

Utopia | December 2016 Edition

ThRAD SPECIAL ISSUE ON UTOPIA

A Present for Victor Margolin

Eduardo CÔRTE-REAL

Editor In-Chief

Helena SOUTO

Co-Editor In-Chief

“It is fashionable today to scoff at the grand claims made by the artistic-social avant-garde earlier in this century (20th). After all, they wanted nothing less than to bring about utopia through the practice of art.”

Victor Margolin, Conclusion of “The Struggle for Utopia”, 1997

“This, which is the essence of his book, is the essence also of the struggle in which we are engaged.”

William Morris, Foreword to Thomas More's Utopia, 1893

A few notes on Utopia as it was

In 1516, the first edition of Utopia, by Thomas More, was printed in Latin. This year we celebrate five centuries of such influential book. Few have read it in full length and fewer in Latin. However, the word and the underlying ideas of Utopia strove not so utopically until our days.

One of our masters and friend, Victor Margolin utopian adept, wrote, from his doctoral research, a celebrated book: *The Struggle for Utopia: Rodchenko, Lissitzky, Moholy-Nagy, 1917-1946*, that soon will celebrate 20 years of publication (in the year of the Russian Revolution centennial anniversary). Also, his book of collected essays *The Politics of the Artificial* positioned the reader in a stance in which human social affairs should be considered primarily in Design Studies. Two years ago, in a preface for a book of essays published in Portuguese, Victor was called a “Paladin of Utopia”.

Utopia, as a book, a concept and an imaginary place in the world, have been highly influential for the past 500 years. By 1913, the words Utopian, Utopianism, Utopianist, Utopical and Utopist were in use and were listed in an American English Dictionary (Webster, 1913).

A reputed pioneer of modern design, William Morris wrote about More's Utopia:

"In More, then, are met together the man instinctively sympathetic with the Communistic side of Medieval society; the protestor against the ugly brutality of the earliest period of Commercialism; the enthusiast of the Renaissance, ever looking toward his idealised ancient society as the type and example of all really intelligent human life; the man tinged with the asceticism at once of the classical philosopher and of the monk: an asceticism indeed which he puts forward not so much as a duty, but rather as a kind of stern adornment of life." (Morris, 1893)

Morris continued in his introduction to Utopia's 1893 edition, praising More's strive for equality and hoping for a new socialist society but tinted with pessimism about that very realization. One hundred years after these thoughts the World seemed to have maneuvered around socialism. In 2000 the strategy of Lisbon and EU new treaty seemed to propose finally, in many aspects, an Utopian society in the way Morris (not More) could imagine it. However, the first decade of the uprising century insisted in remind us about the difficulties of such achievements.

In our field, Design Studies, it became more and more clear throughout the past century and the early years of this one, that social (if not socialist) concerns are at the core of projects and applied research. In this manner, Design studies have been contributing, in its possible way through sustainability, social innovation, urban rehabilitation, healthcare programs and so may other fields, to a possible Utopia in this world and in a nearby future.

There are many interesting aspects about Utopia, but by reading it we must not forget the time and place of its writing and publishing. By using Greek words and written in Latin, Utopia is a clearly a Renaissance work. By acknowledging European discoveries and travels it is also a Modern (early) work. And if Design is linked to modernity, it is quite interesting to plunge back in the early 1500's, when More thought, wrote and published is description of such unplaceable island.

A Portuguese peddler of nonsense

In the beginning of the tale, Peter Giles, born in Antwerp introduces Raphael Hythloadeus to Thomas Morus in the first pages of Utopia in this way:

"For this same Raphaell Hythlodaye (for this his name) is very well learned in the Latine tongue: but profounde and excellent in the Greke language. Wherein he ever bestowed more study then in the Latine, because he had geven himselfe holy to the study of Philosophy. Wherof he knew that ther is nothyng extante in Latine, that is to anye purpose, fauyng a fewe of Senecaes, and Ciceroes dooynges. His patrimonye that he was borne unto, he left to his brethern (for he is a **Portugall borne**) and for the desire that he had to see, and knowe the farre Countreyes of the worlde, he ioyned himselfe in company with Amerike Vespuce, and in the. iii. last voyages of those. iiii. that be nowe in printe, and abrode in every mannes handes, he continued styll in his company, sauynge that in the last voyage he came not home agayne with him." (More-Robinson, 1551, pp. 29-30)

This is a quotation from the first translation of the book to English, published in 1551 and again in 1556, probably

benefiting from Mary Tudor's reign, the last catholic sovereign of England. We must have in mind that Thomas More, a catholic partisan, had lost his head (or his body, depending on the perspective) in 1537 when he stood on the wrong side of Henry VIII's options for a Religion's Reform.

Hythloday, as the reader may guess, is not a common Portuguese family name (est enim Lusitanus: More, 1518, p. 27). Arguably Raphael would not be also a usual given name at the time. So RH's "Portugueseness" is part of a character construction that, by his indisputable inexistent person, can only be regarded as Thomas More's voice of whatever he choose to distill in the book. Authors like Wolfgang E. H. Rudat (1981) stress the inherent deceiving nature in Hythloday's name meaning in Greek "nonsense peddler" that should be considered to add a mythical, fantastic origin for Utopia. By reporting Hythloday's tale, More could say, in the event of any sharp interrogations, that he had, not only called "without a place" to his island but he had only "transcribed" the words of a fantasist (as clearly expressed in his name).

However there is also a note regarding Hythloday's nature worth to mention. His connection with Amerigo Vespucci, Ameriko Vespuce, in More's translator words. As mentioned in the text, Vespúcio's recounts of travels under the patronage of King Manuel I of Portugal in lands of South America had been published in 1504 in Latin under the title "Mundus Novus"(Vespucci, 1504). In the land we now term Brasil he found evidence of a New World, a vast continent south of the equinocial line (equator) in so many aspects different from Europe of the time. Let's remember that Brasil was only officially "discovered" in 1500. There is therefore an intention to associate Hythloday with this notion of a New World lying on a remote South, promising a diversity in population, geography and politics as rich as in the northern hemisphere...

Thomas More "responds" to Ameriko's letter that described strange humans, reddish (this feature is attributed to excessive sun exposure) naked, with the irrational habit of offering their wives and daughters to visitors and also very kin on eating their foes and living in large houses with apparent no regard for family or social boundaries.

All these preposterous social organization, contradicted the sophistication of Turkey, Persia, India and China already described and part of the "old world" and, by comparison, closer to Europe. Ameriko hints a mirror hemisphere in the South of the equator, ready to be discovered. Thomas More grasps this idea and imagines, how such "through the looking glass" world might be, symmetrical to his own.

He feels that might be able to present a social organization, probably still suspicious about Vespucci's veracity, that might make sense out of the Idea for a "New World". We know now that most of Amerigo's descriptions are relatively accurate, whereas More's Polylerites ("people of much nonsense" inhabiting in Persia) and other peoples, namely the Utopians are inventions for allegoric, metaphoric, moral or narrative purposes.

Design in Utopia

In the second book, devoted to the description of Utopia, Design is mentioned related with the project of Utopia's capital city:

"Nam totam hanc urbis figuram, iam inde ab initio **descriptam ab ipso Utopo ferunt**. Sed ornatum, caeterumque cultum, quibus unius aetatem hominis haud suffectum uidit, posterites adiciendum reliquit. (More 131, 132)

Translated by Robinson in 1551 as:

“For they saye that kinge Utopus him selfe, even at the first beginning appointed, and **drewe** furth the platte fourme of the citie into this fashion and figure that it heth nowe, but the gallant garnishing, and the beautifull settinge furth of it, wherunto he sawe that one mannes age would not suffice: that he left to his posteritie.” (p. 79) (131, 132)

and translated by Gilbert Burnet in 1639 as:

“So that he who founded the town seems to have taken care of nothing more than of their gardens; for they say the whole scheme of the town was **designed** at first by Utopus, but he left all that belonged to the ornament and improvement of it to be added by those that should come after him, that being too much for one man to bring to perfection.”

What was Drawn in 1551 become Designed in 1638. Again we gather more evidence about the fact that “Design” arrived in English shores at least in 1500’s late years or in 1600’s early years and for “design purposes” signifying a “project drawing”.

Atlantic Orel and Mediterranean Calvera

This year of celebrating five hundred years of Utopia and on the verge of celebrating Margolin’s Struggle for Utopia twenty years, Anna Calvera and Tufan Orel responded to our demand on contemporary manifestations of Utopia. These should be related with Victor Margolin’s strive for a grid of interpretation of art and design.

Both have a recursively probe into More’s book, and into Margolin’s adoption of the Idea.

They discursively digress from fictional utopia to present utopical stressing matters.

They pay tribute not only to More but to his followers (or critics).

Orel remind us of Bacon’s New Atlantis (remember that there was a Plato’s “Old” Atlantis). Like Vespúcio gave is name to America, Atlantis gave its name to an Ocean. Both in the west, which might have given a sort of legitimacy for a famous “Democracy” bathed by that ocean and located in Vespúcio’s continent.

More’s Utopia didn’t got an equivalent, a name in geography, to America and Atlantic (unless you consider Utopia in Uvalde County, Texas, United States, 227 population according to Google maps).

Calvera calls our attention to an Utopia of Beauty (for Beauty?) and its complicated endeavor crossing almost two centuries of Design History but consistently focusing in our post modern condition.

Both articles resist and intellectually overcome a state of affairs in design discourse that tends to template all writings according to a “Scopus” model.

Like others before in ThRAD, they show their independent voices on a forum that may resemble key-note or critical lectures and hopefully will make sense of our academic discipline.

SOURCES:

— Margolin, Victor, *The Struggle for Utopia: Rodchenko Lissitzky Moholy-Nagy, 1917 - 1946*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997 .

— Morris, William, 1993

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/morris/works/1893/utopia.htm>

— Wolfgang E. H. Rudat

(<http://www.thomasmorestudies.org/moreana/Moreana69pages41-64.pdf>

Moreana n° 69, March 1981, pp 41-64, "More's Raphael Hythloday: Missing the Point in Utopia Once More?".

— Sir Thomas More, *UTOPIA*, originally printed in Latin, 1516. Translated into English by Ralph Robinson, Sometime Fellow of Corpus Christi College, Oxford.

His second and revised edition, 1556, precede by the title and epistle of his first edition 1551, Edited by Edward Arber, Associate, King's College, London, F.R.G.S., etc., London: Alex Murray & Son, 30, Queen Square, W.C. 1. March 1869.

— The *Utopia* of Thomas More, in Latin form the edition of March 1518, and in English from the first edition of Ralph Robynson's translation in 1551, with additional translations and notes by J.H. Lupton, B.D., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1895.

— *Mundus nouus* by Vespucci, Amerigo, 1451-1512; Medici, Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de', 1463-1503, Published 1504.

Topics Imprint 1504, Latin translation by "iocundus interpres" (i.e. Fra Giovanni Giocondo da Verona) of the Italian manuscript giving Vespucci's account of his third voyage, addressed to Lorenzo de Medici in 1503, Originally published as: Albericus Vespuccius Laurentio Petri Francisci de Medicis salutem plurimam dicit / Amerigo Vespucci. [Paris : F. Baligault and J. Lambert, 1503]. Generally known as: *Mundus novus*.

— The *Utopia* of Thomas More, Written: 1515; First Published: 1516; Source: 1901 Cassell & Co. edition; *Utopia* (London: Cassell and Co., 1901), by Thomas More, ed. by Henry Morley, trans. by Gilbert Burnet (1639) (Gutenberg text) Language: Elizabethan English; Transcription/Markup: David Price/Trevor Schroeder; Online Version: Project Gutenberg (2000)[Etext #2130]; The three Prefaces and the biography were transcribed by Rob Lucas, 2004. <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/more/works/utopia/index.htm>

Utopia in some English dictionaries

— **1658 - The new world of English words, or, A general dictionary containing the interpretations of such hard words as are derived from other languages... 1658**

Phillips, Edward, 1630-1696?

<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A54746.0001.001/1:10?rgn=div1;view=fulltext>

Vtopia, the feigned name of a Countrey described by Sir Thomas More, as the pattern of a well govern'd Commonwealth; hence it is taken by Metaphor for any imaginary, or feigned place.

— 1755 - Nathan Bailey's An Universal Etymological English Dictionary, London.

https://books.google.pt/books?id=CFBGAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

UTOPIA (eutopia, Gr. q.d. a fine Place) a feigned well-governed Country, described by Sir Thomas More.

UTOPIAN, belonging to Utopia.

— Noah Webster's 1828 - Although no listing Utopia, Webster knows the word and lists:

UTOPIAN, a. (from More's Utopia.) "Ideal; chimerical; fanciful; not well founded".

And also in the second meaning of

ATLANTIS n. A fictitious philosophical commonwealth of Lord Bacon, or the piece describing it; composed in the manner of More's Utopia, and Campanella's City of the Sun. One part of the work is finished, in which the author has described a college, founded for the study of Nature, under the name of Solomon's House. The model of a commonwealth was never executed."

— Noah Webster's 1844

U-TO'PI-A, n.

A term invented by Sir T. More, (from the Gr. ουτοπος, no place,) and applied to an imaginary isle, which he represents as enjoying the greatest perfection in politics, laws, &c. The word is now used in all the languages of Europe, to signify a state of ideal perfection. – Brande.

U-TO'PI-AN, a. [from More's Utopia.]

Ideal; chimerical; fanciful; not well founded.

U-TO'PI-AN-ISM, n.

Chimerical schemes in theory or practice. – Chalmers.

— Noah Webster's 1913

<http://lexicon.x10host.com/?w=utopia>

UTOPIA (n.)

1. An imaginary island, represented by Sir Thomas More, in a work called Utopia, as enjoying the greatest perfection in politics, laws, and the like. See Utopia, in the Dictionary of Noted Names in Fiction.

2. Hence, any place or state of ideal perfection.

UTOPIAN (n.)

An inhabitant of Utopia; hence, one who believes in the perfectibility of human society; a visionary; an idealist; an optimist. Hooker.

UTOPIANISM (n.)

The ideas, views, aims, etc., of a Utopian; impracticable schemes of human perfection; optimism.

UTOPIANIST (n.)

An Utopian; an optimist.

UTOPICAL (adj.)

Utopian; ideal [this usage is obsolete]. "Utopical perfection." Bp. Hall.

UTOPIST (n.)

A Utopian.

Lisboa, December 2016