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Introduction: The Imaginary and its Utopian Potential

"No matter where, no matter where, so long as it is out of the world." Charles Baudelaire

The essays gathered together in this volume were prompted by the articulation of two notions: the imaginary and utopia, whose paradoxical convergences and divergences are currently altering our experience and conception of the radical changes brought about by various creative practices and, indeed, the very idea of what it means to think.

This introduction will try to touch upon this complex issue through a consideration of Foucault's conception of space and spatialisation, focusing on the notion of heterotopia, which we will attempt to reformulate differently while following its logic more closely. The present period, Foucault famously claims in his essay *Of Other Spaces*, is the epoch of space, thus announcing a transition between temporal and spatial paradigms: in contrast to the 19th century, which was obsessed with temporality, more specifically, with history, at present, "[w]e are in the epoch of simultaneity, we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side by side, of the dispersed."² The space in which we live is not an empty space, but a heterogeneous space that takes on the form of relations among sites that are irreducible to one another. It is from this perspective that Foucault introduces a distinction between utopias and heterotopias: "Utopias are sites with no real place. They are sites that have a general relation of a direct or inverted analogy with the real space of Society. They present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any

¹ Charles Baudelaire, "XCIII: Anywhere, Anywhere Out of the World" in: *Little Poems*, trans. A. Crowley, The Teitan Press, Chicago 1995, pp. 117–119.

² M. Foucault, "Of Other Spaces", *Diacritics*, Vol. 16, No. 1, 1986, p. 22.

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case these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces." In contrast to the utopian unreal spaces, there are also

real places – places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society – which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias.³

One of the distinctive features of heterotopias, as Foucault defines them, is their capacity to juxtapose in a single real place several spaces that are in themselves incompatible. As they are in relation to all remaining spaces, heterotopias, according to Foucault, have a double function, i.e. either to "create a space of illusion that exposes every real space [...] as still more illusory," or, on the contrary, to "create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled."⁴ While it may appear that in this second function heterotopias appear to be indistinguishable from utopias, this is not the case. Taking certain colonies as an example, Foucault goes on to show that such heterotopias, unlike utopias which could be seen as heterotopias of illusion, have a compensatory role: they are spaces in which "human perfection [has been] effectively achieved."⁵

It should be noted, however, that the examples mentioned by Foucault (the museum, the cemetery, the holiday village, etc.), i.e. social sites intended for a particular activity, which are well demarcated, both spatially and temporally, prevent one from fully developing the potential of the heterotopic idea introduced by Foucault, for envisioning the possibility of gaining distance from the here and now. In order to widen its scope and areas for its redeployment, thus bringing into play new spatio-temporal dimensions, so as to include a spatialisation of the subject within the framework of networks of relations between different points beyond the subject's control, it is important to note that a het-

³ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

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erotopia concerns the users of a site, not only its spatial organisation, as has been elaborated in essays concerned with the utopian potential in urbanism, architecture, and design. For in the heterotopic site it is not only spaces that may be multiplied, but the simultaneous presence of the subject – insofar as it is distinct from the individual – may be multiplied in these different spaces as well. Moreover, being-in-space today means being-in-heterotopic-space, which is why heterotopia is not just a matter of well-demarcated sites as the whole world is gradually becoming heterotopic to the extent that heterotopic spaces are spaces that are not mastered by the speaking bodies that inhabit them.

At the heart of the investigations presented in the various essays assembled in this volume are the notions of the imaginary and utopia, whose redefinitions and redeployment serve widely divergent ends: from the reinforcement of the typically modernist political fantasy regarding the possibility of radically breaking with the here and now, to assisting in the reimagining of ethical and politically responsible urbanism, architecture, and design. Directed against the pressures of the neoliberal dominant discourse, this collection of essays attempts to rediscover the emancipatory potential of these two troubled notions by clarifying their vicinity to and/or distance from notions such as ideology, fiction, fantasy, and illusion.

The individual contributions range from an examination of the utopian drive inherent in language, to reworking concepts, such as Lacan's notion of anamorphosis, Badiou's notion of the post-evental truth in literary terms, and considerations of specific political issues, such as the simultaneous coexistence of more spatial settings in a single space, the emergence of new socio-political formations in which the boundaries of mastery are disseminated everywhere, thus becoming progressively invisible, and the correlative necessity of creating new heterotopic spaces, spaces that are out of joint precisely at those points of passage where different speaking bodies use the same space differently.

While each of the essays brought together in this volume contributes to a collective reflection on the relations of conjunction or disjunction that can be established between utopia and the imaginary, the essay "Utopie et langage" by Jean-Jacques Lecercle provides the most general framework in which this reflection can be inscribed. Thus, utopia, or rather the utopian drive, is not primarily due to the unbridled imagination, but is inherent to the very structure of human language. Taking up the line of argument of Karl Mannheim, according to which utopia is consciousness that does not coincide with being, a trait shared by ideology, too, as both utopia and ideology push towards transgressing the frontier of reality and, in so doing, partly or entirely destroy the ontic regime of a given situation. For Lecercle, however, the gist of utopia is not to be found in the content of various utopian fictions, it is language itself that encourages and produces what he terms the utopian impulse or drive. On this reading, utopia parasitises language's ability to construct and organise time, i.e. to transgress the present, to anticipate the future, or to return to the past. But it equally exploits the modal dimension of language. Because language does not express only what is, it also states what is possible, thereby opening onto the possible worlds. The modality of the possible is the linguistic equivalent of the mirror experience in that it opens onto a multiplicity of worlds. If utopia can thus be situated in the vicinity of fiction, this is because, Lecercle maintains, "all fiction is virtually utopian." Fiction is a way of escaping imprisonment in our world in order to accede to other worlds. Utopia pushes this possibility of escaping to the extreme. But the structural trait that, in a sense, constitutes the basis for all others, and which is for that reason at the heart of the relation between utopia and language, is negation. Language has the capacity to negate or annihilate what is and to bring into existence what is not and it is precisely in negation that the militant "no" of a revolt finds its roots. Several conclusions follow from this analysis, first of all concerning the relationship between ideology and utopia, since both aim at transcending the existing reality. However, while utopia is destructive, ideology is essentially conservative: being a false consciousness, it fosters adaptation to reality in the very move of going beyond it. This distinction allows for a more elaborated account of the emancipatory potential of the utopian, which is to be situated in the moment of counter-interpellation that opens up the possibility for individuals interpellated into the subjects of ideology to gain some distance vis-à-vis their condition. By finding its support in the non-referential functions of language (emotional, poetic, metalinguistic), which presuppose that the speaking being has a body, utopia is able to spell out the truth of imagination and the imaginary insofar as the latter is not simply a reproduction or representation but primarily a creation.

Several essays focus on the relation between fiction and truth, which figures, for different reasons, as the eternal irony of writing. The essay by Claire Sibony, "Virginia Woolf. La stratégie du grain de raisin ou l'utopie d'un corps trans-

lucide", addresses the issue of utopia in connection with the imaginary from a slightly different angle. Setting out from Foucault's definition of the utopian body, "the utopia of an incorporeal body" – since it is only in a place outside of places, this being Foucault's definition of utopia, that it is possible to have "a body without a body"⁶ – Sibony interrogates Virginia Woolf's "private utopia" or, rather, fantasy of "another body that is experienced as one's proper body, but not as I" in order to bring to light its connection to writing. In this regard, the scopic fantasy of "lying in a grape and seeing through a film of semi-transparent yellow" that intimates the experience of rapture, i.e. the pleasure of being without being oneself, represents a source of Woolf's writing, indeed, a utopia of a non-place wherefrom, for her, meaning emerges. A grape, for Woolf, as a fantasmatic and utopic place, allows the writer not only to experience the sense of being, but also to protect herself from the chaos of nonbeing. "Lying in a grape" thus turns the subject into a monadic shelter that shields her from moments of de-realisation, moments of the eclipse of being and the *aphanisis* of the subject.

Discussing the connection between truth and affect as revealed and treated in Proust's writing, Rok Benčin in his essay "Sans cause': Affect and Truth in Marcel Proust" probes the intricate articulation of the imaginary, utopia, fantasy, and fiction. The truth that is at stake in the work of Marcel Proust is, in the words of Deleuze, "one that depends on an encounter with something that forces us to think and seek truth."⁷ Focusing on the forceful aspect of truth that "presents itself to us as necessary and inevitable," Benčin presents how Proustian truth shares some crucial traits with a Badiousian post-evental truth, to the extent that it is endowed with the potential to "reframe what we perceive as reality," a problematic that is also addressed in the essays of Riha and Finkelde. The emphasis on the real dimension of truth comes to the fore in the very nexus of affect and truth: from this vantage point which, Benčin argues, situates truths "beyond the realm of the possible," i.e. beyond the realm of the imaginary, a truth can only be "revealed by the intermediary of an affect because it is a truth that does not yet exist, that still needs to be developed." Through an analysis of the relationship between the affect and truth, Benčin pins down what is specific to Proust's idea of subjectivation, noting that it involves the effect of depersonalisation since affects "give rise to another being from within the individual

⁶ M. Foucault, *Le Corps utopique, les hétérotopies*, Nouvelles Editions Lignes, Paris 2009, p. 10.

⁷ G. Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2000, p. 16.

that can be the bearer and the developer of a truth." Or in terms closer to the Badiousian vocabulary: it is from within a finite entity, the individual, that there emerges an instance of infinity, i.e. the subject whose function is precisely to fully develop the truth. It is also at this level that Benčin situates and discusses the Proustian conception of fiction, for the correlation between affect and truth is reduplicated by another correlation, that of event and world. Conceived as a frame of totality, the world dissolves under the impact of the event; on the other hand, the event, if the truth it carries is not developed, disappears without a trace. The eventual truth that Proust's conception of the artist's vocation implies is singular, Benčin insists, but precisely for that reason it must be "for all," which can only be achieved and demonstrated through the fictional "construction of a world to be shared."

The last essay to tackle the utopian potential in language and art is one that, paradoxically, places the object of its analysis, music, at the uncomfortable point of a "neither nor," thus opening another, quite unexpected, heterotopic perspective. In his essay, "White-heating the Real' - On Music's Force towards Impossible Nudeness", Christoph Sökler positions music "at the rim of language, at the border between language and non-language." Neither purely symbolic, "another language with its own rules," nor the imaginary, a kind of fantasmatic ancestor of language, music is rather what Sökler, borrowing from Alain Dider Weill, calls "experimenting with lack," an experience involving both a particular topology – "music is always on the other side" of the Möbius strip – and temporality – involving a logical time that can be reconstructed in the very experience of listening to music. Discussing this experience, Sökler examines the subjectifying effects of music, a "music-making subject," as Dider Weill puts it, that can be reconstructed through "torsions between the subject and the Other." For what characterises the experience of listening to music, Sökler claims, is the experience of lack. It is as a lacking, desiring subject that one listens to music and it is only by listening to music that one discovers oneself as lacking. Here, Sökler, insists, we are facing a double nescience or a double lack, which, however, is never to be fused in order to dissolve in a mystical experience of ecstasy. On the contrary, the experience of the two lacks is one that presents the subject with the possibility of experimenting with his or her own lack and the lack in the Other, "without the mediation of a fantasmatic object," yet which precisely as such "opens up the possibility of directly enjoying the barred Other, the Other that is fundamentally inconsistent and lacking." It is only at this point that – through the experience of listening to music – the subject experiences the "ceasing of time," an experience of fantasy beyond fantasy, as it were, as it presents the subject *in statu nascendi*, so to speak, i.e. at the "degree zero" of his or her subjectivation when, as a speaking being, he/she emerges as the subject of desire, which is to say, as divided.

It is from the perspective of fantasy that Helmut Draxler's essay "Traumatic or Utopian Other? Conditions of Emancipation: Phantasy, Reality, and Depression" broaches the complex relations between utopia, trauma, and emancipation. Defined as "a fundamental fantasy inseparable from the ideal of emancipation," utopia signifies the possibility of a full realisation of this ideal. On the other hand, trauma, too, necessarily contains an aspect of fantasy insofar as it relates to reality as "pure negativity," as a complete loss of the ideal. Consequently, a politics that strives for emancipation oscillates between utopia and trauma because of its inability, in the words of Draxler, to "synchronise content and form." In fact, this lack of synchronisation constitutes "the symbolic space of politics" in which "single acts are symbolically determined as political only in and through the relations that structure them." And, paradoxically, it is only insofar as politics can be defined as a symbolic space characterised by the absence of unity, stability, and control that its articulation to utopia can be elucidated. At the same time, politics can be seen as having "the symbolic function allowing one to imagine a world beyond the existing normative order, and the possible realisation of utopian ideals." And it is precisely this inconsistency of the symbolic that ceaselessly calls for alternatives, thus keeping us "trapped within the narcissistic and competitive aspects of the imaginary." This can be evidenced in a paradoxical relation between the impossibility of a radical break or the transgression of the existing symbolic and the ceaseless productions of alternatives. The symbolic, in this view, can only operate by tacitly calling for new alternatives. It is precisely as a symbolic operation that politics is driven by the desire to think otherwise and to search for another world. Put otherwise, the very fact that a politics of emancipation gestures towards another world signals that it is caught up in the symbolic matrix. Hence, the desire to find a way out of the symbolic is only possible within the framework of the symbolic. Because politics can only be symbolically radical, Draxler proposes reconsidering it from a post-Kleinian perspective. This would be a politics that, renouncing its utopian ambitions, takes into account utopia and trauma, on the one hand, and phantasy and reality on the other, while keeping them distinct from each other. This is the only viable solution to

avoid both traps of modern politics: the imaginary confusion of these categories, as well as an orientation to the impossible real that would require the (unachievable) transgression of the framework of the symbolic.

Rado Riha's essay refocuses the main theme of this collection by asking "What is the object of thinking differently?" Following Lebrun, Riha argues that it is Kant and more specifically his Critique of the Power of Judgment that can teach us to think differently. A short analysis of the artwork *Public Toilet* by the contemporary Slovenian sculptor and architect Jože Barši provides us with a reflection on the object proper to such thinking differently. Taking up and further developing Barši's thesis according to which contemporary artwork is destined for anybody and is thus "for all," while presenting at the same time an irreducible uniqueness, Riha considers this paradoxical connection of the artworks singularity and its universal destination as one that opens up a possibility for the elaboration of the notion of singular universality, this being, for him, a new notion of the universal introduced in Kant's third Critique. Strictly speaking, the true referent of thinking differently as implied in Kant's reflecting power of judgment is what is declared to be a case of the generic Idea of Reason, i.e. something that has no body of its own within reality and can therefore only exist by parasitising some existing, ordinary objects. By transforming an ordinary object, a public toilet, into an object of art, Public Toilet, Barši de-sublimates the sublime object Public *Toilet* and, at the same time, de-realises the ordinary utilitarian object, a public toilet. But precisely as such, in presenting "a materialisation of the double absence of this 'neither the one nor the other'" contemporary art presents what it means to think differently: it implies the kind of thinking that "opens our eyes so that we can see that our objective reality is objective only under the condition that we are capable of understanding and using it as a place where also something non-existent is present." And in so doing, it signals that the de-constitution or de-realisation of the given reality through "the affirmation of the existence of the non-existent in this reality" is to be considered as "the de-realisation of reality in the name of this same reality," which as a consequence of this very operation turns into "something other than what it is."

In the essay that follows, "Anamorphose und Subjektivität – Zu den beugungsgesetzen von Bewusstsein und Wirklichkeit", Dominik Finkelde shifts the focus of attention from what could be called a heterotopic object, an object that finds no place in "objective" reality, to the subject of desire, that is, likewise, placeless and can only situate itself in some "other space." To delineate the contours of such a heterotopic subject and the mode of its operation in reality, Finkelde takes the Kantian difference between phainomenon and noumenon as a point of departure, only to displace it by introducing Lacan's notion of anamorphosis. Grounding his argument on Lacan's analysis of Holbein's painting The Am*bassadors*, which shows how the spectator, as the subject of desire, is "literally called into the picture, and represented here as caught,"⁸ Finkelde maintains that what is constitutive of objective reality is nothing other than the subject's gaze that is present in the perceived reality as a blind spot, or better, as that in the object that is more than the object itself. Discussing the moment of the paradoxical self-inclusion of the subject in "the picture" of objective reality that renders visible the parallax hole that separates reality from itself allows Finkelde to bring together Lacan and Hegel: If, on the one hand, anamorphosis can be seen as that operation that allows the subject to be inscribed in the realm of being only to provoke the de-hegemonisation of the objective reality, there is, on the other hand, no domain of veridical facts without the constitution of an anamorphic place since for both Lacan and Hegel, Finkelde's argument goes, this curious heterotopia that is here called anamorphic place is nothing other than the subject.

When the concept of heterotopia is applied not only to space but also to its users it becomes possible to account for those creative practices that take place on the frontier between places, thus enabling the emergence of new spatial-temporal configurations in which the process of subjectivation can only deploy itself. While the concept of heterotopia does not automatically imply emancipation, for it relates to a complex of irreconcilable spaces in which one remains entangled in obscure networks of power beyond anyone's control, it nevertheless gestures towards those liminal sites where the stitches by which the dominant discourse strives to hold together a heterogeneous reality become visible, thus providing an opportunity for an unforeseeable transformation of the present conditions. Or, in the words of Christopher Dell, "it is always possible for urban actors to find a gap in any power regime in order to try out and experiment on new ways of socialising spatiality."

⁸ J. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan, Penguin Books, London 1977, p. 92.

Of particular importance and all the more ambiguous is the discussion of our spontaneous urge to imagine how our everyday life could be better than it is now in architecture and design, the two disciplines that shape our daily existence, since the capacity to transform in architecture and design is itself moulded by the demands of the neoliberal market. Among contemporary architects, Yona Friedman, with his "mobile architecture" and "utopies réalisables" (feasible or realisable utopias), is known as *the* theorist and practitioner of utopia. Indeed, in a world moving toward increasing pauperisation, utopia, as a collective response to this problem, for Friedman, appears to be not only possible, but necessary. Friedman's utopian architecture takes the form of architecture without architecture, a new kind of mobility of architectural structures that are neither determined nor determining, relegating responsibility for the conception and creation of their dwelling to future users – a process he calls "autoplanification". Fundamentally convinced that the ideal mode of architecture is the absence of planning, Friedman advances the idea of an improvised architecture, modelled on the future user who is ultimately situated as the creator of his/her dwelling. Thus emancipating the user, changing his/her environment, intervening in the very materiality of the real by encouraging new modes of behaviour, architecture, as Friedman conceives it, allows for a new way of envisioning and using the world, one marked by the coexistence of heterogeneous spatialities.

The architectural principles of mobility, flexibility, improvisation, and renunciation of construction, dear to Friedman, speak thematically to the final three essays in this volume, which reveal the utopian perspective materialised in theories and practices in architecture and design in order to explore the potential for a radically transformative thinking in these two fields. Architecture and design converge toward the same aspiration: engaged in a process of subjectification, which is itself a consequence of a displacement of their conceptual practices – due to grappling with the heterogeneity of the real – architecture and design aim at opening the space for a rethinking of the social and political space.

This architecture's ability to use the unpredictable in order to re-invent, to make new spaces that emerge alongside new urban objects, is at the foreground of Christopher Dell's essay, "Towards the Improvisation of Space". The thorny question of the "right to the city" is raised here from the perspective of contingency considered "as a positive resource of the city" insofar as it "shifts the focus away from the city as object towards the city as process." As a response to the transformations of ways of life and the mutations of spatial and built morphologies, the city, considered as "a space of possibility" in a constant state of flux, is transformed into "a social laboratory." Taking into account the constantly changing urban practices in unforeseeable, contingent situations requires a radical transformation of urbanism: a move away from static solutions to a mobile urbanism that can be understood as "the technology of improvisation" capable of rapid alterations and re-utilisations in response to the needs and desires of the city's inhabitants. This new way of thinking, which requires such a "fluctuating urbanity," is one that "reads the city as an unfolding of action situations," states Dell, and thus opens up a space for emancipatory gestures.

Petra Čeferin raises the question of utopia in architecture, however not in the sense of a retreat from or the denial of reality denounced by Manfredo Tafuri. Traversing the divide between idealism and materialism, "the utopia of Enlightenment architecture," and "absolute realism", which denies any sort of utopian aspirations, the essay "Architecture: Constructing Concrete Utopias" considers architecture as a creative practice that is no longer merely a spatial practice, but one that engages an attitude, a concept, thus turning architecture into a vector of a much vaster transformation. It is in this sense that architecture, according to Čeferin, could be considered as being "always, already, utopia realised." For architecture, to be engaged "in the construction of a better world" requires that we insist precisely on "enacting architecture in the world as a utopian, that is, creative practice." Taken in its radical sense, the utopian moment in architecture signifies its ability to open up "a space in the given world for something that is radically heterogeneous to it." It is precisely this utopian moment that architecture shares with other creative practices: "it affirms something in the world that from the point of view of this world seems impossible, something that isn't of this world." The possibilisation of the impossible of a given world is at the same time the way in which "the materiality of architecture as a thing is present" in the world. It is present through peculiar kinds of objects that are both a-topical and anachronistic insofar as they are displaced both spatially and temporally with respect to the structuring coordinates of the world. This paradoxical extimacy of the objectality of architecture requires a special kind of materiality that Čeferin defines as a Twoity in One, an issue also addressed in Riha's essay. In its capacity to bring into existence objects that are always something other than what they are, architecture, like any other creative practice, calls for a creative repetition of architectural solutions that "set our thinking in motion."

Barbara Predan's essay, "Design for Life: The Struggle for Utopia?" provides an epilogue to this collection dedicated to reflection on utopias and alternatives, two perspectives that open the space for thinking otherwise, by re-posing a question raised by a number of essays included herein: how to rekindle not only the courage of resistance, which is necessary for bringing about radical change in the world we live in, but even more so the courage of imagination. It is not by chance that the emphasis is placed on the courage to imagine. In the world of consumer capitalism, which pretends to exhaust the realm of the possible by promising full satisfaction to everyone, thus thwarting from the outset any attempt to look for a feasible alternative to the here and now in some unfathomable "elsewhere", the explosive force of the transformation is, paradoxically, to be found in the usually invisible, anonymous, yet gradually changing everyday life. It is precisely here that the utopian moment in design brings the emancipatory function of design to the fore. Taking up Clive Dilnot's definition of design as an act that is "wedded to the possible" since it "comes into being only in so far as the possible is present as possibility – i.e. the capacity for change," Predan takes an additional step forward by claiming that design is capable of actualising the potential inherent in everyday life by focusing on "the impossible within the possible," more specifically by identifying "the structural impossibility within the potential for designing our everyday life" in order to turn the impossible "into a new possibility." It then follows that the principal role of design is "no longer [to] provide the final, unalterable solution to potential users," but, rather to "allow (as well as empower) the community of users to address - autonomously, independently, according to a given situation - the issues and needs they are faced with." In encouraging passive consumers to invent new ways of use, design contributes at the same time to creating new ways of thinking.

Writing, as Lacan suggests, is "a trace in which an effect of language can be read."⁹ Beyond what the essays gathered here can say about the specific issues they address, it is to be hoped – following and further developing Lacan's idea – that they may also engender certain effects in their readers' ways of thinking and thus encourage further explorations of thinking differently.

⁹ J. Lacan, *Encore. The Semminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XX*, trans. Bruce Fink, W.W. Norton & Co., New York, London 1998, p. 110.