Why should geography, a discipline which deals with places and spatial differences, be interested in utopia, which is literally a non-place?

On closer examination, the theme is particularly fruitful for those of us who are preoccupied with spatial justice. Why is it that thinking about justice has led numerous authors to ground their analysis in specific places, even if these are metaphorical places, as though a fair social organization necessarily called for a fair spatial organization? This is by no means paradoxical, and grants legitimacy to the central place given to justice in geographical discourse.

Utopia is elsewhere, it has, and this is its very definition, no material reality. But it presents, in allegorical form, an ideal society, an alternative project. It is an intellectual construction that serves -as its dark counterpart, dystopia- as a subtle critique of the injustices of the real world, as if taking some distance from our world allowed for easier identification of wrongs, unjust norms and errors. Producing utopic narratives is therefore no idle dreaming or freewheeling imagining devoid of reasoning ability. It consists of a description of “elsewhere”, in order to criticize what exists and depict what is possible, by building a species of “spatial play” (Utopics: Spatial Play, Louis Marin, 1984). There is an ample literary tradition of utopias, with major contributions such as Thomas More's 1516 Utopia, but “gardens of Eden” and ideal cities were themes in the early Antiquity. In numerous other works, there is this idea of a place where prohibitions are lifted and happiness attainable, from Rabelais's Abbaye de Thélème in Gargantua (“do as you please”) to Fontenelle's Republic of Philosophers. The 19th century was a major turning point, along with the Industrial Revolution and growing misery of the working class. In the works of Robert Owen, Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier or Etienne Cabet, the idea was less to offer an allegory than to propose an achievable project, one that might be tried out in distant America, seen as a favorable environment for social experimentation. Though these projects may seem far-
fetched and extravagant (Charles Fourier has been seen as a forerunner of surrealism), these authors did not think of themselves as utopians. Their work was later interpreted in that way, because they assumed they could construct a just city without having changed society: it now seems necessary to tackle social change first, in order to foster urban change. This statement is not to be taken too literally though, since it would annihilate the very idea of territorial planning if social change were always to come first. The interaction between the social and the spatial works both ways, and thinking both as enmeshed is probably more accurate. Conceiving utopia as a spatial process seems then necessary: for instance, the production of space can be conceived as a “potentially endlessly open experimentation with the possibilities of spatial forms”, to “explore alternative and emancipatory strategies” (Henri Lefebvre, *The production of space*, 1991, David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, 2000).

In a way, the self-styled "scientific" socialism was also utopian, but in a dangerous way. One sad lesson of the 20th century was that utopias can kill when they aim to make people happy against their will and by trampling their basic rights. Totalitarianism is a possible collateral consequence of utopia. One could argue that the Soviet Union failed because it was never really “sovietic” in nature, that its system was undemocratic by nature and that power was never in the hands of the Soviets. China under Mao Zedong and Cambodia under the Red Khmers were further illustrations of this. Do these instances give sufficient cause to dismiss any form of utopia? One must confront to the authoritarian potential of utopias, without dismissing them, otherwise a consequence would be to block the free play of the imagination in the search for alternatives (Harvey, 2000). It would also mean the very idea of justice is to be forsaken, since justice is hardly anything else than an utopia. It is a positive utopia, an utopia that outlines a future situation that will never be attained, but at which one can aim. Justice is an objective to be submitted to public debate, to decide on both ends and means. As Ernst Bloch writes (*The Spirit of Utopia*, 2000, *The Principle of Hope*, 1986), giving up utopia is giving up hope. In his philosophical perspective, *material utopia* has emancipatory potential for society and individuals.

The proposed issue of *Justice Spatiale | Spatial Justice* on Utopia can therefore be an opportunity for debate. We hope to receive contributions on a wide range of issues, among which:

- spatial justice as positive utopia. To what extent is any thought about justice part utopian, and how does this utopia serve both theory and action?

- the idea of progress. While this idea goes against conservatism, it could also be argued that it mislead one into thinking that all change is positive, and believing technical advances are to be welcomed regardless of social consequences. The link between progress and utopia is to be examined: is utopia really a non-place, or is it a place to which progress could lead us?
- the experiments in utopian socialism: the phalansteries created in the US by Victor Considérant, Cabet's Icarias, the anarchist community of Cecilia in Brazil, Godin's "familistère" in Guise, etc.

- urban utopias confronted with reality: if most of the urban planning has been inspired (or “infected” (Harvey, 2000)) by utopian mode of thought, the figures of the city and Utopia having long been intertwined, some urban forms crystallize utopias more spectacularly (Brasilia, the capital of Brazil, or Auroville, in India, or earlier urban projects by Tony Garnier or inspired by the Athens Charter). Symmetrically, it will be fruitful to examine, from the perspective of spatial justice, the influence of the “utopian” urban production on its surroundings.

- utopia and democracy in planning. Utopia is one way of conceiving of a territory, or it can consist of a procedure to make planning decisions. This raises the issue of the legitimacy of planning procedures. In a way, all experiments in participative planning can be interpreted as utopias.

- geography, utopias and science fiction. How has geography inspired utopias or been inspired by literature? How does science fiction prepare or announce future spatial forms, “colonizing the future with problems of the past”? Is science fiction, essentially, a meta-commentary on our present, mostly referring to our present? It will be interesting to question “science fiction's capability to act out contemporary fantasies of social power, justice and science in their full temporal and spatial extent” (Middleton & Woods, Literature of memory: history, time, and space in postwar writing, 2000).

Please send articles proposals (7500 words at most) no later than December 31st, 2011. The special issue on “Utopia and Spatial Justice” is to be published online in autumn 2012.

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