# Locus, Horizon, and Orientation: The Concept of Possible Worlds as a Key to Utopian Studies (1989)[1]

To the memory of Ernst Bloch

The truth is not in the beginning but in the end, or better in the continuation.

— LENIN, *Philosophical Notebooks*

## 1. The Pragmatics of Utopian Studies

*1.1*

Pragmatics has been much neglected in literary and cultural studies. In the semiotic sense in which I am using it, it was defined already by Charles Morris as the domain of relationships between the signs and their interpreters, which clarifies the conditions under which something is taken as a sign. From Peirce, G.H. Mead, and Bühler, through Bakhtin/Vološinov, Morris, Carnap, and the Warsaw School, to (say) Richard M. Martin, Léo Apostel, and John R. Searle, pragmatics has slowly been growing into an independent discipline on a par with syntactics (the domain of relationships between the signs and their formally possible combinations) and with semantics (in this sense, the domain of relations between the signs

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1    All translations in the text, unless otherwise indicated, are mine.

and the entities they designate). But what is more, there are since the late 1950s strong arguments that it is constitutive of and indeed overarches both semantics and syntactics. The basic – and to any materialist sufficient – pair of arguments for it is, first, that all existents and events are (only or also) signs and, second, that any object or event becomes a sign only in a signifying situation; it has no "natural" meaning outside of it (e.g., in More's *Utopia* gold is a sign of shame). This situation is constituted by the relation between signs and their users; a user can take something to be a sign only as it is spatio-temporally concrete and localized, and as it relates to the user's disposition toward potential action. Both the concrete localization and the user's disposition are always socio-historical. Furthermore, they postulate a reality organized not only around signs but also around subjects, in the double sense of psychophysical personality and of a socialized, collectively representative subject. The entry of potentially acting subjects reintroduces acceptance and choice, temporal genesis and mutation, and a possibility of dialectical negation into the frozen constraints of syntax (in fact, by the most orthodox Structuralist standards, only such dynamics can make the – temporary – stability of any structure meaningful). It also re-grounds semantics: each and every semantic presupposition is also a pragmatic one, effected by a subject – atomic or collective – as a choice in a sociohistorical signifying situation.

Thus, pragmatics could also be taken as the mediation between semiotics and an even more general theory of action or practice. Only pragmatics is able to take into account the situation of the sign producers and its social addressees and the whole spread of their relationships within given cognitive (epistemological and ideological) presuppositions, conventions, economical and institutional frames, etc. The pragmatic presuppositions about the signs' possible uses by their users, as argued above, necessarily inscribe historical reality – as understood by the users – between the lines of any text.

In this semiotic perspective, "text" is understood in the widest sense of an articulated and recordable signifying micro-system, of a coherent unit of signic work. Any spatio-temporal organization which can stand still for such a recording – e.g., any verbal or graphic description of a utopian colony – qualifies for this sense of "text"; and in fact semiotics began with ancient medicine taking the body for its text or ensemble of signs

(signifying health or various sicknesses). Yet there are problems if this imperialistic sense of text is absolutized: against the deconstructionists, I believe that bodies and objects (and subjects) are not only texts, for I don't see how a text can experience loss, delight, or indeed death. In other words, organic and inorganic molecules may be no more or less material than signs, but they are material in different ways from signs. Thus, even if the sciences are, no doubt, texts (though not purely verbal ones), the book of science is also – for all its partial autonomy – an interpretation of the book of nature, which is the presupposition of all scientific propositions. Furthermore, what exactly are the pertinent categories which constitute any object of investigation (in the widest sense, including a whole discipline) in the first place? This delimitation, which constitutes not only the cognizable domain but also the possible ways of envisaging and cognizing it, cannot be established from the object alone but only from its interaction with the social subject whose pragmatic point of view or approach is defining the pertinence, and by that token constructing the object's cognitive identity (though not necessarily the extra-signic pre-existence of the object's elements etc.).

*1.2*

Now in the light of such an approach (for which see further Suvin, "Can People?"), what is the first pragmatic fact about utopian scholarship? Let me take as emblematic the situation in North America, which also has undoubtedly the largest number of scholars and investigations in the "utopian" field (Italy and West Germany probably coming a close second), who meet regularly at national or international conferences, often publish in the same organs, etc. The central fact about their activities, it seems to me, is that they encompass what is at a first glance two rather different foci and scholarly corpuses, namely utopian fictional texts and utopian movements and communities. While it is undeniable that there are certain overlaps between these two corpuses, mediated by imaginary projects and attitudes related to a fictional imagination but intended to be the basis or seed for empirical construction of a micro- or macro-society, the corpuses are usually

subjects of different disciplines and rather different methodologies and discourses. In one case, literary and textual approaches are mandatory, in the other a spectrum of approaches about which I am too ignorant to pontificate – sociological, geographical, etc. Again, it should not be denied that psychology can be applied to authors of both corpuses, that philosophy is applicable to the first principles of anything, that everything happens within given social and political histories, etc. Thus, it is not only semioticians who can and do claim that their discipline can explain – at least an important aspect of – anything and everything: philosophers, historians, etc., have just as good a claim to mediate (indeed, it is my stance that unless semiotics is informed by philosophy and social history – as in a number of Italian scholars – it remains at best a sterile and at worst a dubious syntax – as in most Parisian versions). Nonetheless, for all the existing and welcome mediations, I hope not to encounter too much resistance if I note that, for all the partial overlap in corpuses and for all the possibilities of fertile cross-pollination between approaches to them, there are still two distinct "wings" to "Utopian Studies", which I shall in a simplified manner call *the literary (or fictional)* and *the sociological (or factual)*.

This could be well documented by a glance at the agendas of various conferences on utopia/s, but I shall here substantiate it only with help of the *Directory of Utopian Scholars*, edited by the meritorious pioneer of our field, Dr Arthur O. Lewis, and used in its May 1986 edition. It contains 349 names of scholars (of which 62 from outside North America) with a brief self-characterization of "Utopian Interests" and "Related Interests." Striving for a loyal interpretation of these interests, I find that they substantiate my above impression, for they are best divided into three large groups. The two opposed poles are a dominant interest in empirical utopian communities and movements vs. a dominant interest in fictional utopias. By my imperfect count (since the interests are not always clearly spelled out) the "empirical" pole accounts for ca. 45 percent and the "fictional" pole for ca. 33 percent of the entries. In between them is a dominant interest in utopian philosophy and thought which accounts for ca. 20 percent (while 1–2 percent of the entries do not permit identification). Now I will readily concede not only that my interpretation of the scholars' interests may well not be final, but furthermore that for other purposes other groupings

could be just as legitimate. Nonetheless, I find that the "empirical" group is professionally mainly in social science departments or indeed in political or social agencies outside of universities, with a few geographers, architects or art historians as well as a few teachers of religion and of literature or natural sciences who are breaking out of the discipline boundaries. Their "related interests" are usually history, political theory, planning, religion, ecology, and/or futurology, more rarely literature or science and technology, even more rarely philosophy or feminism. On the contrary, in the opposite "fictional" group, the most frequent "related" interests are science fiction, women's studies, literary theory and various segments of literary history or political philosophy, more rarely Fantasy literature, religion, or science. Finally, the "in between" or "utopian philosophy" group relates most strongly in its interests to intellectual history (including political thought) but there is also a smattering of most diverse interests from computers through esthetics and space to peace and mysticism.[2]

Thus, in spite of a number of scholars with significant overlaps between two of the above three groups (ca. 15 percent), in spite of the intermediate philosophy group, and finally in spite of the fact that utopian scholars as a whole are indeed a group with unusually and refreshingly interdisciplinary interests, I think that this little survey confirms a question that might occur to anybody who has assisted at one of the national or international conferences of Utopian Studies or who has read some of the volumes arising from their work: Just what is the common denominator, in corpus or methodology, between the interest in New Harmony or the Shakers and the interest in Morris's or Wells's fictional texts? Now we all know that Bellamy's books started a political movement with partly utopian hues; that the Marxists call most writers of societal blueprints from Morus to Wells and further "utopian socialists", with respect accorded to people before 1848 and increasing impatience with regard to people after that; etc.

2    In a 1988 letter to me, Lyman Tower Sargent observed that "the balance of scholarship that you record would change if the membership of the National Historic Communal Societies Association and the International Communal Societies Association were taken into account." In 1992 he thought the two wings may be approximately equal in size. I trust that my basic argument would not be affected.

I am not at all arguing that there were or are no good reasons for scholarly interested to be so bifurcated as that of the "utopian scholars." But even if we conceded their corpus presented some continuities (which would still leave many discontinuities and problems), just what is the methodological common denominator in approaches to and discourses about Oneida "free love" and Morus's use of dialogue and satire? Personally, I must confess that I often think of being in the presence of a two-headed monster. And if utopian scholarship centrally or predominantly uses two (or more) different discourses or methodologies, is not this at least a radical pragmatic problem and perhaps even an intellectual scandal? In sum, is Utopian Studies one discipline or (at least) two?

It could be objected that there is in practice a common denominator which has been used to rationalize this budding discipline, namely the concept of "utopian thought" practiced by pioneering scholars as different as Mannheim and the Manuels (and for which Bloch too is sometimes claimed). This is empirically correct but, to my mind, philosophically and methodologically quite inconclusive. I cannot discuss this anywhere near as fully as it deserves, but it seems fairly clear that – psychologically, philosophically or politically – free-floating "thought" pre-existing to wholly different methodologies and largely different corpuses is a woolly concept that raises as many questions as it solves. If Utopian Thought created the universe of Utopian Studies, one must ask about this creator the same questions as about a monotheistic God: and who or what created god (or the idea of utopia)? If one stops at the notion of the Creator or of the Platonic Idea, this is an act of belief, necessary but insufficient for scholarship. Rather than an explanation, this philosophically Idealist concept itself needs to be explained: it is not a solution but a problem. Indeed, there is to my mind something despotic about watertight conceptual systems that are not dissolved in and humanized by other aspects of contradictory societal practice; and historical practice – just as that of texts – is never fully reducible to an Idea. (It must be added that the best people in "intellectual history," from Mannheim to W. Warren Wagar, have in practice often transcended their doctrine, and that Bloch is to my mind not to be categorized as such anyway.) In sum: the touchstone and minimal requirement for a real unity of our field would be, I believe, the existence of *some common*

*and centrally significant tools of inquiry*, ensuring the possibility of some common *lines of inquiry*. Can they be found? The rest of this chapter is a much too brief, admittedly schematic attempt to answer this question in a cautiously positive vein.

## 2.  Paradoxes and Ambiguities in the Denial of Utopia

### 2.0

In this section I shall make an only apparent detour into a consideration of central ideological objections to utopia which dominate present-day bourgeois and techno-bureaucratic attitudes in the "real world" and are not rarely introjected by scholars dealing with utopia. The detour is apparent because, as argued above, pragmatics subsumes – but also needs to be based upon – not only syntactics but also semantics (in this case, of utopian studies).

### 2.1

Without pretending to an even approximate survey of the state of the art in the burgeoning utopian studies (*Utopieforschung*), I shall postulate there are two related paradoxes within them. I call the first *the paradox of incoherent denial of utopia* – of both utopian fiction and empirical projects for utopian communities. Utopia is denied *in toto* and *a limine* as static, dogmatic, and closed. And yet this critique is incoherent because a lot of evidence exists – marshalled into arguments by Wells, Zamyatin, Bloch, and others since them (for example, Hansot) – that utopian fiction and projects have historically not always been closed, that indeed theoretically they may be either open or closed, and that no easy (much less automatic) correspondence exists between utopia on the one hand and either openness or closure on the other.

I shall in this second section focus on verbal, predominantly on fictional, texts (and only later see whether the argument can be extended to an approach to all fields of utopian investigation). Here it seems, first, arguable that most of the significant utopian texts historically *were not* closed but subject to varying degrees of openness or opening. Second, I see no good (methodo)logical reason why utopian texts *have to be* closed.

*2.2*

This sub-section could be called "true, but." *True*: historically utopias arose at least once (with Morus) as a secularization of the static millennium and projection of a final Paradise onto Earth, as a political version of Earthly Paradise. *But*: even in Morus there is change (the Utopians open up to Greek knowledge and Christian religion). Not to speak of non-fictional – i.e., doctrinal or what the French call "doxic" – texts such as Gioacchino da Fiore's or Condorcet's, in Bacon and Mercier the notion of a more or less ongoing evolution appears. *True*: there are notoriously dogmatic elements in these three texts too, and such elements grow almost seamless in such "cold stream" centralizers as Campanella, who delineated his utopian locus as an astrological prison, or Cabet, who expressly calls his locus "an Eden, [...] a new Earthly Paradise" (Cabet 3). *But*: there was always a critique of such closure from within utopianism, from its "warm stream": Pantagruel's unending voyage balances Hythloday's arrival, Morris responds to Bellamy, the use of the conditional tense and approach in Wells's *A Modern Utopia* throws into relief the weakness of most other utopian fictions of his. Often this dialectics between the cold and warm currents within the utopian ocean of possibilities that opposes the status quo is to be found within a single text – in Morus's ancestral dialog, in the succeeding hypotheses of Wells's equally paradigmatic Time Traveller, or in the succeeding series of stations of Mayakovsky's *Mystery Bouffe* and Platonov's *Chevengur* (for more on Russian utopias see *MOSF* chapter 10 and Strieder 57–59). This is also quite clear in the latest utopian fiction wave, the best US utopian SF of the 1960s–1970s: *The Dispossessed* by Ursula K. Le Guin, the (highly unjustly

neglected) *Daily Life in Nghsi-Altai* tetralogy by Robert Nichols, *Woman on the Edge of Time* by Marge Piercy, etc. (see Suvin, *Positions* 83–85).

*2.3*

However, even if we were to find that almost the whole past tradition of utopian fiction was in fact static, dogmatic, and closed, this would not answer the logical and methodological question of whether utopia as a genre and orientation is since Wells (or since tomorrow) *necessarily* such. As Bloch rightly noted: "utopian thinking cannot be limited to the Thomas More kind any more than electricity can be reduced to the Greek substance *elektron* – amber – in which it was first noticed" (*Prinzip* 14). This has then a counterpart in the re-reading of history necessitated by the industrialized *epistémé* which entails that "we cannot breathe in a closed world. We have invented the productivity of the spirit […]" (Lukács 33–34). Following such methodological and historical leads, I argued in *MOSF* that utopia was "an 'as if', an imaginative experiment," and that literary utopias in particular were "a heuristic device for perfectibility, an epistemological and not an ontological entity;" and I concluded that "if utopia is, philosophically, a method rather than a state it cannot be realized or not realized – it can only be applied" (now in the first chapter of this book). This argument of mine was based on a quite respectable philosophical tradition, perhaps first noted in Socrates' dictum that he was tracing "a theoretical *model* of a good city" (Plato, *Politeia* 472e, 1099; emphasis added) and continuing down to Bloch's discussions of fashioning models for an unfinished and open world-process (see the latest formulation in his *Abschied* 131 and passim). The dogmatic and eschatological *forma mentis* found in all laicized religious psychologies – e.g. in those partisans and enemies of socialism which believed that a perfect, utopian state could be realized (say, Stalin and Berdyaev) – is therefore fundamentally wrong. As Italo Calvino wrote in "Per Fourier" (252): "l'utopia come città che non potrà essere fondata da noi ma fondare se stessa dentro di noi, costruirsi pezzo per pezzo nella nostra capacità d'immaginarla, di pensarla fino a fondo" ("utopia [is] as a city which cannot be founded by us but can found itself within us, can

build itself bit by bit in our capacity to imagine it, to think it through"). I would today reaffirm my quoted claim that utopia is a *method* rather than a *state*, but I would add that it is a method camouflaging as a state: the state of affairs is a signifier revealing the presence of a semiotic process of signification which induces in the reader's imagination the signified of a Possible World, *as a rule not identical with the signifier*.

In effect, "any true understanding is dialogic in nature [...]. Meaning is the effect of interaction between speaker and listener [...]" (Vološinov/ Bakhtin 102–03; see Suvin, "Performance"). It follows from such considerations – as I also claimed in my earlier chapter – that "to apply a literary text means first of all (wherever it may later lead) to read it as a dramatic dialogue with the reader"; and that, therefore, "utopia is bound to have an implicit or explicit dramatic strategy in its panoramic review conflicting with the 'normal' expectations of the reader. Though formally closed, significant utopia is thematically open: its pointings reflect back on the reader's 'topia'"; and I cited Barthes à propos of Fourier to the effect that the utopian *écriture* must mobilize at the same time an image and its contrary. Converging with this, in a rich essay on Russian utopias, Striedter has pointed out that the utopian state represented in a novel should not be confused with the function of that novel: "The explicit or implicit reference to the external context, the dialogue with this polyphonic reality, counteracts the isolation and the abstract idealism of the utopian 'polis' itself" (38; see now also the argument of Ruppert's book). In other words, even in the case of perfect stasis and closure in the signifier, the signifying process inscribed in or between the text's lines, and finally proceeding to contextual reference, will make for a larger or smaller opening of the signified. Or, in a probably much more adequate terminology: whether the vehicle be open or closed, the tenor will finally be a – more or less – open meaning. As Ricoeur (who with good reason renames meaning into "reference") put it,

> The sense of the work is its internal organization, whereas the reference is the mode of being unfolded in front of the text (93).[3]
>
> The sense is the ideal object which the proposition intends, and hence is purely immanent in discourse. The reference is the truth value of the proposition, its claim to reach reality. (140)

Any utopian novel is in principle an ongoing feedback dialogue with the reader: it leaves to him/her "the task of transforming the closing of the 'completed' utopia (and utopian novel) into the 'dynamics' of his own mind in his own world" (Striedter 55). But conversely, if the reader is Stalin or Berdyaev, even the dynamic Marxian permanent revolution will for him freeze into an ossified stasis: "the application of utopia depends on the closeness and precision of his reading" (*MOSF* 53). And if this bent reader's readings come to rule, they will destroy the method (the Way) in order to preserve the state (the supposedly final Goal).

Possibly the most sophisticated argument for this thesis can be found in a remarkable review sparked by a remarkable book, Fredric Jameson's "Of Islands and Trenches" à propos of Louis Marin's *Utopiques*. Jameson sees in Marin's stance a proposal to grasp utopian discourse as a process (in Humboldt's terms, the creative power of *energeia* rather than the created piece of work or *ergon*, in Spinoza's terms *natura naturans* rather than *natura naturata*). This proposal is also the repudiation of the

> conventional view of utopia as sheer representation, as the 'realized' vision of this or that ideal society or social ideal [...]. [I]t is possible to understand the utopian text as a determinate type of *praxis*, rather than as a specific mode of representation, [...] a concrete set of mental operations to be performed on [...] those collective representations of contemporary society which inform our ideologies just as they order our experience of daily life.
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> In this vein, the utopian "real" is not "something outside the work, of which the latter stands as an image or makes a representation [...]." What is "real" or perhaps operative in a utopian text is rather a set of elements participating in an allegorical

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3    For a longer discussion that begins with Frege's *Sinn* vs. *Bedeutung* and goes on to consider the trickiness of reference (in fiction always "second-order reference"), see Suvin, "Proposal."

referentiality, "interiorized in [the text's] very fabric in order to provide the stuff and the raw material on which the textual operation must work". (Jameson 81)[4]


*2.4*


Thus, I claim that utopia is not necessarily static and dogmatic, that indeed it is at least as probable to suppose it may intrinsically not be such as to suppose the opposite. If so, what are the reasons for the paradox of incoherent denial of utopia? My hypothesis is there are two:

First, *the errors of utopophiles*, who stressed either the openness of texts considered as final objects of analysis and/or the ideas to be found in the texts, neglecting the real location of utopian fiction and horizons in a feedback traffic with readers. As against this error, my thesis is that *utopias exist as a gamut of Possible Worlds in the imagination of readers, not as a pseudo-object on the page*. It becomes evident here that (even without going into the complex formalizations of an Eco), we cannot do without some elementary but indispensable semiotic distinctions, such as the one between syntactics, semantics, and pragmatics, or between signifier and signified, or vehicle and tenor. As a Bakhtinian dialog with contextual readers, utopian Possible Worlds are in principle not closed.

Second, *the errors of utopophobes*, who ab/used the (practical as well as – or more than – theoretical) errors of utopophiles to concentrate on the vehicle – the utopian text on the page, in order to impugn both the

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4    My argument here is not to be confused with Abensour's interesting distinction between systematic and heuristic utopias, developed by Raymond Williams (202–03; see also Moylan 5–6, 49, and passim), i.e., with focusing on institutions vs. focusing on direct relationships between people; this is an old debate between anarchist and "archist" utopians (see my chapter 1) or, in Fourier's terms, between the focus on Need and on Desire (see Barthes 90, also 114–15). No doubt, Abensours's argument and mine arise within the same horizon and from cognate preoccupations, but they seem to me aslant to each other. I would be more sympathetic to a distinction between a praxis gelled into fixed concepts and one developing so quickly it largely has to be rendered by polysemic but also cognitive metaphoric systems, as I argue in my essay "On Metaphoricity" and apply to *Life of Galileo* in "Heavenly."

semantic meanings and the syntactic closure-cum-value-hierarchy which is formally unavoidable in it. Omitting the pragmatic tenor, they identified, without much ado, both these levels of the vehicle with political repression. The best one can say of this procedure is that it oscillates between ignorance and bad faith.

2.5

This situation permits the second paradox, that of a very unhealthy ambiguity between objectors to utopian orientation as such (or in general) and objectors to closed utopias (in particular). To somewhat simplify, the first group objects to utopian orientation because that orientation radically doubts and transcends the bourgeois construction of human nature and the capitalist economico-political power-system. The second group objects to utopias because they *did* not – or, in metaphysical hypostasis, because they in principle *can* not – find the otherwise necessary way out of backward-looking ideologies and out of a globally destructive system. A strange alliance has thus come about, it seems, between bourgeois conservatives and anti-Stalinist leftists understandably (but also inconsistently) shell-shocked from the three totalizing political experiences of Fascism, Stalinism, and massified consensus capitalism spreading from the US. Perhaps the best names for this alliance are on the one hand Karl Popper, Thomas Molnar, and C.-G. Dubois, and on the other hand Theodor W. Adorno and Michel Foucault. I wish I could enter into this at more length, but this rather easily provable point must be left for documentation in another place (see Brenner). There is little doubt that it has powerfully contributed to the pragmatics of what Neusüss has called "the denunciation of utopia" (33–80), which has since grown into a stifling one-dimensional orthodoxy.

## 3.  Locus, Horizon, Orientation, and Possible World

### 3.1

To help in disambiguating the pragmatic puzzles presented so far, I propose in the spirit of semiotics to introduce the paired concepts of *utopian locus vs. utopian horizon*. Since most of the present discussions around utopia are a mediated reaction to Marxist projects or to developments claiming to be Marxian, it might be appropriate to go back to the origins:

> Der Kommunismus ist für uns nicht ein Zustand, der hergestellt werden soll, ein Ideal, wonach die Wirklichkeit sich zu richten haben [wird]. Wir nennen Kommunismus die wirkliche Bewegung, welche den jetzigen Zustand aufhebt. (Marx and Engels 35)
> [Communism does not mean for us a state of affairs that ought to be brought about, an ideal which reality will have to follow. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of affairs.]

This is a constant attitude in the classical Marxist tradition. On the one hand, it is pretty clear what communism should NOT be – a way of people's living together with war, exploitation, and State apparatus, i.e., neither today's US nor today's USSR; so that from Marx's key notion of alienation a utopian horizon can be inferred by contraries (see Ollman) and so that Lenin can write perhaps the greatest utopian work of this century, *The State and Revolution*. Yet on the other hand in this vein, the same Lenin answered Bukharin's query about future socialism by a vigorous affirmation that "what socialism will be [...], we do not know [...]" (122; see a somewhat different translation in Striedter 36).

As Bloch noted, ever since Plato used the term *topos ouranios* (heavenly space or place, the locus of Plato's Ideas), a clear signal had been given that utopian location (*Ortung*) is only seemingly spatial, if spatial is to be taken in the positivistic sense of photographable places (Bloch, *Abschied* 43, 45–46). To find this signal indicative and illuminating is quite independent from ideological agreement with Plato's notion that such a non-positivistic space is a transcendent or heavenly place for ideas: "it ain't necessarily so"

(a watered-down Platonism is, as noted above, my main objection to the notion of "utopian thought" by the Manuels and company). What is to be retained from Plato's intuition is that in the utopian tradition *the actual place focused upon is not to be taken literally*, that it is less significant than the orientation toward a better place somewhere in front of the oriented. In the most significant cases, furthermore, even the place to be reached is not fixed and completed: it moves on. It is thus situated in an imaginary space which is a measure of and measured as value (quality) rather than distance (quantity): "it is a true not-yet-existing, a novum which no human eye hath seen nor ear heard" (Bloch, *Abschied* 46). The necessary elements for meaningful (and certainly for utopian) movement are, then: first, an agent that moves, and second, an imaginary space in which it moves. In this chapter I have unfortunately, for reasons of spacetime, to bracket out the extremely important agential aspects, on which I have written at length elsewhere ("Can People?"); they would contain the properly political problematic of who is the bearer of utopia/nism (I approach this in chapter 10 of this book). However, I hope that sufficient initial illumination may come from the pertinent aspects of space. They are:

a.   the place of the agent who is moving, her/his *locus*;
b.   the *horizon* toward which that agent is moving; and
c.   the *orientation*, a vector that conjoins locus and horizon.

A horizon is the furthest reach of that agent's visual and cognitive imagination at a given moment; yet it is characteristic of horizon that it moves with the location of the moving agent, as was exhaustively argued by Giordano Bruno (cited in Mahnke 54). Obversely, it is characteristic of orientation that it can through all the changes of locus remain a constant vector of desire and cognition. As Musil was to formulate it in a self-reflection on writing ironic utopias, in *The Man Without Characteristics* – a text that is itself emblematic for its intended signification of permanent movement through various loci in a fixed direction which is also a movable, expanding

horizon: "Eine Utopie ist aber kein Ziel, sondern eine Richtung" [A utopia, however, is not a goal but an orientation] (1594; see also Plattel 97).[5]

*3.2*

The use of notions such as locus, horizon, and orientation is predicated on an analogy with conceptions of the empirical world. The Possible Worlds (further PWs) of utopian fiction, which exist in the imagination of given social types and implied addressees of utopian texts, take their structures – wherever these are not expressly modified – from "natural worlds" (i.e., dominant conceptions thereof). A highly important aspect is that for a PW "the term of 'world' is not a manner of speaking: it means that the 'mental' or cultural life borrows its structures from natural life" (Merleau-Ponty 225), that "our *hic et nunc*" has "a preferential status" (Eco, *Role* 223). In the same vein, Marin concluded (significantly, by advancing from an avowed parabolic text) that

> the natural world, as an organized and perceptually structured spatiotemporal ensem-
> ble, constitutes the original text [...] of all possible discourse, its "origin" and its
> constitutive environment [...]. All possible discourse is enunciated only against the
> ground of the perceived world's significant space, by which it is surrounded [...].
> ("Théorie" 167 and 175)

The fact that we can meaningfully effect this metaphoric analogy, that we can transport these three notions into a discussion not of practice but of verbal (or of all signic) constructs constitutes, therefore, itself a highly significant meta-meaning. My contention (developed at length in my essay "Performance") is that the interaction between the fictional elements presented in a text and the presuppositions of the implied reader induces in

5    For a first sketch on the semiotics of horizon in West European literatures from
     Bacon to the nineteenth century see Koschorke; on orientation as "the Ur-form of
     theoretical work" and its etymological root in astronomy see Negt and Kluge 1002,
     and my "Haltung" for the synonyms of "bearing" or "stance," which connect it with
     the agential discussion.

the readers a specific PW. This PW is constructed by and in the reader's constrained imagination, it is a tenor (signified) to be clearly distinguished from the isolated text or the text surface which is a vehicle (signifier). As argued in Section 1, an element (work, agent, shape, color, change, or indeed a whole corpus, etc.) that can help to induce and constrain a PW for the reader becomes a sign only in a signifying situation. In the particular case of reading fiction, the specific, imaginary PW of a fictional text is constituted by complex and intimate feedback with the readers on the basis of its not being identical with, and yet being imaginatively supported by, their empirical world (or empirical PW). This interaction ensures (among other things) that, whatever the spatiotemporal and agential signifiers, it is always *de nobis* or, more precisely and significantly, *de possibilibus pro nobis* that the fable narrates. It is the tension between the finite, often closed texts and the multivalent (im)possibilities facing the reader that creates the fictional utopia's basic openness.

## 3.3

Let me pursue some consequences of the three terms proposed in 3.1, so that they may be judged by their fruits. Since without a utopian orientation our field of inquiry does not exist, so that its discussion has to be left to the discussion of utopian agents, what are the mutual relationships – or indeed the combinatorics – of locus and horizon? Can they give rise to a typology which would be a useful grid for utopian studies as a whole?

My approach has been (for all my abiding demurral against his pan-utopianism) stimulated and largely shaped by Bloch, the most important philosopher of utopia. The concept of horizon comes from phenomenology, from which (Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Ricoeur) I believe we also have much to learn. But Bloch refunctioned it into a sociopolitically concrete tool within a "warm stream" Marxism. As I argued in *MOSF* upon his tracks, imaginary space shifts into time with the industrial and bourgeois revolutions. Therefore, I shall here briefly discuss Bloch's late hypothesis on elastic temporal structure in history, on the analogy of Riemannian space.

Riemann assumed that the metrical field is causally dependent upon matter and that it changes with matter: the field is not a pre-existent static and homogeneous fixity but a process of changeable material feedback. With all due caution toward analogies from natural sciences (e.g., the awful example of Heisenberg's Indeterminacy): historical matter is at least as unequally distributed as matter in relativistic physics. No doubt, history would have to add to this at least the latent tendencies possibly present – and in the form of dominant alternatives, most probably present – in its matter (see Bloch, *Tübinger* 129ff., in particular 133 and 136). Adapting Bloch's final *Theses on the Concept of Progress*, I would say that the goal of utopia is in principle not a defined, localized or fixed humaneness but a not-yet-manifest type of human relationships, a hominization in Engels's or Teilhard's sense. This is "a depth dimension (*Tiefenbeziehung*) of the Onwards" (ibid. 147); from which it follows that there can be no final, "classical" or canonic locus of utopianism.

In my proposed terms, this can be systematized as *the dominance of Horizon over Locus*. Locus does not coincide with but interacts with Horizon: this makes for a dynamic, open utopia (e.g. Platonov's *Chevengur*, Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*). I shall characterize it in the words of a brilliant graduate student of mine: "The tension in *The Dispossessed* is not between a voyager from here and now (the familiar) and the utopian locus (the strange), but between the utopian hero and the utopian locus" (Somay 34). I would add that this is so because the hero or protagonist embodies here the orientation toward a moving (in this case, an anarcho-communist) utopian horizon.

The second possibility would be that *Locus coincides with or swallows Horizon*: this makes for a dogmatic, static, closed utopia (e.g., Campanella's *Civitas Solis*, Cabet's *Voyage en Icarie*):

> A doctrinaire, or dogmatic, utopian text [...] asserts the utopian focus as "ultimate" and drastically limits the possibilities of the utopian horizon; an open-ended text, on the other hand, portrays a utopian locus as a mere phase in the infinite unfolding of the utopian horizon, thereby abolishing the limits imposed on it by classical utopian fiction. (Somay 26)

The third possibility would be to have *Locus alone*, i.e., without a utopian Horizon (by now to my mind a pseudo-utopian locus): this makes for heterotopia. The best theoretical example is of course Foucault, and the best fictional one his disciple Samuel Delany's *Triton*, also a direct polemic with "ambiguous utopia" of *The Dispossessed*, and explicitly couched in terms of heterotopia.

> [Both these SF novels do away] with the doctrinaire identification of the utopian locus with the utopian horizon. Delany, however, goes one step further: he also does away with the utopian horizon itself. In Le Guin, too, the utopian horizon is not actual, solid; yet the utopian horizon, appearing as an urge towards certain actions, furnishes her narrative agents with a purpose; whereas in Delany, the horizon and the urge are [...] absent, and that absence leaves his characters purposeless and confused. (Somay 33)

The final logico-combinatorial possibility is to have in a text *Horizon alone*, without a utopian Locus. This is where non-localized "utopian thought" belongs, such as all the abstract blueprints, utopian programs, etc. I have difficulty in seeing how a horizon without concrete locus – without Bakhtin's chronotope – can be a fictional narration in any strict technical sense (though it can of course be called both fictional in an ironic and narrative in a loosely metaphoric sense, both of which I would find irksome).

To resume the above locus/horizon combinatorics:

1. H > L: *open-ended or dynamic utopia*;
2. L = H or L > H: *closed or static utopia*;
3. L (H = 0): *heterotopia*;
4. H (L = 0): *abstract or non-narrative utopia/nism*.

Thus, there seems to be no obstacle to applying these terms (as well as a further set of agential terms) as analytic tools to the whole range of utopian studies – fictions, projects, and colonies.

*3.4*

The interaction of locus and horizon in the case of the dynamic utopia constitutes it as not too dissimilar from – possibly as a special case of – Eco's definition of a semiotic encyclopedia:

> Essa appare [non come un oggetto finito ma] piuttosto come un progetto aperto: non una utopia come *terminus ad quem*, e cioè uno stato di perfezione da raggiungere, ma una utopia come idea regolativa, come progetto *ante quem*, la cui forza è data proprio dal fatto che esso *non può e non deve* essere realizzato in modo definitivo. (Eco, "Quattro" 108)
> [It appears not as a finished object but rather as an open project: not a utopia as *terminus ad quem*, i.e. a state of perfection to be reached, but a utopia as a regulating idea, as a project *ante quem*, whose force stems precisely from the fact that it *cannot* and *should not* be realized in any definitive form.]

Let me add here (as an epistemological complement) that Eco himself is somewhat more agnostic or pessimistic – or "post-modern" or "weak thought" – than I would be, since he identifies such an open utopia with a rhizomatic encyclopedia only, which I would in its "disorganized organization" rather liken to my possibility no. 3. I am very skeptical toward "shapeless shapes" (ibid. 107), unless they are simply initial stages of our still partly inchoate understanding – or construction – of a new kind of organization and shape. While fully agreeing with Eco (and Deleuze) that it is an ideological illusion knowledge could be organized in a definitive and permanent fashion, I would not share their distrust toward global (or indeed total) organization of knowledge (ibid. 121) on the same presuppositions as those of utopia no. 1 above: on condition that this globality is conscious of itself as a synchronic cross-cut for well-defined interests and with a limited pertinence. Nonetheless, there is no reason that would necessarily prevent such an organization (e.g., a dynamic utopia) from defining strategically central cognitions necessary and available for action aimed at radical or global change at a given spacetime point (see Suvin, "Two Cheers").

## 4. Towards a Conclusion: Physician, Heal Thyself

I conclude with some questions and open proposals of a partly self-critical nature, in light of further reflection (including further reading of Bloch) within our evolving ideologico-political situation. In chapter 1 of this book (written at the beginning of the 1970s), I stressed the specificity of utopian fictions as *verbal constructs* (and of course this is readily extrapolated to other textual constructs in a wider acceptation of "text," i.e., to paintings). I believe that such a stress was at that initial point mandatory. Indeed, it still seems to me the indispensable beginning, or A, of all wisdom when discussing utopian texts (and remember that any description, verbal or pictorial, of a project or colony is also a text). Still, I would today advance from this position by saying that after A there follow B, C, etc., and that I was perhaps too narrowly focused when I claimed Blochian methodology for texts only. The dichotomy of the field of utopian studies into texts vs. practices, supposedly unified by "utopian thought" but in fact separated by a tacit gap, is *à la longue* untenable. It is also one of the utopophiles' errors, or at least areas of lack, that gives great comfort to the utopophobes, as mentioned in Section 2. For, logically, either utopian texts and utopian practices are two fields, in which case there should be two disciplines and two professional organizations to study them. Or, on the contrary, we should attempt to establish at least some traffic across the existing gap. I have argued why the only present footbridge of "utopian thought," always flimsy, seems by now rather worm-eaten and not too *tragfähig*, unable to support much burden. The concept of Possible Worlds, on the contrary, as adapted and humanized from a sociohistorical and pragmatic semiotics of mainly Italian provenience (a critical view of its sources can be found in Suvin, "Performance", and a development in "Can People?") – and in particular its spatial categories of orientation, locus, and horizon – has some chances to become a real bridge. But of course, this is only a hypothesis. It remains to be proven by further, if possible cooperative, exploration.

Allow me, nonetheless, to provisionally close this open-ended utopian modest proposal by reiterating, with Bloch, that we should hold a steadfast

orientation toward the open ocean of possibility that surrounds the actual and that is so immeasurably larger than the actuality. True, terrors lurk in that ocean: but those terrors are primarily and centrally not (as the uto-pophobes want to persuade us) the terrors of the not-yet-existing, but on the contrary simple extrapolations of the existing actuality of war, hunger, degradation, and exploitation of people and planets. On the other hand,

> there exists a process and we people are at the advanced front-line of this world-process; it is given unto our hands to nurture the possibilities already pending [...]. The seventh day of creation is still before us, the seventh day of which Augustin said: "dies septima ipsi erimus, we ourselves shall be the seventh day" [...]. (Bloch, *Abschied* 63, and see also 59)

But in order to understand how to approach such open adventist possibilities given into our perhaps feeble hands, I believe we have first to learn the lesson of the dynamic utopias, where locus constantly tends toward and yet never fuses with horizon. The best formulation I can find of this is in the stupendous close of Brecht's *Badener Lehrstück vom Einverständnis* (1929 – *Baden Learning Play on Consent, Gesammelte Werke* 2):

THE LEARNED CHORUS
When bettering the world, you might have perfected the truth,
Now go on perfecting the perfected truth.
Give it up!

CHORUS LEADER
March!

THE LEARNED CHORUS
When perfecting the truth, you might have changed humanity,
Now go on changing the changed humanity.
Give it up!

CHORUS LEADER
March!

THE LEARNED CHORUS
Changing the world, change yourself!
Give yourself up!

CHORUS LEADER
March!

And as Brecht added in his radio theory: "If you deem all of this utopian, I beg you to reflect on the reasons which render it utopian" (*Gesammelte Werke* 18: 30).[6]

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