issues (Ahmed 2006; Guillaumin 2016; hooks 1989, 1990, 2009; Young 1980). Space, and urban space in particular, is a place for combining and recombining our relationship with otherness and our definition as social and political subjects. Far from being a purely material dimension or a backdrop for social interactions, the public space is also symbolic, transcending physical boundaries and changing according to each society's self-image. The meaning, the experiences, and even the emotional relationships we establish with it change over time and depending on our social position. The city is the setting of social life and political expression, where power structures, social relations, and exclusions are shaped. At the same time, it is a space for reappropriation and self-determination, making urban space a contested battlefield in which different political visions and social relationships clash.

The centrality of the urban, transcending everyday experience reaches the roots of the political unconscious (Vanolo 2024, xv). Imagining different types of cities is a way of imagining different types of societies: more or less just. This is why utopian and science fiction traditions are often linked to imagined cities or places (p. xv). And this is why, of course, spatiality also plays a central role in feminist imaginations. Let us remember that the term Utopia takes us to two different destinations: *eu-topia*, the good place, but also *ou-topia*, no place. A place that does not exist, yet to come, yet to be realized. An unresolved, never-ending spatiality that comes into tension with social processes and subjects. The ways and senses of this reshaping of space are often intertwined with the rewriting of power relations and new interspecies and interstellar alliances.

In 1405, Christine de Pizan (2011) imagined a city of women, *La Cité des dames*. Tired of the misogyny and stereotypes that weigh on the experience of female subjects, Pizan wrote a new history of women, claiming female authority through the construction of a city: a space for herself

and others, a space of freedom. In doing so, she developed a new genealogy in which all women could see themselves reflected, regardless of their social background, creating a community of women who supported and determined themselves. As for Virginia Woolf a woman's freedom goes hand in hand with the possibility of a 'room of one's own,' for de Pizan, women's freedom comes from having a space all to themselves, but in a choral and political dimension, such as that of a shared city.

From its foundations to its towers, the city is conceived as a new space, entirely feminine. The ladies, noble not by birth but by spirit, form an ideal community that is organized, free, autonomous, and eternal. The response to female subordination lies in imagining and building a city where genealogies can emerge and where women – both present and future – can fully exist and flourish. The city is not only an archive of feminine memory but also a practical proposal for a community, for a future of female vindication (Bonu 2021). Christine de Pizan's urban utopia identifies coexistence among women and the construction of a community as the answer to injustice and establishes a possibility of existence where there was silence (Bonu 2021). So the city – the public space *par excellence*, the space where politics, community, and the world are made – is contrasted with the spaces to which women are destined, such as the home and the convent. For this reason, the shift in claiming a genealogy of women through the construction of an ideal city allows de Pizan to achieve a double subversion: of historiographical and literary silence, on one side, and of the city as a male prerogative on the other (Bonu 2021). The founding act of the city is writing (Caraffi 2003, 23). With this architectural metaphor, de Pizan declares that her writing is organized with the complexity and rationality of an architectural project, thus appropriating a traditionally masculine language (p. 23). The architecture of the city presupposes rationality, order, measure, and proportion, which contrasts with the misogynistic image of the feminine as an intricate labyrinth (p. 24). The hoe of intelligence digs the ditch, clears the ground of dirty, black, and coarse stones (pp. I, VIII), which are the prejudices and clichés against women. Then, she mixes mortar and ink from her inkwell (pp. I, II) and lays shiny, living stones at the foundations of the city. Reason, Rectitude, and Freedom guide her; the outstanding women of history become its gates and railings, bastions protecting the city from violence and misogyny.

The City of Ladies is a fortified city, typical of the medieval landscape, separated from a chaotic and brutal world, a refuge and protection. It is

a place of civilization and alliance between women, a space for transformation and self-determination. In the City, women transform a savage and beastly world into a civilized and civic space (Caraffi 2003, 26). Here, women can be safe from violence, a theme to which the work devotes numerous passages. This should not, however, be understood as implying that de Pizan's utopia is closed or static; rather, it can be seen as separate, in the sense articulated by *feminist separatism*: as the choice – whether tactical or structural – to create spaces and practices separate from men and patriarchal institutions in order to build autonomy, agency and collective power outside male control. This separation is contingent, not oppositional or exclusionary.

The City is perfect, eternal, and unparalleled in beauty (pp. i, iv). It will never decay, and no one can ever be expelled from it. Within it, there is no patriarchy, no violence, no injustice. It is divine in its nature, which is why its peace will never be disturbed.

The Land. *Herland*

Expanding the focus from the city to the nation, we encounter *Herland* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1979, first published in 1915). In her utopian novel, Gilman imagines a society composed exclusively of women, reproducing by parthenogenesis and developing in total isolation from the rest of the world. The arrival of three men – a doctor, a wealthy tycoon, and a sociologist – from outside serves as a narrative dispositif to compare Western patriarchal assumptions with an alternative social order. The community of Herland is, in fact, organized according to principles of rationality, cooperation, scientific education, and motherhood as a central social function.

Social life in Herland is communal. There is no livestock or exploitation of natural resources, thanks to rigorous planning (an expression of Gilman's positivism and her belief in rationalization); there is no slavery (because slaves died out long ago), no poverty, no squalor, and no private property; the dichotomy between public and private does not exist; motherhood and family do not coincide, nor do motherhood and education. The women of Herland do not know the hierarchy of division of labour. Everyone does everything. Education, the true art of Herland, is careful to encourage the slightest tendency toward diversity and improvement. The community is caught up in continuous progress.

Herland is structured around the metaphor of the beehive or anthill, envisioning society as a collective project in which the individual is subor-

minated to the common good. Within this framework, the dominant values of Gilman's socio-cultural context – such as private property, individual freedom, and personal self-realization – are absent. Instead, Herland's women conceive the present as a shared resource to be preserved and improved for future generations (Scacchi 2011, xxxv1). The narratives brought by the three male visitors further underscore this contrast: the violence characterizing their world, particularly practices such as abortion and infanticide, provokes bewilderment and moral outrage among the women of Herland, for whom such acts are inconceivable in a society grounded in female control over reproduction. What amazes visitors, even more than the organization of social life, is the appearance of the inhabitants, which is not modelled on male desire. In Herland, there are middle-aged women, girls, and elderly women. The male fantasy (embodied by Terry, the tycoon) of a country of only women, all beautiful maidens of marriageable age to be possessed, is frustrated. Herland frees women from 'femininity' as produced by the male gaze and sexualisation; this produces new emotional geographies: there is no jealousy, envy, or negative feelings triggered by patriarchy and living in relation to men. They have developed the ability to control their fertility through their own desire.

Herland is a society centred on daughters and the legacy of the world, in terms of knowledge and happiness; motherhood is not a mere reproductive instinct and is understood as the conscious (and collective, since there is not just one mother, but rather co-mothers) creation of a person. Within this communal redefinition of motherhood, maternal identity is stripped of its oppressive, suffocating, and individualizing connotations, and genealogies cease to be proprietary. This vision resonates with feminist reflections on kinship and the mother–daughter relationship, as articulated, e.g., by bell hooks in *Communion* (2002) and Luce Irigaray in *Éthique de la différence sexuelle* (1984). In a reappropriation and reinterpretation of that patriarchal imagery which, since the Greek *polis*, has linked motherhood to the sole 'civic' duty of women (Loraux 2008), 'Ma-Land' as Terry calls it at the end of the book, proposes a vision in which republican motherhood engages in politics and citizenship in an active, conscious, and public manner.

Herland is guided by cooperation rather than social Darwinism (so popular in Gilman's day), authoritarianism, or military discipline. The dedication to the nation is rooted not in patriotism, but in sisterhood and a deep connection to the land, which is unspoiled and flourishing;

rather than exploiting and impoverishing it, the women have made it increasingly prosperous. Agnieszka Hensoldt (2022) has highlighted how Gilman's utopia emphasizes a new way of relating to the land, the environment, and the non-human, in a non-extractive approach that focuses on cooperation and coexistence rather than domination and enslavement of natural 'resources.' This way of looking at otherness and the environment goes hand in hand with a new way of understanding society and motherhood. Whereas the society from which the visitors come is organized according to patriarchal values and modes, that of Herland reflects the values of idealized motherhood. Interconnection, cooperation, responsibility, and care oppose the individualism and anthropocentrism of patriarchal societies: not by virtue of the 'good heart' and good feelings that women are said to possess, but through knowledge (Hensoldt 2022, 244). In a certain sense, Herland dialogues with the idea of the body-territory of indigenous and Amazonian feminist visions (Chiricosta 2024), in which the subject is an expression of their own territory and, in turn, redefines it through their own body, in which the paradigm of appropriation and domination that marks Western modernity is replaced by the idea of interrelation and interdependence.

Unlike many utopian spaces, Herland is not a closed country that rejects foreigners or change. The women of Herland welcome the male protagonists of the story and are intrigued by them. Still, they maintain their position of authority and do not allow themselves to be transformed or subjugated by their gaze. Moreover, Gilman's Utopia is not static since Herland is always striving for the new, for learning; the women are curious, humble, and open towards visitors. In this land, a new civilization, radically better than one based on binary thinking and sexual dimorphism, produces justice and self-determination.

Beyond the Nation, Vaster than Empires

Finally, we return to Ursula K. Le Guin – the same author who once guided us to a dimension 'vaster than the Empire' and who, reflecting on the imaginative process behind the *Earthsea* saga, describes herself not as a world-builder but as an explorer (Le Guin 1973, 7). It is undeniable that for Le Guin, space is a fundamental element of imagination. Her main *topos* is, in a sense, voyage, and especially return: a return that is always more than just coming home, more than a return to the pre-existing. According to Misserville (2024, 93), for Le Guin, returning takes us back to a place that is no longer home, in a journey that is complex

and contradictory – shaped by loss and mourning – and which, rather than tracing a straight path along one's previous steps, unfolds in a spiral. Movement and the changing environment reshape subjectivity; return is more trigger than exploration. 'True voyage is return' (Le Guin 1975, 68). Shevek from *The Dispossessed*, Genly Ai and Estraven from *The Left Hand of Darkness*, and Ged in *Earthsea* show us in their journeys, in familiar or unknown places, the unravelling of a mutating subjectivity.

'In speculative fiction, maps are not the immutable compasses of paper we are used to thinking of and often take on a symbolic hue instead. Others, although material, continuously shift their co-ordinates, as a parody of those traditional maps sticking to the illusion of geographical indissolubility' (Raso 2024, 564), and often territories are surrounded by unstable boundaries. This is not the same as the spatiality of classic, imperialist, and colonizing science fiction, which is calibrated to the British Empire of the late nineteenth century, made up of belligerent nations or empires, colonies to exploit, or lands to 'civilize' (Misserville 2024, 67). Take, for example, Gethen, the planet on which *The Left Hand of Darkness* is set, a novel in which Le Guin wonders what might happen if gender were removed from the scene, eradicating sexual and gender roles from their biological basis, in which she wants to understand what differentiates men and women beyond mere physiological functions and social conditioning; a world without biological divisions between the sexes, no war, no Nation-states, no hierarchies, no conquest. That is why Gethenians love a territory, not its borders.

I know people, I know towns, farms, hills and rivers and rocks, I know how the sun at sunset in autumn falls on the side of a certain ploughland in the hills; but what is the sense of giving a boundary to all that, of giving it a name and ceasing to love where the name ceases to apply? What is love of one's country, is it hate of one's uncountrry? [Le Guin 1969, 201]

On Gethen, there is no exploitation. The Gethenians do not violate their world. They do not believe in progress, linearity, pushing boundaries, or disregarding limits. Sexuality is not a permanent factor and plays no role in social life; the biology of the Gethenians makes only consensual relationships possible. There is no rape. Gethen's social organization is based on a communal and variable group of people, the Heart, which is more tribal than urban. The various Hearts can come into conflict, albeit ritualized, controlled, and nonviolent: the *shifgrethor*. When the Hearts unite, their alliance resembles a cellular model rather than the centralized

model of the Nation. The class structure is flexible; there is no slavery or servitude. There are no personal possessions. Economic organization is closer to communism than capitalism (Le Guin 1987). Everything changes when the first Nation-state rises on Gethen, implementing State capitalism, centralizing power, and establishing an authoritarian government and secret police: a Nation that can now unleash a war on a planetary scale.

For Le Guin (1987), Gethen does not represent a Utopia in the classical sense since, for her, it is not a viable alternative to our world. However, it serves to broaden our horizons and imagine a world that seeks balance and integration rather than domination, embracing interdependence without reinforcing divisions and dualisms (Le Guin 1987). ‘Not We and They; not I and It; but I and Thou’ (Le Guin 1969, 245).

In the same way, *The Disposessed* tells the story of a planet, Urras, and its twin, a moon called Anarres. Urras is similar to our world: divided into Nation-states in conflict with each other, capitalist, sexist, classist, extractivist, scientific, and consumerist. Here, about 200 years before the novel is set, a woman – Odo – led a revolutionary anarchist movement to which Urras responded by offering a separate space, the moon of Anarres. Anarres is arid and difficult. Surviving here requires a high level of social organization (Leiss 2015, 40). The borders between the two twin worlds are closed. On Anarres, there is only one wall, which divides the port area where the few – very few – commercial exchanges with Urras take place from the rest of the moon.

Through the eyes of an Anarresian, the connection between war, patriarchy, and nationalism stands out starkly. The people of Urras are ready to fight for their country, because that is their *function*. ‘The common soldier has always been our greatest resource as a nation. It’s how we became the leader we are’ (Le Guin 1975, 230), explains Atro to Shevek. And he continues (p. 230):

The trouble with Odonianism, you know, my dear fellow, is that it’s womanish. It simply doesn’t include the virile side of life. ‘Blood and steel, battle’s brightness,’ as the old poet says. It doesn’t understand courage – love of the flag.

Shevek was silent for a minute; then he said, gently, ‘That may be true, in part. At least, we have no flags.’

On the other hand, Anarres is an anarchist, environmentalist, non-sexist, egalitarian, non-racist, communal society. Here, ‘All lives are in common’ (Le Guin 1975, 18) and ‘that balance of diversity which is the character-

istic of life, of natural and social ecology' (p. 78) is respected. Anarres does not believe in hierarchies, in the fact that 'superior' corresponds to 'better'; it believes in cooperation, while Urras believes in social Darwinism and the struggle for survival. This leads Anarres to a different idea of individuality and responsibility, and towards an idea of freedom that does not coincide with that of Western liberal individualist thought: 'our common nature [is] to be Odonians, responsible to one another. And that responsibility is our freedom. To avoid it, would be to lose our freedom. Would you really like to live in a society where you had no responsibility and no freedom, no choice, only the false option of obedience to the law, or disobedience followed by punishment?' (p. 36). Anarres is a society in which the focus on the subject is not individualism but rather encourages cooperation with others, in plurality. And yet, hard work requires rigid social organization, which risks stifling individual action and expression.

Anarres is a realized utopia. But, *we know*. Le Guin warns us, since the novel's subtitle ('an ambiguous utopia'), of the utopian risk of suffocating individuals. *The Dispossessed* shows us two models of society and, at the same time, the risks and contradictions of both. It highlights the critical issues of realized utopias and accomplished revolutions, while also showing the rottenness of the society against which the utopia was born. It tells us about the complex relationship between self-determination and society, when politics is not self-government, but control and organization. Utopia is as idiosyncratic as the world it leaves behind. Power risks reproducing itself even in everyday action and habits, beyond the State (Leiss 2015, 41). When Odo's thinking becomes law and starts regulating behaviours, it loses touch with lived experience. Social consciousness ceases to be a living thing and becomes 'a machine' (Le Guin 1975, 135). The main character, Shevek, who is a physicist, abandoning simultaneity, abandons the choice in dichotomies, between two certainties: he includes, connects, understands (Leiss 2015, 43). This does not mean that he does not act; it does not mean that he does not choose at all. He rejects the idea that two contradictory statements cannot be made about the same thing, the idea that if one thing is certain, the other is an illusion (p. 42). Following him, we can understand and embrace the ambiguous utopia.

Conclusions: New Cartographies and Everyday Utopias

This paper began by examining the reciprocal relationship between feminist imagination and politics. We highlighted how feminist utopias circumvent the prescriptive and normative tendencies characteristic of clas-

sical utopian thought, and considered how the interplay of feminist theory and fiction fosters new relationalities, ontologies, and forms of interdependence. Finally, we emphasized the crucial role of spatial grounding in shaping these alternative imaginaries.

Throughout the paper, we have seen how the feminist approach to the political question of utopia is connected and intertwined with the relational, interdependent, non-dichotomous view of the subject. Similarly, these utopias are intertwined with the spatial dimension, redrawing the meaning of terms such as map, border, nation, and empire, and rooting political imagination in co-constructed, collective, communal, self-determined spaces. These are open, never closed, sometimes separated, spaces where alliances and conflicts avoid the terrain of war between states and conquest; territories in connection with the bodies that inhabit them, in correspondence, echo, *sympoiesis*. Whether it is a city, a land, or one or more planets, the spatial dimension enters into direct dialogue with the narrative and imaginative level, ‘making room’ for new relationships, new visions of society, and new political practices.

This productive encounter has the potential to reshape the spaces we inhabit daily. Through our bodies, desires, and affections, contemporary neoliberal public spaces are continuously inscribed and transformed, giving rise to what Cooper (2014) terms ‘everyday utopias,’ tangible experiments that operate beyond the dichotomies and hierarchies of the dominant neoliberal phallogocentric order. We find relational, spatial, immanent, utopias rooted in embodied practices and opening up glimpses of a new world, challenging established political and legal norms and categories: women’s houses, feminist self-managed spaces, and square occupations, are examples of spaces of care and interdependence which write relational grammars different from the liberal (and neoliberal) individual; so it is for feminist networks and ‘safer spaces’ (Bonu Rosenkranz 2025) in which to build embodied alliances (Butler 2015). These are experiences and conflicts that make care a battleground for political struggle and social transformation: rather than abstract projects, they open up critical horizons rooted in shared practices (Serughetti and Fano Morrissey 2024).

In this sense, feminist utopias are not merely imaginative exercises but living, embodied practices that continually remake both our social and spatial worlds, offering concrete pathways toward more relational, interdependent, and collectively self-determined futures. They insist that the political, the social, and the spatial are inseparable: new worlds emerge

where bodies, desires, and collective practices converge to challenge, remake, and inhabit the impossible.

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Longing for the South: Camus, Relative Utopia, and the Logic of Abstraction

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Abstract. Under conditions of generalized reified abstraction – a historically sedimented condition in which mediating forms forget they are mediating and present themselves as reality itself – utopia has lost its critical function and become indistinguishable from ideology. Where Paul Ricoeur argued that the tension between ideology and utopia is unsurpassable, this essay contends that the tension has already collapsed. Utopia has been absorbed into ideology rather than correcting it, leaving what Marx called ‘the language of real life’ without a foothold. Against this diagnosis, the essay proposes Albert Camus’s notion of ‘relative utopia’ as a specifically adequate response to the conditions of reified abstraction, one that builds the critique of abstraction into its own structure by refusing the consolation of any ground, including the ground of hope itself. Reading Camus alongside the nineteenth-century Balkan poet Konstantin Miladinov and his poem ‘T’ga za jug’ (Longing for the South), the essay argues that relative utopia is not a chastened utopianism but a form of first praxis, an orientation without innocence: limit, doubt, and attachment to the other and to a world accepted as flawed and yet worth the effort.

Key Words: relative utopia, abstraction, Albert Camus, Konstantin Miladinov, praxis

Tožba za jugom: Camus, relativna utopija in logika abstrakcije

Povzetek. Pričujoči esej trdi, da današnje ponovno oživljanje utopičnega diskurza ni znak obnovljene politične možnosti, temveč simptom njegove izčrpanosti. V razmerah splošne reificirane abstrakcije – zgodovinsko utrjenega stanja, v katerem posredniške oblike pozabijo, da posredujejo, in se predstavljajo kot sama realnost – je utopija izgubila svojo kritično funkcijo in postala neprepoznavna glede na ideologijo.

Medtem ko je Paul Ricoeur trdil, da je napetost med ideologijo in utopijo nepremostljiva, naš esej trdi, da se je ta napetost že zrušila. Utopija je bila vključena v ideologijo, namesto da bi jo popravila, s čimer je tisto, kar je Marx imenoval »jezik resničnega življenja«, ostalo brez opore. V nasprotju s to diagnozo esej predlaga Albert Camusov pojem »relativna utopija« kot posebej ustrezen odgovor na pogoje reificirane abstrakcije, odgovor, ki kritiko abstrakcije vgradi v lastno strukturo s tem, da zavrača tolažbo kakršne koli podlage, vključno s podlago upanja samega. Eseg, ki Camusa bere skupaj z balkanskim pesnikom iz 19. stoletja Konstantinom Miladinovom in njegovo pesmijo »T'ga za jug« (Tožba za jugom), trdi, da relativna utopija ni skromnejši utopizem, ampak oblika prve prakse, usmerjenost brez nedolžnosti: omejitev, dvom in navezanost na drugega ter na svet, ki je sprejet kot pomanjkljiv, a kljub temu vreden truda.

Ključne besede: relativna utopija, abstrakcija, Albert Camus, Konstantin Miladinov, praksa

Introduction

If we are once again asked to think about utopia, then there is something in our historical moment that makes it possible to do so. When does utopian thinking arise? Amidst crises or on the eve of revolutions, when everything seems possible? When the present becomes so absurd and suffocating that only imagining a radical elsewhere seems capable of redeeming it? Or, to ask it with Ricoeur (1976), is utopia emerging because the political order has lost so much credibility that ideology can no longer bridge the gap between authority's claim and the belief it requires, leaving utopia to provide the suspension of disbelief that makes the existing order livable?¹ If for Fredric Jameson (1971, 111) '[t]he Utopian idea [...] keeps alive the possibility of a world qualitatively distinct from this one and takes the form of a stubborn negation of all that is,' in this essay I argue for a more unsettling diagnosis. Namely, that the resurgence of utopian discourse today² is a symptom of a deeper capitulation to ex-

¹ My sincere thanks to the two anonymous reviewers for their thoughtful comments, which helped sharpen the argument and conclusion, and for prompting me to engage with Ricoeur's thought.

² I am referring to a utopian discourse that has returned without calling itself explicitly utopian, and that is visible, for example, in techno-policy imaginaries (innovation, disruption, alignment, ESG, AI-for-good); in platform-mediated promises of personalization, optimization, and change by aggregation of clicks; in crisis governance framed

isting conditions.³ A return to utopia is a sign of the present in which effective agency has become so implausible – absorbed by platforms and apparatuses that monetize its image – that change can only be fathomed in its most unrealizable, abstract form, and is therefore no change at all.

Slavoj Žižek correctly identifies this impasse: ‘true utopia,’ he says in a much-circulated talk, ‘is when the situation is so without issue, without the way to resolve it within the coordinates of the possible that out of the pure urge of survival you have to invent a new space. Utopia is not a kind of free imagination; utopia is a matter of innermost urgency – you are forced to imagine it, it is the only way out, and this is what we need to-day’ (MacLean 2009). But Žižek does not cross the threshold to critique, for he frames utopia as a necessity instead of interrogating it as a form that may remain fully compatible with the coordinates of capitalism. The claim that I am making here is precisely that, when utopia presents itself as an urgent necessity, it does not necessarily indicate resistance to resignation but rather the exhaustion of agency. In this scenario, the only imaginable alternative to the present appears in the form of radical unreality whose pursuit is taken up by technical and policy apparatuses. In this sense, utopia, in its dominant modern political form, is neither a critique nor a horizon of change, but a symptom. It does not register the opening of possibility but its suppression, an abstract substitute for the inability to think and enact change within the constraints of the present.

Moreover, far from offering a way out of this condition, utopia today increasingly describes the structure we already inhabit. This is not because we live in a perfect, just, and harmonious world, but because, *pace* Bauman and Ashcroft, utopia has lost its critical thrust.⁴ It has become indistinguishable from ideology,⁵ channelling imagination in self-referential, non-transformative ways. Jameson’s (1971, 111) ‘stubborn negation of all

as mitigation and risk management; and in contemporary literary and cinematic forms (speculative fiction, cli-fi, dystopian film).

³ For utopia as a symptom of civilizational crisis, see Sokolova (2019).

⁴ For Bill Ashcroft, ‘all utopias are critical. The distinguishing feature of all utopian visions is critique of those present conditions that make utopia necessary’ (Ashcroft 2007, 419). Similarly, for Zygmunt Bauman (1976, 47), ‘[a]ny utopianism worth the name must engage in a significant polemic with the dominant culture.’

⁵ Ricoeur (1976, 27) argued that ‘the tension between ideology and utopia is unsurpassable. It is even often impossible to tell whether this or that mode of thought is ideological or utopian.’ For him, utopia’s subversive and ideology’s integrative function require each other as corrective. Thereby, utopia serves as the critical counterpart that exposes ideology’s legitimating fictions. I do not refute this claim but historicize it, for the question

that is' has been realized, but not in the way he imagined. The negation of all that is has hardened into an abstracted world that can never become anything else than an image of what it denies. This abstracted world does not figure as a realm of possibility, hope, and change (even if it is aggressively marketed as such)⁶ but as its commodification: accumulable, exchangeable, measurable, controllable, and incapable of circling back into real-world transformation. All that is solid melts not into liquidity but into commodified air.⁷

In digital environments, for instance, where potential futures are constantly imagined and performed, utopia does not orient transformation but substitutes for it precisely because it allows for the difficult, situated work of collective change to be deferred or made unnecessary. Such a condition signals what I see as the deep logic of our present: In the age of generalized reified abstraction in which we live, not only labour, value, social relations, and culture are abstracted and commodified, but also the very capacity to imagine change itself. By 'reified abstraction' I mean a historically sedimented condition produced by ongoing processes of metric rationality. It is 'generalized' in the sense that it increasingly extends across all realms of life. However, it is important to note that abstraction itself

here is not how utopia functions as a mode of imagination in general but what its return means as a symptom to be read rather than a structure to be described. What I am arguing, then, is that a specific historical development, generalized reified abstraction, has broken Ricoeur's ideology-utopia dialectic in one direction and that utopia has been absorbed into ideology. Today, we genuinely cannot tell ideology and utopia apart, not because they are in a fruitful tension but because the distinction has collapsed.

⁶ See, for example, the rhetoric of self-realization and creative fulfilment circulating in contemporary AI and startup culture. At the first ever GENAI conference, hosted by Jasper (San Francisco, February 14, 2023), the following slogans were prominently displayed and repeated: 'Write the books you want to read,' 'draw the art you want to see,' 'play the music you want to hear,' 'build the product you want to use,' 'start the business you want to run,' 'do the work you want to see done.' Comparable promises structure the mission statements of major technology platforms, which similarly frame technical infrastructures as vehicles of fulfilment and collective good. For instance, Microsoft declares its aim to be '[t]o enable people and businesses throughout the world to realize their full potential'; Google promises '[t]o organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful'; Amazon stages itself as 'the Earth's most customer-centric company'; and Airbnb advances the slogan 'belong anywhere'; while Facebook promises to 'give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected.'

⁷ Mark Fisher similarly diagnosed this obstruction as atmospheric. In his view, capitalist realism operates as 'a pervasive atmosphere, conditioning not only the production of culture but also the regulation of work and education, and acting as a kind of invisible barrier constraining thought and action' (Fisher 2009, 16).

is unavoidable simply because thinking, judging, imagining, and creating all depend on mediating forms (such as utopia) through which humans orient themselves in the world. Abstraction, in other words, shapes how the world becomes intelligible and actionable.

Now, difficulties arise when abstraction forgets its mediating character and begins to present itself as reality. In that moment, abstraction no longer guides experience but governs it, appearing as necessity. It therefore becomes essential to distinguish between forms of abstraction that remain self-aware and provisional, orienting humans in the world (what I call *reflexive abstraction*) – utopia among them – and those in which what used to be instrumental operations become ends that substitute for the world by imposing their own form as inescapable (*reified abstraction*) – the form ideology takes.⁸ If reified abstraction is the condition in which mediating forms forget they are mediating and present themselves as reality itself, then reflexive abstraction is simply the refusal of that forgetting, the capacity to use abstractions while remaining aware that they are abstractions. This is what utopia was always supposed to do: cast a glance from nowhere at the here and now, defamiliarize the given, keep open the gap between what is and what could be. Ideology, by contrast, closes that gap by naturalizing the given.

But, today, the ‘nowhere’ has been colonized. Ricoeur’s ideology-utopia dialectic presupposes that imagination retains some capacity for the ‘nowhere,’ the eccentric glance from no-place that defamiliarizes the given. I argue that this capacity has been captured. The ‘nowhere’ is now a platform, the eccentric glance is monetized, and the clearing where Levinas says man is revealed has become a content feed (Ricoeur 1976, 27). If, as Gil Scott-Heron once insisted, the revolution would not be televised, today the danger is different: it is continuously streamed, excerpted, and rendered performative. Praxis has turned into hyperactivity without transformation, for what circulates is not collective change but its image, detached from duration, risk, and consequence. When change turns into an image, it is abstracted from lived reality and becomes commodifiable, so that utopia itself appears less as a project of transformation or critique than as a consumable form.

Now, when utopia returns as public discourse, it tends to do so first

⁸ I have begun elsewhere to develop the distinction between reflexive and reified abstraction as well as the idea that reified abstraction is the defining condition of contemporary life (Ilievska 2026).

in its most abstract and idealized form precisely because this is the form most legible to institutions, policy, and tech governance. Therefore, it is particularly vulnerable to the mechanisms of abstraction for several reasons. First, because, as a non-place and an ideal form, it is already abstraction. Second, because it lacks constraint. And third, because it operates at the level of representation rather than the here and now. As Laurence Davis (2021, 565) shows, theorists of utopia such as Ernst Bloch, Gustav Landauer, and Walter Benjamin had already attempted to ‘save’ utopia from its abstracted forms by producing

alternative, grounded utopian conceptions of time intended to open the historical process – ‘grounded’ in the sense that, whereas the dominant form of abstract utopianism depicts or conceptualizes an immobilized vision of society detached from time and habitable place [...], they instead theorize utopia as an integral part of the historical process that ensures that the past never assumes a final shape and the future never shuts its doors.

In this paper, however, the form of abstraction I am warning against is not the same countered by Bloch, William Morris, Ursula Le Guin, and Laurence Davis in the effort to resist abstract ideals of perfection and embed utopian thinking in historical processes and lived practices. What concerns me instead is reified abstraction in which utopia becomes operative and commodifiable, absorbed as it is into technical scenario-thinking, platform logics, and design solutionism that saturate the present while cutting it off from practice (Lukács 1923; Kinzel 2026). Social transformation is imagined here as a technical problem that is to be managed. In other words, utopia transforms from a question of imagining a different, better world to *optimizing* the present one. Bloch’s horizon of hope (1959) is thereby commodified and attached to innovation and disruption, from Silicon Valley’s civilizational mottos of ‘organizing the world’s information’ (Google) to platform liberalism, policy inevitabilism, and NGO-ized activism. that translate political conflict into metrics, dashboards, and symbolic alignment with a moralized horizon of being ‘on the right side of history.’ On the academic side, utopia risks becoming another research project that may be pursued if it secures recognition and funding through grant schemes.

The question then does not concern measuring utopia’s pulse in our times and whether it can jolt us out of the present. For, if hope has been hollowed out by commodification, it is not about how to restore utopia,

but how to think and live without false promises when even the horizon comes with a like button and cannot be trusted. Ultimately, beyond the recovery of hope for another world, I am interested in a form of critical attachment to this one, an *amor mundi* stripped of consolation and teleological promise. Herein lies the greatest challenge.

Camus and Relative Utopia

It is against this backdrop that I turn to Albert Camus's notion of 'relative utopia.' I do this not as a renewed investment in utopian thinking, but as a way of curbing it and situating it within the above-mentioned wider concerns. As Camus famously wrote, the fundamental philosophical question is ultimately 'whether life is or is not worth living' (Camus 2018, 3). Anyone who has ever confronted this question knows that it does not arise in the abstract, but as a limit, a wall, articulated in the simple, exhausted claim: *I cannot go on like this anymore*. The deictic 'this' does not point elsewhere, toward another world or another life, but to *this* one, to the inescapable facticity of a life that ultimately must be lived *here*, under given conditions, and without appeal. But it is precisely in this simple claim that another one emerges: *Is there anything I can do to change this?* Utopia is one of those ideas that has often served this question like a crutch, allowing one to provisionally endure the present by imagining another world or another life. Now, for Camus (2018, 6), the experience of the absurd admits of no prosthesis, precisely because it deprives us 'of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land' producing a 'divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting.' But if neither origin nor redemption can be trusted, then why would any form of utopia be legitimate and can it be reconceived at all? It is at this point that Camus introduces the idea of a relative utopia as an orientation constrained by limits and responsibility within the world as it is, translating the logic of the absurd from an existential register into a political and ethical one.⁹

Although formulated as a response to a very different historical moment and context, Camus's reflections on utopia and, indeed, abstraction

⁹ This transition from the individual to the political has been well noted by Camus scholarship, most recently by Rémi Laroue (2024, 94; trans. mine): 'Très tôt dans son parcours, Camus a perçu l'importance de réfléchir à des principes fondateurs d'une conduite dans un premier temps individuelle mais que pourrait être élargie ensuite au reste du groupe.' ['Very early in his intellectual trajectory, Camus perceived the importance of reflecting on foundational principles for a conduct, at first individual, that could later be extended to a wider group.']

are strikingly pertinent to our times. What Camus identifies as the moral danger of abstraction in the mid-twentieth century has been the point of departure of my own analysis that shows how this abstraction has since become generalized, institutionalized, and internalized as the very condition of contemporary political and imaginative life. In 'Ni victimes ni bourreaux' (2002; first published in *Combat*, the daily newspaper of the French Resistance, in November 1946) writing in the aftermath of total war and ideological violence, Camus diagnosed a world in which human beings no longer addressed one another in the language of humanity, but as abstractions that cannot be persuaded: 'We have witnessed lying, humiliation, killing, deportation, and torture, and in each instance it was impossible to persuade the people who were doing these things not to do them, because they were sure of themselves and because there is no way of persuading an abstraction' (Camus 2006, 258). In such a world, utopia does not disappear, but becomes dangerous. The alternative then becomes what he denounced as 'anachronistic thinking' or political realism tied to governments and the nation state. The question therefore is not whether utopia should be abandoned, but how it must be disciplined, precisely 'because we live in a world of abstraction, a world of bureaucracy and machinery, of absolute ideas and of messianism without subtlety' (p. 259). Camus asked: what are we willing to do to human beings and concrete lives in order to realize any form of utopia? This is why, in his view, utopia could no longer be judged by its promises, but only by its costs. Camus then proposes a modest political philosophy that refuses to legitimize murder, rejects abstraction as moral alibi, and defines utopia not as fulfilment, but as a measured orientation constrained by limits: 'The goal, in short, will be to define the conditions for a modest political philosophy, that is, a philosophy free of all messianic elements and devoid of any nostalgia for an earthly paradise' (p. 261).

One concrete expression of this orientation is articulated in Camus's reflections on international democracy. Writing in the context of post-war geopolitics, Camus argued that what passed for 'international law' was in fact a form of international dictatorship, since it remained subordinated to executive powers, i.e. governments, rather than placed above them. A genuinely democratic international order (unlike the one adopted by the UN), he suggested, would require law to stand above governments, articulated by a representative global parliament constituted through worldwide elections. In the absence of such conditions, Camus insists that the only legitimate response is not resignation or revolutionary violence, but

international resistance conducted through means consistent with the ends sought. He imagines a bottom-up, transnational form of political action grounded in cooperative communities, free contracts, and shared principles of justice.¹⁰ Through these, individuals would not seek ‘to elaborate a new ideology’ but ‘simply to search for a new way of life’ (Camus 2006, 273) and ‘save the bodies’ (p. 261) within the existing order while refusing violence, ideology, and domination.

Here, Camus articulates what scholarship has variously described as his modest utopia, ethical-political realism, Mediterraneism, utopianism, idealism, and even libertarianism. Independently of the labels, what matters is that Camus thought about what a new definition of action would entail that does not take utopia lightly nor refuses it. As Ronald Aronson writes (2004, 208), ‘[h]e insisted on *creating* alternatives, no matter how few people supported them at first.’¹¹ The new definition of action, for him, hinges on relative utopia: ‘I have come to the conclusion that those who want to change the world effectively today have to choose among carnage, the impossible dream of bringing history to an abrupt halt, or the acceptance of a relative utopia that leaves some chance of human action’ (Camus 2006, 266). Therefore, the term ‘relative utopia’ here does not mean a rescue of utopian thinking nor an acceptance of resignation. It is a deliberate disciplining of the term that retains it only to name a minimal orientation towards change that allows meaningful human action to re-enter the political horizon. Camus is not interested in revolutionizing the economy, but, as Michel Onfray (2012, 283) writes, in the obverse: ‘on change l’homme pour qu’il révolutionne ensuite l’économie et la mette non plus au service du capital, des propriétaires, des possédants, mais du peuple.’ [‘one changes humans so that they may revolutionize the economy and place it no longer in the service of capital, owners, and propertied classes, but of the people.’]

¹⁰ For a detailed discussion of Camus’s argument and its critiques, see John Foley (2008) and Tommaso Visone (2024).

¹¹ Aronson (2004, 108; italics in the original) continues: ‘[U]nlike Sartre, [Camus] was not trying to be realistic in the sense of gearing himself to observable tendencies with a demonstrable prospect of success. [...] Camus’s friends saw him as naively encouraging a crackpot scheme that had no chance of success. [...] Camus was certainly an idealist. [...] The ‘utopian’ dimension would express itself again and again, right down to his proposal for a civilian truce during the Algerian War. To disparage him for such a proposal, as Beauvoir did in 1963, was to ignore the strength of Camus’s approach. He insisted on *creating* alternatives, no matter how few people supported them at first.’

Camus's proposals may be naïve to some, and ill-informed to others; in a third respect, they are impossible to disentangle from his contested *pied-noir* position from which he wrote on Algeria, and some suggest they should therefore be forgotten (Gloag 2023, prefaced by none other than Fredric Jameson). And yet they bring into focus something that remains crucial for our times: the question of praxis under conditions that actively disable action. If relative utopia is constrained by limits and responsibility, its force does not lie in institutional design but in its insistence that change must begin through embodied, collective practices aligned with humane ends. Today, however, the conditions for such praxis have shifted profoundly. Action is increasingly displaced onto screens (Schwendener 2026), participation reduced to expression, and the collective is being hollo[we]d out by platforms that monetize attention while absorbing dissent.¹² In this sense, Zygmunt Bauman (2003, 19) was not wrong when he wrote that it would be a waste of time to focus 'hopes and efforts on the extant, hopelessly local tools of joint action' and that one should 'better follo[w] action to the place to which it has moved. The name of this place is no-place, no-land, no-territory.' What Bauman could not have anticipated is that, now that we have arrived in this place, we find only simulacra of action.¹³

Under conditions of generalized abstraction, the problem is no longer merely how to act without illusion, but *how to act at all* – how to recover forms of agency, relationality, and resistance that are not imme-

¹² There is broad scholarly agreement on this point. For a representative discussion, see Jodi Dean (2005; 2009).

¹³ Bauman (2003, 19) continues: 'Unlike that orthodox space sliced into sovereign, border-poles erecting and border-passages guarding nation-states, the new trans-national and trans-state global space is (at least for the time being) "whole and uniform", unmarked by legible signs and full of unanchored, floating meanings, vainly seeking (or keenly avoiding?) fixed locations. It is in such a space that the new powers reside.' Written in 2003, before the consolidation of *onlife* and the rise of social media and generative AI, this characterization now appears untenable, and Bauman was careful enough to signal it by adding a 'for the time being.' Today, far from being 'unmarked by legible signs,' the digital spaces in which social, political, and economic life increasingly unfolds are among the most densely marked and documented environments ever produced. What Bauman figures as floating meanings in a uniform space are, under conditions of platformization and generative AI, continuously logged, indexed, measured, and rendered available for extraction and sale; see Maurizio Ferraris (2022). Indeed, the digital realm itself is now a 'space,' forming 'digital territories that, like physical spaces, have the propensity to become sites of extraction and exploitation, and the sites of digital-territorial coloniality' (Mohamed et al. 2020, 665).

diately defused by abstraction. Even more fundamentally still, the question is whether we can be brought to look again at *this* world, *this* life, indeed even look at the face of the other and assume responsibility for the relation, rather than retreating into the horizons of digital dystopias or utopias produced by reified abstraction that reorganize perception and increasingly make it difficult to relate to anything offline. Davis (2021, 572) proposes a ‘grounded utopia’ that is historically open, materially embedded, ‘rooted in deep respect for the experiences and perspectives of ordinary people’ and ‘[e]pitomized by the grassroots struggles of the dispossessed’ (p. 573). Even Kristen Ghodsee’s (2023) account of ‘everyday utopia,’ which relocates it to the scale of everyday practices and communities, still risks presupposing forms of sociality that can be stabilized and recognized as such. Under conditions of generalized abstraction, however, even these practices are immediately absorbed, mediated, or rendered as content: the Danish cohousing community becomes an Airbnb listing; ecovillages become a lifestyle brand.

In this constellation, relative utopia introduces limit, measure, refusal of extremes, and, as its qualifier ‘relative’ suggests, an *orientation without innocence*. This is not a rejection of grounded or everyday utopia, but a correction through limit. It is a tragic (but not resigned) recognition that even the ground is not pure, the soil itself is never uncompromised, that humans are both victims and executioners, and that staying often is not redemptive but *necessary*. Indeed, we should push this reasoning to the limit and acknowledge that the very reified abstraction which today commodifies ‘the ground’ and ‘the community’ is not imposed from elsewhere but produced through human practices themselves.¹⁴ Unless we are speaking of communities entirely insulated from technological and global entanglement, there are no innocents in the ordinary gestures of scrolling, clicking, liking, swiping, tagging, following, and posting that are the lifeline of reified abstraction.

It is here that reflexive abstraction becomes decisive as an orientation that permits temporary withdrawal without exit, moving dialectically between critique of, and attachment to, *this* world. It is not incidental that some of the most enduring articulations of utopian orientation, especially in its relative, non-programmatic sense, have taken literary form.¹⁵

¹⁴ Elsewhere I have referred to the human as an ‘abstraction-making animal’ (Ilievska 2026, 16).

¹⁵ Bloch (1989) as quoted in Ashcroft (2007, 418): ‘Literature, according to Bloch, is in-

A poem is itself an act of reflexive abstraction; it mediates experience while remaining aware that it is mediating, which is precisely the cognitive mode that reified abstraction destroys and that relative utopia requires. In what follows, I approach this measured orientation through Konstantin Miladinov's 'T'ga za jug' (usually translated as Longing for the South). This move is not intended as an aesthetic supplement to theory but as a necessary pause, as an instance of slow, reflexive abstraction that remains aware of its own mediation and limits, at a moment when hope itself has become structurally compromised under the conditions of reified abstraction. Miladinov's poem is chosen not only for its biographical and geographical proximity to Camus's Mediterraneism; but because its formal structure – the conditional doubt of the second stanza, the refusal to absolutize return – enacts precisely the logic of relative utopia in a way that a poem of pure longing could not.

A Doubtful Longing

While the Balkans were still under Ottoman rule, Konstantin Miladinov, a nineteenth-century poet and intellectual from Struga (today in North Macedonia), emerged as one of the region's most educated as well as culturally and politically engaged figures. After completing his studies in Greek philology in Athens, Miladinov travelled to Odessa, Kiev, and Smolensk in support of a broader national awakening of Slavic populations under Ottoman rule, before enrolling at Moscow University in Slavic philology. It was there that he wrote 'T'ga za jug', published in 1861.¹⁶ Translated into more than 60 languages, the poem has nevertheless received remarkably little international scholarly attention. Today, it

herently utopian because its *raison d'être* is the imaging of a different world.' See also Fredric Jameson (2005) and Ruth Levitas (2013, xiv): 'The boundaries of literary genres are porous, and literature, poetry and song are, like art and music, amenable to exploration through the hermeneutic utopian method.' For Miguel Abensour (2017), too, literature is a site that stages utopia as critique and horizon that exposes the failures of current society. Literature's capacity to estrange perception, disclose the world without totalization, and sustain judgment through narrative rather than prescriptive models has been widely noted. Here I limit myself to two poignant formulations: see Hannah Arendt (1961), especially 'The Crisis in Culture,' where literature and narrative are understood as sites of judgment, appearance, and world-disclosure distinct from doctrine or instrumental reason; and Darko Suvin (1979), who introduces the concept of 'cognitive estrangement' as a mode of perceiving the world otherwise without totalization.

¹⁶ For the historical context, the poem's place in the canon, and Miladinov's life, see Milne Holton (1982).

is deeply ingrained in North Macedonia's cultural memory, circulating in popular culture, giving its name to a well-known red wine, and opening the annual Struga Poetry Evenings, one of the oldest and most significant international poetry festivals (Simoska 2008).

Already the title of the poem poses some difficulties for translators, for *t'ga* or, in contemporary Macedonian, *taga*, is not quite or primarily 'longing.' Its meaning is 'sadness,' perhaps 'sorrow' and even 'grief.' In some ways, it is the Balkan counterpart of the Portuguese *saudade* for it implies a state that does not require fulfilment, an attachment to something that may never return. One can live with *t'ga* and *saudade* indefinitely. However, the title entails a further element, and this is where the poem breaks both with *saudade* and the German *Sehnsucht* and receives, retrospectively, the translation as 'longing.' For there is in 'T'ga za jug' an object of longing: the South (*jug*, as in *Jugoslavia*, 'land of the South Slavs'), rendering Miladinov's 't'ga' earthbound, place specific, and exposed to disappointment. But let us turn to the poem itself. The first stanza is as follows:

The wings of an eagle let me borrow and soar
fly down South to our ancient shore
to cross path with our fair southern land
to see Kukuš once more, Stambol again
to see whether the sun there too is as faded
as my dim days here dreadfully fated.¹⁷

In its object-directed longing for a concrete homeland, the emotion articulated in the title 'T'ga za jug' comes close to the German *Heimweh*, for it has specific geographical coordinates. The speaker writes from a distance, from a cold, sunless Moscow that remains unnamed, and is longing to see the South and cities like Kukuš (Kilkis in Macedonia, Greece) and Stambol (Istanbul, the Ottoman Empire's capital), places that he associates with collective belonging, signalled by the use of the first-person plural possessive in 'our ancient shore' and 'our fair southern land.'¹⁸ But the poem immediately complicates the longing of the first four verses by subjecting it to doubt. The speaker is not just unreflectively longing to

¹⁷ Translated by the author; adapted from Michael Sporer's rendition of the poem in Konstantin Miladinov (1994, 18–19). Adaptations were made for reasons of rhythm and emphasis, so as to bring the rendition closer to the poem's affective and tonal texture.

¹⁸ For reasons of rhyme, the translation overstates. The original, by contrast, simply says 'v nashi str'ni' ('to our parts') and 'na nashi mesta' ('to our places'), which signal identification without qualifying modifiers such as 'ancient' or 'fair southern.'

return home but wants 'to see *whether* the sun there too is as faded' (emphasis added), as if a return would not guarantee warmth and redemption. The 'whether' ('ako') signals epistemic uncertainty, while the desire 'to see' ('da vidam') points to the need of verification rather than conviction. Even the scorching sun of the South is framed as potentially shining gloomily ('mračno ugrevjat'), signalling a loss of meaning, promise, and warmth. This return is not a return to Ithaca – an unambiguously desirable, restorative, and redeeming home – but a reflective longing for a home that is not what one would like it to be. Odysseus does not fear that Ithaca might disappoint; Miladinov does. His doubt intensifies in the following stanza to the point of making the return conditional:

And if the sun there too rises dimly
and if the sun there too greets me grimly,
I'll make ready for the rough road once more
I'll make haste for some unfathomable shore
where the sun's favourable rays forever shine
and the pitch-black heavens with stars are lined.

For a poem titled 'Longing for the South,' the conditional 'ifs' of the second stanza come as a surprise. The speaker's desire to return is not absolute, but subject to verification and capable of being reoriented should the South fail to fulfil its promise. This is longing without hope, orientation without guarantees, desire without redemption. The speaker refuses to absolutize home and is ready to soar to other faraway places ('unfathomable shore' is merely 'v'drugi str'ni' or 'to different parts' in the original) not because he would abandon the problematic South lightly but because he wants to limit its effect on him, call to mind the negative aspects as well. If home cannot redeem, there will be neither collapse nor despair. The turn toward the 'unfathomable shore / where the sun's favourable rays forever shine' undeniably invokes utopian imagery. Yet this gesture emerges only after both home and return have been subjected to doubt, and it remains deliberately indeterminate, for the poem does not settle in utopia – there is no programme, no arrival plan. Rather, it reaches toward it as a way of refusing capitulation to disappointment without transforming it into a destination or a horizon of fulfilment. But the poem does not end here.

In the next stanza and a half, the speaker returns to his present reality, to the 'grim winter' and the 'piercing winds' of the unnamed Moscow where 'darkness and frost and fog rage around [him],' filling his breast with dark

thoughts. This return to the northern present rekindles and intensifies the longing for the South of the first stanza that culminates in an extended celebration of the region and its natural plenitude:

give me the wings of an eagle, oh, let me soar
speed homeward to the lush land I adore
to cross path with our fair southern land
to see Ohrid, oh Lord, look at Struga again.

There the rose-fingered dawn brightens my soul
there the sunset keeps wooded hills aglow
there a mighty force a great bounty has spread
over fields of harvest of wine and of bread
and the clear lake shimmers, widens the view
darkened by the wind, it turns hues of blue
look upon these mountains, behold these plains
everywhere God's beauty this land contains.

There to play the kaval to my heart's content
ah! let the sun set, let this life end.

After the moment of conditional doubt, the poem returns insistently to the South – but not as a social or political utopia. What follows instead is a dense evocation of sensory and elemental plenitude, the ‘suchness’ of place: light, harvest, water, landscape, atmosphere, and music.¹⁹ Set against the suffocating cold, the darkness, and the psychic depletion of the speaker's northern sojourn, the South appears as a space of measure, rhythm, and embodied life. This return does not undo the earlier doubt, nor does it resolve it through a promise of redemption. Rather, it reframes the choice at stake. The speaker would rather endure finitude – and even political chaos – within a world that sustains life's basic rhythms than persist in a climate that extinguishes them. Even the poem's final gesture – ‘let this life end’ – is not nihilistic, but names a refusal to live without warmth, measure, and beauty.

Rather than a retreat into illusion, what emerges here is a dialectical holding-together of doubt and attachment, lucidity and fidelity. The South is neither idealized nor abandoned but chosen under conditions

¹⁹ Davis (2021, 567) employs “suchness” and particularity of place’ in his reading of Ursula Le Guin to name her emphasis on the concrete, sensuous, and irreducible particularity of place within what he calls grounded or non-ideal utopian thinking.

of uncertainty and imperfection. In this sense, Miladinov's longing anticipates what Camus would later describe as an ethics of measure and attachment, a form of *amor mundi* that does not deny imperfection, suffering or injustice but at the same time refuses to withdraw from the world on their account. Hope here is not consolation, but commitment without guarantees to a world accepted as flawed and yet *worth the effort*. Moreover, for Miladinov, this orientation was not merely poetic. For his cultural and political commitment to the region that he refused to abandon, he died in 1862, only one year after the publication of the poem, in a prison in Istanbul, the very city he so doubtfully longed for (Holton 1982, 161). Of course, Miladinov's 'T'ga za jug' does not respond to reified abstraction, nor could it. Written before the historical conditions that render orientation itself abstract and consumable, the poem nevertheless articulates a mode of attachment that becomes newly legible under those conditions: a way of remaining bound to place, climate, rhythm, and finitude without projecting redemption or transformation as a future state. Change appears neither as programme nor promise, but as the decision to stay within the world's constraints without surrendering to them.

If grounded utopia, as articulated by Davis, stresses historical openness, material embeddedness, and the perspectives of ordinary people, relative utopia, as formulated here through Camus and Miladinov, marks an internal limit to that project: measure, refusal of extremes, and an orientation without innocence. In this sense, I do not oppose 'grounding' but correct it by acknowledging that the ground is never pure, that attachment does not redeem, and that human beings are always implicated in the worlds they inhabit and reproduce, *including* the abstractions that render those worlds illegible and commodified. Miladinov's own fate underscores this point with tragic clarity: he did not perish elsewhere or in exile but died within the very South to which his doubtful longing was bound, a reminder that this soil has long been lethal to its own inhabitants, let alone to those who attempt to cross it without protection or permission.

Conclusion

Relative utopia should not be understood merely as a modest or chastened utopianism. It is specifically adequate to the conditions of reified abstraction because it builds the critique of abstraction into its own structure. Unlike grounded utopia, which can still be absorbed into platform logics and design solutionism as long as it retains an image of 'the ground,'

relative utopia introduces limit where expansion is demanded, and refuses the consolation of any ground, including the ground of hope itself. Unlike Ricoeur's dialectic of ideology and utopia, which assumes the two can be kept in productive tension, relative utopia proceeds from the recognition that under generalized reified abstraction that tension has already collapsed. Utopia has been absorbed into ideology rather than correcting it. What remains is not a restored dialectic but something more modest, the decision to stay within measure in a world accepted as flawed and yet worth the effort, without the consolation of transcendence or the alibi of resignation. It is, perhaps, the last available form of what Marx called 'the language of real life,' thinking and living that have not yet entirely come apart (Ricoeur 1976, 17).

The question of whether life is or is not worth living thus returns under the conditions of reified abstraction, not only as the question of how much suffering one can endure, but also as the more elusive question of how one can act at all when agency is dispersed, relation is flattened into content, and responsibility is deferred to authority and law. If there are no innocents here, it is because this abstraction is not imposed from the outside, but sustained through ordinary, repetitive gestures that render the world intelligible while quietly dulling our capacity to respond to it. The problem, then, is not how to imagine another world but how to remain present to this one without resignation or extremism in a kind of *emblematic longing for the south*.

Where would such an education in doubtful longing begin when we are at ground zero of political action, when the very conditions for collective action such as shared spaces, durable institutions, publics capable of sustained attention, have themselves been dismantled? There is no ground to stand on; we must make one, in the *here* and *now*. If we do not begin to build it, large-scale narratives of coherence and salvation will inevitably reoccupy this vacuum, offering a substitute ground that risks repeating the catastrophes of previous centuries on an even more intensified planetary scale. But the starting point cannot be in the realm of the social nor the political and not even the private. The starting point is prior to them all: the pre-institutional encounter with another person before they become a category, a demographic, a content. In this sense, if for Camus the political project of relative utopia involved supra-governmental structures built from below, today the task of relative utopia is even more modest and therefore infinitely more difficult because, before collective action can be reconstructed, *human encounters themselves must be*. This is not

existentialism, but something closer to a Levinasian ethics as first philosophy, a *first praxis*, rooted in the recognition that the encounter with the other precedes every political form, and that when that encounter is colonized by abstraction, politics has already lost its ground. The very condition for political action is to first encounter the other beyond familial, clan, religious, ethnic, racial, party, and national structures. Only then can political action become meaningful. Yugoslav Marxist Humanism, among other traditions of praxis philosophy, already attempted to think this passage from the reconstruction of the human to the renewal of collective praxis in conditions of alienation and political dogmatism. But this is the subject of another paper.

For present purposes, the road toward praxis as the political project of a relative utopia begins at the smallest, ordinary scale. This is not because it is politically negligible, but because it is precisely there that abstraction is reproduced and its reified form can be interrupted, in the ways we attend, encounter, and rebel. To meet the face of the other and take responsibility for it, to sustain an attachment without converting it into capital, content, or cause, now these are not moral gestures, but what one might call minimal acts of de-reification. In this way, action becomes thinkable again beyond the monetized infrastructures that currently absorb it. For, if grand narratives are resurfacing, it means that we have unlearned how to hold attachment on the most granular, organic level. And if we cannot refuse, in these ordinary ways, to abandon the other in the first place, how, then, are we supposed to save bodies?

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Saving the Future Without Forgetting the Past: Crisis, Transmission, and Temporal Sense

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Abstract. Contemporary debates on utopia, dystopia, and retrotopia are often framed as conflicts between competing visions of the future. This paper argues that such figures are better understood as symptomatic expressions of a deeper crisis in the phenomenological articulation of time. What is at stake is not primarily a lack of imagination, but a disruption in the transmission of meaning across past, present, and future. Drawing on Husserl's late diagnosis of crisis, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of institution and sedimentation, and postphenomenological accounts of technical mediation, the paper reconstructs the conditions under which temporal sense can remain *operative* rather than *rigidified*. It shows that the future remains accessible as an open horizon only insofar as the past functions as a living, revisable ground of meaning, rather than as inert tradition or nostalgic refuge. The analysis further examines how contemporary technoscientific forms of anticipation, while indispensable for understanding large-scale phenomena, risk transforming futurity into a preformatted and governable object, thereby foreclosing the very openness they seek to secure. In dialogue with Levinas's ethics of responsibility and Waldenfels's phenomenology of responsiveness, the paper concludes that phenomenology 'saves' the future not by stabilizing or predicting it, but by *preserving* the conditions of transmission, reactivation, and response through which temporal meaning remains generative. Utopia, dystopia, and retrotopia are thus reframed as derivative temporal operators that emerge when the balance between inheritance and anticipation is compromised.

Key Words: temporality, crisis, phenomenology, transmission, futurity, technoscience

Reševanje prihodnosti brez pozabljanja preteklosti: kriza, transmisija in časovni smisel

Povzetek. Sodobne razprave o utopiji, distopiji in retrotopiji so pogosto uokvirjene kot konflikti med tekmujočimi vizijami prihodnosti. Pričujoči članek zagovarja tezo, da je te figure bolje razumeti kot simptomatične izraze globlje krize v fenomenološki artikulaciji časa. Pri tem ne gre prvenstveno za pomanjkanje domišljije, temveč za motnjo v transmisiji (prenosu) pomena skozi preteklost, sedanost in prihodnost. S pomočjo Husserlove pozne diagnoze krize, Merleau-Pontyjeve fenomenologije institucije in sedimentacije ter postfenomenoloških opisov tehnične mediacije članek rekonstruira pogoje, pod katerimi lahko časovni smisel ostane operativen namesto rigiden. Dokazuje, da prihodnost ostaja dostopna kot odprto obzorje le, v kolikor preteklost deluje kot živa, revidirajoča podlaga pomena, ne pa kot inertna tradicija ali nostalgичno zatočišče. Analiza nadalje preučuje, kako sodobne tehnološko-znanstvene oblike anticipacije – čeprav so nepogrešljive za razumevanje obsežnih fenomenov – tvegajo preobrazbo prihodnosti v vnaprej formatiran in obvladljiv objekt, s čimer zapirajo prav tisto odprtost, ki jo želijo zavarovati. V dialogu z Levinasovo etiko odgovornosti in Waldenfelsovo fenomenologijo odzivnosti članek sklene, da fenomenologija »rešuje« prihodnost ne z njeno stabilizacijo ali napovedovanjem, temveč z ohranjanjem pogojev transmisije, reaktivacije in odziva, ki časovnemu pomenu omogočajo generativnost. Utopija, distopija in retrotopija so zato redefinirane kot časovni operatorji, ki se pojavijo, ko je ravnovesje med dediščino in anticipacijo ogroženo.

Ključne besede: časovnost, kriza, fenomenologija, transmisija, prihodnost, tehnost

Crisis, Temporality, and the Question of Transmission

Contemporary debates on utopia, dystopia, and retrotopia are often framed in terms of imagination, ideology, or political orientation.¹ Yet

¹ Recent debates on utopia, dystopia, and retrotopia (Bauman 2017) often approach these figures as cultural or political responses to late-modern uncertainty, systemic risk (Beck 1992), social acceleration (Rosa 2013), and changing regimes of historicity (Koselleck 2004; Hartog 2015). Within this framework, temporal imaginaries are typically analysed in terms of ideological critique, social diagnosis, or narrative compensation. While such perspectives illuminate important historical and sociological dynamics, they tend to presuppose that past and future remain readily available as horizons of projection, expectation, or retrieval. What is less frequently addressed is how these horizons themselves are constituted, destabilized or rendered inaccessible at the level of lived temporal experience.

what appears to be at stake in many of these diagnoses is not primarily a lack of imaginative capacity, nor a simple oscillation between future-oriented and past-oriented narratives. Rather, they converge on a shared intuition: that something in the relation between past, present, and future has become disarticulated, such that the future no longer functions as a viable horizon of meaning.² From a phenomenological perspective, this condition is better described as a form of temporal *disorientation*, affecting not the content of social imaginaries, but the very structures through which meaning is constituted and transmitted across time. Besides phenomenology, this disorientation has been sharply described, albeit at different levels, by several influential accounts. In *The Principle of Hope*, Bloch insists that human experience is structurally oriented toward the future through anticipatory consciousness, claiming that human beings are ‘essentially determined by the future’ (1986, 5). At the same time, Bloch warns against the historical risk that this anticipatory orientation may collapse into a ‘no-future’ attitude when hope is *severed* from its concrete and mediating conditions (pp. 5–6). From a different but complementary perspective, Jameson famously describes the contemporary blockage of futurity by observing that ‘it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism’ (Jameson 2005, xii). Here, the proliferation of dystopian imaginaries does not signal an excess of imagination, but rather its confinement within a present that increasingly appears without (fair) alternatives.

A similar diagnosis underlies *Retrotopia*, where Bauman characterizes nostalgia as a ‘sentiment of displacement’ (Bauman 2017, 2). Retrotopia, in this sense, does not negate the utopian impulse but redirects it *backward*, transforming the past into a compensatory resource when the future no longer appears capable of providing security, stability, or orientation (Bauman 2017, 3–8). Taken together, these accounts compellingly describe the symptoms of a temporal *crisis*. However, precisely insofar as they remain at the level of description, these accounts share a significant limitation. They approach utopia, dystopia, and retrotopia primarily as variations in the content or orientation of temporal imagination, that is, as ways in which the future is *represented*, lost, or reappropriated. What

² The issue is not the disappearance of future-oriented representations, but a disruption in the mediation between past, present, and future, whereby anticipation tends to assume the form of calculation or risk management, and the future loses its character as an open horizon of meaning.

remains underdetermined, however, is the more fundamental question of how the future can appear at all as a *meaningful horizon of experience*. In this sense, these diagnoses tend to mislocate the problem at the level of representation rather than at the level of *constitution*. They successfully describe the symptoms of temporal disorientation, but they do not fully account for the conditions under which such disorientation becomes possible in the first place. Yet, I hold here, they tend to approach past and future primarily as objects of imagination, loss, or retrieval, rather than as *dimensions* of experience whose very mode of constitution has become problematic. The present paper argues that these symptoms cannot be fully understood without shifting the level of analysis. Accordingly, rather than asking which futures are imagined, lost, or nostalgically reclaimed, the phenomenological question I would like to address concerns how the future *can be experienced at all* as open, and under which conditions the past *can continue to ground* the present without hardening into repetition, myth, or, as Bauman pointed out, compensatory fixation. In this sense, the contemporary crisis of futurity is not resolved by producing new utopian contents, nor by opposing retrotopian narratives with alternative visions. It calls instead for a clarification of the phenomenological conditions of temporal transmission, that is, of the ways in which meaning is inherited, sedimented, embodied, and safely reactivated across generations.

However, to do that, the concept of crisis itself must therefore be understood in a precise phenomenological sense. In *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (1970), Husserl insists that the crisis of 'Modern' rationality lies not in a lack of achievements, but in the loss of their *meaning for life*, once scientific and cultural formations become detached from the *Lebenswelt* that originally conferred sense upon them. Crisis thus names a situation in which historically sedimented meanings persist as inert formations, having lost their self-evidence and therefore *orienting* power. Yet, for Husserl, this loss is structurally ambivalent: it also opens the possibility of a critical reappropriation of the past, insofar as sedimented meanings can be reactivated rather than merely repeated. Read in this light, the phenomena described by Bloch, Jameson, and Bauman appear as different expressions of a single underlying problem: the rigidification of temporal sense. More precisely, this crisis can be described as a breakdown in the transmissive coupling between past sedimentation and future anticipation. When the past no longer functions as a *living* and reactivable ground of meaning, anticipa-

tion loses its anchoring in inherited sense and becomes either an abstract projection or a preformatted expectation. Conversely, when anticipation becomes detached from the task of reactivating inherited meaning, the past is reduced either to inert tradition or to compensatory nostalgia. The crisis of temporality, in this sense, does not consist in the disappearance of temporal orientations, but in their *disarticulation*. Indeed, when the past ceases to function as a living sediment capable of sustaining transformation, anticipation is deprived of its grounding, the present loses its orienting depth, and the future becomes either abstractly projected, catastrophically foreclosed, or regressively compensated.

As Maurice Merleau-Ponty also shows in *Phenomenology of Perception* (2002), temporality is not an abstract sequence of moments, but a lived and embodied horizon, articulated through habit, perception, and action. When this embodied articulation is disrupted, the future can no longer be inhabited as a *field of possibilities*, but only imagined, feared, or nostalgically replaced. Post-phenomenological approaches radicalize this insight by foregrounding the role of technical mediation in the constitution of temporal experience. In *Technics and Time*, Bernard Stiegler (1998; 2008; 2011) argues that human temporality is always already exteriorized through technical supports of memory and anticipation, so that the transmission of the past is inseparable from the material and technical conditions under which it is inscribed and preserved. Similarly, Ihde emphasizes that technologies do not merely mediate experience but actively configure the structures of perception and temporal orientation, amplifying certain horizons while reducing others. On this basis, the central thesis of the paper can be stated as follows: only a non-rigid, faithfully mediated relation to the past can sustain the openness of the present and the accessibility of the future. Here, utopia, dystopia, and retrotopia are therefore approached not as solutions or failures in themselves, but as secondary and derivative figures that emerge when the phenomenological transmission of meaning becomes disrupted. The paper thus shifts the focus from contemporary diagnoses of temporal disorientation to the phenomenological conditions that make such diagnoses possible.

By reconstructing the constitution of temporal sense through sedimentation, institution, embodiment, and technical mediation, this paper re-frames the problem of futurity at a more fundamental level. Accordingly, utopia, dystopia, and retrotopia are addressed in the concluding section not as explanatory frameworks, but as manifestations of deeper transformations in how temporal horizons are inherited, stabilized, or disrupted.

Phenomenology, Validity, and the Problem of the Past

The phenomenological reorientation proposed in this paper takes its point of departure from Husserl's late work, where the problem of the past emerges not as an ancillary historical concern but as a decisive philosophical issue for the understanding of science, rationality, and temporality. What motivates Husserl is not the failure of scientific rationality, but its paradoxical success: the sciences continue to generate valid and reliable results while progressively losing the capacity to account for the meaning of their own activity and for their relevance to life. In his late work, *The Crisis*, Husserl famously diagnoses this condition as one in which scientific reason becomes 'meaningless for life' (Husserl 1970, 6). Accordingly, validity persists, yet its genesis and orienting sense become opaque, so that inherited meanings survive as unexamined sediments rather than as living grounds for further inquiry (Carr 1974; Ni 2018; Nobili 2024). Indeed, Husserl traces the roots of this predicament back to the modern transformation of the scientific attitude inaugurated with Galileo. The *mathematization* of nature introduced what Husserl describes as a garb of ideas through which the world comes to appear primarily as a field of measurable magnitudes (Husserl 1970, 28). In this shift, the heavens cease to function as loci of symbolic and existential orientation and are reconfigured as objects of quantitative prediction (Husserl 1970, 37–44).

Yet this transformation does not abolish the need for orientation, but merely displaces it. Indeed, even the mathematically constituted world continues to presuppose a pregiven *Lebenswelt* as its unthematized ground (Husserl 1970, 48–59). The crisis diagnosed by phenomenology thus concerns not science as such, but the forgetfulness of the historical and practical conditions under which scientific meaning is constituted and preserved (Landgrebe 2011). This is why, in Husserl's mature phenomenology, the problem of validity becomes inseparable from the problem of history. Ideal meaning (most visibly in the sciences) does not endure by virtue of abstract permanence, but only insofar as it is instituted, consolidated, transmitted, and repeatedly brought back to presence through acts of reactivation (Bernet et al. 2023; Mensch 2016). Absent such renewal, sedimentation hardens into inert tradition and validity is misconstrued as a self-subsisting property of ideal objects rather than as the outcome of a living historical process. In response to this situation, Husserl rearticulates universal teleology as the internal form of rational existence. Teleology, here, does not designate an external finalism or a

predetermined end. Rather, it names the historically structured responsibility to renew sense by bringing it back to presence.³

This is why teleology becomes increasingly central in Husserl's later work (Miettinen 2014, 2021; Serban 2024). In §15 of *The Crisis*, Husserl characterizes philosophy as an ongoing process that 'hones and enriches the core of the becoming of philosophy' and describes philosophers as 'bearers of this teleology,' grounded in 'our personal intentions in the unity of our historical task' (Husserl 1970, 70–71). As Eugen Fink also emphasized, this conception implies that rationality is inseparable from a task-like responsibility that binds subjects into a historical 'we,' rather than isolating them as merely epistemic agents (Fink 1995, 174–176). Moreover, this teleological structure already implies a *generative* logic of validity. Every act of renewal substitutes itself for earlier sedimentations without abolishing them, and it conserves sense precisely by taking it up again for a new present and for others yet to come (Cahoone 1986; Pradelle 2013). Validity persists only through such acts of renewal, which are at once preservative and transformative. In §40, Husserl makes this explicit when he describes scientific life as presupposing 'an infinite horizon of inactive validities which function with them in flowing mobility,' forming a 'single indivisible, interrelated complex of life' (Husserl 1970, 149).

Moreover, Husserl's appendix 'Origin of Geometry' provides a paradigmatic articulation of these claims by showing that even the most 'ideal' validity is historically instituted and intersubjectively maintained. Scientific meaning is inseparable from a diachronic community of sense: 'every science is related to an open chain of generations, to those who work for and with one another,' a chain composed of researchers 'who are accomplishing subjectivity of the whole living science' (Husserl 1970, 355–356). The unity of science is therefore not a synchronic aggregation of individual achievements, but a diachronic and cumulative formation in which 'the new ones serve as the foundation for still others [...] in the unity of a propagative process of transferred meaning' (Husserl 1970, 362–363).

³ Enzo Paci's reading of Husserl, developed within the Milan School, is particularly relevant here. In *Funzione delle scienze e significato dell'uomo* (1963), Paci interprets the crisis of science as a crisis of meaning and historical responsibility, stressing that scientific validity cannot be detached from praxis, intersubjective transmission, and the human task of sense-constitution. Science, on this view is the sense 'in this view' or 'on this viewpoint?', retains its rational force only insofar as it remains embedded in a living historical process rather than reified as an autonomous system of results.

Crucially, this continuity depends on the very possibility that meaning *outlives* the immediacy of intuitive presence and survives the finitude of any given community. Husserl therefore insists on the decisive role of writing and documentation: oral transmission remains tied to living conversation, whereas writing secures 'the persisting existence of the ideal objects' even when their originators 'are no longer alive' (Husserl 1970, 360). As Jacques Derrida later emphasized, writing thus opens a transcendental field in which sense is emancipated from present evidence and made available for indefinite reactivation.⁴

In this sense, writing is not an external instrument added to already constituted idealities. Rather, it represents the technical condition under which ideality becomes historically transmissible. An 'ideal construction,' Husserl writes, can 'be understood for all future time and by all coming generations of men and thus be capable of being handed down and reproduced with the identical meaning,' thereby attaining validity 'with unconditioned generality for all men, all times, all peoples' (Husserl 1970, 377). This analysis yields a precise phenomenological concept of history: the 'historical a priori' that Husserl identifies names the *transcendental* condition under which meaning can acquire a persisting mode of being through sedimentation and reactivation. History, Husserl insists, is 'nothing other than the vital movement of the coexistence and interweaving of original formations and sedimentations of meaning' (Husserl 1970, 371). This account is also crucial for the present study. It allows the contemporary crisis of temporality to be understood neither as a lack of imagination nor as a mere ideological fluctuation, but as a crisis of transmission. Indeed, when sedimentation hardens into mere preservation, inherited meanings survive only as opaque objectivity, and the future loses its accessibility as an open horizon of sense. To save the past, in the phenomenological sense clarified here, does not mean to restore it nostalgically, but to assume responsibility for its reactivation as a living source of

⁴ Derrida's engagement with Husserl, from *Speech and Phenomena* to *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction* (1989), is deeply informed by these themes. His analyses of writing, trace, and *différance* radicalize Husserl's insight that ideal meaning depends on inscription, transmission, and iterability. Writing, for Derrida, is not a secondary aid to living sense but the condition that allows meaning to survive presence, to be repeatable beyond any originating consciousness, and thus to acquire historical durability. In this sense, Derrida extends rather than abandons the Husserlian problem of historicity, showing how ideality is inseparable from temporal deferral, mediation, and the risk inherent in transmission.

meaning. Only such a non-rigid relation to inherited sense can sustain the openness of the present and preserve the future as a field of possibility. It is precisely this nexus (between historicity, embodiment, and technical mediation) that will be taken up and radicalized, in different but complementary ways, by Merleau-Ponty's account of an operative past, by Stiegler's analyses of tertiary retention and technical inheritance, and by Ihde's work on technologically mediated temporality.

The Operative Past and the Responsibility of Sense: Institution, Sedimentation, and Militant Truth

The phenomenological clarification of the past developed above finds a decisive extension in Merleau-Ponty's reinterpretation of Husserl's late work, explicitly grounded in the 'Origin of Geometry.' Indeed, as the *Notes de cours sur L'origine de la géométrie de Husserl* make clear, Merleau-Ponty reads this document as a paradigmatic inquiry into the historical and intersubjective conditions under which meaning acquires durability and remains available for future reactivation (Merleau-Ponty 1998). What Husserl disclosed in the case of *geometrical* idealities – namely, that validity persists only through sedimentation, transmission, and reactivation – is here generalized to the broader domain of cultural and embodied experience. Moreover, this Husserlian framework directly informs Merleau-Ponty's lectures on *Institution in Personal and Public History*. For Merleau-Ponty, institution designates the establishment of dimensions of sense 'in relation to which a whole series of other experiences will make sense and will make a sequel, a history,' while instituted sense is 'deposited' without being re-created at the moment of recovery and without determining in advance the course of what will follow (Merleau-Ponty 2010, 8–9). In this respect, institution can be read as a generalization of Husserl's concept of *Stiftung*: a first, founding event (*Urstiftung*) that never exhausts its sense in its initial occurrence, but continues to operate through sedimentation and partial reassumption.

On this basis, Merleau-Ponty articulates a phenomenology of the past that avoids both nostalgic restoration and voluntaristic reconstruction. Indeed, the past that matters for the constitution of meaning is not a collection of *former presents* available for intellectual, idealistic or transparent reappropriation, but an *operative* depth that supports experience without being fully thematizable. This is why, in *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty can speak of 'an original past, a past which has never been present' (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 281–282). Importantly, this

claim is not a thesis about cosmic time but about the *horizon of lived sense*: the ‘past which has never been present’ names an operative inheritance that exceeds any given present and yet conditions what can count as meaningful for it. Phenomenological temporality, in this precise sense, does not begin from a punctual origin available for retrieval, nor does it close in a final completion; it persists as a transmissive horizon within which each present assumes a provisional responsibility for how inherited sense is taken up and carried further. This conception becomes explicit in *The Visible and the Invisible*, where Merleau-Ponty introduces the idea of an ‘indestructible’ past that remains efficacious without being reducible to the ‘frameworks of [present] acts’ characteristic of intentional analytic (Merleau-Ponty 1969, 244; see also Al-Saji 2007). What must be rethought, he argues, is the latent intentionality that operates ‘within being’ itself, beyond the objectifying grasp of reflective consciousness. Accordingly, past is here no longer conceived as a mere modification of consciousness, but as a ‘massive Being’ that continues to bear the very fact of having perceived (Merleau-Ponty 1969, 244). This shift is decisive for the present inquiry: it shows why the crisis of transmission cannot be resolved by an intensification of reflection alone, since the operative past that conditions meaning is structurally anterior to reflective capture.

At this point, the notion of sedimentation acquires its full phenomenological and normative weight when considering the last lecture Merleau-Ponty gave at the Collège de France, *Husserl aux limites de la phénoménologie*, where he directly confronts the ‘Origin of Geometry’ in the light of his personal reflection while also considering the role of technical mediation Husserl himself went through. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, sedimented meanings ‘carry their sense as an activity that has sunk into obscurity, but that reawakens and can once again be transformed into activity’ (1998, 29; translation mine). For him, sedimentation is therefore inherently ambivalent. On the one hand, it enables what Merleau-Ponty would label as a ‘good’ sedimentation: a mode of inheritance that stabilizes sense sufficiently to orient practice and thought, while remaining open to reactivation and transformation. On the other hand, however, sedimentation can also degenerate into *sclerosis* when the acquired hardens into inert tradition and reactivation collapses into mere restoration (Merleau-Ponty 1998, 78; see also Thierry 1995). The distinction is not moral but strictly phenomenological: what is ‘good’ is that which remains workable, assumable, and capable of being taken up again without demanding a total re-foundation at every step. This ambivalence is fur-

ther clarified by Merleau-Ponty's distinction between two heterogeneous regimes of truth, also articulated explicitly in the *Notes de cours*.

On the one hand, the so-called 'logical truth' (fr. *vérité logique*) operates within already constituted idealities. It presupposes that the power to re-activate the founding operations of ideality has itself become sedimented, and it moves within 'the given universe of Sätze,' crystallizing meanings into stabilized propositions and methods without inheriting 'the power to reactivate the sources of sense' (*Sinnesquellen*) as Husserl would put this (Merleau-Ponty 1998, 80; see Dastur 2016). Logical truth thus presupposes sedimentation and can function productively only as long as this sedimentation remains operative; taken in isolation, however, it risks reinforcing sclerosis by treating inherited sense as a closed system of results.

Opposed to this regime, Merleau-Ponty calls into question 'constitutive idealities and ready-made language' (*les idéalités constitutives et le langage tout fait*) in order to recover, 'outside any technicization,' the very genesis of ideality (1998, 80–81). Philosophy, here, is not a meta-discipline surveying established truths, but the practice that reopens their historicity and reactivates their sense-sources. For the present study, this notion is also pivotal, for it names the phenomenological attitude required to counter a crisis of transmission by assuming responsibility for inherited sense rather than merely *administering* its results. Militant truth does not abolish sedimentation. Rather, it keeps sedimentation from hardening into closure by continually reopening the historical conditions and tacit sources that make meaning workable in the first place. It is precisely this logic, I think, that Stiegler radicalizes through his concept of *tertiary retention*. Building on Husserl's analyses of *Dokumentierung* and in continuity with Merleau-Ponty's account of sedimentation and institution, Stiegler argues that the endurance of meaning depends on the 'material inscription of the memory retentions in mnemotechnical systems' (Stiegler 2011, 4). Through such exteriorization, a 'collective memory qua patrimony' becomes transmissible beyond the limits of individual and even communal memory (Stiegler 2008, 98). Stiegler's decisive contribution here lies in showing that this technical mediation affects the *very structure* of the present. The temporality opened by writing and other mnemotechnical systems exceeds the 'living present' and gives rise to what he calls an 'archi-large-now,' a temporal field that conditions invention and transmission from the outset (Stiegler 2011, 216, 230; cf. Derrida 1989).

In this sense, phenomenological temporality appears as a transmissive horizon that no single present can found or complete. Whether inherited sense remains a living resource or collapses into inert accumulation depends on how sedimentation, institution, and technical inheritance are negotiated in practice. This conclusion is crucial for the overall argument of the paper: the contemporary crisis of futurity cannot be adequately understood as a lack of imagination or as a mere ideological shift. Conversely, it must be approached as a crisis of transmission, in which the balance between preservation and reactivation is disrupted. By clarifying the phenomenological conditions of a *good* construction of the past (one that conserves sense precisely by allowing it to be taken up again) this section provides the conceptual groundwork for the subsequent analysis of technologically mediated *anticipation* as a site where openness can be supported or prematurely *foreclosed*.

Technical Mediation and the Reconfiguration of Temporal Horizons

From this perspective, the guiding question of the present analysis can be reformulated more sharply: what, precisely, has gone wrong in the contemporary articulation of temporality? The answer proposed here is that the balance between sedimentation and anticipation has been structurally displaced. In particular, contemporary technoscientific forms of anticipation increasingly operate independently of the reactivation of inherited meaning. As a result, the future is no longer experienced as emerging from a living past, but as a domain of projected and *governable* outcomes, while the past itself loses its operative function as a source of orientation. The turn to postphenomenological perspectives does not abandon the phenomenological framework developed so far. It radicalizes it by relocating the question of temporal sense within technologically mediated practices of perception, interpretation, and sense stabilization. If meaning endures only through sedimentation and reactivation, the decisive issue becomes how these processes are transformed when access to the relevant phenomena is itself *technologically constituted*. This transformation is articulated with particular clarity in Ihde's postphenomenology. In his works, Ihde argues that technoscientific knowledge no longer proceeds from isolated intuitions or purely theoretical abstractions, as was apparent in Husserlian primitive considerations, but from technologically mediated relations that co-*constitute* what can appear as an object of experience. Accordingly, instruments do not merely extend human capacities, because they co-actively reconfigure the conditions

under which phenomena become perceptible and interpretable in the first place, thereby shaping what counts as *evidence* and what can enter a shared horizon of intelligibility (Ihde 1979, 1990). Two features of Ihde's account are crucial for the present inquiry. First, technoscientific disclosure is irreducibly *hermeneutic*. Indeed, in many scientific contexts, what is 'seen' is accessible only through immanent *translations*: measurements, visualizations, and inscriptions that must be read within interpretive practices. Satellite imagery, remote sensing, and computational outputs do not actually deliver a world 'as such.' Rather, they disclose a world through technologically configured styles of access, requiring interpretive competence and communal calibration in order to be grasped (Ihde 1998). Second, the *technoscience* Ihde speaks of is irreducibly *diachronic*. Many contemporary phenomena become intelligible only through long chains of recording, comparison, and cumulative inscription. A purely synchronic 'whole Earth measurement,' Ihde notes, would amount to little more than a momentary indicator unless situated within long-term series of measurements spanning decades and centuries, as is the case for global warming, for instance (Ihde 1998, 50–51; Ihde 2016, 80). What is at stake is that the relevant 'intuition' here is not the *presentation* of a determinate object, but the technologically mediated grasp of patterned change across time. In this respect, Ihde can be read as radicalizing a Husserlian insight by technical means: the conditions of validity and communicability depend on material supports and communal practices that exceed the scale of individual lives. Technoscience becomes 'instrumentally embodied' insofar as instruments take on the role of organs of perception, enabling access to phenomena that no unaided intuition could disclose (Ihde 2016, 80).

Yet this embodiment is never equivalent to transparency. Ihde stresses that technological mediation always involves a double movement, because revelation is inseparable from concealment. 'For every revealing transformation of the world, there is a simultaneously concealing transformation of the world which is given through a technological mediation' (Ihde 1990, 49). Indeed, instruments amplify certain dimensions of reality while filtering out others. They incline interpretation without fully determining it (Ihde 1990, 183). This irreducible opacity is here philosophically decisive. It prevents the reduction of technoscientific disclosure to pure calculation or to a definitive mapping of reality. At the same time, it clarifies why postphenomenology remains continuous with the earlier phenomenological problem of *transmission*. Because technosci-

entific meaning depends on cumulative inscriptions and revisable interpretive practices, it presupposes a form of stabilization that must remain workable and in principle corrigible. In other words, technological mediation can support the endurance of sense only insofar as it does not solidify into inert deposits that substitute for reactivation. However, the question of how contemporary anticipatory dispositifs affect this balance (whether they sustain or compromise the openness of temporal sense) becomes the next problem of this issue.

Anticipation, Technical Mediation, and the Risk of Temporal Closure

The preceding analysis has shown that technoscientific disclosure is inseparable from historically layered practices of sedimentation and interpretation. Meaning does not arise from isolated acts of intuition, nor does it persist through abstract validity alone. It endures only insofar as it can be transmitted, stabilized, and reactivated across time. Yet it is precisely this diachronic structure of sense that is put under pressure when *anticipation* itself becomes technically embodied and increasingly dominant.⁵ What is at stake, in other words, is not simply the expansion of our predictive capacities, but a *transformation* in how the future is phenomenologically accessible at all. From a postphenomenological perspective, anticipation is not an accidental feature of technoscience. As Ihde consistently argues, technologies actively mediate how the world appears and how it is temporally oriented. Scientific instruments and models do not merely register past or present states of affairs. They also reorganize experience by rendering future-oriented possibilities visible in advance. In this sense, technoscience institutes a specific style of futurity: one in which possible outcomes are projected, compared, and evaluated *before* they occur as such (Ihde 1998; 2016). This anticipatory mediation is indispensable for phenomena that exceed immediate perception, such as climate change or planetary processes. Without long-term modelling, simulation, and pro-

⁵ By anticipation, this paper does not mean a psychological expectation or a speculative projection of future states, but a structural dimension of temporal experience through which the present is oriented toward what is not yet. In phenomenological terms, anticipation names the protentional opening of experience, i.e. the way in which meaning is oriented beyond the given without being reducible to prediction. Its importance lies in the fact that anticipation mediates the relation between past sedimentations and future possibilities: when anticipation is reduced to technical forecasting or pre-emptive calculation, the future risks appearing as already determined, thereby undermining the openness required for responsible sense-making and historical renewal.

jection, such phenomena would remain largely unintelligible and practically inactionable.⁶

However, we can now add that when anticipation becomes structurally dominant, its phenomenological *ambivalence* becomes unavoidable. Anticipatory models do not simply open the future; they also tend to format it. By translating futurity into scenarios, trajectories, and risk profiles, they delimit in advance what can meaningfully count as a possible future. At this point, anticipation risks shifting from a mode of orientation to a mode of stabilization. The future no longer appears primarily as an open horizon calling for reassumption, but as a set of prefigured outcomes awaiting management. This transformation directly affects the problem that animates the present paper: the contemporary difficulty of experiencing the future as genuinely open rather than as foreclosed, catastrophic, or nostalgically displaced. The European initiative DESTIN-E, as analysed by Vincent Blok, offers a paradigmatic illustration of this shift.⁷ By constructing a digital twin of the Earth, DESTIN-E does not merely enhance environmental knowledge. Rather, it actively reorganizes the very horizon within which planetary futures become think-

⁶ Anticipation here designates a technologically mediated mode of temporal articulation through which phenomena unfolding across heterogeneous temporal scales are rendered intelligible as coherent processes. In the case of climate change, this involves the integration of past data series, present measurements, and future-oriented simulations into predictive models that exceed the capacities of unaided human perception. Contemporary forms of artificial intelligence, especially machine-learning systems applied to climate modelling, intensify this anticipatory function by detecting patterns, correlations, and trends that are not directly inferable from individual datasets. Importantly, such systems do not simply predict the future, but reorganise temporal experience by transforming dispersed traces into actionable scenarios. This reinforces the phenomenological claim that anticipation is not reducible to subjective expectation, but increasingly operates through technical mediations that structure how futures become conceivable and governable.

⁷ DESTIN-E (Destination Earth) is a flagship initiative of the European Commission designed to develop a high-precision digital twin of the Earth. Its objective is not merely representational, but anticipatory: by combining real-time data, long-term climate records, and AI-based simulations, DESTIN-E seeks to explore possible future states of the planet and to inform policy decisions related to climate change, risk management, and sustainability. As Blok emphasizes, such infrastructures do not simply support scientific knowledge: they actively reconfigure how the future is disclosed, anticipated, and governed. DESTIN-E is therefore relevant here not as a technological example among others, but as a concrete instantiation of a broader transformation in which the future increasingly appears through technically mediated scenarios that orient present action. This makes it a privileged case for examining the phenomenological and ethical implications of anticipatory technoscience.

able and actionable (Blok 2023). Through the integration of satellite data, climate models, and computational simulations, the Earth appears as a dynamic totality whose future states can be explored in advance. Phenomenologically, this means that the future enters experience not primarily as indeterminacy, but as a field of coherent and *anticipated scenarios*. Responsibility is thereby reconfigured, because it increasingly concerns the governance of projected outcomes rather than *responsiveness* to what has not yet taken form.⁸ What becomes visible in this case is not merely an epistemic shift, but a structural transformation in the relation between past, present, and future. The past is here primarily mobilized as data, that is, as a resource for predictive modelling, rather than as a sedimented field of meaning requiring reactivation. At the same time, the future is rendered as a set of computable trajectories, thereby narrowing the space of genuinely open possibilities. In this sense, DESTIN-E exemplifies the very disarticulation described above: anticipation becomes detached from the lived reactivation of inherited sense, and temporal openness risks being replaced by anticipatory closure.

Within the framework developed in this paper, this reconfiguration must be read as a critical point of tension in the transmission of temporal sense. Indeed, when anticipatory infrastructures function as provisional orientations, they can support what Husserl and Merleau-Ponty described as good sedimentation, a stabilization of meaning that enables action while remaining open to reinterpretation. In this case, anticipation does not replace responsibility but it almost evenly extends it across generation.⁹ Yet when models acquire *normative* authority, i.e.

⁸ This reconfiguration of responsibility raises a further phenomenological problem that exceeds the scope of the present analysis. If responsibility is increasingly exercised through the governance of projected outcomes, the question arises of how responsiveness to what has not yet taken form, i.e. to alterity, interruption, and non-anticipable demands, can still be accounted for. This issue will be briefly addressed in the concluding perspective through reference to Levinas's ethics of responsibility for the non-present and Waldenfeld's phenomenology of responsiveness, not as fully developed alternatives, but as critical horizons that mark the limits of anticipatory rationality rather than its replacement.

⁹ Responsibility is here said to be extended across generations insofar as anticipatory infrastructures allow present actors to take into account the long-term consequences of actions whose effects will be borne primarily by others who are not yet present. In phenomenological terms, such extension does not consist in predicting or controlling the future, but in widening the horizon within which present decisions are experienced as answerable to absent others. When anticipation remains provisional and revisable, it supports a form of intergenerational responsibility grounded in transmission rather than

when they become taken-for-granted representations of what will happen, they risk transforming sedimentation into fixation.¹⁰ Accordingly, the future ceases to be something that must be actively assumed and becomes something that appears already decided (with all that follows). This risk directly illuminates the contemporary proliferation of dystopian and retrotopian imaginaries. Dystopia emerges when the future is experienced as already closed by catastrophic projections, leaving no space for transformative action. Retrotopia, conversely, arises when the past is mobilized as a compensatory refuge, precisely because the future no longer appears inhabitable as a horizon of possibility. In both cases, the problem is not the content of these imaginaries, but the temporal structure that underlies them: a disruption in the *balance* between sedimentation and reactivation, between inheritance and anticipation.

At this point, Morton's analysis of hyperobjects provides a crucial phenomenological corrective. Indeed, *Hyperobjects* such as global warming, Morton argues, are massively distributed across time and space and resist totalization (Morton 2013). Their temporal viscosity and nonlocality prevent them from being fully synchronized or exhaustively anticipated. From the perspective of this paper, this resistance is not merely epistemic. Rather, it could indicate a structural *excess* of sense that no predictive model can fully absorb. Hyperobjects thus expose the limits of anticipatory closure and remind us that the future cannot be reduced to a calculable extension of present knowledge, even under advanced technological mediation. It is precisely here that Merleau-Ponty's notion of *vérité militante* becomes, once again, decisive. Indeed, the militant truth he supported does not consist in producing definitive representations of the future, nor in administering stabilized projections. Conversely, it names a form of rational responsibility that remains *answerable* to the historicity

mastery: the present assumes responsibility not for determining future outcomes, but for preserving the conditions under which future agents may inherit, reinterpret, and transform the sense of what is handed down.

¹⁰ Gardiner has analysed this risk in terms of what he calls the tyranny of the contemporary, i.e. the structural tendency of present-oriented decision-making to treat projected models as normatively sufficient grounds for action, thereby displacing responsibility toward future agents and conditions. In this framework, models do not merely inform judgment but may come to function as justificatory substitutes for ethical deliberation, encouraging a form of temporal moral complacency. When projections are treated as authoritative representations of what will happen, rather than as provisional orientations open to revision, they contribute to a moral fixation that stabilizes expectations at the expense of responsiveness to future uncertainty.

of sense and capable of reopening sedimented meanings. Applied to anticipatory technologies, this implies that predictive models must remain contestable, revisable, and phenomenologically situated. Their legitimacy does not lie in their capacity to close the future, but in their ability to orient action without exhausting what the future may become. Read in this light, Ihde's postphenomenology does not endorse a technicist freezing of temporality. On the contrary, his insistence on the interpretive and provisional character of technoscience converges with the phenomenological demand to preserve temporal *openness*. Technological mediation intensifies responsibility rather than resolving it. When anticipation becomes technically embodied, responsibility shifts toward a critical engagement with the very temporal frameworks that shape expectation and action. The challenge is not to renounce anticipation, but to prevent it from collapsing into *preemption*.

The central claim of this paper can therefore be restated with greater precision. Saving the future is inseparable from saving the conditions under which the past can continue to function as a living, reactivable ground of meaning. Utopian, dystopian, and retrotopian imaginaries are not competing solutions to a temporal crisis. They are symptoms of a deeper disruption in the phenomenological transmission of sense. Anticipation must remain a practice of orientation grounded in good sedimentation and sustained by militant truth. Only under these conditions can technoscientific mediation support, rather than undermine, the openness of the future as a meaningful horizon of experience.

Concluding Perspective: Temporal Sense, Crisis, and the Fate of the Future

The analyses developed throughout this paper converge on a single, structurally coherent claim. Contemporary figures of utopia, dystopia, and retrotopia do not primarily express competing visions of the future, but different ways in which the phenomenological articulation of time has become strained. What is at stake is not the exhaustion of imagination, nor the mere dominance of pessimistic or nostalgic narratives, but a disruption in the transmission of meaning across past, present, and future. Phenomenology allows this disruption to be described with greater precision by shifting attention from temporal contents to temporal conditions. First, the paper has shown that the future can function as a meaningful horizon only insofar as the past remains operatively available as a living sediment. Husserl's diagnosis of crisis already indicates

that meaning collapses when sedimentation hardens into inert tradition, severed from its conditions of reactivation. Merleau-Ponty radicalizes this insight by showing that the past which matters phenomenologically is never a collection of former presents, but an operative depth that sustains experience without being fully thematizable. In this sense, saving the past does not mean restoring it or securing it as an object of memory. It means assuming responsibility for its reactivation as a resource for new sense. When this responsibility fails, the present loses its orienting depth, and the future ceases to appear as a space of transformation.

Second, the paper has argued that contemporary technoscientific forms of anticipation intensify this problem rather than resolve it. Postphenomenology makes clear that technological mediation does not merely support cognition but reorganizes temporal experience itself. Predictive models, simulations, and planetary infrastructures disclose futures in advance, shaping what appears urgent, plausible, and actionable. While such anticipatory mediation is indispensable for understanding large-scale phenomena, it also carries a structural risk. The future may become preformatted as a set of expected trajectories rather than experienced as an open horizon *calling for reassumption*. When anticipation solidifies into authoritative projection, sedimentation turns into fixation, and the future is effectively immobilized by its own visibility. Third, this temporal distortion provides the phenomenological background against which utopia, dystopia, and retrotopia must be understood. Utopia expresses the attempt to reopen futurity through projection when the present no longer sustains it from within. Dystopia registers the experience of a future perceived as already foreclosed by catastrophic anticipation. Retrotopia redirects normative expectations toward an idealized past when the future no longer appears inhabitable as a horizon of meaning. These figures do not solve the temporal crisis but symptomatically respond to it. Each presupposes a *breakdown* in the balance between inheritance and anticipation, preservation and transformation. Their proliferation thus signals not a surplus of temporal imagination, but a fragility in the structures that allow time to be meaningfully inhabited.

From this perspective, the contribution of phenomenology is neither programmatic nor prescriptive. It does not propose a new image of the future to replace dystopian or retrotopian narratives. Instead, it clarifies the conditions under which any future can appear as more than a projection, a threat, or a compensation. Husserl's notion of crisis, Merleau-Ponty's account of institution and militant truth, Stiegler's analysis of technical in-

heritance, and Ihde's postphenomenology converge on a shared insight: temporal openness depends on a non-rigid, responsibly mediated relation to the past. The future remains accessible only where inherited sense can be taken up again without being either absolutized or erased. The ethical and responsive phenomenologies of Levinas and Waldenfels finally allow this insight to be radicalized. They show that the future cannot be fully secured through anticipation, prediction, or governance. It addresses us instead as an appeal that interrupts established orders of sense and calls for response rather than control. Responsiveness names a temporal rationality that preserves delay, asymmetry, and non-coincidence as conditions of responsibility. In this sense, phenomenology 'saves' the future not by stabilizing it, but by refusing to close it prematurely.

To 'responsibly mediate' the past, in the sense proposed here, does not mean to preserve it unchanged nor to freely reinterpret it without constraint. It requires maintaining a dynamic balance between preservation and reactivation. This implies, first, that inherited meanings must remain revisable and contestable, rather than being treated as fixed authorities. Second, it requires that technical mediations – such as predictive models – remain open to reinterpretation and do not acquire the status of definitive representations of the future. Finally, it entails a form of responsiveness to what exceeds both inherited frameworks and anticipatory projections, that is, to the emergence of meaning that cannot be fully pre-figured. Only under these conditions can temporal transmission remain generative rather than rigidified. The overall argument of the paper can therefore be summarized as follows. The contemporary crisis of futurity is a crisis of transmission. It arises when the past no longer functions as a living ground of meaning and anticipation becomes detached from responsibility. Utopia, dystopia, and retrotopia emerge as secondary figures within this crisis, not as its resolution. Phenomenology does not overcome this crisis by supplying new temporal imaginaries. It clarifies, instead, the fragile conditions under which futures remain possible at all: faithful sedimentation, critical reactivation, technical mediation without foreclosure, and responsiveness to what exceeds presence. Only where these conditions are sustained can the future remain open without becoming arbitrary, and the past operative without becoming oppressive.

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Unfolding Temporalities: How Utopias Integrate Time in Eighteenth-Century France

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Abstract. Utopia is classically defined as both a *no-place* and a *good place*. Its primary determination is spatial: utopia appears as an elsewhere, set apart from existing reality. Time, by contrast, has often been treated as secondary or even absent. Influential interpretations, most notably those of Reinhart Koselleck and Bronisław Baczko, argue that utopian thought becomes temporal when it projects itself into the future and aligns with broader transformations of Enlightenment political imagination. Such readings risk imposing a linear narrative on a heterogeneous corpus. By analysing selected eighteenth-century French utopian texts, this article challenges the idea of a unidirectional process of temporalisation. It demonstrates instead that utopian writing mobilises distinct temporal orientations: the past as a critical elsewhere in Fénelon's *Telemachus* (1699) and Terrasson's *Sethos* (1731); the future as a mode of distance rather than a horizon of realisation in Mercier's *L'An 2440* (1771); and cyclical temporality in Tiphaigne de La Roche's *Histoire des Galligènes* (1765). The article thus proposes a plural and non-linear conception of utopian time, in which past, present, and future are intertwined. This perspective refines the historiography of eighteenth-century utopias while contributing to broader theoretical debates on the relationship between time and utopia.

Key Words: utopia, temporality, French Enlightenment, anticipation, antiquity, critique

Razvijajoče se časovnosti: kako utopije vključujejo čas v Franciji 18. stoletja

Povzetek. Utopija je klasično opredeljena kot »nikjer« (angl. *no-place*) in »dober kraj« (angl. *good place*). Njena primarna določitev je prostorska: utopija se pojavlja kot »drugje«, ločeno od obstoječe realnosti.

Nasprotno pa je bil čas pogosto obravnavan kot sekundaren ali celo odsoten. Vplivne interpretacije, zlasti tiste Reinharta Kosellecka in Bronisława Baczka, trdijo, da utopično mišljenje postane časovno takrat, ko se projicira v prihodnost in se uskladi s širšimi preoblikovanji politične domišljije razsvetljenstva. Takšne interpretacije tvegajo, da heterogenemu korpusu besedil vsilijo linearno pripoved. Z analizo izbranih francoskih utopičnih besedil iz 18. stoletja pričujoči članek izpodbija idejo o enosmernem procesu temporalizacije. Namesto tega dokazuje, da utopično pisanje mobilizira različne časovne usmeritve: preteklost kot kritično »drugje« v Fénelonovem *Telemachusu* (1699) in Terrassonovem *Setosu* (1731); prihodnost kot način oddaljenosti in ne kot obzorje uresničitve v Mercierjevem delu *L'An 2440* (1771); ter ciklično časovnost v delu Tiphaigneja de La Rocha *Histoire des Galligènes* (1765). Članek tako predlaga pluralno in nelinearno pojmovanje utopičnega časa, v katerem so preteklost, sedanjost in prihodnost medsebojno prepletene. Ta perspektiva izpopolnjuje historiografijo utopij 18. stoletja, hkrati pa prispeva k širšim teoretskim razpravam o odnosu med časom in utopijo.

Ključne besede: utopija, časovnost, francosko razsvetljenje, anticipacija, antika, kritika

Introduction

Utopia has traditionally been defined in relation to space. As its etymology indicates, utopia designates both a *no-place* (*ou-topos*) and a *good place* (*eu-topos*). This spatial ambiguity has long structured utopian discourse, insofar as utopia is conceived as an elsewhere, a place set apart from existing social and political reality, within which alternative forms of life and organisation can be imagined. The spatial dimension is therefore not incidental but constitutive, since it provides the very condition of possibility for utopian description itself. In this sense, a minimal definition of utopia may be proposed: utopia is the description of an ideal place governed by norms and values that differ from those of the present world.

The primacy of the spatial dimension is already articulated in Thomas More's *Utopia* (first published in 1516), where the utopian society is presented through the detailed description of an island, its institutions and social practices (More 2011, 38–40). This spatial organisation is further reinforced by the structure of the work itself, divided into two books: the first offers a critical account of social and political conditions in early sixteenth-century England; the second presents the description of the is-

land of Utopia. By contrast, the temporal dimension occupies a far more ambiguous position. Although the utopian order is situated outside ordinary historical continuity, time is neither thematised nor conceptualised with the same degree of explicitness as space.

At first glance, utopia appears devoid of time. While time is undeniably present within utopian narratives, it does not function as a structuring principle. Utopian society is characterised by an internal temporality regulating the daily lives of its inhabitants (cycles of work, rest, and social organisation), yet this internal time remains largely stable and repetitive (More 2011, 44–48). It is correlated with an external temporal framework that allows travellers from the real world to enter and leave utopia, but this relation does not give rise to historical transformation within the utopian space itself (More 2011, 37). Because utopian life is defined as complete or perfected, temporal succession does not operate as a vector of change or development.

Utopian time thus appears as a regulated and neutralised temporality. This feature is not confined to More's work, but extends to a broader tradition of texts written in its wake. In this article, utopia is not treated as a rigid genre or as a fully stabilised concept; the term itself only enters common usage towards the end of the eighteenth century. Rather, the analysis is guided by recurrent textual structures. The works considered here do not necessarily identify themselves as utopias; yet they reproduce the fundamental descriptive scheme inaugurated by More. It is on the basis of this shared structure that they are treated as utopian.

Contemporary understandings of utopia tend to privilege time over space (Bloch 1986; Macherey 2011). Utopia is commonly conceived as an elsewhere that does not yet exist and may, or may not, be realisable in the future. Within this framework, time, and more specifically futurity, becomes the decisive dimension of utopian imagination. Utopia is articulated as the possibility of transforming the present world at another time, rather than as the description of a separate place existing alongside it. While spatial coordinates do not disappear entirely, and utopia continues to function as an elsewhere, they are relegated to a secondary role, understood as the outcome of temporal transformation rather than its point of departure.

This shift raises an important question: when and under what conditions does utopia integrate time as a structuring parameter? A canonical answer is formulated by Reinhart Koselleck, who introduces the concept of the 'temporalisation of utopia' (*Verzeitlichung der Utopie*) (Koselleck

2006, 252–273). According to Koselleck, utopia becomes genuinely temporal only in the second half of the eighteenth century, when it ceases to be defined primarily as an alternative place and is instead projected into the future. The emergence of futurity thus marks a fundamental rupture in the history of utopian thought: utopia is no longer organised around spatial separation, but around temporal anticipation. Through this transformation, utopia becomes capable of inscribing itself within a philosophy of history, no longer as the description of an ideal elsewhere, but as the projection of an ideal content into a possible future.

To support his thesis, Koselleck undertakes a conceptual and lexical analysis of the term *utopia* across English, French, and German usages, showing that it undergoes a significant shift in meaning and function. This semantic transformation reflects a broader change in the paradigm of utopia. As a sign of this temporalisation, Koselleck turns to a French utopia published by Louis-Sébastien Mercier in 1771: *L'An 2440* (Mercier 1999). Set in Paris, Mercier's text describes a transformed version of the city without displacing it spatially. What changes is not the place itself, but the time in which it is situated: Paris in the year 2440. Koselleck therefore interprets this temporal displacement as emblematic of the transition from spatial utopia to future-oriented utopia, that is, from *utopia* to *uchronia*.

A similar position is advanced by Bronisław Baczko in *Utopian Lights* (Baczko 1989). Like Koselleck, Baczko emphasises the growing centrality of the future in utopian thought and identifies the final decades of the eighteenth century as a decisive moment in the history of utopian imagination. Yet he is more cautious in attributing a privileged role to Mercier's *L'An 2440*. Rather than treating Mercier's text as the origin of a new utopian model, Baczko tends to read it as a symptomatic expression of a transformation already under way, noting that other anticipatory narratives had already begun to emerge (Baczko 1989, 122–128). Baczko's primary interest thus lies less in the formal reconfiguration of utopia than in the changing relationship between utopia and history, particularly in the second half of the eighteenth century and during the revolutionary period.

Despite their methodological differences, Koselleck and Baczko seem to converge on a linear account in which utopia remains essentially non-temporal until it is temporalised through futurity in the late eighteenth century. This convergence, however, conceals three difficulties. First, can Mercier's text sustain the claim of a paradigm shift? Second, can the

emergence of futurity be understood as a rupture separating two distinct regimes of utopian imagination? Third, and most fundamentally, does the absence of futurity necessarily entail the absence of time in earlier utopias?¹

The linear interpretation of utopian temporalisation risks imposing a retrospective teleological framework. Read from the standpoint of modern temporality, which accords a central place to the future, earlier utopian texts may appear merely as imperfect stages on the way towards a fully temporalised model. Such a perspective projects a unidirectional conception of historical time onto the past, thereby obscuring the diversity of temporal configurations at work within utopia. The transition from space to time is thus presented as abrupt and decisive, even though the texts themselves suggest a far more gradual and heterogeneous process.

This article is structured in three steps. It first revisits interpretations that locate the temporalisation of utopia in a rupture occurring in the late eighteenth century. It then examines how different temporal modes – retrospective, cyclical, and anticipatory – are stratified within utopian texts. Finally, it argues that the integration of time into utopian writing follows a more complex trajectory than the linear model suggests. To support this claim, it examines selected eighteenth-century French utopian texts in order to identify the concrete ways in which time is articulated in their structures. The focus on French-language texts is not arbitrary: it is within this corpus that the diversity of utopian temporal configurations becomes most visible. The analysis moves from the classical spatial paradigm to past- and future-oriented temporalities, showing that utopian time cannot be reduced to a progressive temporal logic.

The Classical Paradigm

When time is considered in relation to utopia, it is most often through the lens of anticipation. This emphasis reflects a modern understanding of utopia as oriented towards what does not yet exist, as a projection of possible transformation within historical time. This raises a problem: how

¹ It should be noted that Koselleck and Baczko do not analyse the same corpus of texts. This points to a recurring methodological problem in utopian studies: to which texts does a given author refer when advancing claims about utopia? The heterogeneity of primary materials across studies complicates direct comparison and calls for caution in assessing broad claims about the utopian tradition.

did utopia move from being conceived as a place that is nowhere to being understood as a place that is not yet?

Classical utopias are not structured around a temporal framework.² Space constitutes the primary and organising coordinate of utopian imagination, while time remains secondary and non-structuring. The utopian world is located elsewhere (on an island, in a distant land, or beyond the boundaries of known geography) and this spatial distance is what guarantees its difference from existing reality (Baczko et al. 2016, 13–24). Space functions here not simply as a setting but as a structural principle; it allows the utopian order to be presented as coherent, complete, and internally consistent.

Time is not absent; it is neutralised. Classical utopias presuppose an internal temporality governing the daily life of their inhabitants (cycles of labour and rest, education, ritual, and social reproduction), but this temporality is repetitive and regulated rather than transformative. It does not introduce novelty or rupture, nor does it orient the utopian society towards a future state of fulfilment. Moreover, although utopian narratives often rely on an external temporal framework that allows travellers from the real world to reach and leave the utopian space, this narrative device does not generate historical change within utopia itself. Time, in other words, exists without functioning as a vector of becoming.

Accordingly, classical utopias are not originally bound to the idea of realisation. Realisation presupposes a conception of time oriented towards historical development, future fulfilment, and progressive transformation. Such a conception only begins to take shape at the end of the eighteenth century and finds its full articulation in the context of the crisis of the *Ancien Régime* and the French Revolution. Classical utopias, by contrast, are not unrealised projects awaiting implementation in time. They are coherent worlds presented as already complete, whose function is not to be realised but to serve as mirrors, counter-models, or critical points of comparison with existing reality.

Setting aside the assumption that utopia becomes temporal only via futurity, a close reading of the texts reveals the presence of other temporal modes. By treating classical utopias as fundamentally non-temporal, traditional interpretations risk reducing their temporal dimension to a mere

² By ‘classical utopias’ (or the ‘classical paradigm’), I designate the tradition inaugurated by Thomas More’s *Utopia* (2011) and extending to the late eighteenth century, when the term itself enters common usage and the paradigm begins to break down.

deficiency. Such readings tend to measure earlier utopian texts against a later, future-oriented model, implicitly assuming that time becomes philosophically relevant only when it is articulated as progress or anticipation. As a result, temporal structures that do not fit this model are either overlooked or dismissed as secondary. The classical paradigm thus invites a reassessment: not of whether time is present in utopia, but of the diverse ways in which it can be integrated without being subordinated to futurity.

Disrupting the Classical Paradigm

Louis-Sébastien Mercier's *L'An 2440* holds a central place in the historiography of utopia. Upon its first publication in 1771, the work enjoyed considerable success, a reception that was subsequently reshaped by the events of the French Revolution. Mercier himself retrospectively presented the text as a form of anticipation, and it increasingly came to be read as a prophetic vision whose predictions appeared to have been confirmed by history. This success can be attributed in part to its evocative, future-oriented title, which promises an unprecedented dream and retains a lasting power of appeal, even for modern readers. This retrospective framing, however, risks obscuring the specific temporality at work in Mercier's text.

Reading *The Year 2440* as a fulfilled prophecy misrepresents the text's temporality. It reflects a tendency to project onto it a model of historical realisation that does not correspond to its internal logic. Although the narrative is explicitly situated in the future, this futurity does not function as a horizon of progressive implementation. The temporal distance separating the present of the 1770s, when Mercier composed the text, from the year 2440 does not delineate a sequence of historical stages to be traversed, nor does it propose a programme destined to be enacted over time. Instead, the future serves as a critical vantage point from which the present is displaced, rendered strange, and subjected to evaluation. In this sense, Mercier's futurity functions less as anticipation than as critique.

An examination of the text's composition clarifies this. Mercier does not invent unprecedented social or political forms projected into an unknown future. Rather, *L'An 2440* gathers elements already present in the intellectual, moral, and political debates of his own time. Its originality lies not in the novelty of its content, but in the way these dispersed elements are condensed within a single narrative framework structured by a decisive fictional device: a protagonist who falls asleep in eighteenth-

century Paris and awakens there in the year 2440. The passage from present to future occurs through a sudden leap that bypasses historical mediation (Mercier 1999, 35). The protagonist does not witness the gradual realisation of utopia; he is confronted with its accomplished form. The future thus operates as a mirror held up to the present rather than as a horizon towards which history progresses.

Consider the chosen date: 2440. The temporal distance it introduces reinforces this interpretation. The future invoked here is not a future to be reached, but a future to be contemplated. In this respect, time functions as an analogue of space. This configuration begins to shift only in the aftermath of the French Revolution. In the decades that follow, the term utopia becomes established as a common designation, and utopia increasingly emerges as a distinct object of political and social reflection (Koselleck 2006, 253–255). This lexical stabilisation coincides with a transformation in the experience of time. The Revolution introduces the historical possibility of collective self-transformation, making realisation thinkable as a political horizon. Within this new configuration, utopia is no longer conceived primarily as a place that exists nowhere, but as a place that does not yet exist. It is in this sense that the works of Charles Fourier and Saint-Simon can be read not only as speculative constructions, but as interventions oriented towards social transformation.

By the late eighteenth century, the classical utopian paradigm is no longer stable. The reference to Thomas More no longer functions as an organising model; utopia acquires growing conceptual autonomy as an idea and political horizon. Yet this development should not obscure the fact that time was already present in utopian writing well before futurity became dominant. Why should the temporalisation of utopia be identified exclusively with futurity?

The Past in Utopia I: The Mythological Elsewhere

Alongside the enduring reference to Thomas More, at the turn of the eighteenth century, another work comes to occupy a central place in the utopian tradition: *Telemachus* by François de Salignac de La Mothe-Fénelon (Fénelon 1994, first published in 1699). Conceived as a continuation of Book IV of Homer's *Odyssey*, the narrative recounts the journey of Telemachus, the son of Ulysses, who leaves Ithaca accompanied by the old family friend and his tutor Mentor, the goddess Minerva in disguise, in search of his father. The text follows the protagonists' voyage across the Mediterranean, their encounters along the way, and the adventures that

ensue. Rich in references to classical mythology, this itinerary provides a narrative framework through which political instruction and moral guidance are conveyed.

Telemachus cannot be classified as a utopia in the strict sense. Considered as a whole, its narrative does not offer a systematic description of an ideal society. Nevertheless, it incorporates passages that reproduce the utopian descriptive scheme inaugurated by More. This is particularly evident in Book VII, where Telemachus and Mentor encounter a sailor who recounts his voyage to Bétique (Fénelon 1994, 97). The utopian society is introduced indirectly, through the testimony of this traveller, and described as an elsewhere governed by principles distinct from those of existing political reality. Structurally, this narrative device closely parallels that of classical utopia, in which distance creates the conditions for comparison and critique.

The society of Bétique is located within an idealised antiquity. This setting implicitly contrasts with the political reality of contemporary France under Louis XIV. Although embedded within a broader *roman de formation*, the utopian mechanism remains intact: two orders of reality are placed in relation, allowing the present to be judged from the standpoint of an ideal elsewhere. What distinguishes Fénelon's strategy is that the past functions here precisely as a mythological elsewhere.

The antiquity invoked in *Telemachus* is neither strictly historical nor oriented towards antiquarian concerns. By confronting the present with an exemplary past, Fénelon activates a mode of critique that does not entail a positive programme or project. The critique of luxury articulated in the land of Bétique is a particularly striking example. The inhabitants of this land maintain that peoples who have devoted themselves to superfluous pursuits are 'very unhappy in having taken so much trouble to corrupt themselves' (Fénelon 1994, 110).

The critique of luxury is not the only theme traditionally associated with utopian writing to appear in the description of Bétique; it is accompanied, for example, by the valorisation of simplicity and the moral regulation of social life, which together reinforce its normative framework. Yet precisely because this ideal is situated in a mythological past and presented as an exemplary model rather than as a project to be implemented, it resists interpretation in terms of realisation. This claim, however, is far from self-evident. Under the influence of retrospective readings that identify utopia primarily with realisable futures, Fénelon's text is not always recognised as utopian. Some commentators therefore prefer to lo-

cate utopia in those sections of the text in which Telemachus arrives in Salentum and Mentor actively participates in political and social reform (Fénelon 1994, Books VIII–X; Trousson 1979, 98–100). This contrast is instructive: it reveals that the exclusion of past-oriented utopias depends less on the absence of utopian structures than on the privileging of realisation as the defining criterion of utopian thought.

Classical utopia, however, is not a project in the sense of a programme or a sequence of measures destined for implementation. Rather, it operates through the description of a complete world whose internal coherence stands in contrast to existing reality. Its critical force lies precisely in this ontological distance. From this perspective, the mythological past in *Telemachus* does not weaken utopia's critical function; it intensifies it. The mythological past thus functions as a political horizon of a specific kind. Utopia here takes the form neither of anticipation nor of a present that nostalgically contemplates the past; rather, it is the past that looks upon the present and exposes its failures (Fénelon 1994, 111–112).

Through this inversion, Fénelon shows that utopian temporality can be fully operative without futurity. Time enters utopia through the past as a resource that allows utopia to function as a space of critique. This recourse to the past does not initiate a process of historical development; it introduces a temporal dimension that enables comparison with the present. The cases of Fénelon and Mercier thus converge on a decisive point: time, no less than space, participates in the construction of the ontological distance upon which utopia depends.

The Past in Utopia II: Nostalgia or Exemplum?

Why does temporal displacement into the past become a means of constructing the utopian elsewhere? Part of the answer lies in a transformation of geographical imagination. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, the world increasingly appeared as largely mapped. Although zones of ignorance persisted, the plausibility of radically unknown geographical spaces diminished. In this context, utopian imagination was compelled to seek new forms of distance capable of sustaining critique. Temporal displacement offered precisely such a resource. The past made it possible to situate utopia in an elsewhere that was no longer primarily spatial but temporal, without abandoning the logic of separation that defines classical utopia.

This tendency was further reinforced by the success of *The Adventures of Telemachus*. Owing to its wide circulation and lasting influence,

Fénelon's text became integrated into the utopian tradition alongside that of Thomas More. As a result, the use of the past as a utopian setting was no longer an isolated strategy, but a transmissible narrative model. The resulting play of mirrors thus functions less as an original argumentative device than as a formal pattern reproduced across texts that draw on the success of earlier works. Among the texts that develop this model, a particularly significant example is Jean Terrasson's *Sethos* (1731).³

Terrasson's *Sethos* does more than offer a narrative set in antiquity; it stages a complex interplay between history and fiction. *Sethos* foregrounds the relationship between historical knowledge and fictional construction, showing how erudite material and invented episodes intertwine without collapsing into one another, thereby producing a narrative of a distinctive kind. What matters most for our purposes is that the novel raises the question of utopian temporality. The utopian elsewhere it constructs is situated in an archaic past that is no longer mythological in the strict sense but ancient. Located in ancient Egypt, this past is distant not only from the present, but also from classical myth, and is reconstructed through erudition, ritual, and initiation rather than through legendary narrative.

The mobilisation of such a past gives rise to an interpretive dilemma: does it imply a return to an original state, or does it function as an *exemplum* offered for imitation? A close reading of *Sethos* suggests that neither interpretation is fully adequate. The past invoked by Terrasson is not presented as a state to which society might return, nor as a model to be directly reproduced. Instead, it operates as an *operational past*, a temporal configuration that enables critique without establishing a relation of derivation or restoration.

The strategy is announced from the outset. The introduction to *Sethos* opens with a warning against any claim to historical authenticity: 'There is no reason to doubt that this is a work of fiction' (Terrasson 1731, I, III; my translation). Ancient Egypt thus functions not as an origin to be recovered, but as a space of formation. The initiatory structure of the narrative does not propose the retrieval of a lost perfection, but rather the transmission of principles through symbolic experience. The past is therefore neither immobile nor inert; it is mobilised as an active resource that shapes reflection.

In this case as well, the insertion of the past does not fundamentally

³ Available at <https://archive.org/details/sethoshistoire002terrgoog>.

alter the ontological structure of classical utopia. Despite variations in temporal setting, the paradigm inaugurated by Thomas More remains structurally in place. Utopia continues to function as an elsewhere radically separated from the present. What changes is not the structure of utopia, but the modality through which distance is produced. It is nevertheless important to note that the relation between present and past remains ontological rather than historical.

A pattern already encountered reappears here. Just as in *L'An 2440* the future is placed at such a distance that it cannot interact with the present as a process of realisation, so too the pasts mobilised in eighteenth-century utopias are situated at a remove that prevents any dynamic temporal tension. In both cases, time functions as a mode of distance rather than as a vector of transformation. Temporal displacement, whether towards a remote past or a distant future, thus reinforces utopia's structural separation from reality without introducing a logic of historical becoming.

The Limits of Linear Temporalisation

The integration of time into eighteenth-century utopian writing does not follow a homogeneous or linear trajectory. Temporal configurations emerge in fragmented and discontinuous forms, coexisting with the classical spatial paradigm rather than replacing it. This argument does not imply that utopian texts in eighteenth-century France are predominantly temporalised, nor that works incorporating time constitute the majority. In quantitative terms, most utopian texts of the period remain structured by spatial models and do not develop a fully articulated temporal dimension. This remains true even after the publication of *L'An 2440* and beyond the moment of transformation identified by Koselleck or Baczkó. The issue is therefore not quantitative but conceptual: the tendency to equate temporalisation with futurity.

Even when futurity becomes more prominent, spatially organised models persist alongside temporal ones, and utopia is not uniformly reconfigured as a project of realisation. The transformation at stake thus concerns not the simple introduction of time into utopian writing, but a broader shift in the conception of utopia itself. This broader shift is most clearly visible not in the texts that incorporate time, but in those that do not. In *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville* (Supplement to Bougainville's Voyage) by Denis Diderot (first published in 1772), utopian critique is articulated through a geographical elsewhere rather

than through temporal projection (Diderot 1989). Similarly, the episodes of Butua and Tamoé in *Aline et Valcour* (first published in 1788) by Marquis de Sade present ideal or anti-ideal societies located in remote spaces, without mobilising either the past or the future as structuring coordinates (Sade 1990). In both cases, utopia continues to function through spatial separation, preserving the classical logic of alterity without establishing a dynamic relation to time.

Even in the latter half of the eighteenth century, utopian imagination does not converge towards a single temporal model. Alongside these spatially structured texts, the period also produces utopias in which time enters the utopian framework in a more problematic and internally differentiated manner. In such cases, temporality is neither absent nor oriented towards futurity or realisation. Instead, it intervenes in and modifies the internal organisation of the utopian world itself.

Tiphaigne de La Roche's *Histoire des Galligènes* (2019, first published in 1765) offers a particularly instructive case. The narrative follows a familiar pattern: the protagonist reaches a remote island after a shipwreck and later returns to Europe. At first glance, the text thus appears to align with the tradition inaugurated by More. Yet this spatial organisation is complicated by the temporal regime governing Galligène society: 'Just as society is formed and perfected over time, so too it gradually degenerates, declines, and eventually falls' (Tiphaigne de La Roche 2019, 1366; my translation).

In contrast to classical utopias, which present a stable and completed order, the world of the Galligènes is explicitly subject to cyclical change. The island's history unfolds in three successive phases – foundation, apogee, and decline – corresponding respectively to the formation of social institutions, a period of prosperity and stability, and a gradual disintegration of both institutions and moral customs. Utopia is therefore inscribed within a cyclical temporality structured by recurrent rhythms of rise and decay. Change does not lead towards progressive improvement or historical realisation but instead relativises both permanence and perfection. The ideal society is neither fixed nor oriented towards fulfilment; it is governed by a repetitive temporal logic that resists linear development. Temporality here takes the form of cyclical rhythm rather than futurity, confirming that eighteenth-century utopian writing cannot be reduced to a single, developmental model of time.

It thus becomes difficult to describe the temporalisation of utopia as a linear process. While Koselleck and Baczkó rightly identify a de-

cisive transformation associated with the emergence of futurity, this transformation cannot be understood as the beginning of temporality in utopian thought. Rather, futurity radicalises temporal configurations already present within utopian writing. Temporalisation must therefore be understood as a stratified and non-linear process in which different temporal orientations coexist.

Utopian Temporal Plurality

The temporalisation of utopia cannot be explained as a simple 'discovery' of time. What changes in the eighteenth century is not the presence of time as such, but the way in which temporal dimensions are articulated within utopian writing. This reconfiguration is inseparable from broader transformations in philosophical reflections on time. Throughout the eighteenth century, temporality increasingly becomes an object of conceptual attention, even before it is fully thematised as an autonomous category. Philosophical discourse begins to register a plurality of temporal experiences – succession and duration, repetition and rupture, continuity and discontinuity – at a moment marked by profound shifts in historical consciousness. Political instability, social reorganisation, and the growing perception of acceleration destabilise inherited temporal frameworks. Time ceases to function as a neutral background and becomes a problem in its own right.

Utopian writing does not merely reflect these transformations; it actively participates in them. As a critical mode of thought, utopia provides a privileged space in which different temporal configurations can be tested without being immediately subordinated to historical feasibility. Rather than adopting a single temporal logic, eighteenth-century utopian texts combine heterogeneous temporal orientations within the same framework. Utopia thus becomes a site in which time is composed, arranged, and experimented with, rather than simply represented.

This plurality also clarifies the status of futurity within utopian thought. The growing importance of the future undeniably transforms utopia, particularly when temporality begins to function as a horizon of possible transformation. In this configuration, utopia increasingly comes to be understood as oriented towards change rather than as a completed elsewhere. Yet futurity does not exhaust the temporal imagination of utopia, nor does it abolish earlier temporal modes. Even when the future becomes dominant, it remains entangled with retrospective and non-progressive temporalities. In many cases, futurity functions less as a con-

crete programme of realisation than as a device of distance, preserving utopia's critical separation from the present.

A particularly revealing case of this temporal plurality can be found in Étienne-Gabriel Morelly's *The Basiliad* (*Naufrage des cités flottantes, ou Basiliade du célèbre Pilpai*, 1753).⁴ At first glance, *The Basiliad* appears to conform neither to the classical spatial paradigm nor to the temporalised utopias examined in the preceding sections: the utopian elsewhere is situated in a remote and mythologised past and is framed within an epic poem (Morelly 1753, 1).

A more attentive analysis shows that it extends the model associated with Fénelon, in which antiquity functions as a critical mirror of the present. Yet Morelly simultaneously introduces a decisive displacement. The utopian world is no longer encountered through the journey of a traveller who discovers an elsewhere; rather, the narrative reverses this structure by having inhabitants of the utopian order confront the corruption of the existing world. This inversion transforms the function of temporal distance: the past no longer serves as an exemplary space of comparison, but becomes a standpoint from which the present is judged and exposed.

At the same time, *The Basiliad* cannot be reduced to a purely retrospective or mythological configuration. Its close relation to Morelly's later *Code de la nature* (first published in 1755) introduces a tension between critique and projection (Morelly 2011). While the narrative itself remains anchored in a distant past and preserves the classical logic of utopia as a completed and separate order, it also articulates a principle – the community of goods – that is subsequently reformulated in theoretical and normative terms in the *Code de la nature* (Morelly 1753, I, 205; 2011, 68). The past thus operates in a double register: it functions both as a critical device, maintaining utopia's distance from the present, and as a reservoir of principles that can be abstracted and rearticulated outside the narrative. Rather than marking a simple transition from past to future, *The Basiliad* reveals the coexistence of heterogeneous orientations within the same work.

Temporalisation should not be conceived as a unilinear passage from space to time. If it were, temporal projection would simply replace spatial distance as utopia's device for estranging the present, but this is precisely what does not happen. What changes, instead, is the way utopian

⁴ Available at <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k84452x>.

writing produces distance from the present in the first place. This distinction matters because it determines how we should read past, future, and cyclical time: not as successive stages in a single historical development, but as distinct modes through which utopia displaces existing reality and renders it available to critique. Because these modes are distinct rather than sequential, temporalisation cannot be reduced to a single logic of progress or realisation; it must instead be understood as a field of formal and conceptual experimentation, in which utopian writing reorganises heterogeneous temporal orientations. It follows, then, that the eighteenth century should be read not merely as the moment utopia becomes future-oriented, but as the moment it becomes a privileged site for thinking through temporal plurality.

Conclusion: Rethinking Time in Utopia

Utopia does not contain time; it works time. Temporality is not a neutral coordinate within utopian writing, nor a passive backdrop against which ideal societies are projected. Rather, utopia organises, reconfigures, and experiments with temporal relations. This article has argued that eighteenth-century French utopias do not undergo a linear transition from spatial imagination to temporal projection, nor do they simply 'discover' time at a determinate historical moment. Instead, they integrate heterogeneous temporal configurations that complicate dominant narratives of utopian temporalisation.

By returning to the classical paradigm inaugurated by Thomas More's *Utopia*, the analysis has shown that utopia was not originally conceived as a project awaiting realisation within historical time. Classical utopias describe coherent worlds situated elsewhere, whose critical force depends on an ontological distance between here and there. Within this configuration, time is not absent but neutralised: it regulates internal life without introducing transformation and frames access to utopia without affecting its structure.

From this perspective, the eighteenth century appears as a period in which utopian writing recomposes different temporal dimensions. Past-oriented configurations, cyclical regimes, and distant futures co-exist within the same historical moment without forming a unilinear sequence. These temporal orientations do not replace one another; they overlap and interact, revealing a stratified structure of utopian temporality.

These observations invite a reconsideration of the thesis of utopia's

temporalisation proposed by Reinhart Koselleck and Bronisław Baczko. While futurity does mark a significant transformation, it cannot be understood as the beginning of temporality in utopian thought. Rather, it radicalises temporal configurations already at work. Temporalisation is therefore not a rupture, but a stratified process in which different temporal orientations coexist and interact.

What, then, does this temporal plurality imply? It first requires that time in utopian writing be thought beyond the framework of historical development oriented towards fulfilment. Rather than functioning as a linear horizon, time appears as a field of relations – distance, repetition, rupture – through which the present is displaced and rendered problematic. Utopian critique does not depend on the projection of a better future; it operates by establishing a standpoint from which existing reality becomes questionable.

This has consequences for the history of utopia and, more broadly, for the history of political thought. If utopia is not bound to futurity, then critique is not confined to anticipation, nor is political thought reducible to models of realisation. Utopian writing shows that imagining otherwise does not require projection into the future alone, but can proceed through a plurality of temporal forms. In this sense, utopia does not prescribe a future; it multiplies the conditions under which critique becomes possible.

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Entangled Futures: Utopianism, White Supremacy, and Radical Futurity

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Abstract. This article examines utopianism as a historically contingent and politically ambivalent discourse shaped by its entanglement with race, Indigeneity, empire, and white supremacy. Challenging neutral or universalist accounts of utopia, it argues that modern utopian thought emerged not outside colonial modernity but through and alongside its architectures of territorial conquest, epistemic hierarchization, racial differentiation, coerced labour, and imperial governance. In its canonical form, utopia functioned as a technology of colonial futurity: it rendered land available for appropriation and extraction, positioned Europe as the agent of historical progress, and naturalized racialized forms of dispossession in the name of an ideal social order. Yet the article does not conclude that futurity itself must be abandoned. Instead, it provincializes classical utopia and asks what remains of world-imagination after utopia's colonial genealogy has been exposed. To address this, the article develops the concept of 'entangled futures': a conflictual field in which colonial, decolonial, Black radical, Indigenous, and anti-humanist temporalities are historically forced into relation without becoming equivalent or fully translatable. Through readings in utopian studies, settler-colonial critique, Black radical thought, critiques of Western humanism, and Indigenous futurisms, it argues that radical futurity cannot be reduced to a single emancipatory horizon. What survives the critique of utopia is not its rehabilitation as a universal ideal, but a fractured and incommensurable field of world-making.

Key Words: utopia, colonial futurity, settler colonialism, entangled futures, radical futurity

Prepletene prihodnosti: utopizem, bela prevlada in radikalna prihodnost

Povzetek. Prispevek obravnava utopizem kot zgodovinsko kontingenten in politično ambivalenten diskurz, ki ga določa njegova prepletenost z raso, s staroselskostjo, z imperijem in belo nadvlado. V na-

sprotju z nevtralnimi oz. univerzalističnimi obravnavami utopije zagovarja tezo, da se moderna utopična misel ni oblikovala zunaj kolonialne modernosti, temveč skozi in skupaj z njenimi arhitekturami teritorialne prilastitve, epistemske hierarhizacije, rasnega diferenciranja, prisilnega dela in imperialnega vladanja. V svoji kanonični obliki je utopija delovala kot tehnologija kolonialne prihodnosti: zemljo je vzpostavila kot razpoložljivo za prisvajanje, Evropo kot subjekt zgodovinskega napredka ter v imenu idealnega družbenega reda naturalizirala rasizirane oblike razlaščenja. Prispevek zato ne sklepa, da je treba opustiti prihodnost kot tako, temveč provincializira klasično utopijo in se sprašuje, kaj ostane od svetotvorne zmožnosti imaginacije po razkritju njene kolonialne genealogije. V ta namen razvije koncept »prepletenih prihodnosti«, konfliktnega polja, v katerem so kolonialne, dekolonialne, črnske radikalne, staroselske in antihumanistične temporalnosti zgodovinsko prisiljene v medsebojni odnos, ne da bi postale ekvivalentne, harmonične ali povsem prevedljive. Ob branjih s področij utopičnih študij, kritike naseljskega kolonializma, črnske radikalne misli, kritik zahodnega humanizma in staroselskih futurizmov zagovarja, da radikalne prihodnosti ni mogoče zvesti na en sam emancipatorni horizont. Po kritiki utopije tako ne ostane njen univerzalni ideal, temveč razklano in neizmerljivo polje svetotvorja.

Ključne besede: utopija, kolonialna prihodnost, naseljski kolonializem, prepletene prihodnosti, radikalna prihodnost

Introduction

This paper challenges the neutral or affirmative interpretations of utopia by situating utopianism within the historical architectures of race, Indigeneity, and empire. Utopian imaginaries do not stand outside a colonial matrix of power. Drawing on scholarship at the intersection of utopian studies, colonial history, and international legal theory, the analysis foregrounds utopia not as an abstract literary genre or philosophical exercise, but as a materially operative discourse embedded in projects of territorial conquest, population management, and epistemic domination. As Ruth Houghton and Aoife O'Donoghue (2023, 206) argue, 'experimental utopian texts play out anxieties over the governance of territory and place, and sit alongside real utopian experiments.' Utopian imaginaries have therefore been deeply implicated in colonial projects of world-making, land appropriation and extraction, and an epistemic and ontological domination. What is at stake is not only documenting that complicity, but determining what conceptual status 'utopia' can still have once that complicity has been laid bare.

The central claim advanced here is twofold. First, utopianism has historically functioned as a technology of colonial futurity, naturalizing and legitimizing imperial expansion, racial hierarchy, and Eurocentric universality through narratives of progress and ‘ideal’ societies. Second, despite this legacy, utopianism cannot be reduced to colonial logic alone. It also arises within decolonial, Indigenous, and anti-racist struggles as a mode of survival, collective imagination, and alternative political association. I treat these struggles as forces that fracture the category from within. The name I give to this fractured remainder is ‘entangled futures’: a conflictual field in which colonial, decolonial, Indigenous, and anti-humanist temporalities are forced into relation without becoming commensurable. Against Kumar’s archive-bound account of utopia’s Western exclusivity and partly against Hardy’s tendency to reduce utopia to a settler-colonial formation, I argue that utopia is structurally colonial in its dominant genealogy but not exhausted by that genealogy.

The theoretical move here is not to rehabilitate classical utopia but to provincialize it and rename what survives its critique. In this article, utopia therefore has a differentiated status: in its canonical form, it names a colonial technology; after that exposure, it can no longer function as a universal category of emancipation. Where the term remains usable, it does so only provisionally, naming practices of world-imagination that refuse blueprint, purity, and closure. ‘Entangled futures’ is the name for that unstable remainder.

I proceed in two steps. The first section shows how canonical utopianism was constituted through colonial projects of land seizure, epistemic hierarchy, racial differentiation, coerced labour, and imperial governance. The second section then examines how Black radical thought, decolonial critique, and Indigenous futurisms do not simply supplement that history but force a rupture in what counts as futurity, collectivity, and political imagination. The article’s argument depends on holding these two movements together: exposure without reconstruction would leave utopia only as a colonial archive, while reconstruction without exposure would merely repeat its violence.

White Utopian Complex¹

While I cannot not provide here an exhaustive survey of utopian studies I focus on the early modern narrative introduced by Thomas More’s *Utopia* as it was ‘mobilized to articulate notions of transcendental progress and

¹ I borrowed the formulation from Novosat (2016).

universal rationality commensurate with Christian Humanism, which served to justify expropriation of Indigenous lands' (Hardy 2015, ii).

Utopianism, a broad conceptual framework, encompasses various ways of imagining, representing, and pursuing the normative projection of alternative socio-political orders. The word 'utopia' originates from Thomas More's coinage in his 1516 book *Utopia*, where he outlines a communal structure conceived as qualitatively superior to the institutional and cultural arrangements of early modern England. Subsequently, the term 'utopia,' which conflates the 'good place' (eutopia) and the 'no place' (outopia), has become a critical label for idealized social formations that serve as both critiques of existing social conditions and speculative alternatives (Sargent 1998).

However, scholars such as Karl Hardy (2012), Susan Bruce (2015), Courtney L. Novosat (2016), and Ruth Houghton and Aoife O'Donoghue (2023) have traced the intellectual genealogies of More, Bacon, and Neville, demonstrating that utopian thinking was entangled with the expansion of European empires and rationalized the imposition of hierarchical, racialized social orders.

Genealogy: Modern Utopia, Colonial Expansion, and Secular Modernity

This genealogical section does more than assemble origin stories. It distinguishes the specific work performed by the authors brought into relation here: Krishan Kumar (1987) periodizes utopia within the secularizing crisis of early modern Europe; Christian Marouby (1988) identifies the constitutive relation between utopian projection and colonial conquest; Karl Hardy (2012; 2015) shows how that relation continues to naturalize settler futurity. Read together, these positions show how modern utopia is never merely literary; it is bound to a geopolitical reordering of space, time, and political legitimacy.

Kumar insists that utopia emerges from a specifically European Christian-classical archive rather than from a universal human impulse (Kumar 1987, 19–20). Hardy radicalizes that claim by showing that the archive in question is not merely Western in origin but productive of epistemologies and ontologies that remain acutely dystopian for Indigenous peoples (Hardy 2012, 126). The point, then, is not simply that utopia is 'Western,' but that its dominant genealogy is inseparable from coloniality.

Kumar's civilizational particularism is useful because it resists universalizing the archive of utopian texts. Yet it theoretically risks conflating

the archive of utopian texts with the horizon of utopian desire. Hardy, by contrast, clarifies the violence of settler utopianism, but his strongest formulations sometimes risk reducing utopia entirely to settler-colonial naturalization. My argument therefore moves between Kumar's civilizational particularism and Hardy's structural reductionism: utopia is constitutively colonial in its dominant genealogy, but not exhausted by that genealogy as insurgent traditions repeatedly seize, fracture, and repurpose the space of futurity.

This is also why later expansions of utopianism into generalized 'social dreaming' are politically misleading. Once modern utopia is detached from its specific colonial history, its material effects become harder to name. As Hardy argues, utopia educated the social dreaming of white settler societies in Canada and the United States (Hardy 2015, 11). What disappears in generalized uses of the term is precisely the violence through which that dreaming was made plausible.

Kumar argues that modern utopia emerges alongside two mutually reinforcing shifts: the breakup of a unified Christian world and the opening of new secular possibilities, on the one hand, and, at the same historical moment, the European voyages of exploration and discovery that stirred the utopian imagination, on the other (Kumar 1987, 22–23). Crucially, within this conjuncture, the New World appears as a space of imaginative availability for Europe rather than as a scene of existing sovereignty. In other words, secular modernity and colonial expansion are not parallel developments that merely intersect with utopia; they are co-constitutive conditions of the form itself.

For Marouby (1988, 159), the relation between utopia and colonialism

is not only historical, in the sense that the birth of modern utopia is contemporary with, and inseparable from, the first colonial enterprises – utopia takes advantage of the discovery of new lands to give credence to its own imaginary world; and not only conceptual, in the sense that [...] the utopian model is the opposite of that of the primitive peoples which are subjected to the colonial conquest; but also it is at the very root of the utopian project.

Marouby's intervention sharpens the argument by refusing to treat colonialism as a secondary backdrop. His formulation makes clear that colonial expansion is not merely the historical environment in which utopia appears, but one of the conditions that makes utopian projection plausible in the first place. Utopia gains credibility by presuming lands,

peoples, and political orders that can be redescribed from the standpoint of conquest.

Kumar similarly links the invention of utopia directly to discovery narratives: distant lands become both a satirical mirror and a zone of settlement, and the encounter with 'strange worlds' expands the sense of what might be politically imagined and territorially possessed (Kumar 1987, 23).

Together, Kumar and Marouby show that travel, 'discovery,' and expansion are not external motifs added to an otherwise neutral genre; they are part of the genre's enabling grammar. This is why More's text is important for the argument that follows: it formalizes these diffuse conditions into a durable model of political imagination.

Utopia as Colonial Genre

More's *Utopia*, a canonical work in utopian thought, is a seminal modernist text created in sixteenth-century Europe, where utopian rationality and colonial imagination emerge together. It established the utopian genre not only by imagining an 'ideal' elsewhere, but by presenting that elsewhere as discoverable, available for extraction, and governable.

More's *Utopia* (1516) is written as a dialogue framed by a semi-fictionalized travel account. The narrative begins with the narrator, More, a fictional character sharing the same name as the author, visiting Antwerp in the Netherlands as an ambassador for England and King Henry VIII. Peter Giles, a friend of More, introduces More to Raphael Hythloday (his name in Greek, means 'talker of nonsense'), a philosopher and world traveller. Together, they walk to More's house and engage in an extended conversation. Hythloday, we learn, is a Portuguese traveller who claims to have journeyed with Amerigo Vespucci to the New World and eventually to the island of Utopia. There he encountered the Utopians, an island people who, in Hythloday's view, live in the most perfectly organized commonwealth in the world.

Book One of *Utopia*, in which Hythloday recounts a dinner he attended at Cardinal John Morton's table in England years earlier, presents a critical diagnosis of the European – especially English – social, legal, and economic conditions. Book Two then shifts to Hythloday's discourse on Utopia, offering a detailed description of the island, an existing but distant 'ideal' commonwealth (whose economic organization rests on the abolition of private property and in which all goods are held in common). The formal movement from critique of Europe to description of a governable

elsewhere is crucial: it is precisely what allows colonial mediation to appear as political knowledge.

Reading *Utopia* through the lens of the ‘colonial history of utopianism’ (Utopian Acts, n.d.) provides an instructive framework for understanding modern utopia from the outset. The aim is not to rehabilitate More’s canonical text, but to reread it as a foundational diagram of colonial governability. In *Utopia*, the ideal society is not presented as a purely abstract philosophical construction but as knowledge derived from overseas ‘exploration,’ mediated through travel, encounter, and descriptions of ‘discovery.’ Hythloday explicitly frames his account as something he has seen and can therefore report back to Europe.

More’s *Utopia* should therefore be read not only as an early modern text but also as a foundational diagram of colonial governability. Here, I align with Hardy’s structural critique but extend it by arguing that utopia functions as a *generative fiction of governability* – a form that produces the very conditions it claims to describe.

If utopia functions as a generative fiction of governability, its first operation is spatial. It must produce territory as administrable, separable, and available for reordering. The next section therefore shifts from literary framing to the settler-colonial production of land.

Settler Colonialism and Territorial Reconfiguration

From early modern utopias onward, imagined perfect societies were often located in distant, supposedly empty or ‘underutilized’ spaces. In More’s book, Utopia is an island that was once a peninsula. It was deliberately separated from the mainland by its founder, General Utopus, who conquered the isthmus on which Utopia now stands and, through a major public works effort, cut away the land to create an island. ‘Founded by a markedly geo-political intervention’ (Bruce 2015, 25–26), the land, rendered *terra nullius*, was colonized and political rationality established through territorial reconfiguration. With this act, the land – imagined as empty, available, and reorganizable – and Indigenous presence (Abraxa’s nations) rendered ‘*rude and uncivilised inhabitants*,’ and thus invisible or obsolete – emerged ‘complete, whole, and immediately independent of its motherland’ (Bruce 2015, 26). The ‘cartographic fantasy’ translated conquest into ‘progress’ and dispossession into ‘benevolent transformation’ (More 2000; emphasis added):

But they report (and there remains good marks of it to make it cred-

ible) that this was no island at first, but a part of the continent. Utopus, that *conquered* it (whose name it still carries, for Abraxa was its first name), brought the *rude and uncivilised inhabitants* into such a good government, and to that measure of politeness, that they now far excel all the rest of mankind. *Having soon subdued them*, he designed to separate them from the continent, and to bring the sea quite round them. To accomplish this he ordered a deep channel to be dug, fifteen miles long; *and that the natives might not think he treated them like slaves, he not only forced the inhabitants, but also his own soldiers, to labour in carrying it on.*

As Hardy argues, *Utopia* explicitly formulates the ‘settler colonial doctrines of *terra nullius* [no man’s land], *vacuum domicilium* [unoccupied home], and *inane ac vacuum* [idle and waste],’ doctrines mobilized by European powers to construct juridical justifications – grounded in an appeal to the ‘law of nature’ – for the expropriation of land represented as ostensibly uninhabited (Hardy 2012, 125). In other words, European colonization cast nature as the Other and, through the logic of *terra nullius*, rendered Indigenous peoples effectively non-existent (Gómez-Barris 2017). This settler gaze operates by arriving on land, refusing to recognize the lives, relations, and sovereignties already present, and claiming that space as available for appropriation (Mirzoeff 2023). The result is the formation of the ‘extractive zone’ (Gómez-Barris 2017). In many ways, ‘genocide was the road to white utopia’ (Mirzoeff 2023).

In ‘Unsettling Hope: Settler-Colonialism and Utopianism,’ Hardy argues that ‘without a doubt, More’s *Utopia*, much of the ensuing modern utopian literature tradition, and the utopianism of settler societies are substantial contributors to the naturalization of settler colonialism’ (Hardy 2012, 133). As Hardy contends, modern utopianism, inaugurated by *Utopia*, is structurally complicit in genocidal white supremacist settler colonialism and theorizes and legitimizes colonialism through population management, territorial expropriation, and the moralization of conquest. Classical utopian thought is thus inseparable from the historical conditions of European (settler) colonialism, as ‘fictional utopias offer[ed] lessons for real-life colonial experiments’ (Houghton and O’Donoghue 2023, 206).

If Abya Yala served as the space for an envisioned potential utopia – a ‘no place’ that could be made a eutopia (‘good place’) in pursuit of an image of a transcendental Christian humanist notion of heaven

– then the pre-existence of Indigenous peoples was an impediment that had to be circumvented. The displacement of Indigenous peoples was, therefore, fundamental to facilitate the naturalization and ‘indigenization’ of normatively white Christian European settlers as the rightful inhabitants of erstwhile European colonies, which eventually became independent settler nation-states. [Hardy 2015, 17]

Territorial seizure, however, is only one aspect of the operation. Utopian order also requires an epistemic narrative that defines who possesses valid knowledge, who embodies civilization, and who is consigned to the past. The next section examines this epistemic dimension of colonial utopianism.

Eurocentric Genealogy of Knowledge and Epistemic Coloniality

Once the peninsula is made an island and ‘loses its [Indigenous] (pre-)history in one fell swoop’ (Bruce 2015, 26) – since ‘at the first constitution of their government, Utopus having understood that before his coming among them *the old inhabitants* had been engaged in great quarrels concerning religion, by which they *were so divided among themselves, that he found it an easy thing to conquer them*, since, instead of uniting their forces against him, every different party in religion fought by themselves’ (More 2000; emphasis mine) – *Utopia* fabulates a distinctly Eurocentric genealogy of knowledge by positioning Europe as the primary source of ‘useful arts,’ traced back to implicitly classical civilization.

They [Utopians] knew little concerning us before our arrival among them. They call us all by a general name of ‘The nations that lie beyond the equinoctial line’; for their chronicle mentions a shipwreck that was made on their coast twelve hundred years ago, and that some Romans and Egyptians that were in the ship, getting safe ashore, spent the rest of their days amongst them; and such was their ingenuity that from this single opportunity they drew the advantage of learning from those unlooked-for guests, and acquired all the useful arts that were then among the Romans, and which were known to these shipwrecked men; and by the hints that they gave them they themselves found out even some of those arts which they could not fully explain, so happily did they improve that accident of having some of our people cast upon their shore. [...] [F]rom one such accident, [they] made themselves masters of all the good inventions that were among us. [More 2000]

Utopia stages a 'colonial relay' in which European knowledge, transmitted through the contingent figure of the shipwreck, becomes the genealogical foundation of Utopian rationality. Utopian 'progress' is authorized through a European origin story, reinforcing the assumption that legitimate knowledge flows outward from Europe to elsewhere. This rationality, in turn, legitimizes Utopian colonization of Abraxa. The text displaces colonial violence from Europe onto a derivative polity while preserving Europe as the epistemic origin of modern governance and imperial authority. Temporality is decisive here. Colonial utopianism relies on linear and teleological models of history, positioning Europe as the vanguard of humanity and non-European societies as remnants of an earlier stage of 'development.' This temporal ordering justifies domination as a civilizational duty. Racial difference is encoded as temporal delay. The future belongs to the colonizer; the colonized are relegated to the past.

The passage therefore exposes Eurocentrism not merely as a claim about origin, but as a political technology of sequencing: Europe appears as history's present, while colonized peoples are made to appear as history's lag. This temporal grammar will matter later, because 'entangled futures' names precisely the undoing of any single authority to distribute pastness and futurity.

Utopia, as Frederic Jameson (2005, 205) argues,

is very much the prototype of the settler colony, and the forerunner of modern imperialism (at least in its North American, apartheid, or Zionist forms – 'the people without land' supposedly meeting 'the land without people'). That Utopias should turn out to be one of the privileged literary expressions of the Spanish empire (whose subject Campanella also was) is thus equally significant: the predestined harmony between a form without content and a content without form. My own feeling is that the colonial violence thus inherent in the very form or genre itself is a more serious reproach than anything having to do with the authoritarian discipline and conformity that may hold for the society within Utopia's borders.

While Jameson's recognition of utopia as the prototype of the settler colony is crucial (though his account remains marked by a Marxist universalism that still presumes a recoverable collective horizon), and he is right to insist that colonial violence is embedded in the very form of utopia, the problem is not exhausted at the level of literary form. Utopia was a material practice. It did not simply narrate settlement; it partici-

pated in producing it politically and juridically by rendering Indigenous presence obstructive, invisible, and eliminable. Its violence was therefore not only representational but infrastructural: it helped turn colonial occupation into a rational, moral, and future-oriented project.

Utopia as Blueprint for Imperial Governance

If the previous section showed that colonial violence inheres in utopian form, the next step is to trace how that form travels beyond literary representation into political reason. The issue is not only what Utopia depicts, but how it becomes available as a model for organizing territory, citizenship, and authority in imperial and national projects.

More's *Utopia* (1516), the work that defined the utopian genre and was among the first texts to formally imagine America as a utopian space (Novosat 2016, 27), functioned not only as literary fiction but also as a conceptual guide for imperial and national governance. Hardy (2015, 91–92) argues that *Utopia* can be 'understood as envisioning and prefiguring English settler-colonialism,' especially given that substantive English settler-colonial expansion follows the text by only a few decades (2015, 91–92).

Novosat tracks the portability of this form into the United States, arguing that More's book served as 'a guidebook for a new nation' and that the island of Utopia became a blueprint for the nation-state (Novosat 2016, 3, 23). Novosat's point is not that Utopia was the sole philosophical source of American political thought, but that its rhetoric of ideal polity, rational order, and natural law helped authorize a nationalized and racialized utopian imaginary (p. 23).

Read together, Hardy and Novosat operate at different scales but converge on the same point. Hardy emphasizes the anticipatory relationship between More's text and later English settler practice, while Novosat tracks the portability of Utopia as usable political theory within the United States. What links these readings is the claim that utopian form does not remain confined to literature; it becomes a grammar of governance.

Justifications of Colonial Violence and Its Expansion

This mobilization of utopian form as a conceptual guide for imperial and national governance reveals utopianism not only as a speculative discourse but as a spatial technology. It reorganizes territory according to imperial rationalities and transforms land into a blank surface for future

development. Utopia does not merely imagine an elsewhere; it authorizes intervention in that elsewhere by recoding occupation as improvement and dispossession as rational stewardship.

In Utopia, territorial expansion (or settler colonialism) is justified through productive use of land, when neighbouring lands are 'under-used' (More 2000):

If there is any increase over the whole island, then they draw out a number of their citizens out of the several towns and send them over to the neighbouring continent, where, if they find that the inhabitants have more soil than they can well cultivate, they fix a colony, taking the inhabitants into their society if they are willing to live with them; and where they do that of their own accord, they quickly enter into their method of life and conform to their rules, and this proves a happiness to both nations; for, according to their constitution, such care is taken of the soil that it becomes fruitful enough for both, though it might be otherwise too narrow and barren for any one of them. But if the natives refuse to conform themselves to their laws they drive them out of those bounds which they mark out for themselves, and use force if they resist, for they account it a very just cause of war for a nation to hinder others from possessing a part of that soil of which they make no use, but which is suffered to lie idle and uncultivated, since every man has, by the law of nature, a right to such a waste portion of the earth as is necessary for his subsistence.

This passage is crucial because it transforms occupation into an apparently neutral criterion of productivity. Land becomes legible only through cultivation as defined by the settler polity, while those who do not conform to that measure appear either assimilable or removable. Colonial violence is thus recoded as rational stewardship and, ultimately, as a just war.

Drawing on Jameson, Novosat makes it clear that More's text provided both a philosophical justification and a formal framework for the necessity of racially homogeneous citizenship, together with the deployment of natural law as a foundation for political order (Novosat 2016, 27). The point is that utopian form helped determine who counts as a subject of the polity, who appears assimilable, and who is marked for expulsion in the name of idealized social formation.

Once the polity is organized through these distinctions, the question of labour becomes unavoidable. The same logic that authorizes expansion also determines which bodies will perform the coercive and degrading

work required to sustain the ‘ideal’ commonwealth. Slavery therefore appears here not as a marginal inconsistency but as a constitutive mechanism of utopian order.

In Utopia, the abolition of property coexists with slavery and strict discipline. Slavery is justified pragmatically, serving as an alternative to capital punishment and as a labour reserve. Slaves in Utopia include Utopian criminals, prisoners of war, and foreign criminals condemned to death elsewhere; they also perform butchery and other ‘distasteful’ work. Hardy notes that their emancipation remains conditional upon assimilation: slaves may be freed only if ‘they adopt Utopian attitudes and prove *willing to assimilate*’ (Hardy 2015, 90; emphasis mine). In this sense, race and whiteness are not incidental themes in Utopia but structural conditions of its world-building. As Hardy (2015, 65) argues,

Utopia [...] as a historical text, [...] documents a pronounced (dis)juncture between the epistemology and ontology of the fictional Utopians and the Abraxans. The Utopians serve as proposed models for More’s contemporaneous English, and indeed wider European, society while the Abraxans (and other fictionalized non-Utopian peoples) who appear as a hybrid representative of the Indigenous peoples of the then-recently discovered New World and the African and Asian peoples with whom Europeans had already come into contact.

As long as certain populations are denied full human subjectivity – on the grounds of what More himself calls the absence of a ‘kinship of nature’ (Hardy 2015, 89), expressed through cultural, epistemological, ontological, and other hierarchically stratified differences – the Utopians are authorized to carry out practices of conversion, displacement, enslavement, or killing. Seen from this angle, slavery reveals how the Utopian commonwealth secures internal order through coercion, racialized differentiation, and the management of disposable life. From here, the discussion can expand from More’s text to the broader normalization of these mechanisms to show that these mechanisms are not incidental features of Utopia but are normalized as recurring techniques of utopian-imperial order.

Utopianism as Imperial Norm

Houghton and O’Donoghue extend this argument by showing how later utopian texts track the expansion of empire across the Pacific and Terra Australis (Houghton and O’Donoghue 2023, 206–207):

Thomas More's *Utopia* was published in 1516, just as the era of colonialism accelerates, and Utopia is imagined to be somewhere in the Pacific Ocean. Francis Bacon wrote his utopia, *New Atlantis*, in 1626, less than twenty years after Hugo Grotius' *Mare Liberum*, and just as the first Europeans landed on mainland Australia. Bacon's *New Atlantis* is set somewhere in the Pacific Ocean, in a place that is beyond both Great Atlantis (America) and the Orient, that is *incognita*. [...] In *New Atlantis*, we have an English imaginary of the colonisation of the Pacific region before the English had navigated there but where trade routes were rapidly expanding. Henry Neville's *The Isle of Pines, or, A Late Discovery of a Fourth Island near Terra Australis Incognita* by Henry Cornelius van Sloetten was published in 1668, not long after the *English Navigation Act 1660*. In utilising a setting that evokes growing trade in that region, Neville exploited contemporary interests in colonialism and exploration, providing an experimental setting in which contemporary anxieties about patriarchal government, colonial mastery, slave revolts and sexuality could be played out. Denis Vairasse's *The History of Sevarambians*, published in 1675, begins with a shipwreck of a voyage *en route* to Jakarta before the characters go onshore to *Terra Australis*, and Gabriel de Foigny's *A Discovery of Terra Incognita Australis* was published in 1693.

Their genealogy shows how the later writings of Bacon, Neville, Vairasse, and Foigny transform the expanding geographies of trade, settlement, and 'exploration' into experimental sites for imagining patriarchal government, colonial mastery, racialized labour, and colonial/modern gender systems (Lugones 2007). Empire, then, does not merely provide a setting for utopian fiction; it becomes one of the very media through which utopian reason formulates its objects/subjects, tests its political forms, and naturalizes its hierarchies. In this sense, modern utopianism functioned as a normative horizon that aligned seamlessly with imperial governance. It provided the moral vocabulary through which extraction, forced labour, cultural erasure, and political subjugation could be reframed as progress. Colonial utopian reason did not merely imagine 'better worlds'; it actively participated in producing a world structured by racial capitalism and colonial sovereignty.

Once colonial expropriation, extraction, and dispossession of racialized subjects are made central, the horizon of emancipation can no longer be imagined as singular, homogeneous, or universally shareable. Yet,

against Hardy's strict reduction of utopia to settler-colonial violence, I maintain that such a reduction forecloses the very insurgent appropriations that render utopia politically unstable. The impossibility of a singular emancipatory horizon does not end futurity, but it does end utopia's claim to universality.

A brief synthesis is necessary before turning to the second section. The first section has shown that canonical utopianism is structured through four linked operations: the emptying of land, the temporalization of racial difference, the authorization of epistemic hierarchy, the organization of racialized labour, and the normalization of coercive governance in the name of progress. Utopia thus appears less as an innocent projection of hope than as a future-oriented technology of dispossession.

However, once the colonial genealogy of utopia is made visible, futurity can no longer be imagined as singular or universally shareable, because the dominant future was historically built through the subordination of other worlds. Yet those subordinated worlds persist, contest, and reconfigure the field of political imagination. The second section therefore turns to those insurgent formations that survive within and against this compromised archive. These formations constitute what I call 'entangled futures.'

Striking Against Whiteness

The second section does not provide a compensatory supplement to the first. Instead, it poses a more difficult question: once utopia has been shown to function as a colonial technology, what forms of world-imagination remain available, and under what conditions? Here I shift from exposure to non-reconciliatory reconstruction. The aim is to trace how decolonial critique, Black radical thought, and Indigenous futurisms force a break in what counts as futurity, collectivity, and political imagination. In Achille Mbembe's (2019) terms, if the first section tracked utopia's 'nocturnal body,' the second section asks what kind of emancipatory horizons can persist without restoring its colonial complicity. What follows stages conflict rather than reconciliation: there is no single emancipatory script. As Nicolas Mirzoeff (2023) suggests,

Striking against whiteness [...] is a conceivable future that would, finally, not be a plantation future. The means of undoing whiteness are clearer now. It requires moving away from the heroic individual emblemized by the memorial statue toward communities cen-

tered on protection. This movement combines repair, reparations, and restitution. It is both symbolic and material at once, an always changing social formation.

To rethink futurity without reproducing utopia's colonial *modus operandi* requires shifting from universalism to pluriversality. But pluriversality here does name a harmonious mosaic of equally compatible worlds. It designates a field of coexistence structured by asymmetry, struggle, and limits to translation. Rather than imagining a single future for everybody, this recalibrated field of world-imagination foregrounds the coexistence of multiple worlds and political projects without assuming their final compatibility. It keeps the space of desire open while remaining vigilant about how desire can be captured by coloniality.

Such a rearticulation does not rely on a general ethic of relation. In some contexts it takes the form of alliances, reciprocity, and accountability; in others it takes the form of refusal, opacity, or (non)relation. Not all futures must be shared, and not all visions require translation into dominant frameworks. What is shared is not a common programme but a struggle against the colonial matrix of power. For this reason, I resist both the Marxist desire to recover a single collective horizon and the Afropessimist foreclosure of all shared futurity (though I find it legitimate). 'Entangled futures' names this unstable interval between imposed universality and absolute incommensurability: a condition of historically forced implication among projects that cannot be reconciled and do not need to be translated into a common horizon.

This is also a point where the article's ambivalence becomes structural rather than merely thematic. I do not move from a 'bad' colonial utopia to a 'good' decolonial one; I move from the exposure of utopia's universalizing colonial grammar to a field of incompatible but historically entangled struggles over futurity.

Utopia 'Otherwise'

Despite its colonial entanglement, utopianism cannot simply be dismissed as an irredeemably compromised discourse. The category is internally fractured: imperial in its dominant historical grammar, insurgent in some rearticulations, and politically unstable across both. The task is not to redeem utopia in general, but to specify when the term ceases to name a colonial blueprint and becomes a provisional name for practices of imagination that refuse blueprint, purity, and closure.

Mbembe (2018) argues that utopia concerns the absence of borders – first and foremost, the borders of the imagination. The utopian impulse involves dismantling or unfixing any limits that might constrain the act of imagining, whether this act is understood as a social, political, or aesthetic process. In that register, utopia is not simply a projection of a universal (i.e. colonial) social order, but a radical destabilization of the epistemic, ontological, and political constraints that govern the present, preserving a sense of alternative world-imagination.

At the same time, Mbembe's emphasis on borderlessness cannot be generalized without remainder. Indigenous sovereign futurity, for example, is organized through land, treaty, and non-substitutable obligations that cannot simply be translated into a borderless horizon. Likewise, Black aesthetic refusal may suspend or refuse relation rather than extend it. Mbembe is therefore productive here not as a universal solution, but as one pole within a conflictual field.

Yet this tension does help clarify why racially marginalized communities have long mobilized world-imagination against imperial and white-supremacist logics. These insurgent formations do not offer 'perfect social orders'; they articulate modes of survival, fugitivity, refusal, and anti-capitalist struggle under conditions of racial violence. Where the term 'utopia' remains usable here, it must remain provisional: it names practices that contest the extractive, expulsive, and genocidal logics of settler colonialism and racial capitalism. When agency as 'fugitivity, flight, or escape' is not available, as Mbembe notes, the question becomes 'when and how to cross over,' become otherwise, and evade the overcoding machine of colonial power (2019, 160).

Reorienting the Genealogy of Utopian Thought

In this context, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's discussion of 'utopia before (white) utopia' reorients the genealogy of political imagination. He argues that 'the racially subaltern can be regarded as the first utopians,' the first 'freedom fighters in modernity' (Bonilla-Silva 2012, 4), and thus that some of modernity's earliest and most foundational emancipatory imaginaries emerged from the struggles of people of colour rather than from European canonical theory (Bonilla-Silva 2012, 13):

We must recall that (1) Amerindian wars of resistance (most notably, the Pueblo Indian rise in 1680, the indigenous uprising in Perú in 1780 which created the mythology around Tupac Amaru, and the so-

called ‘caste war’ of Yucatán of 1847 which continued in the region until 1903!) were more numerous than those launched by blacks, (2) their revolts continued for much longer (until the 19th century), and (3) their efforts evinced in some cases what Robins (2005) labels as a ‘revitalization effort’ – attempts to remove the people and culture of the colonizers.

Bonilla-Silva’s re-situation of utopian origins does more than add new actors to an existing archive; it overturns the archive’s organizing logic by disrupting Eurocentric genealogies of political imagination and re-centring racialized resistance as foundational to modern emancipatory thought. The resistance of ‘human cargoes’ brought to the New World and their revolutionary agency arose from the persistence of their languages, cosmologies, metaphysics, belief, and moral life – inherited worlds of meaning that could not be fully expropriated (Bonilla-Silva 2012, 12). Captured Africans became ‘troublesome property’ from the moment of their enslavement and rebelled in multiple forms against slavery because they did not enter modernity as blank matter (pp. 12, 14); they carried worlds that could not be fully expropriated. In this sense, Black insurgency is not a response that appears after European utopia; it is a constitutive site from which futurity can be theorized.

Aboard the slave ships, captives engaged in sustained practices of conspiracy, sabotage, self-annihilatory refusal, and insurrection, generating insurgent cultures and political consciousness forged directly within the extremity of racial terror. These modalities of resistance emerged in immediate response to the material and symbolic violence of maritime captivity: hyper-compression, fungibilization as ‘black cattle,’ systematic sexual violation, and routinized brutality. Yet the passage across the Atlantic did not exhaust this insurgent praxis. ‘When possible, they rebelled openly [...] and, not surprisingly, enslaved Africans produced the first revolution against the “agroindustrial plantation regime” [...] in history: the Haitian revolution [...]’ (Bonilla-Silva 2012, 12–13).

Saidiya Hartman sharpens this genealogy by asking how Black women’s insurgency becomes legible at all, since Black femininity’s ‘freedom struggle remains opaque, untranslatable into the lexicon of the political’ (Hartman 2016, 171) and thus structurally effaced even within Black tradition’s canonical accounts of emancipation, revolt, and labour struggle (pp. 167–168). In ‘The Belly of the World,’ her questions – ‘What is the text of her insurgency and the genre of her refusal? What visions of the fu-

ture world encourage her to run, or propel her flight?’ (p. 171) – displace masculinist and productivist accounts of resistance and redefine the very archive through which (Black) futurity becomes legible.

Conceptualizing the slave ship as a womb–abyss and the plantation as the belly of the world, Hartman situates racial slavery within a necropolitical regime of reproductive extraction in which Black women’s bodies function as pivotal infrastructures of accumulation, governance, and social reproduction (Hartman 2016, 166). Within this violent political economy, reproduction is recoded as a technique of domination, severed from biological or domestic frameworks and reconstituted as an apparatus for producing surplus life and surplus death.

Yet Hartman simultaneously excavates a subterranean archive of fugitivity, refusal, and survival, identifying Black women as central agents in ‘an army of fugitives’ whose flight, care practices, and reproductive insurgencies fracture the logics of plantation discipline and colonial labour management (Hartman 2016, 167). By displacing masculinist genealogies of revolt, Hartman reframes resistance through the analytic of waywardness, theorizing everyday practices of intimacy, kin-making, social reproduction, and collective care as insurgent modes of life forged within, yet against the architectures of death, social or factual (pp. 168–170). These practices constitute a counter-ontological politics that sustains Black existence under racial capitalism while refusing the extractive temporalities of capital and colonial governance. Fugitivity thus emerges not merely as spatial escape but as a generative modality of world-making that unsettles dominant grammars of political collectivity and futurity under racial capitalism without guaranteeing a universally shareable model of relation.

Rizvana Bradley (2019) pushes this argument further by insisting that Black femininity names not simply an exploited position within racial capitalism, but a representational and ontological crisis for the very categories through which colonial modernity recognizes femininity and humanity. Where Hartman reconstructs a fugitive sociality, Bradley lingers at the limit where Blackness throws relationality, ethics, and futurity themselves into crisis.

If Hartman demonstrates how Black women’s insurgent practices surpass the political vocabularies available to describe them, Bradley clarifies that Black femininity is not merely excluded from normative categories of personhood, gender, and humanity, but reveals that these categories are structurally dependent on anti-Black violence. Black femininity, Bradley (2019) argues, has been rendered ‘discursively empty and materially full’

– simultaneously denied symbolic recognition and made available for biopolitical capture, labour extraction, pathologization, and captivity. Its refusal, therefore, cannot be assimilated into a relational ethics or a shared emancipatory horizon, because anti-Blackness is not external to those frameworks but is one of their enabling conditions. What Bradley adds to Hartman is thus a sharper account of refusal as an ontological and aesthetic rupture: the disruption of the very terms through which futurity, relationality, and humanity become legible.

Hartman and Bradley therefore make clear that Black futurity cannot be reduced to a single idiom of emancipation. To specify this internal heterogeneity, the next subsection distinguishes three influential formations whose tensions are crucial to the concept of entangled futures.

Afrocentrism, Afropessimism, Afrofuturism

When tracing the genealogy of internal critiques of Western humanism – articulated by Césaire, Senghor, Fanon, Wynter, Glissant, and Gilroy – and distinguishing them from its external formulations, Mbembe (2019) identifies three principal modalities of the latter.

First, Afrocentrism seeks to dismantle the epistemic and political universalism of Western humanism, explicitly aiming ‘to demystify the universalist pretensions of Western humanism and lay the foundations for a knowledge endowed with categories and concepts drawn from the history of Africa itself’ (p. 161). ‘Humanism is [...] a myth that does not want to say its name’ (p. 161).

Second, Afropessimism radicalizes this critique by foregrounding the irreducibility of racial antagonism. As Mbembe writes, Afropessimism’s ‘racially circumscribed body is built on a politics that disavows passages, bridges, [and] conjunctions of intensities,’ so that certain strands of Afropessimism posit a ‘racial categorical antagonism’ that is structurally untranscendable, or transcendable only through a form of war directed against ‘the very concept of humanity,’ since this concept itself functions as ‘the Trojan horse that has trapped the Negro in a permanent state of death, social or otherwise’ (p. 163). Afropessimism ‘calls for the burning of memory in the belief that what might emerge from the ashes can never be worse than what we already endure’ (p. 163).

Third, Afrofuturism operates as a literary, aesthetic, and cultural formation that emerged in the Black diaspora during the latter half of the twentieth century. Mbembe characterizes it as a heterogeneous assemblage that fuses science fiction, technological imaginaries, magic realism,

and non-European cosmologies to ‘interrogate the past of so-called colored peoples and their condition in the present’ (p. 164). Central to this project is a decisive rejection of the humanist postulate, insofar as ‘humanism can constitute itself only by relegating some other subject or entity (living or inert) to the mechanical status of an object or an accident’ (p. 164). Consequently, Afrofuturism rethinks the human through the prism of hybrid assemblages – ‘objects-humans and of humans-objects’ – for which the Negro becomes both ‘prototype’ and ‘prefiguration’ (p. 164), as it ‘refers to the idea of a quasi-infinite potential of transformation and plasticity.’ Afrofuturism seeks to rewrite the Black experience through a logic of continuous metamorphosis and inversion, foregrounding ‘plasticity, including anatomical, and corporeality, if required machinic’ (p. 164).

These three formations are not harmonious variants of a single Black critique of Europe. Afrocentrism risks reconstructive closure by re-grounding the human in an alternative civilizational centre; Afropessimism risks foreclosure by insisting on the structural impossibility of shared futurity; Afrofuturism risks aesthetic abstraction when severed from material histories of dispossession. Yet each names a real limit that any account of entangled futures must acknowledge. Rather than reconciling them, I treat their friction as constitutive evidence that radical futurity emerges through incommensurable strategies rather than through a single emancipatory script.

This friction also marks a point of tension with Indigenous futurisms. Black radical and aesthetic refusal often emphasize the impossibility or limit of relation under anti-Blackness, whereas Indigenous futurity is organized through land, treaty, kinship, and sovereignty as non-substitutable grounds of world-making. ‘Entangled futures’ therefore refers not to a reconciled horizon, but to a conflictual field of historically complicated yet irreducible struggles.

Indigenous Futurisms and the Practice of Sovereign Futurity

Indigenous futurisms disrupt colonial temporality by asserting futures rooted in ancestral continuity rather than linear progress. As Hardy shows, Indigenous critical theory and speculative fiction function as an immanent critique of the settler-utopian traditions of Canada and the United States (Hardy 2015, ii). I do not invoke Indigenous futurisms as simply another variant within an expanded utopian archive; I treat them as a structural challenge to the empty-land premise that made

that archive possible. Indigenous utopianism begins not with an aspirational blueprint but with a decolonial dismantling of the Western utopian framework.

In direct opposition to the transcendental, future-oriented ‘no place’ of Western utopia, Hardy articulates an Indigenous utopianism that is immanent, land-based, and focused on restoration and relational sovereignty. ‘Differentiated from the progress (understood as a continual re-defining of what it is to be “modern”) and time-oriented transcendental “no place[s]” of modern utopian narratives, Indigenous narrative proposals for decolonization may instead be (generally) characterized by principles of immanence, reciprocity, and relationship between the Indigenous nations and their traditional lands’ (Hardy 2015, 43).

This directly challenges the white supremacist settler utopian drive, which Hardy identifies as ‘fundamental to the sustaining of the condition of settler colonialism’ through its continuous orientation toward a ‘decidedly utopian modernity’ that justifies displacement (Hardy 2015, 100). Thus, Indigenous utopia is conceived as the active reconstitution and healing of existing relationships disrupted by colonialism.

A primary vehicle for this decolonial envisioning, as theorized by Hardy, is the emergence of Indigenous Futurisms and speculative fiction. These genres are framed as dynamic utopian practices that simultaneously engage with and subvert conventional narrative forms. Hardy explains that ‘Indigenous futurisms, as expressed through Indigenous science fiction narratives [...] serve several functions at once’ (p. 55). They operate internally as a means of ‘creative exploration, healing, and entertainment,’ a process linked to the Anishinaabe concept of ‘returning to ourselves’ (*biskaabiiyang*). Externally, they function as ‘compelling critical interventions in the wider sf, literary, and indeed societal narratives concerned with Indigeneity, race, settler colonialism, and decolonization’ (p. 55). In this way, works by authors like Leslie Marmon Silko and Daniel Heath Justice perform a dual function: they proffer ‘an immanent critique of the modern utopian tradition, while utilizing aspects of its conventions to do so’ (p. 13). Indigenous Futurism, therefore, becomes the literary and theoretical space where the future is reimaged on Indigenous terms.

Central to this project is the unwavering assertion of Indigenous intellectual and political sovereignty, which serves as a bulwark against assimilation into Western utopian frameworks. Hardy’s analysis foregrounds what Robert Warrior (Osage) calls Indigenous ‘intellectual sovereignty,’ a practice that refuses both romanticized authentic Indigeneity and incor-

poration into settler categories (Hardy 2015, 11). This sovereignty is not merely a political stance but the generative condition of self-determined futurity, provoking questions of survival, reclamation, resurgence, and re-Indigenization.

Accordingly, Hardy argues that the academic field of utopian studies must undergo radical decolonization by centring Indigenous critiques and ending its chronic deferral of Indigenous concerns. The author applies an ‘immanent critique [...] to contemporary utopian studies discourses, including emergent discussions of “Non-Western” and “post-colonial” utopias’ (Hardy 2015, ii), which often continue to marginalize Indigenous specificity. Hardy contends that genuine engagement must prioritize ‘attending to contemporary Indigenous presence, including but not limited to expressions of Indigenous nationhood and Indigenous futurisms’ (p. 3), as this is what actively ‘intervene[s] in the ongoing naturalization of white supremacy and settler colonialism’ within the utopian tradition (p. 3).

Ultimately, Hardy presents Indigenous utopianism not as distant ideal but as an active, present-tense practice of survivance and resurgence. It is embodied in ongoing assertions of Indigenous presence and critical interventions into surrounding discourses (Hardy 2015, 53). This living utopian practice enables historically colonized peoples to generate proposals that, in Daniel Heath Justice’s words, involve “‘imagining otherwise’ in ways that center decolonization’ (Hardy 2015, 164). At the same time, Indigenous sovereign futurity cannot simply be folded into Mbembe’s borderlessness or into Black refusal: its grounding in land, treaty, and nationhood marks a non-substitutable political formation. That non-substitutability is central to what I mean by entangled futures.

Taken together, Indigenous interventions shift the question from designing an ideal polity to sustaining sovereign futurity amid ongoing settler occupation. They do not simply diversify the utopian archive; they alter the conceptual terrain on which futurity becomes thinkable.

The conclusion returns to this point: once utopia has been exposed as a colonial technology, what remains is not a purified concept but a contested field in which different struggles imagine and enact life otherwise from incompatible positions.

Conclusion

Utopianism is fundamentally entangled with the violent architectures of race, Indigeneity, and empire. As this analysis has shown, the modern

utopian tradition – initiated by More's *Utopia* and reproduced through the literary and political imaginaries of settler colonialism – functioned as a colonial technology of world-making. It legitimized appropriation, dispossession, extraction, genocides, racial hierarchy, and ontological and epistemic domination, while naturalizing these operations through narratives of progress, productive use, and ideal society. In its canonical form, utopia is structurally colonial.

Yet utopianism cannot be reduced to colonial logic alone. What the second half of the article demonstrates is not the redemption of utopia, but the instability of the category once insurgent traditions seize the field of futurity. The Black radical tradition, as theorized by Bonilla-Silva, Hartman, and Bradley, reorients the genealogy of world-imagination by locating refusal, fugitivity, opacity, and care within the very sites colonial modernity cast as death-worlds. Indigenous futurisms, as analysed through Hardy, perform an immanent critique of the settler-colonial utopia by replacing its empty-space telos with land-based sovereignty, survivance, and decolonial presence. These formations do not harmonize; they expose the impossibility of a single emancipatory script.

The critical task, therefore, is not to rehabilitate the concept of utopia as a universal ideal, but to hold open the fractured field that its critique has revealed. What survives is not a redeemed utopia, still less a purified one, but what I call 'entangled futures': a conflictual horizon of world-imagination in which incompatible struggles against colonial rule, racial capitalism, and settler occupation remain historically entangled without becoming equivalent. If this horizon sometimes takes the form of reciprocity, care, and alliance, at other times it takes the form of opacity, refusal, or nonrelation. Its political value lies precisely in refusing a single emancipatory blueprint while preserving the necessity of imagining and making life otherwise.

If a rupture in what counts as futurity, collectivity, and political imagination marks the point at which 'utopia' can no longer remain the same conceptual object, then 'entangled futures' names what remains: not conceptual purity, not reconciliation, but a contested and incommensurable field of world-making after the colonial exposure of the utopian form.

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Psihologija
Psychology

Psihometrične značilnosti slovenske priredbe Vprašalnika za ocenjevanje dejavnikov tveganja za motnje hranjenja EDE-Q: factorska struktura in notranja skladnost

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Povzetek. Neprilagojeno prehranjevanje zajema vedenjske (npr. pretirano omejevanje prehranjevanja) in kognitivne procese (npr. zaskrbljenost glede postave in/ali teže), ki se pojavijo tudi pri posameznikih brez izpolnjenih diagnostičnih kriterijev za motnje hranjenja. Zato so potrebni zanesljivi merski instrumenti, ki jih lahko uporabljamo tudi na normativnih vzorcih. Namen pričujoče raziskave je bil preveriti factorsko strukturo, notranjo skladnost ter veljavnost slovenske priredbe Vprašalnika za ocenjevanje dejavnikov tveganja za motnje hranjenja (Eating Disorder Examination Questionnaire – EDE-Q) na priložnostnem vzorcu odraslih. Sodelovalo je 428 posameznikov, starih med 18 in 50 let, ki so izpolnili slovensko različico vprašalnika EDE-Q. Rezultati so pokazali visoko notranjo skladnost ter najboljše prileganje trifaktorskemu modelu. Analiza razlik glede na ITM je pokazala, da posamezniki z ITM nad 25 dosegajo višje rezultate pri EDE-Q, kar potrjuje kriterijsko veljavnost vprašalnika. Šibka do zmerna pozitivna korelacija z mero depresivnosti priča o konstruktni veljavnosti vprašalnika. Slovenska oblika vprašalnika EDE-Q je zanesljiva in veljavna meritev za ocenjevanje jedrnih simptomov motenj hranjenja ter neprilagojenih vzorcev prehranjevanja.

Ključne besede: vprašalnik za oceno motenj hranjenja (EDE-Q), motnje hranjenja, veljavnost, notranja skladnost, factorska struktura, psihometrične lastnosti

Psychometric Properties of the Slovenian Adaptation of the Eating Disorder Examination Questionnaire (EDE-Q): Factor Structure and Internal Consistency

Abstract. Disordered eating encompasses behavioral (e.g., excessive dietary restriction) and cognitive processes (e.g., concerns about body shape and/or weight) that are also present in individuals who do not meet the diagnostic criteria for eating disorders. Therefore, reliable measurement instruments that can be applied to normative samples are needed. The aim of the present study was to examine the factor structure, internal consistency, and validity of the Slovenian adaptation of the Eating Disorder Examination Questionnaire (EDE-Q) in a convenience sample of adults. A total of 428 individuals aged between 18 and 50 years completed the Slovenian version of the EDE-Q. The results demonstrated high internal consistency and the best fit for a three-factor model. An analysis of differences with respect to body mass index (BMI) indicated that individuals with a BMI above 25 scored higher on the EDE-Q, supporting the criterion validity of the questionnaire. Weak to moderate positive correlations with a measure of depressive symptoms provided evidence of construct validity. The Slovenian version of the EDE-Q is a reliable and valid instrument for assessing core symptoms of eating disorders and maladaptive eating patterns.

Key Words: Eating Disorder Examination Questionnaire (EDE-Q), eating disorders, validity, internal consistency, factor structure, psychometric properties

Uvod

Motnje hranjenja so skupina kroničnih duševnih motenj, vedenjsko izraženih v obliki pretiranega omejevanja hranjenja, epizod kompulzivnega prenažedanja ter neustreznih kompenzatornih mehanizmov za izgubo telesne teže (Jansen 2016). Za njihovo razumevanje so ključni kognitivni procesi, ki odražajo preokupacijo s težo, postavo in telesnim izgledom (Fairburn idr. 2003) ter predstavljajo dejavnike tveganja za razvoj in vzdrževanje motenj hranjenja (Murphy idr. 2010). Vodilni model za razumevanje motenj hranjenja – transdiagnostični kognitivno-vedenjski model motenj hranjenja – te navaja kot ključni mehanizem nastanka in vzdrževanja (t. i. jedrno psihopatologijo) težav na področju prehranjevanja (Murphy idr., 2010).

Kljub temu da se vedenja in kognitivni procesi neprilagojenega prehranjevanja največkrat opisujejo v kontekstu duševnih motenj, se (v manj izraženi obliki) pojavljajo tudi pri posameznikih, ki sicer ne dosegajo kri-

terijev za motnje hranjenja. Neprilagojeno prehranjevanje je opredeljeno kot subklinična izraženost simptomov motenj hranjenja. Vključuje nezdrave ter neprilagojene skrbi glede telesa ter kompenzatorna vedenja, s katerimi poskuša posameznik uravnavati svojo težo. Pri nekaterih posameznikih so prisotne tudi epizode prenajedanja (Levine in Smolak 2006). Skladno z rezultati metaanalize 89 raziskav 18,1 % študentov poroča o prisotnosti neprilagojenega prehranjevanja, če so bili ti merjeni z Vprašalnikom za ocenjevanje dejavnikov tveganja za motnje hranjenja (Eating Disorder Examination Questionnaire – EDE-Q) ter opredeljeni na podlagi jasnega mejnega kriterija (Alhaj idr. 2022). Raziskave, ki so preverjale izraženost posameznih simptomov jedrne psihopatologije na odrasli populaciji, kažejo, da med 46 in 66 % odraslih žensk ter med 35 in 52 % odraslih moških poroča o določeni stopnji skrbi glede teže, nezadovoljstvo s svojim splošnim izgledom pa izraža med 23 in 56 % odraslih žensk ter med 15 in 43 % odraslih moških (Fiske idr. 2014). Podoben delež posameznikov se poslužuje tudi nezdravih vedenj za regulacijo svoje telesne teže (npr. postenje, uživanje majhnih količin hrane, preskakovanje obrokov ipd.) – slednja so bila zabeležena pri 61 % žensk ter 36 % moških, starih med 18 in 23 let, 54 % žensk ter 34 % moških, starih med 20 in 31 let, ter 53 % žensk ter 41 % moških, starih med 27 in 33 let (Simone idr. 2022). Kljub višji prevalenci jedrne psihopatologije motenj hranjenja pri ženskah (Fiske idr., 2014; Simone idr. 2022) pa v zadnjih desetletjih strmo narašča tudi prisotnost slednje pri moških (Mitchison idr. 2014). Povzamemo lahko, da so kognitivni procesi in vedenja, povezani z neprilagojenim prehranjevanjem, v splošni populaciji široko razširjeni in se pojavljajo pogostejše kot klinično diagnosticirane motnje hranjenja (Alhaj idr. 2022; Fiske idr. 2014; Qian idr. 2022; Simone idr. 2022).

Raziskave, ki zagovarjajo dimenzionalne modele psihopatologije na področju motenj hranjenja, poudarjajo, da so določene motnje hranjenja na kontinuumu z normalnim vedenjem (Wildes in Marcus 2013; Williamson idr. 2005) in torej niso nujno kategorično drugačne od normalnega prehranjevanja. Za raziskovanje na področju psihologije prehranjevanja to pomeni, da lahko tudi raziskave na normativnih in analognih vzorcih (tj. nizko izražene težave na področju prehranjevanja, ki ne dosegajo kriterijev klinične diagnoze) prispevajo k razumevanju mehanizmov razvoja in vzdrževanja motenj hranjenja. Takšne raziskave se umeščajo na področje eksperimentalne psihopatologije, ki predstavlja most med eksperimentalno in klinično psihologijo (van den Hout idr. 2017), kjer je v ospredju eksperimentalno testiranje vzročnih hipotez na nekliničnih

populacijah (za utemeljitev potrebe po eksperimentalnih raziskavah na področju motenj hranjenja glej Jansen 2016). Za izvajanje takšnih raziskav pa najprej potrebujemo psihometrično ustrezne instrumente, ki so namenjeni ocenjevanju dejavnikov tveganja za razvoj motenj hranjenja na normativnih vzorcih.

Diagnostični standard pri ocenjevanju motenj hranjenja predstavljajo zlasti strukturirani klinični intervjuji, kot je Intervju za oceno motenj hranjenja EDE (Eating Disorder Examination (Cooper in Fairburn 1987)). Časovna zahtevnost EDE omejuje njegovo uporabnost za presejanje večjega števila posameznikov ter testiranje udeležencev v raziskavah z analognimi vzorci (tj. vzorci udeležencev, pri katerih težave s prehranjevanjem ne izpolnjujejo kliničnih diagnostičnih meril). Posledično obstaja potreba po krajših orodjih za ocenjevanje jedrnih simptomov motenj hranjenja, ki jih je možno v krajšem času uporabiti na večjem številu posameznikov. S tem namenom sta avtorja EDE na njegovi podlagi razvila Vprašalnik za oceno motenj hranjenja EDE-Q (Eating Disorder Examination Questionnaire; Fairburn in Beglin 1994), ki meri jedrno psihopatologijo motenj hranjenja preko samoocenjevanja. Pri neklinični populaciji je primeren za oceno neprilagojenega prehranjevanja (Mond idr. 2006). Vprašalnik sestavljajo dimenzije *omejevanje* (meri nagnjenje k omejevanju vnosa hrane za spremembo postave in teže), *skrb glede prehranjevanja* (meri stopnjo izraženosti zaskrbljenosti glede prehranjevanja), *skrb glede teže* (meri stopnjo izraženosti zaskrbljenosti glede teže) ter *skrb glede postave* (meri stopnjo izraženosti zaskrbljenosti glede oblike telesa in postave), dodatno pa zbira tudi informacije o prisotnosti temeljnih vedenjskih značilnosti motenj hranjenja (npr. prenačedanje, bruhanje, jemanje odvajal, pretirana telesna aktivnost, izguba kontrole nad hranjenjem). Dimenzije lahko združimo v skupni dosežek, ki izraža splošno mero izražnosti jedrne psihopatologije motenj hranjenja (Fairburn in Beglin 2008).

Tuji raziskovalci so dokumentirali visoko zanesljivost vprašalnika EDE-Q tako v originalni obliki kot v prevedenih različicah (Berg idr. 2012; Calugi idr. 2017; Luce in Crowther 1999; Mond idr. 2004a; 2004b), poročajo pa o nejasnosti njegove faktorske strukture. Njegove izvirne dimenzije – *omejevanje*, *skrb glede prehranjevanja*, *skrb glede teže* in *skrb glede postave* – niso bile empirično oblikovane, temveč so bile zasnovane na podlagi intervjuja EDE, ki izhaja iz kliničnih intervjujev in pregledov literature (Cooper in Fairburn 1987; Fairburn in Beglin 1994). Dimenziji *skrb glede teže* in *skrb glede postave* sta se v večini raziskav izkazali za najproblematičnejši (Lichtenstein idr. 2021), postavki iz teh dveh dimenzij namreč

tvorita en sam faktor (npr. Hilbert idr. 2007; Peterson idr. 2007; White idr. 2014). Združitev omenjenih dimenzij je smiselna tudi teoretično – skladno s teorijami telesne samopodobe nezadovoljstvo s telesom vključuje tako nezadovoljstvo s telesno težo kakor s postavbo (Vartanian 2012).

Z izjemo dveh (Villarroel idr. 2011; Franko idr. 2012) nobena raziskava ne potrjuje prvotno predlagane faktorske strukture (za pregled glej Berg idr. 2012; Jenkins in Rienecke 2022). Raziskave, ki ohranijo vse postavke izvirnega vprašalnika, podpirajo enofaktorski model (de Oliveira Júnior idr. 2023; Pennings in Wojciechowski 2004), dvofaktorski model (Becker idr. 2010; Penelo idr. 2013; Sepúlveda idr. 2019; Lewis-Smith idr. 2021; Rica idr. 2022), trifaktorski model (Peterson idr. 2007; Barnes idr. 2012; Darcy idr. 2013; Giovazolias idr. 2013; White idr. 2014; Carey idr. 2019; Melisse idr. 2022) in prilagojeno štirifaktorsko strukturo (Aardoom idr. 2012; Friborg idr. 2013; Mitsui idr. 2017; Rand-Giovannetti idr. 2020; Klimek idr. 2021; Mohd Taib idr. 2021; Goel idr. 2022), pri čemer je sama ugotovljena struktura odvisna od kulturnega okolja prevoda.

V pričujoči raziskavi želimo preučiti faktorsko strukturo in notranjo skladnost slovenske različice vprašalnika EDE-Q na priložnostnem vzorcu iz splošne populacije in s tem razširiti ozek nabor validiranih slovenskih vprašalnikov za ugotavljanje simptomov motenj hranjenja. Preučili smo prileganje nekaterih v literaturi najpogostejše testiranih modelov, in sicer enofaktorskega modela (Pennings in Wojciechowski 2004), dvofaktorskega modela (Becker idr. 2010), ki združuje *skrb glede teže*, *skrb glede postave* ter *skrb glede prehranjevanja* v eno dimenzijo, trifaktorskega modela (Peterson idr. 2007), ki v eno dimenzijo združuje *skrb glede teže* in *skrb glede postave*, ter izvirne štirifaktorske rešitve (Fairburn in Beglin 1994). Poleg zanesljivosti in faktorske veljavnosti želimo s primerjavo izraženosti dimenzij glede na indeks telesne mase udeležencev (ITM) preveriti tudi kriterijsko veljavnost vprašalnika. Dodatno smo vključili še lestvico depresivnosti, s katero smo želeli preveriti tudi konstruktno veljavnost vprašalnika.

Metoda

Udeleženci

Slovensko različico vprašalnika EDE-Q je izpolnilo 428 posameznikov (85,5 % žensk, 14,5 % moških), starih med 18 in 50 let ($M = 27,2$ leta; $SD = 8,5$). Udeleženci so lahko v raziskavi sodelovali, če so bili stari 18 let ali več. Večina (58,9 %) jih je zaključila srednješolsko izobrazbo, sledijo tisti z visokošolsko (38,3 %) in osnovnošolsko izobrazbo (2,8 %). ITM, izraču-

nan na podlagi samoporočane telesne višine in teže, se je gibal med 15,57 in 48,44 ($M = 23,71$, $SD = 4,59$). Večina udeležencev (64,3 %) je bila uvrščena v kategorijo normalne telesne teže (ITM med 18,5 in 24,9), sledilo je 21,0 % s prekomerno telesno težo (ITM med 25 in 29,9) ter 7,7 % z debelostjo (ITM nad 30). Manjšina udeležencev (6,3 %) je spadala v kategorijo podhranjenosti (ITM pod 18,5).

Podatki so bili zbrani z metodo priložnostnega vzorčenja v okviru širšega raziskovalnega projekta o psihologiji prehranjevanja. Udeleženci so bili rekrutirani preko družbenih omrežij in elektronskih seznamov različnih študentskih organizacij. Večina (76,4 %) je vprašalnik izpolnila na spletni platformi ika. Preostali del vzorca (23,6 %) je vprašalnik izpolnil s papirjem in svinčnikom. Končni nabor podatkov ni vseboval manjkajočih vrednosti. Dva udeleženca nista zagotovila dovolj podatkov za izračun ITM, njuni podatki so bili vključeni v analize zanesljivosti, faktorske strukture in konstruktne veljavnosti ter izločeni pri izračunu kriterijske veljavnosti. Pred začetkom raziskave so udeleženci podali informirano soglasje. Sodelovanje v raziskavi je bilo prostovoljno. Raziskavo je odobrila etična komisija Filozofske fakultete Univerze v Mariboru.

Materiali

Vprašalnik za oceno motenj hranjenja 6.o (EDE-Q 6.o (Fairburn in Beglin 2008)) je samoocenjevalni vprašalnik z 28 postavkami, ki preučuje prehranjevalno vedenje v zadnjih štirih tednih (tj. 28 dni). Postavke 13–18 se nanašajo na osnovne vedenjske značilnosti motenj hranjenja (npr. prenajedanje, bruhanje), pri katerih posameznik odgovarja z navedbo števila dni, ko se je določeno vedenje pojavilo. Teh šest postavk ne pripispeva h končnemu rezultatu in so vključene zgolj za dodatne informacije. Udeleženci na preostalih 22 postavk odgovarjajo na sedemstopenjski Likertovi lestvici od 0 (»noben dan/nikoli/sploh ne«) do 6 (»vsak dan/ves čas/izrazito«), pri čemer ocenjujejo pogostost določenih misli in/ali vedenj. Te postavke ocenjujejo štiri dimenzije jedrnih simptomov za motnje hranjenja: *omejevanje* (pet postavk), *skrb glede prehranjevanja* (pet postavk), *skrb glede postave* (osem postavk) in *skrb glede teže* (pet postavk). Ena postavka (»Ali vam je razmišljanje o obliki ali teži telesa zelo otežilo osredotočanje na stvari, ki vas zanimajo?«) je izvorno uvrščena tako v dimenzijo skrbi glede oblike kot tudi skrbi glede teže. Pred začetkom prevajanja vprašalnika smo kontaktirali izvirne avtorje (Fairburn in Beglin 2008) za informacije o morebitnih obstoječih prevodih. Ker slovenski prevod ni bil na voljo, smo pridobili dovoljenje avtorjev za prilago-

goditev vprašalnika v slovenski jezik. Prevajanje je potekalo po metodi vzratnega prevoda, kjer je študentka psihologije naredila prevod, ki so ga preverile asistentka ter ostale raziskovalke v skupini. Vzratni prevod v angleški jezik je prispevala druga študentka. Na podlagi primerjanja vzratnega prevoda z originalom smo nato prilagodili določene postavke. Končno različico je s prvotno primerjala prva avtorica, ki tekoče govori oba jezika.

Lestvica depresivnosti (The Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale – CESD (Carleton idr. 2013)) zajema 14 postavk, ki merijo negativni afekt (primer: »Počutil/-a sem se depresivno«), anhedonijo (primer: »Bil/-a sem zadovoljen/-a«) in somatske simptome (primer: »Nisem imel/-a apetita«). Namenjena je merjenju depresivne simptomatike pri normalni populaciji in ni diagnostični instrument. Udeleženci ocenjujejo pogostost občutij v zadnjem tednu s pomočjo štiristopenjske lestvice (1 – redko, 4 – večinoma). Koeficient notranje skladnosti je bil zadovoljiv ($\alpha = 0,87$). Eva Kranjec idr. (2016) so potrdili ustreznost faktorske strukture slovenske različice lestvice. V pričujoči raziskavi uporabljamo samo skupni rezultat lestvice.

Analize

Podatke smo analizirali z uporabo programov SPSS 28 (IBM Corporation 2021) in R (R Core Team 2023). Konfirmatorno faktorsko analizo smo izvedli z uporabo knjižnice *lavaan* (Rosseel 2012). Uporabili smo cenilko WLSMV (iz angl. Weighted Least Squares Means and Variance Adjusted), ki se uporablja v primeru podatkov, katerih porazdelitev se ne prilega normalni porazdelitvi (npr. Compte idr. 2019; Liang in Yang 2014; Nagata idr. 2023; Serier idr. 2018). Pri odločanju o ustreznosti absolutnega prileganja modela smo uporabili χ^2 , RMSEA (iz angl. Root Mean Square Error of Approximation) in SRMR (iz angl. Standardized Root Mean Square Residual). Za oceno o ustreznosti primerjalnega prileganja modela pa smo uporabili CFI (iz angl. Comparative Fit Index) in TLI (iz angl. Tucker Lewis Index). Za odločanje o ustreznosti prileganja modelov smo uporabili sledeče mejne vrednosti: RMSEA < 0,06; SRMR < 0,08; CFI in TLI > 0,95 (Hu in Bentler 1999; Kline 2016). Za primerjavo rezultatov EDE-Q glede na kategorije ITM je bil uporabljen Mann-Whitneyjev U-test.

Rezultati

Prileganje enofaktorskega, dvofaktorskega, trifaktorskega ter štirifaktorskega modela smo preverili z uporabo konfirmatorne faktorske analize.

Preglednica 1 Indeksi prileganja za enofaktorski, dvofaktorski ter trifaktorski model

Model	χ^2	df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA [90 % IZ]	SRMR
Enofaktorski	428,92***	209	0,986	0,985	0,050 [0,043, 0,056]	0,088
Dvofaktorski	285,25***	208	0,994	0,994	0,033 [0,023, 0,042]	0,080
Trifaktorski	255,53*	206	0,997	0,997	0,024 [0,012, 0,033]	0,070

OPOMBE df = stopnje prostosti, CFI = primerjalni indeks, TLI = Tucker-Lewisov primerjalni indeks, RMSEA = parsimonični indeks, SRMR = absolutni indeks primerjanja.

* $p < 0,05$; *** $p < 0,001$.

Izvornega štirifaktorskega modela ne moremo potrditi, saj umestitev ene postavke v dve dimenziji vodi do kovariančne matrike latentnih spremenljivk, ki ni pozitivno definitna. V preglednici 1 so prikazani χ^2 -test in indeksi prileganja za enofaktorski, dvofaktorski ter trifaktorski model.

Test χ^2 je pokazal, da vsi trije modeli pomembno odstopajo od vhodnih podatkov, vendar je χ^2 pri večjih vzorcih občutljiv na trivialna odstopanja med vhodnimi in reproduciranimi podatki (Brown 2015). V nadaljevanju smo zato pregledali tudi indekse prileganja. Ti so pri vseh modelih zadovoljivi. Primerjalna indeksa (CFI in TLI) kažeta na odlično prileganje vseh modelov v primerjavi z ničelnim modelom (je pa prileganje najboljše pri trifaktorskem modelu). Na odlično prileganje modelov kaže tudi parsimonični indeks RMSEA, ponovno pa so vrednosti najboljše pri trifaktorskem modelu. Absolutni indeks prileganja (SRMR) pa kaže, da je trifaktorski model boljši od eno- in dvofaktorskega pri pojasnjevanju vhodne povezanosti (kovariance) med postavkami, saj je ta pri trifaktorskem modelu pod mejno vrednostjo 0,08. Posledično smo kot najustreznejši model izbrali trifaktorski model. Standardizirane uteži postavk za trifaktorski model, povprečne vrednosti in standardne deviacije so prikazane v preglednici 2. Nasičenosti postavk s faktorjem so bile ustrezno visoke. Povprečne standardizirane nasičenosti postavk po posameznih faktorjih so bile 0,67 s faktorjem omejevanje, 0,70 s faktorjem zaskrbljenost glede prehranjevanja ter 0,76 s faktorjem zaskrbljenost glede postave in teže. Nobena postavka ni imela nasičenosti manjše od 0,40.

Udeleženci so najvišje povprečne vrednosti dosegali na faktorju zaskrbljenost glede postave in teže, sledil je faktor omejevanje. Najnižje povprečne vrednosti pa so dosegali na faktorju zaskrbljenost glede prehranjevanja. Koeficienti notranje skladnosti so bili zadovoljivi tako za skupni rezultat pri vprašalniku kakor tudi za posamezne dimenzije (glej preglednico 3).

Vse dimenzije vprašalnika so med seboj visoko pozitivno korelirane.

Preglednica 2 Standardizirane uteži postavk za trifaktorski model in opisne statistike postavk

Faktor	Postavka	Nasičenosti	M (SD)
Omejevanje	EDE-Q 1	0,84	2,05 (2,16)
	EDE-Q 2	0,42	0,38 (1,05)
	EDE-Q 3	0,75	1,71 (1,98)
	EDE-Q 4	0,73	1,74 (2,19)
	EDE-Q 5	0,61	0,55 (1,37)
Zaskrbljenost glede prehranjevanja	EDE-Q 7	0,60	0,68 (1,40)
	EDE-Q 9	0,78	0,83 (1,68)
	EDE-Q 19	0,57	0,31 (0,74)
	EDE-Q 20	0,89	1,15 (1,51)
	EDE-Q 21	0,64	0,55 (1,22)
Zaskrbljenost glede postave in teže	EDE-Q 6	0,60	2,58 (2,51)
	EDE-Q 8	0,57	0,53 (1,24)
	EDE-Q 10	0,77	1,62 (2,11)
	EDE-Q 11	0,83	1,97 (2,21)
	EDE-Q 12	0,84	2,07 (2,31)
	EDE-Q 22	0,81	1,81 (2,00)
	EDE-Q 23	0,80	2,00 (1,97)
	EDE-Q 24	0,39	1,34 (1,80)
	EDE-Q 25	0,88	2,43 (2,05)
	EDE-Q 26	0,88	2,69 (1,98)
	EDE-Q 27	0,86	2,41 (2,06)
	EDE-Q 28	0,84	2,35 (2,12)

Preglednica 3 Cronbachova alfa in Spearmanovi korelacijski koeficienti za posamezne dimenzije ter skupni rezultat

Dimenzija	α	1	2	3	4
1 EDE-Q omejevanje	0,80	1,00			
2 EDE-Q zaskrbljenost glede prehranjevanja	0,82	0,52***	1,00		
3 EDE-Q zaskrbljenost glede teže in postave	0,94	0,65***	0,73***	1,00	
4 EDE-Q skupni rezultat	0,94	0,85***	0,77***	0,93***	1,00

OPOMBE *** $p < 0,001$.

To kaže tudi na prisotnost nadrednega faktorja drugega reda. Prileganje modela, kjer se tri dimenzije vprašalnika združujejo v nadredni faktor drugega reda, je enako kot pri trifaktorski rešitvi ($\chi^2(206) = 271,52$; $p < 0,001$; RMSEA = 0,026), saj je model s tremi faktorji prvega reda in z enim

Preglednica 4 Povprečja in standardne deviacije dimenzij ter skupnega rezultata

	ITM < 25 (<i>n</i> = 303)		ITM ≥ 25 (<i>n</i> = 123)	
	M	SD	M	SD
Omejevanje	1,14	1,33	1,66	1,35
Zaskrbljenost glede prehranjevanja	0,63	0,97	0,89	1,13
Zaskrbljenost glede teže in postave	1,61	1,43	2,53	1,57
EDE-Q skupni rezultat	1,15	1,09	1,73	1,10

OPOMBE ITM = indeks telesne mase. Dva udeleženca nista podala zadostnih podatkov za izračun ITM.

faktorjem drugega reda identificiran ($df = 0$; Brown 2015). Standardizirane nasičenosti dimenzij z nadrednim faktorjem so bile 0,71 za dimenzije omejevanja, 0,84 za dimenzijo zaskrbljenosti glede prehranjevanja in 0,96 za dimenzijo zaskrbljenosti glede postave in teže.

Za pridobitev ocene kriterijske veljavnosti vprašalnika smo povprečne vrednosti treh dimenzij ter skupnega rezultata pri vprašalniku še primerjali glede na ITM udeležencev. Opisne statistike so prikazane v preglednici 4.

Udeleženci z ITM nad 25 (kategorija prekomerne telesne teže/debelosti) so poročali o pogostejšem omejevanju vnosa hrane ($U = 13699,50$; $p < 0,001$; $g = 0,38$), več skrbeh glede prehranjevanja ($U = 15837,00$; $p = 0,015$; $g = 0,25$) ter več skrbeh glede postave in teže ($U = 12251,50$; $p < 0,001$; $g = 0,62$). Razlike so se pokazale tudi v skupnem rezultatu pri EDE-Q, kar kaže na večjo izraženost jedrnih simptomov motenj hranjenja pri udeležencih s prekomerno telesno težo ($U = 12225,50$; $p < 0,001$; $g = 0,53$). Ko smo iz analize izključili manjše število udeležencev s podhranjenostjo ($n = 27$), so rezultati ostali podobni: udeleženci z ITM nad 25 so poročali o višjem omejevanju ($U = 12933,50$; $p < 0,001$; $g = 0,36$), več skrbeh glede prehranjevanja ($U = 14787,00$; $p = 0,036$; $g = 0,25$), več skrbeh glede postave in teže ($U = 11577,00$; $p < 0,001$; $g = 0,58$) ter višjem skupnem rezultatu pri EDE-Q ($U = 11573,00$; $p < 0,001$; $g = 0,50$).

Za oceno konstruktne veljavnosti smo preverili povezave med dimenzijami EDE-Q in simptomi depresivnosti, merjenimi z lestvico CES-D. Vse dimenzije EDE-Q so bile pozitivno in statistično značilno povezane z depresivnostjo ($p < 0,01$): omejevanje je bilo šibko, a značilno povezano z depresivnostjo ($rs = 0,15$), zaskrbljenost glede prehranjevanja in zaskrbljenost glede postave in teže pa sta izkazovali zmerno močne povezave ($rs = 0,46$ oz. $rs = 0,45$). Skupni rezultat EDE-Q je bil prav tako zmerno pozitivno povezan s simptomi depresivnosti ($rs = 0,40$).

Razprava

V pričujoči raziskavi smo preverili psihometrične značilnosti slovenskega prevoda vprašalnika EDE-Q na priložnostnem vzorcu odraslih. Tako kot v drugih jezikovnih prilagoditvah (Barnes idr. 2012; Mond idr. 2004b; Peterson idr. 2007) je tudi slovenska različica EDE-Q izkazala ustrezno notranjo skladnost. Z vidika factorske strukture se je na našem vzorcu kot najprimernejša izkazala trifaktorska rešitev, kar je skladno s teoretičnimi predpostavkami in številnimi raziskavami, ki so problematizirale prvotno štirifaktorsko strukturo lestvice ter predlagale združitve konceptualno sorodnih dimenzij zaskrbljenosti glede teže in zaskrbljenosti glede postave (Barnes idr. 2012; Hilbert idr. 2007; Peterson idr. 2007; White idr. 2014). Vse dimenzije so zmerno do močno povezane in jih je mogoče združiti v višjeredni faktor, ki omogoča celostno oceno prisotnosti jedrnih simptomov motenj hranjenja, za katere so značilni pretirano vrednotenje pomena telesne teže in oblike, zaskrbljenost glede prehranjevanja ter uporaba neustreznih mehanizmov za izgubo telesne teže.

Rezultati torej kažejo, da je slovenska različica Vprašalnika za ocenjevanje dejavnikov tveganja za motnje hranjenja zanesljiv pripomoček, ki omogoča oceno jedrnih simptomov motenj hranjenja. Rezultati izmed vseh testiranih empirično ocenljivih modelov, ki ohranijo vse izvirne postavke, potrjujejo ustreznost trifaktorskega modela. Izvorno (teoretično) predlagani štirifaktorski model se je namreč kot neustrezen izkazal zaradi visoke povezanosti med dimenzijama zaskrbljenost glede teže in zaskrbljenost glede postave (Brown 2015), ki je nastala kot rezultat umestitve ene postavke v obe dimenziji ter vodila v kovariančno matriko latentnih spremenljivk, ki ni pozitivno definitna. Podobno so pri prevodu v različne jezike poročali tudi drugi avtorji (npr. Compte idr. 2019; Serier idr. 2018).

Primerjava rezultatov EDE-Q glede na kategorije ITM je pokazala, da so udeleženci s prekomerno telesno težo in/ali z debelostjo dosegli višje rezultate na vseh dimenzijah EDE-Q ter pri skupni oceni v primerjavi z udeleženci z normalno telesno težo in/ali s podhranjenostjo. Ti izsledki so skladni z drugimi raziskavami, ki so ugotovile višje rezultate EDE-Q pri osebah s prekomerno telesno težo, pri čemer so se večje razlike pokazale predvsem v zaskrbljenosti glede postave in teže ter v nagnjenosti k omejevanju prehranjevanja (Johnson idr. 2012; Rø idr. 2015). Skupni rezultat pri vprašalniku ter vse tri dimenzije vprašalnika so se pozitivno povezo-

vale z rezultatom na lestvici depresivnosti, kar je v skladu z ugotovitvami drugih raziskav na normativnih vzorcih (Gee in Troop 2003).

Pričujoča raziskava ima nekaj pomanjkljivosti, ki jih je treba upoštevati pri interpretaciji rezultatov. Posplošljivost rezultatov je omejena zaradi priložnostnega vzorčenja. Neuravnoteženost vzorca po spolu je sicer manjša omejitev, saj so motnje hranjenja pogostejše pri ženskah kot pri moških (npr. Qian idr. 2013). Kljub temu bi bilo smiselno preveriti invariantnost merjenja glede na spol, kar pa v tej raziskavi zaradi izrazite neuravnoteženosti vzorca ni bilo mogoče. V prihodnjih raziskavah bi bilo smiselno preveriti tudi faktorsko strukturo vprašalnika EDE-Q na kliničnih vzorcih ter določiti mejne vrednosti za klinično pomembno izraženo jedrnih simptomov v slovenski populaciji. Raziskave tujih prevodov vprašalnika poročajo o povprečni skupni oceni 4 kot mejni vrednosti za klinično pomembno motnjo (Hilbert idr. 2007). Dodatno smo v tej raziskavi preverjali kriterijsko veljavnost (ITM) in konstruktno veljavnost, vendar je bila slednja preverjena le glede na en soroden konstrukt (simptomi depresivnosti). V prihodnjih raziskavah bi lahko to razširili z dodatnim naborom relevantnih mer (npr. telesna samopodoba).

Kljub omejitvam podatki kažejo, da je slovenska različica vprašalnika EDE-Q zanesljivo in veljavno orodje za ocenjevanje različnih vidikov odnosa do prehranjevanja, telesne teže ter oblike, ki predstavljajo pomembne dejavnike tveganja za razvoj pogostih motenj hranjenja. Omejena trifaktorska rešitev se je izkazala kot najustreznejša med empirično ocenljivimi modeli, ki ohranijo vse izvirne postavke. Prevedena različica EDE-Q predstavlja psihometrično ustrezen presejalni pripomoček ter dobro osnovo za raziskave na analognih vzorcih, ki lahko prispevajo k razumevanju vzročnih mehanizmov razvoja in vzdrževanja motenj hranjenja v slovenskem prostoru. Ti pa lahko služijo kot osnova za oblikovanje empirično utemeljenih intervencij za uporabo v klinični praksi.

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Kulturna antropologija
Cultural Anthropology

Make the Friendship Bracelets: From Parasocial Attachment to Horizontal Reciprocity in Taylor Swift Fandom

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Abstract. This article analyses the exchange of friendship bracelets among Taylor Swift fans (Swifties) as a gift economy shaped by parasociality and platform capitalism. Because the celebrity is structurally inaccessible at scale, reciprocity cannot return as an interpersonal gift and is instead displaced laterally into fan-to-fan exchange, becoming horizontal reciprocity and a moral economy of belonging. Drawing on Mauss and Lévi-Strauss, and extending the analysis through Malinowski, Appadurai, Kopytoff, Weiner, Gell, and Miller, I show how mass-produced materials are singularised through labour and exchange. The Eras Tour operates as a tournament of value in which bracelets function as pop-cultural valuables whose circulation organises recognition and inclusion. Reciprocity here can be understood as temporally extended, networked circulation anchored around an absent centre.

Key Words: Taylor Swift fandom, Swifties, friendship bracelets, parasociality, reciprocity, tournaments of value, inalienable possessions

Izdelujte zapestnice prijateljstva: od parasocialne navezanosti do horizontalne recipročnosti med oboževalstvom Taylor Swift

Povzetek. V besedilu analiziram izmenjavo zapestnic prijateljstva med oboževalci/-kami Taylor Swift (swiftiji) kot ekonomijo daru, ki jo dooločata parasocialnost in platformni kapitalizem. Zaradi strukturne nedosegljivosti zvezdniške figure ni mogoče realizirati recipročnosti kot medosebno povračilo, temveč se lateralno premakne v izmenjave med oboževalci/-kami ter udejanji kot horizontalna recipročnost in moralna ekonomija pripadanja. Opiraje se na Maussa, Lévi-Straussa in Godelierja ter s pomočjo Malinowskega, Appadurajja, Kopytoffova, Annette Weiner, Gella in Millerja pokažem, kako se množično proizvedeni materiali singularizirajo skozi delo in izmenjavo. Turneja Eras

deluje kot turnir vrednosti, v katerem so zapestnice dragocenosti, katerih kroženje organizira prepoznavanje in vključevanje v oboževalstvo. Recipročnost v tem kontekstu lahko razumemo kot omrežno kroženje, ki je razpotejeno v času in zgoščeno okoli odsotnega centra.

Ključne besede: oboževalstvo Taylor Swift, swiftiji, zapestnice prijateljstva, parasocialnost, recipročnost, turnirji vrednosti, neodtujljiva posest

Introduction

Fans of Taylor Swift, popularly known as Swifties, exemplify the parasocial¹ nature of fandom, in which fans can feel intimacy, friendship, and even moral obligation towards a celebrity who does not, and by definition cannot, reciprocate in an equal manner (Zafina and Sinha 2024). Developmental research on 'famous character role models' shows that adolescents often cite celebrities like Swift as examples of how to be a 'good person,' that is, as parasocial personalities whose perceived ethics they wish to emulate (Hammond et al. 2024). This moral and affective investment in a celebrity figure like Swift raises a classic anthropological question: if reciprocity cannot flow back from the pop idol, then where does it go?

Marketing strategies surrounding Swift's career, such as the extension of the Eras Tour into cinema, have intensified this question by creating an 'amalgamation of activities,' in which audiences do not simply watch the concert film but also sing along and interact with other fans, thus translating parasocial attachments into forms of solidarity among the fans themselves (Ambadar 2024, 531). Because of the parasocial nature of the relationship, reciprocity is displaced into networks based on emotional support and feelings of belonging. Genuinely reciprocal relationships thus emerge among fans and are even materially enacted in gift-like exchanges, most visibly in the circulation of friendship bracelets at Swift concerts.

For fans, Swift's music and lyrics mirror their own emotional experiences of self-empowerment and vulnerability (Obenza and Silah 2024). Making and exchanging friendship bracelets can therefore be interpreted as a material expression of this emotional discourse, and the bracelets

¹ The example could not be more timely nor a better fit: in 2025, parasocial was selected word of the year by the Cambridge Dictionary (2025) and Taylor Swift was most-streamed artist on Spotify for the past two years, claiming second place in 2025 (Spotify 2023; 2024; 2025).

carry much more than song titles or fragments of lyrics. They do not circulate in a symbolic vacuum but instead condense themes that fans have already explored through listening and online discussion. The friendship bracelets function as objects with little or no material value in which fans invest affect and personal narratives, and through which relationships are formed and maintained.

The friendship bracelet exchange among Swifties began in 2022 as a fan response to a lyric in Swift's song 'You're On Your Own, Kid' from the *Midnights* album, which encourages listeners to 'Make the friendship bracelets / Take the moment and taste it / You've got no reason to be afraid' (Swift 2022). When the Eras Tour was announced just weeks after the album's release, some fans suggested making and exchanging these bracelets at concerts, giving rise to a global trend – including a temporary bead shortage (Wind 2024). The practice quickly became an integral part of the Eras Tour, with fans often arriving with arms full of items to trade. The bracelets, which they often make themselves, include references to lyrics, 'eras,' or Swiftie inside jokes. They have become visual hallmarks of the tour; numerous celebrities have been photographed wearing them, and a stadium in New Orleans even welcomed Swift with a giant friendship bracelet decoration on its exterior (Flam 2024).

As recent work in fan studies suggests, the most revealing dynamics are found not in celebrities' actions but in the 'inner politics of fandom,' such as online debates, coordination for live events, and practices like friendship bracelet exchange (Antolínez 2025). At the same time, research on Swift's marketing campaigns shows that fan participation is 'choreographed' across digital and physical spaces as part of a broader marketing strategy to commodify engagement (Ryan Bengtsson and Edlom 2023). Swifties exchanging friendship bracelets is therefore not merely a 'cute' trend, but a community-building practice that, within the fandom, carries deep cultural meaning. The acts of giving and receiving bracelets are treated as gestures of friendship and often lead to ongoing social media connections among fans. The bracelets also convey meaning outside concert spaces, where they signal belonging to the fan community and foster a sense of instant kinship.

To interpret Swift fandom solely as an extreme case of commodified entertainment risks oversimplification. Approaches to fandom based on cultural industry and political economy often foreground capture over reciprocity; they treat fandom primarily as commodified participation and emphasise how it is organised through branded engagement and

monetisable attention and affect. This article does not aim to dispute these approaches, but to argue that reciprocity in contemporary fandoms is not absent but, rather, structurally rerouted. Parasociality introduces a structural reciprocity gap, displacing obligations to give, receive, and reciprocate laterally into relations among fans, where they become actionable as forms of horizontal solidarity.

In this article, late capitalism refers to platformed (Srnicek 2019), event-based cultural economies in which participation is measurable and monetisable across digital and physical spaces. Celebrity operates as a 'branded personhood' (Banet-Weiser 2012) that is omnipresent yet structurally inaccessible. Swifties provide a useful example because Swift's exceptional scale and the event infrastructure make this reciprocity gap unusually visible. The Swiftie friendship bracelet exchange, facilitated by platformisation and driven by fans' 'affective labour' (Jarrett 2016), sheds light on this lateral displacement. By making and exchanging bracelets, fans transform commodified materials into singular gifts that mediate recognition and obligation among peers while maintaining Swift as the absent centre that upholds the system without really participating in it. This transforms the Eras Tour from a simple site of consumption into a 'tournament of value' (Appadurai 2014).

This article therefore proposes a reconceptualisation of gift theory for platformed popular culture, where reciprocity cannot be reduced to a dyadic return, but can instead be interpreted as a distributed, temporally extended circulation that depends on event-based infrastructures and late capitalist regimes of commodified engagement. It also draws on material culture approaches to theorise bracelets as socially active mediators whose efficacy stems from labour and exchange. The third section situates bracelet exchange within anthropologies of the gift; the fourth section develops the argument through tournaments of value, cultural biography, and inalienability; the fifth section concludes with implications for gift theory under platform capitalism.

Methodology

This article draws on academic literature, media reports, and qualitative digital observation and content analysis of publicly accessible Taylor Swift fan spaces online. Data were collected in September 2025 and focused on posts and forum threads published between 2023 and 2025, with most material originating in 2024 and 2025, when friendship bracelet exchange became widely recognized as an Eras Tour practice.

The empirical corpus includes material from Reddit, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, selected to capture norms of exchange and reflexive accounts. On the Taylor Swift subreddit, I searched for ‘bracelets,’ filtered results by ‘Top,’ and read approximately 50 threads, including comment discussions. On YouTube, I searched ‘swiftie friendship bracelet,’ filtered for long-form videos (20+ minutes), and prioritised results by ‘most popular.’ I analysed the top seven videos, including their comment sections. On Instagram, I sampled reels via the hashtags *Aswiftiefriendshipbracelet*, *#erastourbracelet*, *#taylorswiftbracelets*, and *#makethefriendshipbracelets*. On TikTok, I sampled via *#taylorswiftfriendshipbracelets*. Across Instagram and TikTok, I analysed approximately 50 short videos with accompanying comments. I prioritised concert-day reflections and posts about bracelet trading over tutorial videos since the former more directly articulate norms and obligations of bracelet exchange.

I approached these online spaces as a non-participatory observer. I did not engage with any content or users, and I treat material as public-facing negotiations of meaning rather than direct access to private experience. The digital ethnographic material is used to identify recurring themes and norms of exchange. It is not intended as a representative sample, but as a starting point for developing the article’s theoretical argument about displaced reciprocity and horizontal exchange. All examples are drawn from public posts with usernames or handles omitted.

Limitations

The material reflects platform visibility dynamics (e.g. ranking and algorithmic amplification), therefore capturing widely shared framings rather than a representative sample of all Swifties. My analysis relies on publicly posted content and is therefore unable to capture experiences that might not be articulated online. This could in future research be complemented with systematic sampling and interviews. The interpretations in this article are thus best read as an analysis of publicly articulated meanings and norms rather than private experiences of all fans.

Swifties’ Friendship Bracelets and Anthropology of the Gift

The exchange of friendship bracelets among Swift’s fans can be interpreted as a form of gift exchange that establishes and strengthens social bonds. Marcel Mauss, in *The Gift*, famously argues that gifts always carry an implicit expectation of reciprocity and therefore create lasting relationships among people. For him, the tripartite obligation to give, to re-

ceive, and to return a gift forms the foundation of social cohesion (Mauss 2002). The bracelets exchanged by Swifties have no significant monetary value, but they create and reinforce social bonds, demonstrating that their true value, which lies in the gesture and the meaning attached to it rather than in the object itself, is social and symbolic. As in Mauss's theory, gifting bracelets is more about establishing relationships than about exchanging commodities.

Building on fan studies' focus on affect and materiality, where merchandise and souvenirs are interpreted as more than mere commodities (Antolínez 2025), friendship bracelets can be understood as the type of 'enchanted' object that Mauss describes as carrying the giver's personhood and binding people into relationships. Mauss (2002, 14) uses the notion of *hau*, 'the spirit of things,' to explain how a part of the giver's identity or 'spirit' is believed to reside in the gift, compelling it to be passed on or reciprocated. Swifties who invest time, care, and emotional attachment into the handcrafted bracelets they give away also attach their 'fan spirit' to them. When another fan wears the bracelet, they quite literally carry a fragment of another fan's identity on their body. The informal obligation to return the gift is often not directed at the same individual but at the fan community more broadly, as the gift is seen as circulating within the shared moral universe of the fandom.

Gift economy is structured not only by what circulates but also by what must be kept, as certain goods and relationships remain inalienable, and, thus, provide the foundation upon which exchange becomes meaningful (Godelier 1999). In the Swifties' case, bracelets are made from commodified materials but transformed through labour and care into objects that can be given away without depleting what is ultimately retained: the fandom's collective identity, sustained by shared attachment to Swift herself.

Gift exchange is a 'total social fact' (Mauss 2002, 100) entangled with morality, religion, and politics. Swift fandom demonstrates a similar entanglement, as affective investment in her is not limited to musical taste but extends to moral and even political expectations of the celebrity. Her 'coming out' as a liberal in 2018 triggered intense debates within the fandom, who framed it at the same time as a necessary stance and as a strategic career move (Driessen 2020; 2022). In this context, the exchange of friendship bracelets is not an isolated, apolitical activity, but part of a broader moral economy of allegiance in which fans negotiate what it means to be a 'good' Swiftie, how legitimacy is performed, and how norms of participation distribute belonging. In this sense, the 'political' dimen-

sion primarily refers to governance of participation within fandom rather than mapping bracelet exchange onto external issues.

This moral economy becomes especially visible in posts that articulate trading etiquette as a normative repertoire. For example, giving bracelets to newcomers or those without them is encouraged. Fans often evaluate behaviour in moral terms (e.g. kindness, generosity, inclusion as ‘good’ Swiftie participation, and gatekeeping or transactional bargaining as improper). In this sense, bracelet exchange marks which forms of participation are read as legitimate.

Swifties’ reciprocity often takes a generalised form, as fans do not just trade bracelets but also distribute them without expecting any return gift. ‘Generalised exchange,’ originally theorised in the context of kinship and marital alliance, is a form of indirect reciprocity that creates a chain or circle. Relationships in that circle are asymmetrical or delayed. The obligation to reciprocate is diffuse and rests on the system rather than on particular individuals. More trust is required in the social network because the return gift is not guaranteed by the immediate recipient. Generalised exchange thus strengthens collective solidarity (Lévi-Strauss 2016). All these characteristics are observable in the Swifties’ bracelet exchange. Although bracelets are often swapped, direct reciprocity is not always required or expected. Fans who do not bring any bracelets of their own still regularly leave concerts with their arms covered in them, demonstrating that exchange is frequently unilateral at the dyadic level. A fan might not receive a bracelet from every person to whom they give one, but is likely to receive bracelets from other fans, so reciprocity occurs indirectly. The giver is not necessarily rewarded with a specific return object from the recipient, but with a sense of belonging generated by participating in the exchange system. For example, one fan in the TaylorSwift subreddit (snappa870 2024) reported ‘Giving them away is so much fun! My daughter and I would look for people without them and ask if they would like them.’ Another (ilikedirt 2024) said, ‘I made so so many bracelets and honestly I gave away far more than I traded, and it gave me so much joy because the people I just gave to were the ones who didn’t have any so they were super happy to be included!’ A person (bellemarcelle 2024) who had gone to a concert without any bracelet reported, ‘I went with zero bracelets [...] and still had a great time. I made up for it by making a ton for the movie and trading there!’ Making and exchanging friendship bracelets can therefore be seen as a shared, pro-social ritual that strengthens the social bonds and collective identity of Swifties.

A crucial observation can be made about the temporality of reciprocity here. Even when a bracelet does not elicit an immediate counter gift from the recipient, return can occur later through further circulation, so reciprocity is delayed, indirect, and diffuse across the network. This aligns with Mauss's (2002, 14) account of gift exchange as temporally extended and sometimes unequal: return may come only 'after a certain lapse of time' and via a third party, and what comes back can be 'the equivalent or something of even greater value' (p. 15). In other regimes, Mauss notes even more explicit asymmetry where gifts must be 'reciprocated with interest' (p. 53). At the same time, it can be argued that a form of reciprocity does also come from Swift herself, where the concert performance and her presence are experienced by the fans as a kind of return. Yet this 'gift' remains mediated and non-interpersonal at scale, which is exactly why the primary arena for actionable reciprocity shifts laterally. Although the context of pop-cultural fandom is very distant, both in time and space, from Bronislaw Malinowski's Trobriand Islands, there are suggestive parallels between the Swifties' bracelet exchange and the kula ring. The latter is a paradigmatic anthropological example of ceremonial gift exchange, documented by Malinowski in Melanesia more than a century ago. The kula ring consists of the continual circulation of shell valuables (necklaces and, significantly, bracelets) in a ring among many islands, with each object moving from partner to partner over time (Malinowski 2002). Objects that circulate in the kula have little material or utilitarian value, and their importance lies only in the relationships and prestige they confer. Just as in the Swifties' case, it is the circulation of the objects, rather than their consumption, that really matters.

Swifties often travel across cities, countries, and even continents for concerts, where they form impromptu exchange networks reminiscent of the kula circle. As kula valuables strengthen social ties and carry stories of their journeys and previous holders, so friendship bracelets create a network of shared memories across the Swift fandom. This analogy is useful but should not be overstated. Bracelet exchange, unlike kula, is only loosely formalised and governed by informal hierarchies. Prestige is more attached to factors such as crafting effort or the meaningfulness of a specific encounter, rather than to rank. Another difference lies in temporality: kula valuables circulate slowly, whereas bracelet exchange is rapid, condensed around concert events, and often amplified by platforms. The parasocial relationship to the celebrity, within the context of commercial infrastructure and branded experience, reshapes the conditions under

which objects can acquire value. These differences, however, are not limitations to the comparison but, rather, insights into what changes when classic gift logics operate within platformed, event-based conditions of late capitalism.

Social Life of Swifties' Friendship Bracelets

Appadurai (2014, 21) identifies the kula ring as a paradigmatic example of tournaments of value; complex, periodically recurring events, 'removed in some culturally well-defined way from the routines of economic life.' Such events are not merely economic occasions but, rather, arenas in which key social and political issues are negotiated. They are also settings in which particular objects temporarily acquire heightened significance, which means that they are treated differently from objects traded in everyday exchanges. In late capitalist societies, tournaments of value are often staged in highly commercialised contexts. The exchange of friendship bracelets among Swifties within the spectacular machinery of Taylor Swift's Eras Tour, which already shows suggestive parallels to the kula ring, can therefore also be interpreted as a tournament of value in late-capitalist societies.

Eras Tour concerts and venues function as ritually marked times and spaces that suspend ordinary routines and intensify the audience's affective investment. These events are meticulously choreographed occasions for fans to perform their Swiftie identities. Within these events, the bracelets function as 'central tokens of value' (Appadurai 2014, 21), as their circulation helps organise encounters among participants, marking some as desired and memorable, and others as inappropriate. Economic exchange itself creates value (p. 3), and politics 'links value and exchange in the social life of commodities' (p. 57). Each friendship bracelet exchanged at the Eras Tour events has its own distinctive 'cultural biography' (Kopytoff 2014), in the sense that one could, in principle, trace its journey from one fan to another, and analyse the meanings it accumulated along the way. At the same time, friendship bracelets as a 'class of things' have a 'social history' that transcends the biographies of individual objects and reflects broader epistemological, economic and cultural shifts (Appadurai 2014, 34).

From a social history perspective, Swiftie friendship bracelets did not simply and spontaneously appear out of thin air, nor were they invented by Swift or her fans. Friendship bracelets were popular among counter-cultures in the 1960s, experienced a resurgence among teenagers in the

1990s, and can be traced further back to indigenous traditions in Central and South America (DJangi 2024). However, the Eras Tour reappropriates and commodifies this already familiar object and the practice of its exchange, situating them within the context of pop cultural fandom. Under late capitalism, the Swiftie bracelet, along with tickets, tour merchandise, vinyl records, and social media engagement, forms a comprehensive apparatus for value extraction. In this sense, the Eras Tour exemplifies late capitalist regimes of value, in which fan participation and creativity become resources, constituting a form of free labour that increases brand value (Ryan Bengtsson and Edlom 2023).

What is specific in the Swifties case is not that members of a fandom exchange small tokens, but the manner in which platformed infrastructures scale these exchanges. These intensify exchange by limiting access (e.g. a limited number of events, expensive tickets). Platforms then amplify visibility so that bracelet exchange becomes content. Through this process, norms and etiquette of bracelet exchange are standardised. Thus, value is produced in the documented and shared act of exchange and the public recognition that this exchange generates, rather than merely in the bracelets themselves. As the lateral gifting is closely tied to the commercial infrastructure, this gift economy flourishes within commodified engagement while still producing meanings that go beyond monetisation.

Kopytoff's concept of cultural biography complements Appadurai: the Eras Tour can be seen as one chapter in the social life of friendship bracelets as a class, while the journeys of individual bracelets through fans' hands reveal the cultural logic by which value is attached and transformed. In terms of their specific materiality, the bracelets are unremarkable. They are made from mass-produced materials of negligible value, emphasising craft and personalisation rather than wealth or status. Despite their modesty, however, they possess social and symbolic value, which, in the context of concerts, makes them central tokens of value. What makes these otherwise generic objects singular and important, then, is the time spent crafting, inscribing, and exchanging them. Fans spend long hours before concerts making bracelets, encoding narratives and identities in humble materials, which function as 'a currency of sorts made from "cloth"' (Weiner 1992, 3), or, in this case, elastic and plastic. Each friendship bracelet carries traces of this prior labour.

Just as the kula ring involves the circulation of valuables that confer relationships and prestige rather than just material value, the friendship bracelets validate the communal identity of the Swiftie fandom and

strengthen their sense of kinship. At the same time, they also participate in processes of differentiation through the paradoxical mechanism of 'keeping-while-giving' (Weiner 1992). Not all bracelets are equal: some commemorate particularly meaningful encounters, while others do not. The former contribute to the 'authentication of difference' (p. 40), which suggests their status, at least for some fans, as 'inalienable possessions' (p. 40), objects that, once received, are effectively withdrawn from further exchange.

Godelier's (1999, 161) claim that it is not only what circulates but also what must be kept that structures societies is relevant here, particularly in the emphasis on the distinction between alienable and inalienable goods as the foundation of social order: 'In every society, alongside those things which circulate, which move about, there must be fixed points, points which anchor the social relations and the collective and individual identities: it is these which allow the practice of exchange and which set its limits.' He further argues that 'society is brought into existence and sustained only by the union, by the interdependence of these two spheres and by their difference, their relative autonomy' (p. 36). In the Swifties' case, friendship bracelets occupy an in-between zone. On the one hand, they originate from commodified production processes; on the other, their singularisation in the ritual of exchange renders some of them unexchangeable. What is kept, then, is not only the bracelets that become inalienable, but also the attachments formed through their exchange. The Eras Tour, as a tournament of value, continually transforms commodified materials into personal gifts, preserving an inalienable core of parasocial devotion and collective identity within the fandom. This is a telling example of the contradictions of late capitalism, where the bracelet exchange demonstrates the tension between commodified and non-commodified registers of worth, and where the same infrastructure that enables the extraction of money from fans also provides the foundation for the emergence of a gift economy, in which fans produce a surplus of meaning that avoids monetisation.

Although friendship bracelets, like typical commodities, are endlessly reproducible at the material level, each becomes unique as value is attached to it at the moment of encounter between giver and recipient. Swifties' friendship bracelets occupy a position somewhere between alienable commodities and inalienable possessions. Mass-produced and therefore not materially scarce, the bracelets nonetheless act socially. A bracelet can be treated as an index of agency, materialising invested time

and intention and enabling recipients to infer (or ‘abduct’) the presence of another person’s care and attention (Gell 1998).

The bracelets are effective because the labour of personalisation and the moment of transfer, rather than their scarcity, singularise a generic commodity (Kopytoff 2014) into a socially active mediator of affiliation and obligation. In this sense, the bracelets do not merely symbolise social relations but help produce them. While Gell helps explain how bracelets become socially active at the moment of exchange, Miller helps argue that their efficacy is sustained within everyday life under conditions of mass consumption. Miller (1987) treats consumption as a practice of appropriation through which people objectify and cultivate relationships by pulling standardised goods into their private social spheres. This is often done by modifying and recontextualising the commodity (Miller 1998), for example, transforming generic beads into specific lyrical references or inside jokes.

Miller’s (2010) broader argument in *Stuff* shifts attention from the moment of exchange to the later work of objects, when they function as an unnoticed background ‘frame’ that guides behaviour and sustains relationships precisely because it becomes ordinary and taken for granted. The bracelet’s commodified material reality therefore does not negate intimacy. Rather, intimacy is produced through the affective work of gifting, which transforms cheap materials into tokens of attachment within the fandom.

If we see individuals as composites of their relations, distributed across the objects that connect them (Strathern 2001), Swifties’ arms covered in friendship bracelets do not merely carry fan ‘spirit’ in the Maussian sense, but also incorporate elements of others into the wearer’s personhood. The bracelets are therefore much more than mere tokens of participation in the commercial pop spectacle; they become media through which fans extend themselves into others and accept others into themselves. Friendship bracelets, ‘although given to others for a time, ultimately are inalienable possessions’ (Weiner 1992, 26): even if they are only meant to mark participation in a commercial late-capitalist tournament of value, they remain part of fans’ extended selves for good.

Conclusion

The Swiftie friendship bracelet exchange reflects many contemporary ambiguities. It shows how gift logics persist and transform through parasocial attachment to a global celebrity and a commercial event in-

frastructure. As reciprocity cannot flow back from the celebrity as an interpersonal return, obligations to give, receive, and reciprocate are displaced laterally into relationships among fans, where they become actionable as a moral economy of belonging. The Eras Tour functions as an event-based tournament of value in which even reproducible materials are singularised through labour and exchange, enabling keeping-while-giving. What is ultimately kept is not only select bracelets as inalienable possessions but also attachment to Swift.

The Swiftie bracelet economy shows that classic gift logics are not fully reproduced in contemporary pop culture but are redefined by parasociality and platform capitalism. Conceptually, the case suggests four adjustments to how reciprocity can be theorised in such contexts: (i) reciprocity can be networked rather than dyadic; (ii) return can be indirect and temporally extended; (iii) reciprocity can be infrastructurally mediated; and (iv) gift exchange can be anchored around an absent centre that sustains the system without directly participating in interpersonal obligations. In this sense, the ‘enigma of the gift’ persists in late capitalism not despite commodified engagement but within and through it, precisely because those infrastructures make lateral exchange scalable and governed by norms. Swift, as the absent centre, never has to directly return the gift. In fact, she does not even have to accept it: the much-publicised failure of Swift’s now husband Travis Kelce to give her a friendship bracelet with his phone number is an almost too convenient example of a circulation designed to function without direct access to its centre (Santaflorientina 2023).

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Miscellanea



Book Review

Nina Rismal, *The Ends of Utopian Thinking in Critical Theory*

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In 1964, Theodor W. Adorno and Ernst Bloch engaged in a radio conversation on the prospects of utopian thinking in the modern age. Consistent with his project of negative dialectics, Adorno insists on a prohibition against representing utopia, while Bloch resists this restraint, maintaining that utopian thinking must not be relinquished. During the discussion, Adorno advances two central claims. First, he questions whether utopian thinking remains possible at all, suggesting that the capacity to imagine a radically different world has withered. Second, he argues that utopia ought not to be depicted, since any affirmative vision of a perfect society would necessarily draw on the conceptual vocabulary of the present, thereby re-inscribing existing constraints into the future it seeks to transcend. Bloch counters both points, insisting that the imaginative faculty required for utopian thought persists and that such visions can, in fact, be meaningfully articulated. In *The Ends of Utopian Thinking in Critical Theory* (2024), Nina Rismal revisits this tension, interpreting it as emblematic of two distinct currents within critical theory. The book's principal achievement lies precisely in its refusal to reconcile or dissolve this opposition; instead, it sustains the divergence, bringing into view its full depth and philosophical significance.

The book's central premise, introduced in the opening chapter, is that utopian thinking does not end with Marx's critique of political economy. On the contrary, Rismal argues that Marx can 'be perceived both as critic and as an advocate of utopian thinking' (Rismal 2024, 29), framing this dual role as a paradox internal to historical materialism. On the one hand, historical materialism maintains that the dominant ideas of any given society are shaped by its existing relations of production; as such, these ideas cannot be genuinely novel but instead mirror prevailing social conditions. On the other hand, the same framework contains resources for

imagining forms of social organization better attuned to human needs, thereby preserving a utopian impulse within its critical apparatus. To substantiate this second claim, Rismal turns to Marx's early writings, including *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* and *The German Ideology*. From these texts, she foregrounds the concept of 'species-essence' (*Gattungswesen*) as central to Marx's account of human nature. Her argument proceeds by suggesting that Marx implicitly identifies certain forms of social relations as enabling the realization of this human essence. From this premise, one can derive a normative conception of the good life, namely, a life lived in accordance with that nature. Closely connected to species-essence is the notion of 'species-activity' (*Gattungsakt*), which Rismal interprets as non-alienated labour. She characterizes this activity through three key features: (i) a reciprocal process in which individuals produce for others while also enjoying the products of others' labour; (ii) the free or self-directed character of such activity; and (iii) its intrinsic diversity (Rismal 2024, 32–33). Taken together, species-essence and species-activity function, in Rismal's reading, as the residual traces of utopian thinking within Marx's work.

After tracing the utopian strands in Marx's writings, Rismal turns to Adorno, arguing that his intervention ultimately consolidates an anti-utopian tendency present in Marx. More specifically, she contends that 'the strengthening of this anti-utopian dimension in Adorno took the form of imposing a ban on the practice of utopian thinking in Critical Theory' (Rismal 2024, 53). She designates this prohibition as the *Utopieverbot*. While Marx, in developing his scientific socialism, also resisted offering positive depictions of a future society, Rismal maintains that Adorno not only inherits this hesitation but radicalizes it. In her reading, the prohibition becomes constitutive of Adorno's philosophical project as a whole. This is most clearly articulated in *Negative Dialectics*, where Adorno insists that a utopian society cannot be positively imagined. The same stance recurs across his work: in *Minima Moralia*, he reiterates the impossibility of constructing affirmative images of a just society, and in *Aesthetic Theory*, he extends this prohibition beyond philosophy to art itself. Taken together, the *Utopieverbot* 'prohibits expressions of the perfect future society in the forms of concepts, discourse, or words' (Rismal 2024, 59). On Rismal's account, this ban is uncompromising in scope. Against interpretations that suggest Adorno does not so much abandon utopian representation as transform it into an alternative, indirect mode, she insists that no such residual form remains; the prohibition, rather, is total.

The second part of the book is devoted to Ernst Bloch, a Marxist philosopher of hope, utopia, and the future whose work calls for integrating utopian thinking into Critical Theory. In contrast to Adorno, Bloch believes that we can envisage utopia. In his magnum opus, *The Principle of Hope*, he seeks to establish the ubiquity of utopian thinking as a historical fact. For Bloch, utopian thinking is present everywhere, from fairy tales, folk songs, and dances to theatrical performances, myths, paintings, architecture, and everyday thought. It is also evident in domains such as religion, medicine, and technology. In this sense, utopia manifests itself everywhere. All wishes, dreams, and ideas produced by the imagination are, for Bloch, expressions of utopian thinking. They appear in these various forms as the 'Not-Yet,' a category that captures the forward-looking, anticipatory dimension of reality. The whole of reality is thus utopian in the sense that it is oriented toward what has not yet come into being. Rismal argues that Bloch conceives of utopia as a 'concrete utopia.' By this, however, he does not mean abstract utopian dreaming or the kind of speculative utopian socialism detached from material conditions. Rather, concrete utopia refers to possibilities grounded in real tendencies and potentials within the world itself.

Rismal's central claim is that Bloch's conception of utopian thinking, as a form of positive, anticipatory thought, constitutes an indispensable element of Critical Theory. In the final part of the book, she therefore seeks to spell out what utopian thinking might look like when developed as a critical-theoretical practice. At the heart of this account is her characterization of utopian thinking as something processual. Drawing on Bloch, she introduces the notion of a 'processual utopia.' On this view, history is not a predetermined trajectory but an open-ended process. Each event arises out of existing conditions and is thus, in one sense, necessary; yet it also retains an element of contingency. As Bloch famously puts it, 'the true genesis is not at the beginning, but at the end' (Rismal 2024, 142). Rismal adopts an interpretation according to which processual utopia stands in sharp contrast to teleological conceptions of utopia. A teleological utopia can only be grasped retrospectively, once the historical process has run its course, much like a seed that becomes a tree and realizes its essence only at the culmination of its development. By contrast, processual utopia is already immanent within the present, though only as a potentiality. It is partially prefigured in existing conditions without being fully determined or brought to completion.

Although the book offers an engaging reading of utopian moments in

Marx, Adorno, and Bloch, it suffers from several shortcomings. Most notably, its title is somewhat misleading. The term ‘Critical Theory’ typically encompasses multiple phases: the first generation (Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse), the second generation (Habermas), and the third generation (Honneth, Fraser, etc.). Rismal’s study, however, does not address Critical Theory in this broader sense. Instead, its focus remains largely confined to the first generation of the Frankfurt School, and even here, the discussion is effectively limited to Adorno. As a result, the scope of the book is considerably narrower than its title suggests. A more accurate framing might have been ‘The End of Utopian Thinking in the Frankfurt School,’ or even more precisely, ‘in Adornian thought.’

In addition, the book’s classification of Bloch as a figure within Critical Theory introduces a certain tension in its overall argument. On the one hand, Rismal claims that utopian thinking effectively ends within Critical Theory with Adorno’s imposition of the *Utopieverbot*. On the other hand, she presents Bloch, whom she explicitly situates within the same critical-theoretical tradition, as preserving and further developing a robust form of utopian thinking. This creates a conceptual inconsistency. If Bloch is indeed to be counted as part of Critical Theory, then it becomes difficult to maintain that utopian thinking has come to an end within that tradition. Rather, Bloch’s work would seem to demonstrate its continuation, albeit in a different form. Conversely, if Adorno’s prohibition is taken to define Critical Theory as such, then Bloch’s position would have to be located outside of it. The book does not fully resolve this tension, leaving unclear whether utopian thinking is meant to be understood as terminated, transformed, or simply divided within Critical Theory itself.

Moreover, the book’s treatment of Marx in relation to Critical Theory remains insufficiently clear. On the one hand, Rismal’s claim that genuinely utopian elements can be found within Marx’s own work is ultimately unconvincing. This is a strong and far-reaching thesis, one that would arguably require a full-length study of its own to be properly substantiated. In the present book, however, the argument is developed only briefly and lacks the depth needed to make it compelling. On the other hand, the precise relationship between Marx and the later figures discussed in the book remains undertheorized. Rismal argues that ‘Through Marx’s influence, utopian thinking was installed in the foundations of Critical Theory’ (Rismal 2024, 149). In addition, she argues that Adorno effectively affirms and radicalizes the anti-utopian dimensions of Marx’s thought. If one were to apply this interpretive framework consistently, the

discussion of Bloch should similarly trace how he appropriates and develops the utopian elements in Marx. Yet the book does not pursue this parallel. Instead, Rismal emphasizes that the defining feature of Bloch's utopian thinking is precisely that it does not constitute a straightforward continuation of Marx. As a result, the book misses an opportunity to present a more systematic account of how Marx's legacy is selectively taken up and transformed by different strands within Critical Theory.

Despite the shortcomings noted above, the aim Rismal sets for herself in this book is entirely commendable. At its core, the book remains faithful to the objective she articulates from the outset: to show that the end of utopian thinking cannot be attributed solely to liberal thinkers, but also implicates Critical Theory itself. In other words, it is not only figures such as Isaiah Berlin, Karl Popper, and Friedrich Hayek who bear responsibility, but also the mainstream of Critical Theory, including 'the French intellectual traditions spanning from poststructuralism to psychoanalysis' (Rismal 2024, 23). Rismal's project seeks to specify what utopian thinking might look like as a tool or method within Critical Theory. Drawing on Bloch's concepts of concrete and processual utopia, she begins to outline the foundational features of such a practice. In doing so, the book opens a space for envisioning how utopian imagination can be integrated into critical-theoretical work, not merely as a philosophical abstraction, but as a method capable of engaging with the present while remaining oriented toward what has not yet come into being.

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Poročilo s konference

Fichte: določenost, intersubjektivnost in država

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Med 11. in 13. marcem 2026 je v Ljubljani v prostorih Cankarjevega doma potekala mednarodna konferenca Fichte: določenost, intersubjektivnost in država, in sicer v organizaciji Filozofske fakultete Univerze v Ljubljani v sodelovanju z Goethejevim inštitutom, Univerzo v Kjotu, Univerzo v Padovi, s Sorbono in z Univerzo v Buenos Airesu. Osnovni cilj konference je bil sistematično premisliti pojmovni neksus določenosti, intersubjektivnosti in države v Fichtejevi teoretični in praktični filozofiji.

Izhodišče razprav je bilo, da intersubjektivnost ni zgolj ideja, da je subjektivnost posredovana skozi odnos do drugih subjektov, pač pa ključen moment subjektivnosti kot take. V *Osnovi celotnega vedoslovja* (Fichte 2022; prvič izšlo 1794) in *Osnovah naravnega prava* (Fichte 1796–1797), specifično, naletimo na formulacije, ki jasno kažejo, da je Fichtejeva analiza jaza hkrati analiza njegove utelešenosti in torej tudi bistveno vključuje razmerje do drugih. Izkušnja omejitve, zajeta v pojmu *Anstoß* (spotika, impulz), ni nekaj zunanjega jazu, temveč pogoj njegove možnosti in notranji moment njegove pojmovne konstitucije. To je jedro Fichtejeve teorije *Anstoß*. V tesni povezavi s tem pojmom je koncept *Aufforderung* (poziv ali povabilo), ki eksplicitno uvaja intersubjektivno dimenzijo: mišljenje po svoji pojmovni nujnosti že vključuje družbeni in socialni vidik – je, v svojem bistvu, »mišljenje za dva«. Neposredno nadaljevanje te ideje je pojem *Anerkennung* (pripoznanje), ki opisuje razmerja intersubjektivnosti, enakosti in simetrije, ki so nujna za delovanje funkcionalne skupnosti.

Prispevki prvega dne so ta pojmovni sklop obravnavali na ravni vedoslovja. Shunsuke Kudomi je pokazal, da je nasprotje med teoretičnim in praktičnim jazom – ideja, da je mišljenje ločeno od konkretnega udejanjenja v svetu dejstev in odnosa do drugih – zgrešeno. Zamejitev teoretične dejavnosti jaza preko ideje *Anstoß* ne zmanjšuje njene učinkovi-

tosti, temveč jo utemeljuje; razmerje med teoretičnim in praktičnim je krožno, saj zavest nastaja prav skozi proces te vzajemne določitve dejavnosti jaza in spotike. V nasprotju s Kudomijem je Niccolò Pardini skozi analizo nejaza v Fichtejevi jenski praktični filozofiji *Anstoß* razumel kot nujen, vendar ne zadosten pogoj za praktično udejanjenje ter zagovarjal primat praktičnega nad teoretičnim in njuno razmerje razumel kot razmerje diskontinuitete. Taiju Okochi je problematiziral razmerje med teoretičnim in praktičnim na primeru Fichtejeve moralne filozofije. Natančneje, zagovarjal je tezo, da Fichtejeva etika spodleti, ker ne priznava zadostne moči občutju (*Gefühl*) v moralni konstituciji posameznika, čeprav ga postavlja za izvor moralne dejavnosti. Sklep, ki ga izpelje, je, da Fichtejev sistem – opirajoč se na Hegla – ostaja formalen idealizem. Jimena Solé je *Osnove celotnega vedoslovja* interpretirala kot političen in revolucionaren program ter teoretsko obrambo pojma *Bildung*: izobraževanje ni zgolj pridobivanje veščin in kompetenc, temveč proces konstitucije emancipatorne subjektivnosti, način, kako se ljudstvo oblikuje kot subjekt zgodovine in se upre absolutnemu vladarju.

Drugi sklop razprav je v ospredje postavil razmerje med intersubjektivnostjo in organicistično paradigmo. Manja Kisner je prepričljivo pokazala, da je dejavnost jaza neločljivo povezana s teorijo gonov: učinkovito delovanje jaza je vezano na njegovo telesno organizacijo in utelešenost, ki je pogoj možnosti udejanjenja njegove svobode. Da živo bitje deluje iz sebe in torej svobodno, mora biti utelešeno in s tem torej tudi vstopati v razmerje do drugih živih bitij. Plato Tse in Goran Vranešević sta analizirala Fichtejevo teorijo spoznavnih zmožnosti in njen potencial za Fichtejevo politično filozofijo. Tse je obravnaval dualizem vere in razuma kot strukturo družbenega reda ter izhodišče za problematične implikacije, kot je rasna teorija, a hkrati pokazal možnost njihovega preseganja skozi idejo izobraževanja. Vranešević pa je razvil idejo upodobitvene moči (*Einbildungskraft*) kot načela družbene transformacije in samoustvarjanja, ključnega za uresničevanje svobode.

Osrednje teoretsko vozlišče konference so ostali pojem intersubjektivnost kot pripoznanje (*Anerkennung*) in njegovi politični učinki. Ker je pripoznanje pri Fichteu imanentno in izhaja iz logične nujnosti, in torej ne iz zunanjih okoliščin, se zastavlja vprašanje, ali njegova teorija intersubjektivnosti utemeljuje ali spodkopava avtoriteto države kot etične institucije. Bartosz Wójcik je rekonstruiral Fichtejevo politično ekonomijo in pokazal, da materialni pogoji – zlasti v modelu zaprte trgovinske države – določajo možnost svobode. Gaetano Rametta je na podlagi Fichtejeve

pozne berlinske faze razvil idejo politike, ki zavrača mehanicistično teorijo države, tj. idejo, da je država nekaj, kar zavira subjektivnost, k razumevanju politike kot nečesa, kar subjektivnost odpira skozi umetnost kot model kolektivnega delovanja.

V zaključnem sklopu so bile v ospredju marksistične interpretacije v razmerju do Fichtejeve teorije države. Jean Quétier je predstavil tri marksistične paradigme takšnega branja: reakcionarno, zgodovinsko in prefigurativno. Znotraj prve je država razumljena kot sistem predpisanih pravil, ki zamejuje ali celo izničuje svobodo posameznikov in je v tem smislu reakcionarna. Znotraj druge je država progresivna, izraz jakobinske osvoboditve, a hkrati neločljiva od protislovij in iluzij, značilnih za razvoj jakobinske diktature. Tretja paradigma je definirana v razmerju do socialistične teorije in sodobnih delavskih gibanj, ki državo razumejo kot nekaj, kar izginja, kot njeno odmiranje, in je v tem smislu še vedno vir marksističnega navdiha. Lucas Damian Scarfia je skozi Fichtejevo in Weilovo analizo dela slednje obravnaval kot temeljno človeško dejavnost, ki omogoča razvoj svobode – delo kot način premagovanja spotike med subjektom in realnostjo ter kot pogoj uresničevanja blaženosti (*Seligkeit*) kot regulativnega ideala v svetu.

Prispevka Roberte Picardi in Marie Louise Krogh sta Fichtejevo teorijo umestila v kontekst sodobnih filozofskih razprav o kolonializmu. Roberta Picardi je pokazala, kako in na kakšen način je mogoče pojmovno združiti Fichtejevo idejo transcendentalne dedukcije subjektivnosti, po kateri so razmerja med državami recipročna, z utemeljitvijo kolonizacije »divjih plemen« kot nujnega pogoja za nastanek in širjenje kulture. Marie Louise Krogh je zagovarjala, da je to napetost mogoče pojmovno razrešiti skozi idejo pravice. Skozi analizo Zaprte trgovinske države (Fichte 1800) pokaže, da izkoriščanje spodkopava gospodarsko in pravno avtonomijo držav ter s tem onemogoča odnose pripoznanja in pravice, kar pomeni, da bi kolonializem in izkoriščanje implicirala neke vrste »metapolitično krivico« ene države proti drugi.

Konferenca je skozi širok nabor prispevkov na temo pojmov določenost, intersubjektivnost in država pokazala, da Fichtejeva filozofija ponuja koherenten sistem, v katerem so teoretični in praktični vidiki ne le združljivi, temveč tudi produktivni za razumevanje sodobnih družbenih in političnih dilem – zlasti vprašanja, kako razumeti razmerje med posameznikom, skupnostjo in državo v kontekstu emancipatorne politike. Prav v tej širini pa se hkrati porazgubita tudi njena specifika in pojmovna preciznost. Kje natanko med pozivom in pripoznanjem vznikne subjekt?

Ali je *Anerkennung* zgolj način, na katerega je subjekt praktično konstituiran, ali je v prvi vrsti normativen pojem, ideal dobre socialne in politične organizacije? Ali posfichtejanska raba *Anerkennung* zvesto ohranja Fichtejevo izvirno idejo ali pa je doživela pomembne pojmovne preobrazbe znotraj sodobnih dilem? Odprta torej ostaja temeljna težava: kako ti pojmi sploh delujejo znotraj Fichtejevega lastnega pojmovnega aparata, še preden jih začnemo misliti v njihovih medsebojnih razmerjih ali v razmerju do sodobnih filozofskih dilem.

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