DOI: 10.34616/151417

Quaestiones Oralitatis
VII (2023)

Gianluca Olcese
University of Wroclaw
gianluca.olcese@uwr.edu.pl
ORCID: 0000-0002-7479-0282

THE DIALECTICS OF UTOPIA AND NON-PLACES: THE SHADOW OF THE IDEAL CITY

Abstract

This article delves into the intricate dialectic between utopian aspirations and the stark realities of contemporary urban environments, labelled as 'non-places'. It explores historical and philosophical conceptions of the ideal city, tracing back to Plato's *Republic* and Thomas More's *Utopia*, and examines how these visions contrast with the dystopian realities presented in modern literature and urban studies. Through the lens of Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* and Marc Augé's analysis of non-places, the article reveals the multifaceted nature of cities as both centres of cultural imagination and arenas of modern anonymity. The discussion extends to the economic aspects influencing urban life, highlighting how monetary dynamics shape urban spaces and societal interactions within them. The article offers a critical reflection on the paradoxes of urban development, questioning the feasibility of utopian ideals in the face of growing urbanization and its associated challenges.

Keywords: utopia, dystopia, non-places, city, Italo Calvino

Introduction

Urban spaces oscillate between utopian aspirations and dystopian realities, with non-places embodying the erosion of communal ideals in favour of homogenized functionality. Calvino's *Invisible Cities* is framed as a literary exploration of urban duality (e.g., *Moriana*'s two faces reflecting utopia/dystopia).

The shadow city's markets (drugs, gambling, usury, prostitution) thrive in the metropolis, where transient anonymity facilitates clandestine transactions. Simmel's 'small change' economy, with its 'frivolous' impulse buys, regulated by dopamine cravings and the need for pleasure, thus coexists with darker monetary flows, revealing the fragility of idealized urban planning when confronted with socioeconomic inequities that depend on unspoken compromises with the illicit. Augé's *Non-Places* anchors the modern critique of transient, impersonal spaces.

This paper compares historical utopias and modern critiques to analyse how utopian ideals and dystopian realities manifest in urban spaces, using literary texts and anthropological and economic theories while exploring the role of oral narratives in shaping urban imaginaries.

1. Moriana. Both sides of the story.

> When you have forded the river, when you have crossed the mountain pass, you suddenly find before you the city of Moriana, its alabaster gates transparent in the sunlight, its coral columns supporting pediments encrusted with serpentine, its villas all of glass-like aquariums where the shadows of dancing girls with silvery scales swim beneath the medusa-shaped chandeliers. If this is not your first journey, you already know that cities like this have an obverse: you have only to walk in a semicircle and you will come into view of Moriana's hidden face, an expanse of rusting sheet metal, sackcloth, planks bristling with spikes, pipes

> black with soot, piles of tins, blind walls with fading signs, frames of staved-in straw chairs, ropes good only for hanging oneself from a rotten beam. From one part to the other, the city seems to continue, in perspective, multiplying its repertory of images: but instead it has no thickness, it consists only of a face and an obverse, like a sheet of paper, with a figure on either side, which can neither be separated nor look at each other.[1]

Moriana's dualism mirrors the utopian/dystopian dialectic. Quadrelli and Dal Lago (2012) extend this duality to the social fabric, the juxtaposition of two worlds, or cities, that coexist but ignore each other, or rather look at each other, despite their proximity, from an insurmountable distance:[2] the official, visible sphere of legality and the shadow realm of illicit economies. These layers, like Moriana's 'face and obverse', are mutually constitutive – two cities, obviously, in a profoundly different and asymmetrical position: the first does not know the second but continually evokes it, making it the source of all discomfort or, as we say today, urban and civil 'degradation', seeing it as the breeding ground of every possible threat, populating it with abnormals and deviants; the second lives in the shadows of the informal, semi-legal or illegal economy, in places scarcely visible to the legitimate city, and above all has no voice. One would be inclined to say two separate cities, if then, despite the distance and asymmetry in which they are placed, one could not reconstruct the hidden relations that bind them. The legitimate city pronounces words of fear and suspicion towards the illegitimate one. Still, it resorts to the latter for a large number of services and benefits: from domestic work to undeclared work on construction sites, from the demand for various types of prostitution to that for drugs, gambling or illegal credit. The illegitimate city has a supply of

[1] CALVINO 1974: 105.
[2] DAL LAG, QUADRELLI 2003: 13.

services whose clientele is largely made up of members of the legitimate society.[3]

1.1. UTOPIA

Utopia (1516) is the title of the novel by Thomas More (1478–1535), which describes an imaginary island where a perfect society was realized. More created the word from the Greek, where '*ou*' means 'not' and '*tòpos*' means place: Utopia was, therefore, a non-existent place. But he played on the fact that the first letter of the word in English pronunciation could also derive from the Greek '*eu*', meaning good, in which case Eutopia, pronounced the same, indicated a good place. From the overlap of these two meanings, the current one arose: Utopia was indeed the non-place of happiness. More served Henry VIII as Lord High Chancellor of England from 1529 to 1532. His involvement in the complex religious and political upheaval under Henry VIII, particularly the King's separation from the Catholic Church, led to More's opposition to the Protestant Reformation and the King's marriage to Anne Boleyn. His refusal to acknowledge Henry VIII as Supreme Head of the Church of England led to his execution for treason.

1.2. NON-PLACES

Non-places, much like utopias, are enveloped in a mythopoetic narrative, promising a semblance of happiness and fulfilment. Oral interactions in non-places are difficult, and replacing conversations with digital screens suppresses human storytelling in favour of standardized advertising. However, unlike utopias, which are fictional realms, non-places are tangible, physically manifesting in spaces like airports, shopping malls, and transit stations. Nevertheless, utopias present their scenario as the most functional for the population with very

[3] DAL LAG, QUADRELLI 2003: 13.

strict rules. Marc Augé, who coined the term non-places,[4] analysed the relationship between non-places and their users. Despite their homogeneous repetitiveness, non-places are usually accepted by the contemporary urban population. The repetition of the franchise businesses does not bother the patrons of stores and shopping centres; similar environments with the same narrative ensure the customers a sense of security and familiarity everywhere.

The essence of a city, instead, is the result of its historical and cultural heritage. Historic centres, monuments, streets and typical shops, combined with traditions, define its character, the fruit of centuries of history. For Augé, every space can become a place to the extent that it encourages and accommodates social interaction. Similarly, the same space can be a place for some and a non-place for others: for instance, an airport is a non-place for those who simply pass through, but it becomes a place for those who work there and engage in a network of social relationships.

Non-places are functional to what Augé defines as supermodernity, which the author identifies by the following elements:

- present temporality, crowded with fleeting events soon forgotten, which prevent long-term planning;
- large urban centres often witnessing massive population transfers and thus seeing the multiplication of installations and means of transport to accelerate movements;
- excess of individualism. The individual sees himself as a world unto himself: that is, there is an individualisation of references as the individual sets out to interpret information for himself.

These characteristics are common non-places' elements and contribute to shaping and reproducing their structure.

[4] AUGÉ 1995.

1.3. DYSTOPIA

The long-term effects of utopias are the same as those of dystopia: a negative utopia. In the two of the most famous examples, *1984* by George Orwell and *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley, there are two major differences: while *1984* is openly a dictatorship, written in 1948, immediately after World War II, in the awareness of the facts that led to the Second World War, the new world of Huxley is from 1932, thus the result of the New Deal, populated by people happy with their condition, as described in utopias. However, the author unmasks the manipulation for the reader. Huxley, in the subsequent *Ape and Essence*, published in 1948, the year the novel *1984* was being written, accentuates the dystopian plot and references to the contemporaneity of the Second World War. George Orwell presents an even more extreme vision, brain manipulation, and domination based on fear and control, a world permanently in war, subdued to pervasive authority. In *1984*, every individuality is suffocated with fear, only the ruling class is exempt on condition of denouncing those who are not aligned, thought is controlled, thus not directed as in the world imagined by Huxley.

2. Utopia as political model

A study that includes an anthology of the most significant utopias is offered in 1949 by Marie Louise Berneri: born in Arezzo in 1918, daughter of Camillo Berneri, a popular figure in the anarchist movement in the 1920s. At eight years old, her family escaped persecution by the fascists and lived for eleven years in Paris. During those formative years, she deepened her interest in political and social issues. At the Sorbonne in 1930, she studied child psychology. She joined the anarchist movement and edited a small newspaper, Revision. Meanwhile, her father Camillo was in Barcelona engaged in the Spanish Civil War with the Italian Column against the fascists, where he published the newspaper *Guerra di classe*.

In 1937 Marie Louise left for Spain and soon after, in May, her father was murdered by Stalinists from the NKVD. In England in 1937, she moved to London where she participated in the editing of the anarchist newspaper Freedom. She married Vernon Richards, an activist from her group. In April 1945 Marie Louise was among the editors of *War Commentary*. She then lived in London until her sudden death from a viral disease following childbirth on April 13, 1949, at the age of 31. Shortly after her death, her book, *Journey Through Utopia*, was published: it collects theoretical and practical aspects filtered from the author's research on the social revolution and the Russian revolution and its development, as well as from the analysis of social experiments attempted during the Spanish Civil War experienced firsthand. According to the author, at that time:

> Our age is an age of compromises, of half-measures, of the lesser evil. Visionaries are derided or despised, and practical men rule our lives. We no longer seek radical solutions to the evils of society, but reforms; we no longer try to abolish war, but to avoid it for a period of a few years; we do not try to abolish crime, but are contented with criminal reforms; we do not try to abolish starvation, but to set up world-wide charitable organisations. At a time when man is so concerned with what is practicable and capable of immediate realisation, it might be a salutary exercise to turn to men who have dreamt of Utopias, who have rejected everything which did not comply with their ideal of perfection.[5]

2.1. From Plato to the ideal city

Plato, in his dialogue the *Republic*, indicated the model of an ideal state governed by philosophers, warriors, and workers in a harmonious and organisational design, in which each individual found placement according to their prevailing virtue: wisdom, courage, and temperance. Furthermore, Plato was

[5] BERNERI 1951: 1.

also referred to for the model of the ideal city of Atlantis, as he described in his dialogues *Timaeus* and *Critias*.

Popper in *The Open Society and Its Enemies* strongly criticized the society proposed in the *Republic*:[6] however, he made a mistake in forgetting, in his zeal, that Plato was talking about a state idea, and an idea, by definition, is never realizable. It is only a point towards which to move. In the *Laws*, an unfinished work, Plato outlined the second-best state: since the one outlined in the *Republic* is purely ideal, Plato sketched one that was achievable, taking the best aspects of each government in such a way as to create the best state among those achievable.

2.2. Utopias arise from a need of the time and show and contrast the paradoxes

Thomas More, in book I of *Utopia*, starts from the real situation of England to which he proposes corrective changes. It was a dream of escape and at the same time a means to satirically describe the institutions and governments under which he lived. *Utopia* is the work of a scholar and reflects More's extensive readings; consequently, the sources to which it can be traced back are innumerable. From the *City of God* by Augustine it is believed the concept of penal and corrective slavery as a substitute for capital punishment derived. In *Utopia*, Raphael Hythlodaeus speaks out against a too severe justice: the laws are not only unjust but also harmful. Death was the punishment for theft at the time therefore, he dwells on the causes of problems generated by poverty. More proposes proportionality of punishment, which also inspired Cesare Beccaria. The first book is about what was being discussed at the time, while the second offers solutions that are seen to be put into practice to avoid generating evils, then also a critique of customs: luxury and ostentation, idleness, and waste. Thomas More clearly perceived the relationship between poverty and

[6] POPPER 2013.

crime, which is even denied nowadays, and the causes that lead to poverty: the rich man manages goods that do not let the peasants make them bear fruit.

For textiles, the author proposes to ban lavish clothes but imposes the use of simple, colourless clothes because time and strength should not be used for useless things. Thus, everyone has free time to read and do other useful things, reducing the working hours. Not as a real proposal but rather an allegory of something to strive for, a stimulus for reflection. The society is structured so that there is no crime. However, we find a different type of crimes and punishments. There are no mercenaries who, in peacetime, become thieves. The soldiers are trained in their free time, which they do as a sport, such as the archer. Wars are not contemplated for invading territories but only for defence. The moral base is no value to gold. Unlike Machiavelli, he is more interested in morality and caring about the fate of the poor.

2.3. Positive aspects of ancient and Renaissance utopias

Plato recognized the equality between men and women, Zeno of Citium in Cyprus, who lived about a century later and is considered the founder of Stoicism, preached cosmopolitanism: all the people can be considered citizens of a single homeland. At the beginning of the 17th century, Campanella hoped for a four-hour workday, Johann Valentin Andreae spoke of pleasant work and proposed a modern, universal, and enjoyable system of education, although in separate classes.

The anti-authoritarian aspects of utopias are less numerous and exert less influence than the others because they do not present a preconceived plan but rather bold, unorthodox ideas, which demand from each of us to be unique and not one among others: when the utopia aims at an ideal life without becoming a project – which would be a lifeless machine applied to living matter – it truly becomes the realization of social progress.

3. Zemrude. The world we see depends on our mood

> It is the mood of the beholder which gives the city of Zemrude its form. If you go by whistling, your nose a-tilt behind the whistle, you will know it from below: window sills, flapping curtains, fountains. If you walk along hanging your head, your nails dug into the palms of your hands, your gaze will be held on the ground, in the gutters, the manhole covers, the fish scales, wastepaper. You cannot say that one aspect of the city is truer than the other, but you hear of the upper Zemrude chiefly from those who remember it, as they sink into the lower Zemrude, following every day the same stretches of street and finding again each morning the ill-humour of the day before, encrusted at the foot of the walls. For everyone, sooner or later, the day comes when we bring our gaze down along the drainpipes and we can no longer detach it from the cobblestones. The reverse is not impossible, but it is more rare: and so we continue walking through Zemrude's streets with eyes now digging into the cellars, the foundations, the wells.[7]

Social organization is transcribed in space, implying that a careful reading of urban environments provides an image of social structure that reveals underlying societal hierarchies. For instance, decoding Zemrude's mood-dependent perception demonstrates how individual subjectivity shapes – and is shaped by – spatial experience. Just as Zemrude's 'upper' and 'lower' facets reflect the observer's psyche, Quadrelli and Dal Lago's 'two cities' expose how power dynamics materialize in urban landscapes. This duality – utopian order vs. dystopian undercurrents – mirrors two main orientations manifest in utopian thought over time. One aims at humanity's happiness through material well-being, the annulment of individuality in the group, and the greatness of the State. The other, while requiring a certain level of material comfort, believes that

[7] CALVINO 1974: 66.

happiness is the consequence of free expression of personality and should not be sacrificed to an arbitrary moral code or to the interests of the State. These two orientations correspond to different conceptions of progress. The contradictions inherent in most utopias are due to this authoritarian conception. The makers of utopias wanted to give people freedom, but the freedom that is granted is no longer freedom.

We will find the condemnation of private property, money and wages considered immoral or irrational, and human solidarity accepted as a matter of course. All these ideas that might be considered audacious today, were then advanced with a certainty that shows how, although they were not generally accepted, they were nevertheless immediately understood.

Before utopias were contaminated by the realist spirit of our time, they flourished with a variety and richness that make us doubt the validity of our claim to have achieved some advancement in social progress. This does not mean that all utopias were progressive, they present some elements of social improvement, but few were revolutionary.

Traditional utopian writings were in contrast with common sense when they advocated a community of goods at a time when private property was considered sacred, the right for every individual to feed themselves when beggars were hanged, the equality of women when they were considered little more than slaves, the dignity of manual labour when it was considered and made a degrading occupation, the right of every child to a happy childhood and a good education and not only, as was the reality of the time, the privilege of the children of the nobles and the rich. All this contributed to making the word 'utopia' synonymous with a happy and desirable form of society. Utopia, in this regard, represents the need of mankind for happiness, their secret desire for the Golden Age, or, as others imagined it, for the Lost Paradise. But that dream often had its dark sides. There were slaves in Plato's *Republic* and in More's *Utopia*; there were mass murders of helots in the

Sparta of Lycurgus; and wars, executions, iron discipline, and religious intolerance are often found alongside the most enlightened institutions. These aspects, which admirers of utopias have often ignored, stem from the authoritarian conception on which many utopias were built and are absent from those that aim at achieving complete freedom.

4. Hypatia. Overturning Mental Schemes.

> Of all the changes of language a traveler in distant lands must face, none equals that which awaits him in the city of Hypatia, because the change regards not words, but things. I entered Hypatia one morning, a magnolia garden was reflected in blue lagoons, I walked among the hedges, sure I would discover young and beautiful ladies bathing; but at the bottom of the water, crabs were biting the eyes of the suicides, stones tied around their necks, their hair green with seaweed. I felt cheated and I decided to demand justice of the sultan. I climbed the porphyry steps of the palace with the highest domes, I crossed six tiled courtyards with fountains. The central hall was barred by iron gratings: convicts with black chains on their feet were hauling up basalt blocks from a quarry that opened underground. I could only question the philosophers. I entered the great library, I became lost among shelves collapsing under the vellum bindings, I followed the alphabetical order of vanished alphabets, up and down halls, stairs, bridges. In the most remote papyrus cabinet, in a cloud of smoke, the dazed eyes of an adolescent appeared to me, as he lay on a mat, his lips glued to an opium pipe. Where is the sage? The smoker pointed out of the window. It was a garden with children's games: ninepins, a swing, a top. The philosopher was seated on the lawn. He said: Signs form a language, but not the one you think you know. I realized I had to free myself from the images which in the past had announced to me the things I sought: only then would I succeed in understanding the language of Hypatia. Now I have only to hear the neighing of horses and the cracking of whips and I am seized with amorous trepidation: in Hypatia you have to go to the stables and riding

> rings to see the beautiful women who mount the saddle, thighs naked, greaves on their calves, and as soon as a young foreigner approaches, they fling him on the piles of hay or sawdust and press their firm nipples against him. And when my spirit wants no stimulus or nourishment save music, I know it is to be sought in the cemeteries: the musicians hide in the tombs; from grave to grave flute trills, harp chords answer one another. True, also in Hypatia the day will come when my only desire will be to leave. I know I must not go down to the harbor then, but climb the citadels highest pinnacle and wait for a ship to go by up there. But will it ever go by? There is no language without deceit.[8]

Calvino, gave the name of Hypatia to this 'city-philosophy' characterized by undecipherable signs. In the context of the city, Calvino's examination of the influence of language and mental structures on our world perception unfolds, echoing Wittgenstein's proposition nr. 5.6, that: "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world."[9] This philosophical stance suggests that our brains, by inherently following a process of linguistic solipsism, reaffirm our pre-held beliefs through established mental schemas.[10] These schemas are not merely filters for interpreting reality but also frameworks for constructing utopian ideals – a vision of perfection shaped and confined by the boundaries of our linguistic capabilities. Here, the notion of *epoché*, or the suspension of judgement, allows us to momentarily detach from these linguistic confines, offering the possibility to envisage and engage with utopias in a manner that is unconditioned, open, and liberated from our cognitive biases. In the case of Hypatia, we can say with the words of Wittgenstein in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*:

[8] CALVINO 1974: 47–50.
[9] WITTGENSTEIN 2023.
[10] DE CAROLIS 1999: 115–120.

5.634 Connected with this is that no part of our experience is *a priori* as well.
Everything we see could also be otherwise.
Everything we can describe at all could also be otherwise.
There is no order of things *a priori.*

5.64 One sees here that solipsism, strictly followed through, coincides with pure realism. The self of solipsism shrinks to an extensionless point and what is left is the reality co-ordinated with it.

5.641 Thus there really is a sense in which philosophy can address the self non-psychologically.
The self enters philosophy through this, that 'the world is my world'.
The philosophical self is not the human being, not the human body or the human soul, with which psychology is concerned, but the metaphysical subject, the limit – not a part – of the world.[11]

The unmistakable sign of this approach is that universality is conceived as certainty, which rests on the self-reference of the subject in two distinct ways. First, my representations are always certain, though their actual alignment with reality is subject to doubt. Second, the laws that *a priori* organize these representations are beyond dispute, even though their specific applicability to individual cases may be questionable.[12]

4.1. THOMAS MORE'S *UTOPIA*

As expected in a state where the family plays such an important role, great care is taken to make marriage as stable as possible: although divorce is allowed, adultery is punished with slavery and sometimes with death.[13] Society has specific rules governing marriage and sexual conduct. Women marry at eighteen and men at twenty-two. Premarital sex is strictly

[11] WITTGENSTEIN 2023.
[12] DE CAROLIS 1999: 118.
[13] MORE 2016: 83–85.

prohibited, with severe punishments for those caught, including a potential lifetime ban on marriage unless pardoned. The household where such an act occurs also faces public disgrace.

Marriage decisions are made through a unique and, to outsiders, a peculiar custom where both the prospective bride and groom are presented naked to each other by a respectable third party. This practice is justified by comparing it to how carefully one might examine a horse before purchase, arguing that knowing physical aspects upfront prevents future dissatisfaction in marriage.

Marriages in Utopia are monogamous and usually only end with the death of a partner, although divorce is permitted in cases of adultery or exceptionally offensive behaviour. The innocent party in a divorce may remarry, while the guilty one cannot. Society does not allow a spouse to be abandoned due to bodily misfortunes, viewing support during such times as essential.

Occasionally, if a couple finds they are incompatible, yet both have found others with whom they believe they can be happier, they may divorce with senate approval and remarry. Divorces are intentionally difficult to obtain to promote conjugal fidelity.

Violations of marital vows are severely punished, even with slavery. If both parties in an affair are married, they are divorced, and the injured parties can choose to remarry each other or someone else. Persistent offenders may face the death penalty, while lesser crimes within the family are typically handled privately unless they require public intervention. If the death penalty is inflicted rarely in Utopia, it is for reasons of expediency, rather than humanitarian or ethical:

> Generally, the gravest crimes are punished with slavery, for they think this deters offenders just as much as getting rid of them by immediate capital punishment, and convict labour is more beneficial to the commonwealth. Slaves, moreover, contribute more

> by their labour than by their death, and they are permanent and visible reminders that crime does not pay.[14]

4.2. TOMMASO CAMPANELLA, *CITY OF THE SUN*

The laws of the City of the Sun regarding sexual relations are dictated solely by the interest in generating healthy children. Plato was among the first philosophers to explore the idea of controlled reproduction within the state, a precursor to modern concepts of eugenics, advocating for the breeding of citizens to enhance desirable traits:

> On the principles we have agreed, the best men should have sex with the best women as often as possible, whereas for the worst men and the worst women it should be the reverse. We should bring up the children of the best, but not the children of the worst, if the quality of our herd is to be as high as we can make it. And all this has to happen with no one apart from the actual rulers realising it, if our herd of guardians is also to be as free as possible from dissension.[15]

Campanella is more accurate than Plato in his eugenic theories and believes that the magistrates should be assisted by doctors and astrologers. As a further precaution, prayers are also offered to God to ensure a healthy progeny. It is rather surprising to see how Campanella adapted little to Catholic morality, which condemns any sexual union whose purpose is not that of reproduction, and the idea that sexual repression in young people is dangerous and must be avoided strikes for its modernity.

> No female ever submits to a male until she is nineteen years of age, nor does any male seek to have children until he is twenty-one or, if he is pale and delicate, even older. Before that age some of them are permitted to have intercourse with barren or

[14] MORE 2016: 85.
[15] PLATO 2018: 157.

> pregnant women so as to avoid illicit usages. The matrons and seniors in charge of procreation are responsible for providing in accordance with what those who are most troubled by Venus reveal to them in secret. They provide, but never without first having spoken with their chief, an eminent physician who is directly responsible to Love, the principal officer. Those who commit sodomy are disgraced and are made to walk about for two days with a shoe tied to their necks as a sign that they perverted natural order, putting their feet where the head belongs. With each repetition of the offense the sentence is increased until finally the punishment is death. On the other hand, those who abstain from every form of sexual intercourse until they reach twentyone are honored, and odes are written in their praise.[16]

4.3. Johann Valentin Andreae, *Christianopolis*

Before being admitted to the city, the traveller is questioned by three examiners. Johannes Valentinus Andreae (1586–1654) was a Lutheran theologian, writer, and social reformer during the Protestant Reformation. Andreae is the first author to make the entrance to his utopia dependent on an examination, and we can be thankful that today's immigration officials are not as meticulous as those of Christianopolis. The first examiner is satisfied with the fact that the traveller is not a charlatan, a beggar, or a theatrical performer. The second inquiries into his moral nature and temperament, and the third wants to know, among other things, what studies he has made:

> He wanted to know from me, if in the most charming way, what I had learned of self-mastery, of service to my brother, of rebelling against the world, of resignation to death, of submission to the Spirit – and what I had learned from contemplating the heavens and the earth, and from a close study of nature. What did I know about scientific instruments, about the structure of languages, and about the harmony of all things?[17]

[16] CAMPANELLA 1981: 53–55.
[17] ANDREAE 1999: 160–161.

The traveller is not very well prepared to answer these questions, but since the guard accepts ignorance as a justification, then answers: "You bring to us the cleanest of slates, as though purified by the sea itself", so he is admitted to the city.

There are eight departments and two rooms reserved for the study of medicine and two for jurisprudence. The latter's study is purely academic since there is no need for lawyers in Christianopolis. For some reason, however, lawyers and notaries have not disappeared, and Andreae informs us that so that they do not remain idle if there is something that needs to be transcribed, it is entrusted to them.

While war or preparations for war have such an important place in the utopias previously considered, in Christianopolis the inhabitants hold a very critical view of their armoury, contrasting it sharply with their library. While the broader world may take pride in its weapons of war, like cannons and guns, the people of Christianopolis gather these deadly instruments in large amounts but view them with disdain and horror. They criticize the human fascination with creating and wielding tools designed to deal with death, highlighting the irony and tragedy of investing in such means when death is an inevitable, ever-present part of life. They reflect on the human propensity to endanger oneself for minor gains like money, and the senseless violence pursued in the name of acquiring worthless things, all while ignoring greater dangers posed by evil, societal decay, and personal failings.

Despite their deep aversion to weapons and warfare, the people of Christianopolis do prepare for defence. They distribute personal weapons to community members to be kept in their residences, to be used only if unexpected situations demand a response to unjust force. This shows a reluctant acceptance of arms, driven by the necessity of safeguarding against external threats, rather than an endorsement of violence or aggression.[18]

[18] ANDREAE 1999: 204–205.

Freedom, in Andreae's utopia, passes through self-motivation, while justice and punishment are reserved rather for the efforts of a moral police in charge of reforming and preventing possible attacks against God:

> Christian freedom needs neither commandments nor threats, but moves of its own will towards Christ himself. Certainly it has to be acknowledged that human nature can not be completely driven out anywhere. [...] There are suitable remedies for this purpose – not all of one kind, but adapted and prepared for different personalities. There is no doubt that if you take the pleasure out of sin, and substitute cudgels for caresses, you will alter a good deal. [...] Moreover the judges of the Christian community observe this above all, that those who attack God directly are punished more severely; those who attack men are punished more lightly; and those whose crime is against property are punished most lightly of all. How differently the world behaves, which punishes a petty thief with incomparably more savagery than a blasphemer or an adulterer! Since Christianopolitans are always chary of spilling blood they do not willingly agree to the death penalty. [...] It would be far more humane to pluck out the first seeds and roots of vice, rather than to chop down the full-grown sterns. For anyone can destroy a man, but only the very best can reform him.[19]

4.4. Francis Bacon, *The New Atlantis*

What is most surprising is that officials have the power to hide their discoveries from the state; as the Father of the House of Solomon explains:

> And this we do also: we have consultations, which of the inventions and experiences which we have discovered shall be published, and which not: and take all an oath of secrecy, for the concealing of those which we think fit to keep secret: though some of those we do reveal sometimes to the state, and some not.[20]

[19] ANDREAE 1999: 177–179.
[20] BACON 2017: 109–110.

4.5. FRANÇOIS RABELAIS, *GARGANTUA AND PANTAGRUEL*

Rabelais describes: "How the Thelemites were governed, and of their manner of living", in particular:

> All their life was spent not in laws, statutes, or rules, but according to their own free will and pleasure. They rose out of their beds when they thought good; they did eat, drink, labour, sleep, when they had a mind to it and were disposed for it. None did awake them, none did offer to constrain them to eat, drink, nor to do any other thing; for so had Gargantua established it. In all their rule and strictest tie of their order there was but this one clause to be observed,
> Do What Thou Wilt.[21]

The concept of Thelema has been interpreted in significantly different ways by François Rabelais in the 16th century and later by Aleister Crowley in the early 20th century. Rabelais introduced the Abbey of Thélème, a fictional utopian society. The motto of this abbey: "Fay ce que vouldras" [Do what thou wilt], encapsulates the liberty granted to the inhabitants who live free of constraints, laws, or religious dictates. This freedom is deeply rooted in Renaissance humanism and is guided by the idea that those who are free, wise, and well-educated will naturally engage in virtuous actions. The freedom serves as a form of self-governance where virtue is achieved through personal integrity and self-discipline. In Aleister Crowley's Thelema, the pursuit of one's will is due to a highly personalized and subjective morality, leading to a diverse range of behaviours among practitioners. The revival of this concept by bending it for sectarian purposes, in a real-life situation, has led Rabelais' concept to unforeseen consequences, opposite to its original intentions.

[21] RABELAIS 2020: LVII.

5. The city

The city is a topographical and social device capable of making the encounter and exchange between men as effective as possible. The geographer Paul Claval argues that the city would maximize social interaction.[22] Each society has its own means and reasons for increasing exchange and encounters. Proximity and agglomeration multiply the means of action of a society: it is a form that admits variable contents (commercial, religious, industrial, economic, bureaucratic-institutional). Cities, unlike utopias and non-places, have a historical nature. The appearance of cities presupposes conditions such as the production of an agricultural surplus from rural areas that allows the feeding of all or part of the urban population and the division of labour that is at the base of the economic activity of the city, which in turn is strengthened by it, leading to specialization and hierarchy of tasks. The geographer Pierre Gourou, recalls that, at the same level of technology, there are societies in Asia or Africa tending to urbanization and others that do not manifest this tendency.[23] The city changes from one civilization to another to satisfy hopes and ambitions. Urban forms are the product of history. At a theoretical level, the concept of the city could be replaced by a general reflection on spatial forms and their relationship with societies. The notion of the city implies the agglomeration of a population. The city is a form of community or coexistence of communities, essentially political in principle. The goal of utopias is the creation of ideal cities, where social organization is precisely the central element. Nevertheless, Baeten critiques utopian urbanism as a tool of social control,[24] while MacLeod and Ward frame dystopias as byproducts of neoliberal neglect.[25] Thus,

[22] CLAVAL 1970: 119.
[23] GOUROU 1973.
[24] BAETEN 2002.
[25] MACLEOD, WARD 2002.

the interference between the two fields of analysis, society and spatial form, was emphasized.

5.1. *Utopia*: an island without money

Thomas More presents a society where utopians not only abolished money and trade among themselves but also managed to deprive gold, silver, and precious stones of their magical and corrupting power. They invented an ingenious method by which they managed to preserve them and use them occasionally as exchange, with foreign countries, without attaching any value to them and even considering them with contempt:

> While they eat from earthenware dishes and drink from glass cups, finely made but inexpensive, their chamber pots and all their humblest vessels, for use in the common halls and even in private homes, are made of gold and silver. Moreover, the chains and heavy shackles of slaves are also made of these metals. Finally, criminals who are to bear the mark of some disgraceful act are forced to wear golden rings in their ears and on their fingers, golden chains around their necks, and even golden headbands. Thus they hold up gold and silver to scorn in every conceivable way. As a result, if they had to part with their entire supply of these metals, which other people give up with as much agony as if they were being disembowelled, no one would feel it any more than the loss of a penny. They pick up pearls by the seashore, and also diamonds and garnets from certain cliffs, but never go out of set purpose to look for them. If they happen to find some, they polish them and give them as decorations to the children, who feel proud and pleased with such ornaments during the early years of childhood. But when they have grown a bit older and notice that only small children like this kind of toy, they lay them aside. Their parents don't have to say anything; they simply put these tries away out of shame, just as our children, when they grow up, put away their marbles, baubles and dolls.[26]

[26] MORE 2016: 64.

The rejection of money aims to foster equality and eliminate greed, yet this approach echoes the constraints of a subsistence economy much like those found in feudal societies. These societies were intricately tied to the land, a system that ultimately led to serfdom and severely restricted social mobility. By binding individuals to a specific locale and economic role without the fluidity that currency can provide, such a system may foster a rigid social hierarchy. In *Utopia*, while ostensibly designed to liberate its inhabitants from materialistic chains, the absence of money might also limit personal agency and innovation. This could lead to dystopian effects, where the lack of economic flexibility solidifies into an oppressive societal structure, paradoxically undermining the utopian goal of a harmonious community free from exploitation and inequality.

5.2. Money and the city

Georg Simmel deepens the relationship between money and personal freedom.[27] In Europe, from the 5th to the 12th century, the presence of money has a continuous decrease. In that period the difference of status was between *potentes* and *humiles*: the human condition, and therefore also the political presence of an individual, was determined by belonging that bound the man to a landed property, a fief or a corporation, his existence was therefore inserted in a well-defined way within specific social circles or interests. The society took care of all the interests of the individual.

In the Late Middle Ages begins a distancing process between landed property and political presence. This unity of the relationship between person and material good cracks when from a natural economy system, one enters a monetary economy system: between person and territory, the material link is lost. This process marked the passage to the Modern Era.

[27] SIMMEL 2005; SIMMEL 1991.

Money, on one hand, divides the owner from the belonging to his goods and, on the other, sanctions this property bond. Consequently, it entails the impersonality of economic action and a greater independence and autonomy of the person.

The forms of interpersonal relationships made possible by money are manifold: a membership fee to participate in associations or a share quote in joint-stock companies, the bond is purely technical and depends on individual choices. Traditional oral barter economies contrast with silent, transactional non-places. It follows that people are inserted in a system that allows the choice between a series of sources of supply and relationships which, due to the exchange of money, is much wider than it was not the free peasant or medieval serf.

Money allows a greater expansion of social circles, albeit more superficial than before, on which subsistence and protection depended. It also promotes greater independence and autonomy in the choice of profession and training, favours the division of labour, and allows greater confidentiality and freedom in the acquisition of knowledge.

Money progressively changed its meaning from a means to obtain a good, to that of a good in itself becoming a goal itself, to the consequence that all actions aimed at achieving it became a means.

> The essence of the blasé attitude is an indifference toward the distinctions between things. Not in the sense that they are not perceived, as is the case of mental dullness, but rather that the meaning and the value of the distinctions between things, and therewith of the things themselves, are experienced as meaningless. They appear to the blasé person in a homogeneous, flat and grey colour with no one of them worthy of being preferred to another. This psychic mood is the correct subjective reflection of a complete money economy to the extent that money takes the place of all the manifoldness of things and expresses all qualitative distinctions between them in the distinction of how much. To the extent that money, with its colourlessness and its indifferent

> quality, can become a common denominator of all values it becomes the frightful leveller – it hollows out the core of things, their peculiarities, their specific values and their uniqueness and incomparability in a way which is beyond repair. They all float with the same specific gravity in the constantly moving stream of money. They all rest on the same level and are distinguished only by their amounts.[28]

By placing money at an intermediate stage toward a certain good, it brings people closer to the possibility of reaching it, increasing their desire. The closer this proximity increases, the more seductive the good becomes.

> The importance that money has been given through the enormous growth of the range of objects that can be acquired by it radiates out into many individual character traits of modern life. Money has moved the complete satisfaction of an individual's wishes into a much greater and more tempting proximity. It gives the possibility of obtaining at a single stroke, as it were, whatever appears at all desirable. Between the human being and his wishes it inserts a mediating stage, a relieving mechanism and, because everything else becomes attainable with the acquiring of this one thing, it stimulates the illusion that all these other things are more easily obtained. But as one comes closer to happiness, the longing for it grows, for it is not that which is absolutely distant and denied us which inflames the greatest longing and passion, but rather that which is not owned, but seems to be becoming nearer and nearer.[29]

The monetary economy implies a continuous series of mathematical operations and calculations in everyday life, in a transition towards a change in which an object is attributed an ever more precise value, up to the penny, in the same way, the scrupulousness of economic relations is shown in the

[28] SIMMEL 2023: 440–441.
[29] SIMMEL 1991: 26–27.

increase in the diffusion of small change, of which Simmel reports the following information:

> Until 1759, the Bank of England did not issue notes under £20 sterling, but since then it has gone down to £5. And, more revealingly, until 1844 its notes circulated an average of fifty-one days before being broken into smaller change, while by contrast they circulated only thirty-seven days in 1871 – in twenty-seven years, then the need for small change increased by nearly 25%. The fact that people carry around small denominations of money in their pockets, with which they can immediately purchase all sorts of small articles, often on a whim, must encourage industries that thrive from this possibility. This and in general the divisibility of money into the tiniest sums certainly contributes to the frivolous style of the external, and particularly the aesthetic areas of modern life, as well as to the growing number of trivialities with which we furnish our life.[30]

Georg Simmel's economic insights show that money shapes individual freedoms and urban spaces and emphasizes the transactional nature of modern interactions. These interactions are influenced by dopamine cravings and the need for pleasure,[31] which can exacerbate the transition from a utopian vision to a dystopian reality closer to Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*.[32] The economic dynamics explain why utopias, when brought into the concrete world, might devolve into non-places devoid of the communal spirit they originally intended to foster.

6. Conclusion

The ideal city bears a shadow that traverses the complex terrain between Utopia and non-places. From Plato's ideal forms to More's envisioned perfection, utopian dreams creak

[30] SIMMEL 1991: 28–29.
[31] BAUMAN 1998.
[32] HUXLEY 1932.

for the similarity to the dystopian outcomes observed in contemporary non-places, as analysed through Marc Augé's lens. Utopian ideals, while inspiring, can exhibit dystopian elements when manifested in reality, ultimately transforming into the very dystopias they sought to avoid. This discourse encourages us to reflect deeply on the allure of utopias and the practical implications of their real-world applications. It prompts a reconsideration of how we, as a society, conceptualize ideal spaces and the anthropological impact on these visions. As we navigate our urban landscapes, let us be mindful of the fine line between utopian aspirations and dystopian realities, recognizing that the shadows cast by our cities can obscure as much as they reveal.

Calvino asked to the public: "What is the city today, for us? I believe that I have written something like a last love poem addressed to the city, at a time when it is becoming increasingly difficult to live there. It looks, indeed, as if we are approaching a period of crisis in urban life; and Invisible Cities is like a dream born out of the heart of the unliveable cities we know."[33]

In contemplating the profound questions posed by the coexistence of Utopia and non-place, we are reminded of the delicate balance required to nurture spaces that genuinely enhance human connections and cultural richness without slipping into the anonymity and uniformity of non-places.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ANDREAE 1999: J.V. Andreae, *Christianopolis*, Dordrecht 1999.

AUGÉ 1995: M. Augé, *Non-Places. Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, London–New York 1995.

[33] CALVINO 1983: 40.

BACON 2017: F. Bacon, *New Atlantis and The Great Instauration*, Hoboken, N.J. 2017.

BAETEN 2002: G. Baeten, *Western Utopianism/Dystopianism and the Political Mediocrity of Critical Urban Research*, "Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography" 84/3–4 (2002), pp. 143–152.

BAUMAN 1998: Z. Bauman, *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor*, Buckingham 1998.

BAUMAN 2003: Z. Bauman, *City of Fears, City of Hopes*, London 2003.

BERNERI 1951: M.L. Berneri, *Journey Through Utopia*, Boston 1951.

CALVINO 1974: I. Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, Orlando, FL 1974.

CALVINO 1983: I. Calvino, *Italo Calvino on "Invisible Cities"*, "Columbia: A Journal of Literature and Art" 8 (1983), pp. 37–42.

CAMPANELLA 1981: T. Campanella, *La Città del Sole: Dialogo Poetico – The City of the Sun: A Poetical Dialogue*, Berkeley–Los Angeles 1981.

CLAVAL 1970: P. Claval, *La géographie urbaine*, "Revue géographique de Montréal" 24/2 (1970), pp. 117–141.

DAL LAGO, QUADRELLI 2003: A. Dal Lago, E. Quadrelli, *La città e le ombre. Crimini, criminali, cittadini*, Milano 2003.

DE CAROLIS 1999: M. De Carolis, *Una lettura del «Tractatus» di Wittgenstein*, Napoli 1999.

FILONI 2019: M. Filoni, *Anatomia di un assedio. La paura nella città*, Milano 2019.

FOUCAULT 1986: M. Foucault, *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*, "Diacritics" 16/1 (1986), pp. 22–27.

GOUROU 1973: P. Gourou, *For a Human Geography*, Paris, 1973.

HUXLEY 1932: A. Huxley, *Brave New World*, London 1932.

MACLEOD, WARD 2002: G. Macleod, K. Ward, *Spaces of Utopia and Dystopia: Landscaping the Contemporary City*,

"Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography" 84/3–4 (2002), pp. 153–170.

MORE 2016: T. More, *Utopia*, Cambridge 2016.

PLATO 2018: Plato, *The Republic*, Cambridge 2018.

POPPER 2013: K.R. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Princeton 2013.

RABELAIS 2020: F. Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, Hastings 2020.

SIMMEL 1991: G. Simmel, *Money in Modern Culture*, "Theory, Culture & Society" 8/3 (1991), pp. 17–31.

SIMMEL 2005: G. Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, London–New York 2005.

SIMMEL 2023: G. Simmel, *The Metropolis and Mental Life*, [in:] W. Longhofer, D. Winchester (eds.), Social *Theory Re-Wired: New Connections to Classical and Contemporary Perspectives*, New York 2023, pp. 438–445.

VIEIRA 2021: P. Vieira, *Utopia and dystopia in the age of the Anthropocene*, "Esboços: Histórias Em Contextos Globais" 27/46 (2021), pp. 350–365.

WITTGENSTEIN 2023: L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Oxford 2023.