

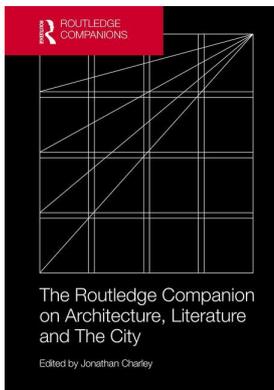
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## **The Routledge Companion on Architecture, Literature and The City**

Jonathan Charley

### **Written cities**

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## Written cities

### Utopian fiction, spatial ordering, and absurdity

*Malcolm Miles*

In a period of post-truth politics when realities are regularly denied by those in power, I want to re-examine the relation between the real and the invented in what I call ‘written cities’ – by which I mean the description or prescription of spatial practices for planned or imagined cities. These abound in the literature of utopianism, for example in Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516) or Samuel Barnett’s *The Ideal City* (1894). They also appear in the plans made by states, such as *The Laws of The Indies* (1573) issued by the Spanish crown as a means to introduce social order in its conquered territories. Yet if *The Laws of the Indies* were intended to be implemented to the letter, ambivalences emerge when such documents are juxtaposed to utopian texts (which may seem no less prescriptive but are fiction). Further, the plans prescribed for cities in New Spain were not as original as their authors claimed, consisting in conflation of earlier directives and borrowing from pre-Colombian precedents. Still, the Laws and previous plans did assume New Spain to be an uninhabited land. Utopia, however, does not exist at all, despite More’s detailed description of its cities and social codes. In the nineteenth century, Etienne Cabet, reading *Utopia* in the British Museum, described the fictional island of Icaria in similarly idealised terms. Cabet went on to found a settlement in North America based on his book. But while Samuel Barnett’s *Ideal City* was based on the real city of Bristol, it was intended as critique, a plan only in its implications for social policy. Perhaps the gap between the unreal and unrealised haunts utopianism; another gap appears today between the unreal and the all too real false narratives in politics and advertising. In answer to criticism, the purveyors answer that there is no alternative to the way things are (which is always a lie).

There is more at stake here than word games (such as the contrasting use of the term *creative* in art and accountancy, or *invention* in modern culture and journalism). An under-lying issue is the status of objective knowledge claimed by modern science, reliant on evidence and repeated experiment, and rejecting the manipulation of facts to suit an ideology or religious belief. But the claim for objectivity reflects a set of values in classical thought that have no evidential justification, and puts goodness, truth and beauty above the knowledge of practice (which is merely useful). Modern science extracts truth from the triad and conflates it with practicality while beauty, defined as useless, is relegated to an aesthetic realm where dreams are entertained but never realised. Goodness, similarly, is relegated to the pursuit of piety,

philanthropy or altruistic pursuits which may be said to benefit the soul but have little use in business. Unpacking the notion of objective truth reveals its historical specificity, and implies that what is taken as objective is in fact subjective. Utopian fiction begins from the opposite polarity, in subjective dreaming, extending this (or not as pure fiction) to a reality not-yet realised. Imagined worlds hold up a refracting glass to what is called the real world, nonetheless, inflecting future attitudes to reality either directly or through irony, satire or absurdity. The refracted image needs credibility, but the question emerges: who imagines whose tomorrow in whose interest, and by what means is it (or not) to be realised? This is the problem underpinning this chapter.

To take this slightly further: if a given end justifies any means for its realisation, the process is instrumental; if, in contrast, it is understood that the means themselves *produce* the end implicit in the values they enact, this is empowering. A divergence between ‘power-over’ and ‘power-to’ pervades the imagination of ideal worlds, whether by a regime or by an oppositional group or individual. I address this by, first, sketching the ambivalences of any idealised spatial practice, citing More’s *Utopia* and the *Laws of the Indies*, both of which traded on the authority of text, and appealed to educated or appointed readers. In the spatial ordering described – by More as if it existed, and by the Spanish crown so that it should – permanence is implied in the self-containment of the systems elaborated, as in the orthogonal street plan. In both cases, an ideal spatial practice is inscribed on a blank ground. But this underpins the modern sense of invention, as if ‘making new’ erases what was before (the intention in New Spain). This leads me to reconsider René Descartes’ architectural metaphor in his *Discourse* (1637), in which an engineer draws regular places from the imagination. In one way, ‘making new’ is free from received prejudices; in another way, it abstracts a representation of reality from the uncertain realms of ordinary life. In the nineteenth century, representation was, in some cases, re-transposed into material existence in utopian settlements. Many failed. Barnett’s *Ideal City* remains of interest, however, because it did not conflate critique with plan. I end by citing a case of utopian satire, Jules Romains’ *Donoggo Tonka, or the Miracles of Science* (1920). In the guise of a cinematographic script, *Donoggo Tonka* satirises the aspirations of an expedition organised by a geographer who has made up a city in the Brazilian rain forest in an academic paper, and tries to validate his text by going there to build it. But when the expedition arrives, the fictitious city is already built, a Temple of Scientific Error in its centre.

Post-truth was *The Oxford Dictionary*’s 2016 word of the year.<sup>1</sup> If pretend-life (as my son called it when he was little) rules, politics is fantasy, likely to be authoritarian because a common infantile fantasy is omnipotence. But it is also the case that a standard city plan has little connection to the ordinary life of the streets it charts, or the ways in which people re-organise the spaces provided for them in the plan. To draw, or write the city, is to inscribe one kind of ordering on a site, which, far from the blank ground of the conventional plan, is replete in memories, associations and desires. It is also to pretend that any built city will not change.

## Utopias and dystopias

Like Descartes’ hermetic systems of geometry and mathematics, fiction begins on a blank page (or writing on a blank screen, today), and describes a world which exists in mental rather than material life. Utopian texts from More’s *Utopia* (1516)<sup>2</sup> to H.G. Wells’ *In the Days of the Comet* (1906), *inter alia*, are repositories of hope<sup>3</sup>. In contrast, Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932)<sup>4</sup> and George Orwell’s *1984* (1949)<sup>5</sup> are repositories of fear. John Carey remarks that Huxley ‘visited America in the 1920s and hated it,’ repelled by consumerism;<sup>6</sup>

and he reads Orwell's nightmare vision in *1984* as fusing Stalinism, wartime London (where he worked in radio propaganda), and his prep school.<sup>7</sup> Like *Utopia, 1984* is a critique of the present in the form of future fiction. But Orwell also wrote a future programme, *The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius* (1941). In part 3, 'The English Revolution', he advocates the nationalisation of land, mines, railways, banks and major industries; and a maximum income ten times the lowest pay.<sup>8</sup> He asserts, 'It is only by revolution that the native genius of the English people can be set free.'<sup>9</sup> Yet this revolution is not about red flags, fighting in the streets, or the dictatorship of the proletariat but, 'open revolt by ordinary people against inefficiency, class privilege and the rule of the old;' and, 'war communism,' equality of sacrifice and the abolition of privilege.<sup>10</sup> *1984* renders a future tyranny frightening, so as to warn of the possible re-emergence of totalitarianism.

This is similar to More's aim in *Utopia*, which concealed its political intent through the subterfuge of the traveller's tale, a satire for educated readers able to see through its pretences of reality – a map, an alphabet. More's use of a map mimics those of an official literature of social ordering. The city plan presents a god's eye view, and an intention that the city will be built *as planned*, epitomising what Henri Lefebvre calls conceived space.<sup>11</sup> A new device in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the plan became the norm of, Lefebvre writes, 'an inert spatial medium where people and things ... take up their abode,' corresponding to a Cartesian model which, 'over time became the stuff of common sense and culture.'<sup>12</sup> More, a servant of the English state, and the Spanish crown, assume this inert space as a realm that denies resistance; but both also saw their efforts as contributing to a better world as they saw it. Simply put, More's tale of an unreal island was a critique whilst the Spanish court issued instructions.

The background for *Utopia* was an emerging modern state in fear of revolt, haunted by belief in an imminent Apocalypse.<sup>13</sup> In England, sects such as the Lollards dissented from the religious authority of the crown, in their case by circulating bibles in English, against the prescribed the Latin. Meanwhile across the water, Anabaptists took the city of Münster in 1534, re-named it Jerusalem, and invited, 'the wretched of the earth to partake of the delights of its primitive communism and sexual freedom.'<sup>14</sup> Frank Manuel reads such efforts as destructive when, 'the fantasist proceeded to act out his vision.'<sup>15</sup> For the conquerors of New Spain the threat was in the opposite direction, since failure to enact the plans would perpetuate the absence of a regime of Christian salvation. More looked to travellers' tales from across the oceans for an ideal society; Spain wrote decrees by which to inscribe the ideal of Europe on an uncivilised ground.

A classical precedent for *Utopia* was Lucian's dialogue *Menippus goes to Hell*, which More co-translated with Erasmus.<sup>16</sup> Both texts begin with dialogues on present issues, and offer solutions in a second part. But *Utopia* also mimicked Amerigo Vespucci's account of his navigations (1507) in which a party of sailors was left at Cape Frio, where More's fictional voyage begins. *Utopia* is satirical, but was published in Louvain, not London, because, 'its satire was too direct to be misunderstood.'<sup>17</sup>

*Utopia* begins in conversations in Bruges between More, his friend Peter Gilles, and the voyager Raphael Hythlodæus (who relates his conversation with a bishop). Its realism is suggested by More's having been to Antwerp as a diplomat, where Gilles was the real Town Clerk. That credibility is undone in the names used to describe the island of Utopia: the main city is Amaurot, meaning castle in the air; it is on the river Anydrus, no-water; etymologically Hythlodæus is nonsense-speaker. This would have been understood by educated readers; yet the description of Utopia as well-ordered remains instructive in imagination, denoted by its setting on a far-away island. For instance, Utopia has fifty-four cities, spaced no more than a day's walk apart; they are of uniform construction with open streets surrounded

by walls and towers, have a single legal code and common social customs including work for the common good and sobriety. The Utopians live cerebrally, eating and drinking for bodily health rather than pleasure. The social unit is the family. There is a degree of egalitarianism – neither Priest nor Prince wear special clothing, one preceded by a man carrying a candle, the other by a sheaf of corn – but Utopia is hierarchic. Elizabeth Grosz argues that Utopian marriage, divorce and sex are rigidly regulated by a patriarchal code.<sup>18</sup> John Carey writes, ‘You need a permit to travel, and must go in a group. If you travel without a permit, you are arrested as a runaway.’<sup>19</sup> It could be a tour guide for a totalitarian state where hidden eyes are always watching – like Henry VIII’s England.

*Utopia* may have been an elaborate joke but More’s concealed argument is that Henry’s England was unstable, to which Utopia offers a sustainable alternative. In part one, Hythlodæus asks why, when so many thieves are hung, crime remains a problem. He says the poor steal only to eat, the real crime being that of the landlords who drive them to it by privations. Louis Marin regards *Utopia* as a ‘fiction-practice’ asserting an, ‘eschatological projection beyond any frontier,’ gaining universality by making details explicit: ‘a totalitarian whole’ which always takes the form of a map.<sup>20</sup> A map appears, too, in the plans sent by the Spanish Court to its officials in New Spain. But while intended to inscribe Spain on the Americas, Setha Low argues, ‘most of the cities of medieval Spain are characterised by their irregular plan and lack of open spaces.’<sup>21</sup> The remnants of Roman grids in cities such as Barcelona were built over during Moorish occupation, with its legacy of winding streets, cul-de-sacs and interior gardens. Angel Rama also reads plans for cities in New Spain as unlike the realities of sixteenth-century Spanish cities, an instrument of power enhanced by being written (the authority of words, abstract space): ‘Their ordering principle revealed itself as a hierarchical society transposed ... into a hierarchical design of urban space.’<sup>22</sup> This is seen in a letter from the Royal Council to expedition leader Pedarias Dávila in 1513:

The town will appear well-ordered as regards the space designated for the central plaza, the location of the church, and the placement of the streets; because where such orders are given from the outset, orderly results will follow without undue cost and effort.<sup>23</sup>

These instructions were informed by a plan made by Fray Nicolás de Ovando, Governor of Santo Domingo in the 1510s: ‘Ovando developed a geometric layout that he used as the model for a network of towns on Hispaniola.’<sup>24</sup> Low quotes Ovando: ‘Since the city was founded in our own time, there was opportunity to plan the whole thing from the beginning. It was laid out with a ruler and compass, with all the streets being carefully measured.’<sup>25</sup> Rama comments, ‘The conquest triumphantly imposed its cities on a vast and unknown hinterland’ adding that the idea of making a social order through spatial planning derives from the Greek polis, against the irregular spatial practices of, ‘barbarous denizens of the countryside.’<sup>26</sup> *The Laws of the Indies* codified these principles of spatial ordering in 1573, bringing together directives from 1509 onwards, the work of Phillip II, influenced by Vitruvius and Leon Batista Alberti.<sup>27</sup>

But by 1573 most cities in New Spain were already built, the *Laws* lending official sanction to their form and subsequently influencing remodelling in Old Spain, as in Madrid’s Plaza Major (1619). Low quotes Jesús Escobar: ‘the planned city square came to symbolise the urban order sought by the Spanish government in the capital and beyond.’<sup>28</sup> If, however, Madrid’s central plaza was a design derived from the spatial practices established in New Spain, those practices were derived from pre-Columbian cities, no less a subterfuge than More’s *Utopia*. Perhaps I should explain. Rama’s comparison with the Greek polis (above) is interesting but

secondary. Indra Kagis McEwen argues that the orthogonal plan was used to bring order to Greek colonial and port cities, seen as inherently disorderly places. Piraeus, port of Athens, was, ‘populated by shifty characters of every description,’ full of foreigners, ‘who practiced strange, extravagant Great Mother cults;’ as a densely populated place it was, ‘a hotbed of radical democracy.’<sup>29</sup> Despite the irregular lay of the land, a grid was constructed to imitate the order of the cosmos. In Spain, equivalent grids were, as said above, largely over-built. But, as Low demonstrates, pre-Columbian cities such as Tenochtitlan were laid out with a grid and central sacred plaza, and offered an *in-situ* model for cities in New Spain close to that of the instructions sent from Madrid. Low cites archaeological evidence that such cities were found across Mesoamerica, and were cosmological: ‘The Mexica were developing principles of general city planning in order to achieve an efficient urban organisation.’<sup>30</sup>

Spain, it appears, co-opted pre-Columbian spatial practices to erase the societies from which they were borrowed. The difference between More’s standardised cities in *Utopia* and those of the *Laws of the Indies* was that More wrote fiction. But More’s map of Utopia was intended, if as a guise, to make Utopia real. Sixteenth-century travellers’ tales, however, blurred the edge between real and imagined (or enhanced) experiences; only by the nineteenth-century did geographers claim objectivity for maps based on expeditions. Yet there was creative accounting, facts made subservient to belief in civilisation no less than in New Spain. John Pickles writes, citing Alexander von Humbolt’s maps, ‘geographers ... mapped the contact zones of the new world by erasing local peoples and their histories and inscribing maps and geographies of primal nature in their place.’<sup>31</sup> He continues,

The myth of the dispassionate neutrality of the map hides the socially constructed nature of the image. In this view, the map is a transparent object that reflects like a mirror that which is real ... represented transparently as objective, neutral and accurate. And it is this view of the map as a technical and scientific tool ... that stands in the way of a critical theory of signs and representation.<sup>32</sup>

The map and city plan, then, are instruments of power-over nature and people (described as users), and a tool for social ordering. More’s seafarer’s tale added a pinch of salt. Phillip II did not. The appeal of a plan remains its abstraction, a certainty which is utopian in face of the world’s vicissitudes, relying on the fiction of a blank ground.

### Imagining certainty, drawing a line

The abstraction of the blank ground underpinned Descartes’ architectural metaphor in his *Discourse*: an engineer draws regular places according to his imagination. Descartes was aware of planned cities such as Nancy (1611) but the *Discourse* was written in the very unstable conditions of the Thirty Years War. As Stephen Toulmin explains, ‘rival militias and military forces consisting largely of mercenaries fought to and fro, again and again, over the same disputed territories ... in the name of theological doctrines that no one could give any conclusive reasons for accepting.’<sup>33</sup> Against such destruction, abstraction offered certainty without interpretation:

If uncertainty, ambiguity, and the acceptance of pluralism led, in practice, only to an intensification of the religious war, the time had come to discover some rational method for demonstrating the essential correctness or incorrectness of philosophical, scientific, or theological doctrines.<sup>34</sup>

The purpose of the *Discourse on the method of rightly conducting one's reason and seeking the truth in the sciences, and in addition the Optics, the Meteorology and the Geometry, which are essays in this method*<sup>35</sup> was to allay doubts which undermined knowledge of the world and of self. While Montaigne had speculated open-endedly, seeing the world as a book to be read in different but always inadequate ways, Descartes sought, Hassan Melehy writes, 'a philosophical narrative whose strategies refuse any kind of inadequacy.'<sup>36</sup> But this is in the world of experience:

I was at one time in Germany, attracted hither by the wars which were not yet ended, and was on my way from the coronation of the Emperor to join the army, when winter brought me to a halt in quarters where, with no society to distract me, and no cares or passions to disturb me, I spent the day in a stove-heated room, with all the leisure in the world to occupy myself with my own thoughts. Among these, one of the first that came to my mind was that there is often less perfection in what has been put together bit by bit, and by different masters, than in the work of a single hand.<sup>37</sup>

In the *Discourse*, on his way to join the Emperor's armies, Descartes sits alone without the distractions of social life or passions; and contrasts a village which has grown into a town to a city, far superior, 'which an engineer can design at will in an orderly fashion.'<sup>38</sup> He adds a colonial analogy:

In the same way I fancied half-savage nations, who had gradually become civilised, but who had made their laws by degrees as the need arose to counter the harm done by crimes and disputes, could never be as well regulated as those who, from the beginning of their associations, had observed the decrees of some pungent lawgiver ...<sup>39</sup>

This is likened to the law of God as, 'better ordered than any other,'<sup>40</sup> because it was given in one act. Modern rationality replaces medieval superstition and scholastic interpretation as a denial of fear and chaos. Toulmin writes,

Descartes was convinced that we can build a secure body of human knowledge, if we scrap our inherited systems of concepts and start again from scratch – with a clean slate – using "rationally validated" methods. That meant, on the one hand, framing one's basic theories around ideas whose merits are clear, distinct and certain; on the other, using only demonstrable arguments, having the necessity of geometrical proofs.<sup>41</sup>

For Andrew Benjamin, this requires that knowledge is tested by methods beyond perception and belief.<sup>42</sup> He summarises from Descartes' *Meditations* of 1641; 'What are at stake ... are two related projected movements. The first is formulating a new set of criteria ... [and] the second is that this formulation must take place anew.'<sup>43</sup> With 'making new', mind becomes the location of scrutiny, leading to Cartesian dualism:

The formulation of Cartesian dualism not only demands a radical separation between mind and body, it is also the case that the centrality and supremacy of the mind and the subsequent reintroduction of the body are themselves premised upon this founding separation. The body is at first to be denied and then reintroduced afterwards.<sup>44</sup>

I must leave Benjamin's analysis there except to link it to Descartes' architectural metaphor. Descartes writes, 'My design has never stretched further than the attempted reform of my

own thoughts ... on foundations that belong only to me.<sup>45</sup> Avoiding reference to affairs of state or religion, he proposes an abstract system of thinking, where the mind *imagines* the gesture of drawing a line. Lefebvre reads this as shifting philosophy's focus from, 'thought thought to thinking thought, from the objects of thought to the act of thinking, from the discourse of the known to the operation of the knowing.'<sup>46</sup> In effect, objective knowledge is produced subjectively, by the mind thinking, if as a last resort against destruction. For Peter Wagner, in this vein, Descartes' analytic geometry inaugurates modern rationalism via, 'a radical positing of subjectivity.'<sup>47</sup> Like Toulmin (above), Wagner argues that Descartes' ideas should be contextualised by, 'the consequences of the Reformation and the religious wars [which] signalled one major step in the destruction of the foundations of certainty.'<sup>48</sup> In the face of crisis, self-contained systems determine outcomes consistently. Analytic geometry fuses, 'geometrical analysis and algebra' to arrive at an 'exact observance' using simple rules.<sup>49</sup>

But Descartes' aim is nuanced. Claudia Brodsky Lacour translates the line from the *Discourse* concerning the engineer tracing regular places, 'on a vacant plain according to his free imaginings [or fancy].'<sup>50</sup> Similarly, Descartes' intention is to order his thought, like an engineer designing regular places, not to build a world:

While Descartes commonly uses *dessein* in the *Discours* ... when stating his speculative plan or intention, he first uses *dessin*, an architect's plan, when, after presenting the four rules of procedure, he describes what one must do "to rebuild a house" in addition to having carefully traced its ground plan (*dessin*). ... Descartes develops and significantly alters the image of the act of architectural drawing he had "thought" of in his stove-heated room.<sup>51</sup>

Lacour reads this as 'non-figural delineation ... without particular mimetic characteristics.'<sup>52</sup> She continues,

The act of architectural drawing that Descartes describes is the outlining of a form that was not one before. That form would combine reason ... with imaginative freedom ... It is not only new to the world, but intervenes in a space where nothing was, on a surface ... where nothing else is. The order of its "places régulières" is the image of imagination engineering a method that is free of historical and intellectual as well as physical constraints.<sup>53</sup>

The line is drawn in space, freely imagined but purposive. In modern architecture, the non-descriptive becomes prescriptive: intention becomes plan (*dessein* becomes *dessin*); if the agency exists, in terms of money, power and technology, a city can be built according to the plan. But, from Lacour's reading, Descartes offers the nuance required to imagine the world non-instrumentally: thought's intention, not its inscription. Utopianism is always faced with this problem, which is whether to re-present the world in imaginative narration (fiction) or design. More evaded the issue via satire. But while nineteenth-century geographers sought objectivity for maps based on expeditions, utopians sought to realise their dreams in built form, transposing critique to specific spatial practices.

## Intention and design

Nineteenth-century utopians such as Charles Fourier and Etienne Cabet prescribed specific kinds of spaces. Although his followers founded Phalansteries (Fourier's ideal unit of

society), Fourier himself had no such opportunity. As fiction, however, Fourier's ideas were re-presented in Nikolai Chernyshevsky's novel *What Is To Be Done?* (1863), in which the protagonist, Véra Pávlovna, in whose textile workshop profits are shared with workers,<sup>54</sup> has a dream in which she sees a palace of crystal (glass) and iron, with galleries at each storey; workers gather the harvest singing, then eat in palatial halls.<sup>55</sup> The design of the palace is a fusion of the Palace of Versailles with the iron and glass construction of 'street-galleries,' or the Parisian arcades of luxury shops, built mainly in the 1820s–1840s.<sup>56</sup> As a novel, the idea of a workers' paradise acts as critique, much as More's *Utopia* critiqued Henry VIII's England through the quasi-spatial distance between present and imagined realities.

No one set sail to build More's Utopia. To do so would have been as instrumentalist as *The Laws of the Indies*. But Cabet's *Voyage to Icaria* (1842)<sup>57</sup> was the basis of attempts at settlement in North America. Cabet wrote his fictional text after fleeing to London to avoid imprisonment for breaking French censorship laws in 1834, reading More in the British Museum and, like More, describing an ideal social order with appropriate spatial ordering. Icaria is, in Robert Sutton's summary, 'a beautifully proportioned country' divided into one hundred provinces, each of ten communities, with its capital city, Icaria, in the geographical centre, divided into blocks with streets of sixteen houses and public buildings at the ends in, 'a model of urban planning;' the visitor is, 'overwhelmed with the geometric order of the countryside,' all paths, roads and ditches intersecting perpendicularly.<sup>58</sup> But when Cabet founded a settlement in Texas in 1848, the land purchased proved difficult to access and unsuitable. A dwindling community relocated to Nauvoo in Illinois in 1849, buying the site from Mormons forced to leave by religious persecution. Writing on utopian communities in the 1870s, Charles Nordoff wrote, 'Cabet had a pretty dream; this dream took hold of his mind, and he spent sixteen years ... trying to turn it into real life.'<sup>59</sup> But Icaria was, 'the least prosperous of all the communities I have visited; and I could not help feeling pity.'<sup>60</sup> Strong leadership was Nordhoff's recommendation, ignoring that Cabet's insistence (later defeated by the community) on being in charge undermined the stability of Icaria.

In *The Ideal City* (1894), in contrast, Barnett describes what a city such as Bristol could become in a society based on social equity, when the wealthy accept responsibility to provide for the city, and the poor are empowered to help themselves rather than abjected by charity. Barnett emphasises public buildings and services:

Halls, galleries, libraries, hospitals, colleges, asylums, prisons (many of them brilliant with mosaic) will catch and raise the thoughts of men, as in old days the thoughts of their citizens were caught by the public buildings of Florence or Venice. ... The city will extend far and wide, but the air will be so clean that no quarter will be unhealthy ... and the tram service will be so complete that no quarter will be isolated. Trees and flowers will grow in the streets along which will run streams of pure water.<sup>61</sup>

It sounds lovely. But *The Ideal City* is a vision. It does not describe Bristol as it was in 1894 but as it might become through what Barnett and his wife Henrietta called practicable socialism,<sup>62</sup> based on qualitative change, not specifications for spatial organisation. Tom Moylan writes of a similarly qualitative outlook:

I have always lived between worlds, looking from one to another, finding ways to cut through the reality around me to see that other place that seemed to make more sense or at least be more interesting ... even satisfying.<sup>63</sup>

## Donogoo Tonka

*Donogoo Tonka or the Miracles of Science* was published in 1920 in the form of a film script, in response to the poet Blaise Cendrars' invitation to contribute to a cinematic book for the publisher La Sirène. Guillaume Apollinaire and Jean Cocteau were also invited, and Joan Ockman sees Apollinaire as, 'among the first French literary figures to herald film's revolutionary potential ... as a paradigmatic embodiment of modernity.'<sup>64</sup> This was the silent cinema of Charlie Chaplin, with captions between scenes. After Apollinaire's death in 1918, the project folded but Romains continued with *Donogoo Tonka*, and Cendrars with his film-novel *La Fin du monde filmée par l'Ange de Notre-Dame*. This was an anti-war text in which god is a modern capitalist operating from Mars, with a backward-run sequence, presented as a projection room mistake, illustrated by Fernand Léger. Ockman notes, 'Romains locates his own cinematographic tale in the interstices between the visual novel and the silent-film scenario' to be read as, 'a parody or metaphor ... rather than literally a hybrid ... a tongue-in-cheek commentary on the formal conventions of both film and literature.'<sup>65</sup> The script has boxed inserts like film captions, and business cards, letters, public notices, and homilies such as 'There comes a moment ... when Donogoo Tonka becomes stronger than their habits.'<sup>66</sup> The format echoes Mallarmé's creative typography of the 1890s, and Cendrars' *La Prose du Transibérien et de la petite Jehanne de France* (1913), a poem on simultaneity, illustrated by Sonia Delaunay. But while Cendrars looked to a future-modernity of dynamic flux, Romains offered an 'arm chair adventure' appealing to the collective imagination of a popular cinema audience, using a first-person plural voice to situate the narrator, 'inside our head or behind our shoulder' while at times finding the action confusing.<sup>67</sup>

The appeal to a collective audience may have extended from Romains' membership of a utopian cultural group in Paris in the 1900s, L'Abbaye de Créteil, which met in an old house near the Marne, south-east of Paris. L'Abbaye was loosely Fourierist and Anarchist in outlook, and included writers Georges Duhamel, Jacques Nayral, and Henri-Martin Barzun. They set up a press which, although operating for only two years, produced around twenty books, including Paul Adam's *L'art et la nation* (1907), René Arcos' *La tragédie des espaces* (1907), Charles Vidrac's *Images et mirages* (1907), and Romains' *La Vie unanime* (1909). In addition, Barzun was a member of the Committee for Social Democracy, and planned a new magazine, *Revue rouge*. It never appeared but in 1912 Barzun founded *Poème et drame* to, 'federate intellectually the young creative elites of the whole world.'<sup>68</sup> In the years leading to war in 1914, a divergence occurred in the Parisian art-world between those supporting patriotism and those looking to avoid conflict, including (by then ex-) members of L'Abbaye.

Unanimism evolved from L'Abbaye's aesthetic, which Daniel Robbins describes as, 'a synthetic view of the universe, presenting the remarkable phenomena of time and space, multiplicity and diversity.'<sup>69</sup> Symbolism was an important strand in French art in the 1890s but L'Abbaye sought a more worldly approach, rejecting its privileging of the psyche for a style stripped of ornament and allegory. As Ockman says, younger writers, 'accused their forbears of being obscurantist ... demanding an active and direct embrace of the world.'<sup>70</sup> Unanimisme proposed universal empathy. Ockman refers to an 'all-encompassing collective reality' experienced by Romains and found amidst a mass of pedestrians, cars and buses, reflected in shop windows, on rue d'Amsterdam in Paris.<sup>71</sup> For David Cottington, Romains' lyrical idea of a collective urban consciousness also reflects a Bergsonian idea of, 'intuition and memory as the subjective condition of existence.'<sup>72</sup> Romains' lampooning of scientific

geography in *Donogoo Tonka* reflects this, presenting objective knowledge as unreal when Professor le Trouhadec, the geographer who put the made up city on a map, tries to avoid being found out when he sees a chance to be elected to his subject's Institute, 'if the members ... didn't have a good memory.'<sup>73</sup>

Like More in *Utopia*, Romain used nonsense names, such as Donogoo Tonka itself, which may follow from a traveller's tale, William Mariner's *An account of the Natives of the Tonga Islands in the South Pacific Ocean*.<sup>74</sup> Mariner's tale was published in French, and used by Cendrars in *19 poèmes élastiques* (1914). A scientific precedent was Henri Poincaré's solution to the problem of the equilibrium of bodies in space (1888); just before it went to print, a young mathematician spotted an error in the calculations, after which the text was withdrawn, re-published the following year with corrections. The story begins at the Port de la Villette in Paris, near the abattoirs, as two characters, Bénin and Lamendin, meet by chance and go to the Cabaret de l'Ambassade for a *pichet* of white wine. Lamendin admits to contemplating suicide at the bridge, on which Bénin recommends Professor Rufisque, a psychologist specialising in suicide prevention. Lamendin makes an appointment: Rufisque sits him down and asks him to close his eyes. Dials begin to spin and Rufisque writes on a blackboard. The answer is  $P_0 = 337$ . The prescription is a set of instructions: watch carriages in the street, count sixteen going by then rush to the next, jump in and ask the occupant to make use of you in whatever way he likes. He does. The occupant is le Trouhadec. Lamendin learns of his problem: his main work is a book on South America in which he marks the city of Donogoo Tonka – which does not exist – on a map of Brazil. Lamendin's solution is to find twenty-five million francs to build it: 'M. le Trouhadec and Lamendin look at each other at length.'<sup>75</sup> A history and prospectus are developed, and rumours produced of a gold rush. The banks refuse to lend. Only a dubious backer can be found but le Trouhadec is invited to a meeting of investors, for which Lamendin directs a photo-shoot pretending to show Donogoo Tonka. A society is formed (the norm for such ventures, its members being financial backers), and unemployed labourers 'from all over the world' are attracted to the gold rush.<sup>76</sup> Parties of adventurers embark from Lisbon, Marseilles, Naples, London, Amsterdam, even Singapore. In a sequence mixing Parisian and far-off scenes, Romain juxtaposes the adventurers with le Trouhadec's party taking a train from Paris to Bordeaux for the ocean liner. Meanwhile a financial crisis rattles the investors. Meetings are held but the press publishes positive news. Meanwhile, Donogoo Tonka flourishes (in the free temporality of text); buildings by Beaux-Arts architects line the central square. The city's Governor dresses in white linen. Gold is found, and adverts placed for ditch-diggers, woodcutters, carpenters and labourers. A vacant lot is transformed into Yves-le-Trouhadec Square, which is elliptical, and the site of the Temple of Scientific Error that resembles a Roman circular temple. It has red-painted columns and, in the foyer, a statue of a pregnant woman surrounded by children.

So, an error in a scientific paper leads with some scheming to a prosperous city in Brazil (not a European colony but an Empire from 1822 and a Republic after a military coup in 1889). There had been a Brazilian gold rush in the eighteenth century: gold was found more or less by accident by raiders looking for indigenous slaves; demonstrating the extent of the find, Ouro Preto, the old capital of the province of Minas Gerais, has a former slave church once decorated in gold leaf. Perhaps Romain's location of his fictional city in Brazil also echoed the Conquistadors' El Dorado, or Humboldt's status in scientific geography, one of his achievements being the mapping of South America. Maps, as Pickles argues (above) lend their objects authenticity, and affirm science as a repository of objective fact. Eric Michaud remarks that images, 'reorganise human memory in every

instance on the material surface of their medium.<sup>77</sup> Romains used generic images of a street of tenements and a field with tents to illustrate *Donogoo Tonka*, not a map, but the point was to satirise geography's new status as a scientific discipline; or it may have been to liberate geography as an imaginative discipline, after the conjectural work of Philippe Bauche in the eighteenth-century.<sup>78</sup> Either way, *Donogoo Tonka* should not to be taken seriously; it is a satirical critique of science and, inversely, of the possibilities of chance association (mirrored by the juxtaposition of scenes in different times and places continuously in a film).

How, then, is *Donogoo Tonka* aligned to histories of utopianism when it deflates the project? Romains had no intention of founding a community; but he located the scenario in a remote country, and in the genre of satire, echoing More's *Utopia*. *Donogoo Tonka* debunks previous uses of travellers' tales and, perhaps, the territorial aspirations of utopians such as Cabot; but it also, if by subterfuge, offers a picture of another world constructed mentally in the image of subjective will. And Unanimism was a utopian idea, seeking empathy with the world, or *unanimity*. Through such a lens, perceptions change. This denies the values of both nineteenth-century capitalism (the gold rush), and of artistic withdrawal (Symbolism). In the eyes of Unanimism, anywhere can become the site of a new perception. But it remains art, or film: a realm of dreams, not inscription. And this is the occupational hazard of utopianism if it is to avoid instrumentalism.

Stepping between worlds, utopianism as an idea fuses self-contained Cartesian space with the imagination of a better life. As fiction, utopianism does not impact power; but as a critique it potentially contributes to a shift in the apperception of reality which might create a chink in which glimpses of alternative realities appear. If the reader, as it were, completes the text, there is less likelihood of the reproduction of power-relations that avant-gardes (if inadvertently) undertook by relying on their own special insight as to society's direction. In its way, *The Laws of the Indies* sought to make a better world; again, however, it was a question of whose world in whose image. Modernist planning exhibited a similarly undermining flaw, as in Le Corbusier's *The City of Tomorrow*.<sup>79</sup> Corbusier wrote, 'Any progress must depend on a well thought-out programme.'<sup>80</sup> Few would advocate a badly thought out programme. The question is whether a programme is required, or a process. Le Corbusier's space is Cartesian in its inert seamlessness; yet Descartes also posited a thinking process, which can perhaps be extricated from his *Discourse*.

Looking at Paris in the 1960s, McKenzie Wark remarks that Gabriel Pomerand, a member of the Letteriste group from which Situationism emerged, likened the Parisian district of Saint-Germain – where intellectuals gathered in the 1940s–50s – to Donogoo Tonka: 'the place makes a spectacle of itself. It is where the spectacle pulls itself up by its own bootstraps.'<sup>81</sup> Situationism might be a successor to Unanimism: the Situationist tactic of the drift (*dérive*) enabled unscientific, serendipitous geographies of association, wandering without plan or intention in the city's streets. The Situationists' collage-like maps refused the authority of scientific objectivity, juxtaposing non-contiguous fragments of the city's plan and images from popular culture to fracture conventional readings. Absurdity renders its material quasi-nonsense to create that chink through which alternative realities appear. More approached that objective through a quasi-traveller's tale. Romains used the device of a traveller's adventure, debunking scientific geography in a period of capitalist opportunism. And so absurdity becomes a critical space beyond satire, although More and Romains, if in different ways, extended literary space as a vehicle for social and political, and to an extent spatial, imagination. More reproduced the ordering characterising *The Laws of the Indies* (if only to lend false credibility to the island of Utopia) but Romains demolished

such legislative authority. If utopianism is haunted by instrumentalism, now as in the sixteenth century, absurdity may free it. And yet ... in a post-truth society absurd lies are a new norm, their instant global communication in mass and social media being an exercise of power, as if to say, 'You see, I can get away with it.' Then? I dread to think. In Saint Germain in the 1940s, Sarah Bakewell notes, 'philosophers often went arm in arm with jazz players, dancing the night away.'<sup>82</sup> Herbert Marcuse made a similar observation, coincidentally, in Paris in May 1968: 'the slogan "*l'imagination au pouvoir*" went well with "*les Comités (soviets) partout*"; the piano with the jazz player stood well between the barricades.'<sup>83</sup> He saw this as the real force for change, indicating a new sensibility by which apprehension of the world could be transformed, and aesthetic reality begin to shape material reality: society as a work of art.



**Figure 8.1** Poundbury is a new town on the edge of Dorchester, in southern England. Built on a large greenfield site owned by the Duchy of Cornwall, Poundbury (still under construction) is intended as an example of what a town should be like – and is in that sense a built utopia. There are progressive aspects such as generous pedestrian space, integration of affordable housing, a mix of residential, retail and light industrial uses, and relatively low energy requirements; and the regulations controlling the appearance of its streetscape do at least prevent gaudy shop signs although they also restrict the activities allowed in the street. In design and occupation, Poundbury is a highly controlled environment which seeks to engineer a specific version of citizenship through design and governance, an idealist project achieved by means of power-over everyday life. Photograph by Malcolm Miles.



*Figure 8.2* Although this follows the precedent of many modernist housing schemes, Poundbury's design rejects modernist styles in favour of a pastiche of pseudo-Georgian and pseudo-Victorian facades. It is as if the ideal life can be found only in a fantasy of a lost pastoral age. Underneath the brick skin, however, as the photograph of a house under construction shows, the fabric is the same concrete block of redevelopment anywhere. Similarly, not far from the rationally proportioned facades of Georgian London in the eighteenth century, people were sentenced to hang for stealing bread and to transportation to Australia for trades union activities. Photograph by Malcolm Miles.

## Notes

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