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Utopias as a Tentative Horizon for Spatial Justice

by Bernard Bret | Sophie Didier | Frédéric Dufaux

Translation: Sharon Moren

Utopias and yearnings for justice are very closely tied to one another. Unlike the disenchanted observations on the inaccessibility of justice in today's world, utopias give shape to the cravings for justice and put the mind en route to what we hope would be a better world. The theme of utopias has a great deal to teach anyone concerned with spatial justice, providing plentiful – and productive – paths. Reflecting on justice has led many authors to anchor their proposals, if metaphorically, in places as if the just organization of the social and the spatial necessarily went hand-in-hand: in this sense, reflection on spatial justice is often derived from a utopian gesture.

Of course, this article cannot envision what the unequivocal utopia of spatial justice fulfilled would be. Utopian trials and errors must be considered in their diversity and historicity, as bearers of yearnings and representations, as well as of course fragile, ephemeral, and contextualized experiments and movements towards more spatial justice.

Researchers have already very extensively explored utopias: this issue of *Justice Spatiale/Spatial Justice* wishes to present more than a collection of articles on the history of utopias, a field widely covered by historians, town planners, philosophers, etc. The historical aspect will not be central here, even if going back over these analyses is essential for understanding the conditions of the articulation of the contemporary form of utopia in connection with justice. If some of the articles offered here reflect on the lessons drawn from past utopias, this reflection is always related to the use of this philosophy in the present (see in particular in this issue the article by Grégory Busquet on Henri Lefebvre). What we are interested in is the connexion of a utopian discourse with very contemporary demands for more justice, and the spatial issues engendered by this expression, which mobilizes very diverse scales, from the world to the community, in relationships that are at times mutually exclusive or contradictory (which the article by Yuval Achouch and Yoann Morvan explains well, with regard to the complicated incarnation of Zionist utopias).

Far from being unequivocal or stable, there are many utopian discourses and they are firmly anchored in their eras. Therefore, their diversity must be stressed. The texts offered in this collection refer to utopian proposals that are indeed quite different and spread out over time in terms of utopian generations; but for the most part, these proposals are anchored in the contemporary utopian field and in the current ferment of thought proposing a reform (sometimes radical) of our societies.

Harald Bauder's article thus addresses the questionings, now global, on international migrations and the possible emergence of a right to free movement, which could become a fundamental right. Likewise, Kelvin Mason's article analyzes the Christiania experiment, an urban utopian experiment in Denmark frequently mentioned in current public debates with regards to both its longevity and scale.

Utopia is not dead!"

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, then that of the Soviet Union and its political satellites, sanctioned the failure of a supposedly socialist system and discredited utopia for the subsequent decades. But the utopia proposed with this system had already been discredited well before this collapse. It had lost its legitimacy due to having produced more injustice than the situations it was supposed to

correct. "Actual socialism" built on the foundation of self-proclaimed *scientific*[1] socialism, was exposed as a failure. The inflexibility of the production system proved the political system's inability to effectively plan the economy in a way that met the population's needs. In the end, the failure undoubtedly came from the experiment's negation of democracy and in that, Marxist-Leninist ideology was terminally challenged, as it entrusted social transformation to a supposedly proletarian dictatorship.

With the historic end of the allegedly communist utopia (aka "on the move toward communism"), the neo-liberal model became hegemonic to the point of crushing all political or social alternatives in the name of so-called natural law and the principle of reality. Neoliberalism is utopian, just as liberalism was itself. One of the merits of the article by Jean-Marie Huriot and Lise Bourdeau-Lepage lies in this demonstration. Everyone knows that *laissez-faire* is the system's underlying philosophy. If the *invisible hand* is left to harmonize individual interests and combine them with one another to produce everyone's happiness, we have to observe that this happy coincidence between the individual and the collective simply does not exist. The idea that the State must not impede the spontaneous course of things rests on the illusion that a natural order would impose itself on everyone. Liberal utopia is based on the protection of individual interests as bearers of the happiness of all. That this state of affairs is *natural* is where a form of intellectual fraud hides. In his famous *Fable of the Bees [Fable des Abeilles]* (1705), Bernard de Mandeville explains how private vices create the public good and warns that the intention to modify the natural order destroys society and produces unhappiness for everyone. It is, of course, normal that the keeping of order in the hive should operate on the basis of a distribution of tasks decreed by nature. But are people bees? The trick for using it as an example for human societies is therefore to "naturalize" the social fact and give it unquestionable legitimacy because it is "natural". This deception subsequently states that the "invisible hand" produces the just order, since justice cannot go against nature and the free social interaction that guarantees the happiness of one and all. And it is precisely here that liberalism may be effectively interpreted as a utopia although it does not recognize itself as such. How could it when it does not claim to move away from the real world, and quite the opposite indeed as it claims to correspond to the order of nature? Yet reality shows that *laissez-faire* results in the pauperization of the greatest number, as already condemned by John Stuart Mill himself. The author of *Utilitarianism,* as liberal as he is considered because he did not challenge ownership of the means of production, nor the market economy, intended however that the State control the system, correct excesses and the effects on the poorest and in order to so do, take strong and restrictive measures (Mill, 1863).

With the fall of the Soviet block, which saw the British Prime Minister state that "there is no alternative", others celebrated the victory of the market economy as the end of History (Fukuyama, 1989). This "end of utopia" and alternative proposals, which would supposedly accompany the general adoption of a form of neoliberalism presented as compliant with the natural order, was however, greatly exaggerated. Utopian experiments have, in fact, continually recurred since the 1960s, the golden age of intentional communities (even if those experimented in developed countries are best known), often within the cracks – spatial and social alike – of Western societies.

Other highly utopian reflections are hidden in this neoliberal perspective itself, besides the illusion that the source of human happiness is to be found there. Harald Bauder thus shows that the concept of abolishing boundaries can be qualified as both a dangerous and unrealistic utopia by neoliberalism's supporters and, restated by them, be the direct consequence of neoliberal thought

1 Friedrich Engels distinguishes between utopian socialism and scientific socialism. But to self-proclaim as scientific doesn't prove that one is, and the term "utopian" intended with contempt could just as well be interpreted positively, depending on the theories targeted.

and the principle of free circulation on which it is founded.

Above all, and despite this celebrated death, for the last decade or so we have been witnessing utopia's great return to the scene and to public debate. Scholarly publications and those for the general public, as well as political debate in its most all-encompassing sense, are spectacularly reactivating the concept in their search for alternatives to the economic-political system in place and in crisis. The transformation of the anti-globalization movements into alter-globalization movements could be mentioned in this regard. In a couple of years, they have gone from the frontal opposition tactics that were emblematic of the early 2000s (Seattle in 1997 and Genoa in 2001), to developing concrete alternative proposals arising from the World Social Forum carried out in parallel with massive and lasting occupations of public space (see Fougier, 2004). Similarly, the environmental crisis and the worldwide awareness of its scope have reactivated the development of intentional community models whose purpose is a global reform of life styles and consumption. The shift started when doubt began to be cast on the long-unquestioned soundness of economic growth. Does it really make sense to always produce more if this blindly forging ahead masks the disastrous effects of uncontrolled growth? Accidents – first, the black tides, then more serious accidents like Chernobyl and Fukushima – have forced us to think otherwise. The basic themes are now the way out of using nuclear power, the invention of an organic agriculture able to feed people and maintain biodiversity, the struggle against global warming, etc. But are these really utopias? Rather, it is a matter of finding credible, generalizable solutions to the crisis in the relationships between people and Nature. And this is a crisis in the literal sense of the word: a system's inability to reproduce itself identically. There is no choice left then but to innovate. Success in this undertaking requires that the solution be accepted by the social system, or in other words, the social system must democratically buy in.

Consequently, there still exists a strong desire for utopia, a need to invent new models or new ways of doing things, in response not only to the neoliberal hegemony, but also to environmental pessimism. In fact, today's proposals are multifocal in their attacks in reaction to the crisis of the neoliberal model: work, the environment, the establishing of genuinely participatory governance, money, etc. This brings us back to the vital need for utopia.

Utopia is not dead, and so much the better, as resigning oneself to the abandonment of utopias would lead to stifling yearnings for justice. This would amount to block freedom of imagination in the search for alternatives (Harvey, 2000). Furthermore, it would mean giving up the very idea of justice, as what is justice if not a utopia? It is indeed a utopia, but a positive one, i.e. a horizon never reached but towards which one tries to move. As expressed by Ernst Bloch (1976, 1977), renouncing utopia would be renouncing all hope, while to use the philosopher's terms, utopia is liberating for society and emancipating for each of its members.

Utopias: Anchored in the present, breaking with the present and shedding light on injustices

What are the take-home lessons that investigations related to spatial justice need to take from this renewed utopian ferment?

Utopia is a never-never land, which by definition, obviously has no physical reality but presents an ideal of a just society in allegorical form, and can propose a plan. On this topic, it is useful to go back to the basic distinction made by Ernst Bloch, recently taken up again by Fredric Jameson (Jameson, 2007): it identifies "utopias as programs", referring back to the intentional communities and, more broadly, to the *in vivo* application of utopia on the one hand, and "utopian gestures" on the other, of a purely imaginary, therefore not "realistic" order, but that also produce art (and particularly science fiction, which for Jameson belongs to this group). This intellectual, and therefore

occasionally applied, creation is (not unlike its sombre twin, dystopia) a clever means for denouncing the injustices of the real world, as if the distance maintained from the real world would make it possible to better identify its shortcomings, its conventionalities and its major injustices. Utopia is first of all, a discourse that sheds light on the era that produced it: to each era its hopes, its fears and its utopias, too. These are therefore not so disconnected from the real world as one might believe. In fact, if utopia is not reality, it is definitely reality that inspires it, in order to design alternatives. In fact, this has been true ever since the publication of Thomas More's foundational text (More, 1987). He gives a very precise description of the island Utopia, undoubtedly less in order to devise a credible form of social and political organization than to deliver a scathing critique of his time. Using sarcasm, he demonstrates that the extravagant lifestyles are not necessarily where one might think. The Amaurotes in fact live according to principles that reflect the absurdity of 16th century European social practices. Subsequent to Thomas More and for the same purpose of denouncing the absurdity and arbitrary nature of the regimes of their time, the theme of good government has long inspired utopias. Later, in the 19th century social questions became the priority and this brought about new utopias, against the liberal utopia and the poverty of the working classes, i.e. the various forms of socialism.

There is no doubt that many of these theories are whimsical. What is important is that the various forms of socialism contradicted the current liberal utopia around a few strong ideas for socio-economic alternatives. First was the idea of abundance: in response to a liberalism that was responsible for the poverty of the working class, only socialism was deemed capable of satisfying the profusion of human needs. A profound optimism lead to betting on the economic efficiency of a system built around an objective of justice. The social blocks that limited production would disappear and enthusiasm for the chores and the tasks at hand would appear, to the extent that work were no longer a source of alienation and had once again become a vector of the social bond. Likewise, the distribution of the wealth generated would become equitable. More production and a better redistribution – that is the result of abundance for everyone. More's Utopians were already producing what they needed on their island with a shortened workday. But they were content with little. This was hardly the case, however, for the Utopians of the 19th century. Quite the contrary in fact: their enjoyment of life included gluttonous consumption of what the social organization made possible to produce. Eating and drinking well, living in a comfortable home, enjoying life – this is a form of socialism that sounds definitely attractive!

These few examples would seem to demonstrate that producing utopian narratives is not the pointless reverie of a restless imagination that would exclude thinking (although this is precisely how utopias are most often discredited, as "unrealistic" and "crazy" plans). Thinking out a utopia is to describe another world in order to critique the existing one and state a possibility, or at least ways toward a possibility, through a "spatial game" (Marin, 1973). Utopias work as critical tools for exploring our present, a present that remains obscure to us. In this sense, utopias have strong connections with the social sciences.

But at the same time, based on its radical critical analysis of the present, the utopia is articulated as a break with the present that may necessarily be a clean or even brutal one. In his lecture given at Berlin-West in July 1967 on "The End of Utopia", Herbert Marcuse reminded us that "Utopia is an historical concept"; he called upon us to realize the fact that "the supposedly utopian possibilities are not utopian at all but are the socio-historical negation defined by the order in place" and he thus developed this reflection:

> This would mean the end of utopia, that is, the refutation of those ideas and theories that use the concept of utopia to denounce certain socio-historical possibilities. It can also be understood as the "end of history" in the very precise sense that the new possibilities for a human society and its environment can no longer be thought of as continuations of the old, nor

> even as existing in the same historical continuum with them. Rather, they presuppose a break with the historical continuum; they presuppose the qualitative difference between a free society and societies that are still unfree, which, according to Marx, makes all previous history only the prehistory of mankind… (Marcuse, 1967).[2]

Utopia as a program: A machine for producing injustice?

There is no choice but to observe that as a specifically implementable program, utopia is almost inevitably a failure. We can certainly mention the pitiful, indeed, at time dramatic ends and collapses of many of the 19th century utopian projects tried in the New World (see, for example, the various Californian utopias, Hine, 1953). One of the driving forces resulting in the failure of implemented utopian programs pertains to the thorny matter of participants' consent to the utopian experiment (see Huriot and Bourdeau's work on this topic), their participation, if any, in the design of the utopian plan, and the organization of the often prison-like utopian society, which is regulated on paper to the smallest detail. The question of power is central to the problem, and the fundamental question of the attack on personal freedom, already present in Thomas More's work, is at stake here. The Utopians live happily because it is in some way mandatory to be happy in a setting where everyone is permanently subject to tight social control. The conditions for happiness are assured everywhere. This doesn't prevent some Utopians from wanting to leave their city to become acquainted with others (although tall cities are constructed based on the same model). While not forbidden, this move is subject to approval by the authorities. Consequently, there is no complete freedom of movement. It is difficult in these conditions to satisfy one's taste for adventure and to answer the call of the open road. Although everyone is entitled to pleasure and happiness, everyone's personal life is strictly codified. The problem posed here is, in short: Is it possible to be happy without freedom? How do we attain happiness in following the rules that others have chosen for us? In other words, is happiness possible without democracy? Now, even if the Isle of Utopia is the opportunity to mock the discretionary power of European princes, and even if democratic practices exist for designating the governors, state control of the mind and body make impossible the full recognition of the individual that citizenship involves. This major issue of personal freedom is recurrent in the later utopias. When Fourier organized the universal harmony of human passions in his Phalanstery, he took the utmost care in deciding the smallest architectural details without ever imagining that the residents could make these decisions themselves. Reading other authors whose influence was more immediate on the fate of their kind, one arrives at the same conclusion. Should Le Corbusier be considered a utopian? This is open to discussion but the idea that the living environment supposedly determines the social should definitely be filed as utopian, with the same problem as always: changing people's life setting without having changed the social organization first. The architect of the Cité Radieuse decided on everything and he, too, intended to dictate behaviours and social practices, deeming himself qualified to decree what was necessary for everyone's well-being.

So Utopia, which advocates for the establishment of a just world, can paradoxically produce injustice. The paradox is, of course, only apparent and resonates greatly with the fundamental debates around spatial justice, and between distributive justice and procedural justice. The faithful realization of a utopia runs the risk of crushing the procedural aspects of justice, imposing a rigid blueprint on individuals whose disagreements, various aspirations and different imaginations can, of course, be on different wavelengths in relation to the collective blueprint. They would thus find themselves denied, even if they had been able to support the realization of this utopian plan at one

2 http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/marcuse/works/1967/end-utopia.htm

time.

To these dangers of authoritarian developments (more than simple drifting off course), a specific dimension of injustice is added, produced by utopian programs and profoundly spatial: rupture, closure, secession, exclusion, etc. Liminality, borders and the principle of separation are essential for guaranteeing the purity of the proposed model. The island is a classic illustration, and this theme runs through utopian thought even from before More. Closure and insularity remain just as important in contemporary utopian proposals. Thus, the recent Utopian plan *Seasteaders,* analyzed by Steinberg et al. (2001), proposes the creation in international waters of independent islands for the moneyed elite of the *e-economy*, independent of any State and entirely in line with American libertarian principles. Through this movement, which plans the reformulation of an entire utopian tradition of parallel marine worlds on the oceans, the problem of the scale of the utopia can be posed, since it appears here as localized forms of selfishness that are very far removed from spatial justice.

Some of today's utopias effectively turn their backs on developing a collective political philosophy with universal scope, taking refuge in the cracks of capitalism:

> The charismatic leaders of these places would retort that everyone builds his own life – in logic that leaves aside any notion of collective struggle outside the circle of the initiated. This Rousseauism has less to do with the Reveries of the Solitary Walker than with the pessimism of a political philosophy limiting the possibility of a "democratic" life to small communities – for Rousseau, the masses represented the beginning of ungovernability and loss of freedom. (Poupeau, 2011).

In so doing, these intentional communities carry out the spatial and metaphorical demarcation that is indispensable to the utopia, but through this detachment risk producing a narrow and limited transformation discourse. If the global reform of capitalism is indeed the issue today, it is tempting to consider these utopian experiments as marginal in that they would only propose ultra-localized solutions that are not intended to radically transform all of society. Their sidelining (through cultural marginality, through their preferred location in isolated, rural settings despite some urban experiments, through their potentially exclusionary nature, etc.) is both the cause and effect of their utopian gesture. There are however longstanding proposals for responses to this disputable matter of isolation contributed by philosophical anarchism: federations, networks, etc. reticular if not rhizomatic structures may be a response to isolation and possibly to the risk of domination by a "centre".

Except for this issue of openness, these projects could otherwise be along the same lines as other forms of utopian programs generally deemed reactionary (see again the *Seasteaders*), arising from the self-enclosure of a community of interests. Numerous examples of these voluntary seclusions exist in the field of urban studies; moreover, they are only able to function by means of the harsh regulation of the spaces of urban poverty. This is the meaning of McLeod and Ward's longstanding synthesis of the abundant critical production focussing on Los Angeles:

> [W]hen blended with the rapid diffusion of 'interdictory' privatopias and fortified cathedrals of consumption, this assault on the poorer sections of cities would seem to herald an exclusionary version of citizenship and an erosion of spatial justice. (McLeod & Ward 2001:163)

Beyond the polemics (due to their exclusionary principle, are the utopias of this latter type really utopias?) the genuine question remains of the frequently limited scope of utopian experiments (in terms of the scale of their implementation) and their limited audience. This brings us back to more general questions on justice and the issue of redistribution for the purpose of equality among individuals.

Finally, the third way that strongly affects utopian programs: Utopias age and run the risk of becoming rigidified. Although they want to break with their era, utopian proposals are strongly anchored in them. Thus, due to the fact that they are intended to imagine a different world from today's, there inevitably comes a time when each specific utopia becomes obsolete because the political, social and economic context, as well as the issues themselves of social reform, change (see on this topic the affirmation of the environmental change of direction in the statements of contemporary utopias). The utopians themselves change as do their needs, which are not completely eliminated by, or the same as those of the collective utopian plan.

Consequently, wanting to freeze a utopian program proves fatal for utopias. The risk is the production of a rigidified utopian philosophy that is inevitably increasingly out of step with contemporary aspirations. Wanting to implement the plans of Fourier, Saint-Simon, etc. today would imply re-establishing the socio-historical conditions that produced these utopias, which clearly is impossible and absurd. This proof through the absurd of the time-bound nature of utopias begs the question of their dynamic and sustainability, which is *a priori* in contradiction with the utopia and yet vital for liberating utopian aspirations.

Utopias in motion: Facing diversity, conflict and their era

With respect to the perplexing difficulty of a frozen utopian proposal, of a model to be achieved by the utopia, the utopias that criticize the present feed on the metamorphoses of our present, its contradictions, conflicts and stresses. Utopian proposals thus become fragmentary, local, ephemeral, and in need of constant realignment. In a recent interview, David Harvey specifically shed some light on this possible role of utopias (Harvey, 2013):

> « There are several ways to build a utopian vision. I think we should always have, one way or another, a utopian vision in our minds, a place where we want to go, even if, eventually, we do not arrive there- and, in a sense, arriving or not does not matter much. If you have a vision, trying to change things, things are moving in one direction or another. I do not have a fixed pattern, I wrote an appendix in a book titled *Spaces of hope*, a description of a utopian society built during a period of 20 years. And I think we need a method of construction through negation. We should understand the aspects of capitalism that we do not like, what we would refuse, what would a society, that no longer works on the basis of exchange value but on the basis of the use value, would look like, what forms of coordination of the social division of labor would be built, how it would be implemented in order to ensure that everybody's supply of use value is sufficient and that there would not be any complete blockages and ruptures, any shortages. These are very practical questions."

The matter of the temporality of utopias is crucial. A utopian experiment is not meant to last "forever", from an eschatological perspective, organized for achieving a stable, just society in perfect harmony, having eliminated all conflict and all contradiction from an eschatological perspective. To the contrary, the utopia is intended to be a driving force, putting things in motion: towards more justice, towards fairer spatial organizations. The utopian horizon of spatial justice is a production process (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, 2010).

In a complementary and profoundly related manner, can utopian proposals integrate the recognition of diversity (of individuals, groups, opinions) both in their formulation and their realization? The questions posed by this recognition activate the yearning for spatial justice and its utopian formulations (Marcuse, 2009; Fincher & Iveson, 2013) at the same time that they can also be what puts a society into motion. Peter Marcuse clearly demonstrated this point and expressed this necessity:

> The Just City sees justice as a distributional issue, and aims at some form of equality. But a good

> city should not be simply a city with distributional equity, but one that supports the full development of each individual and of all individuals, a classic formulation. I argue that such a concept should lead to a recognition of the importance of utopian thinking but as well to the direct confrontation with issues of power in society (Marcuse, 2009).

Questions around procedural justice are central to the weakening of formulations of spatial justice imposed "from above", and of restrictive, if not authoritarian, utopian plans. A major issue is certainly then the taking into consideration and the recognition of diversity in all its complexity, and in all its dynamics as well. How is a complex, changing society (turn-over of population, new expectations, formation of new groups or reformulations of the expectations of previously formed groups, etc.) integrated at different scales (State, city, neighbourhood, etc.)?

Susan Fainstein – analyzing the concrete example of decision-making in urban planning – states the importance of alternatives presented by utopias and its articulation with the respecting of a plurality of viewpoints:

> Nevertheless, utopian goals, despite being unrealizable, have important functions in relation to people's consciousness [...]. Right now, in most parts of the world, the dominant ideology involves the superiority of the market as decision maker, growth rather than equity as the mark of achievement, and limits on government [...]. To the extent that justice can be brought in as intrinsic to policy evaluation, the content of policy can change. If justice is considered to refer not only to outcomes but also to inclusion in discussion, then it incorporates the communicative viewpoint as well. (Fainstein, 2009)

Many tentative utopian efforts have identified this major risk tied to the power structure. Many utopias today strongly advocate dialogue, no hierarchy, and a defiance of big chiefs or spiritual leaders. In this case, beyond the material details specific to each situation, the utopian plan essentially rests on open discussion so that nothing is forced upon anyone. While an early affirmation of this was already to be found in anarchistic utopias; this is generally the case with most utopian currents today. This also means that conflict becomes a driving force in the very formulation and life of the utopian plan, or at least, that conflict is not avoided (even though the utopian plan is traditionally supposed to produce an ideal society and thereby eliminate all conflict). The balance is delicate and perhaps impossible to achieve. The acceptance of *dissensus* gets the initial utopian plan in motion, makes it reconnect with the era, and can sometimes undermine it from within, often resulting in the implosion of intentional communities around strong dissension. The utopians themselves can become worn-out from the time devoted to the participatory decision-making processes, which might also precipitate this very implosion.

Nevertheless, turning its back on the caricatures of turn-key social plans and nightmares of authoritarian universes, this weakening is without doubt a condition of the liberation of the utopia's radical potential and its capacity for helping us get on the right track towards more justice.

To come back to the distinction made by Ernst Bloch, these utopian plans that have been discussed, challenged and conflict ridden, converge with the other source of utopian production: the utopia as a plan, a game, a mental construction, a draft, an attempt, and a partial local response. The crisis of modernity (and simultaneously, the crisis of leadership, in connection with the assertion of the individual and the crisis of belief in a single development model, not to say mode of government) would potentially engender a great diversity of utopian responses. This fragmentation expressed in local, partial and contextual formulations, would be further reinforced by the micro-scale advocated for action by intentional community stakeholders (for more control over the experiment) deriving from their defiance with regard to a utopian "creator-in-chief", and thus also of broader scale of action.

In the end, it seems that this fundamental distinction that existed between the utopian gesture and

the utopian program can become blurred. Utopian reflection increasingly integrates the necessity of thinking in socio-spatial and production process terms that are of their era. It is thus possible to think about the production of space as an open and free, virtually infinite, utopian experiment with various spatial forms, making it possible to explore alternative emancipating strategies (Lefebvre, 1974; Harvey, 2000). So, it is not a matter of proposing a turn-key program but of allowing the utopian gesture to be an ongoing means of questioning and reflection. In this regard we return here to Henri Lefebvre's proposals from 1961 around "experimental utopia", and "imaginary variations" (Lefebvre, 1961):

> « This thinking intends to invent new forms, yet concrete forms. Thus, it does not shy away from calling upon the imagination, but an imagination that has to be called upon and controlled by practical issues. The method used is consequently that of imaginary variations on themes and demands that reality and its virtualities raise. This method tries to circumvent two pitfalls and to avoid two dead ends. On the one hand, it tries, when envisioning what is possible, to avoid formulating purely empirical (or supposedly so) statements that only monitor and then extrapolate what is accomplished. On the other hand, it tries to avoid a priori elaboration. This is the case of abstract utopias dealing with the ideal city with no reference to determined situations. The method should then be to navigate between pure practicality and pure theorisation. In order to identify these workings of rational thought, and to use them in a coherent way, should not there be a specific vocabulary, concepts and methodology? One could call "transduction" the thought pattern that is neither purely deduction nor induction, that constructs a virtual object based on real informations and a specific problematics (...) We could then name "experimental utopia" the exploration of human possibilities, with the help of images and imaginaries, accompanied by a relentless critique and an incessant reference to the problematics arising from "reality"[3] Experimental utopia is broader than the normal use of hypothesis in social sciences.»[4]

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