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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Utopias and temporo-spatial invention: reading More with Marin

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Louis Marin views Utopia as the organization of space in a discourse that finds its expression in specific texts from More's onwards. He argues that More's text contains non-congruent spaces - internal gaps and fissures in the geography of Utopia unwittingly betrayed by the description of More's traveller - and that these point to places of argument awaiting an as-yet unformulated theory of society in an era of capitalism. It is here suggested that, even as Marin thus presents Utopia as organized space, his analysis is driven by time, primarily the historical time that produces Marx, whose social theory Marin projects backwards on to More's work. Marin's retro-projective approach, for all the remarkable insights it generates, leaves underexamined the question of how early modern utopianism may be said to have imagined space in historical time and, in so doing, emerged as a tradition of invention.

KEYWORDS Utopia, invention, play, space, time, Thomas More, Louis Marin

The early modern utopian tradition is an imaginative mode of discourse immediately engaged in questions of space and place.[1] It displays that engagement in its very name: 'Utopia' is, as is well known, the name of a far-flung place that a character called Raphael Hythloday, who lived on that island before returning to

[1] I presented an oral version of this article at the annual conference of the Society for Early Modern French Studies, held at the University of St Andrews in July 2022, which explored the theme of 'Space and Place'. I thank Michael Moriarty and the other participants at the conference for their comments on my presentation. I am grateful to Nigel Saint for reading and commenting on a written draft.

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Europe, describes to More's friend Peter Gilles and More himself. The work reporting their discussion bears the name of the place, 'Utopia', in its title.[2] That work, first published in Latin in 1516, was much translated and imitated in early modern Europe. In it Raphael presents communist Utopia to his interlocutors as the best place he has lived in and a vast improvement on the unequal and divided societies of Europe. His account establishes a realist fiction in which the commonwealth of Utopia appears as a place that exists out there in space and time. Yet various signs scattered in the narrative – including the self-deconstructing proper names found in Utopia – suggest to the reader, meanwhile, that the realism of the travel narrative in fact conceals a form of literary play.[3] The most prominent of these names is, of course, 'Utopia' itself: it combines two Greek words, *οὐ* ('not') and *τόπος* ('place'), adding the classical Latin suffix *-ia* to mean 'No-Place'. Utopia is out there in space, then, and it is not. It is and is not a place. The utopian tradition, from More's inaugural text onwards, is thus immediately engaged in complex ways with questions of space and place.

No scholar has done more than Louis Marin to explore the engagement of the utopian tradition with these questions. In his 1973 study, *Utopiques: jeux d'espaces*, Marin explores this engagement in cultural works from More's text to Disneyland and beyond. Marin remains a guide to and an imagined interlocutor for many – including me – working in the fields that his work reached.[4] I would like to use the space available to me here to define both what Marin contributes to our understanding of the utopian tradition and what I think he leaves out of the picture. What I would like to suggest is that a shift of approach would be desirable if we are to take fuller account of questions that Marin leaves unexamined in *Utopiques* and underexamined in his later utopian writings. This shift of approach means, in a nutshell, viewing the utopian tradition from More onwards no longer as spatial play but rather as temporo-spatial invention.

I propose to unpack the contents of that nutshell by explaining, first, what I think Marin means by Utopia as spatial play and, second, how I mean to alter the approach by speaking of Utopia as temporo-spatial invention.

Spatial play

In *Utopiques* Marin takes the view that 'la notion d'utopie dans les œuvres, que l'on convient de ranger sous l'étiquette utopique, est sous la dominance de

[2] I write Utopia thus (with a capital U) when I refer to the name of the place in More's conception. I write it without capitalizing its first letter when I treat utopia as an idea or as a word (and, in the latter case, I place the word in italics).

[3] See the classic analysis by Louis Marin, *Utopiques: jeux d'espace* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1973), pp. 115–31.

[4] See the special issue devoted to Marin of *Early Modern French Studies*, 38.1 (2016), ed. by Alain Cantillon and Nigel Saint. See also Alain Cantillon, Pierre Antoine Fabre and Bertrand Rougé (eds), *À force de signes: travailler avec Louis Marin* (Paris: Éditions de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 2018). Marin's utopian work receives little attention in these two publications, apart from the notable exception of Pierre Antoine Fabre's contribution to the 2016 special issue ('À nouveau l'Utopie', 17–25). Yet it continues to be cited in utopian studies, thanks in part to the influence of Fredric Jameson, who describes it as 'fundamental' in his *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London and New York, NY: Verso, 2005), p. 41.

l'espace'.[5] This is Marin's statement, in a 1979 article, of the view he takes in *Utopiques*. He defines the term *espace* in a very wide sense, not only using it interchangeably with *lieu*, but also exploiting to the full the fact that both terms designate textual and discursive constructions as well as geopolitical ones: in his coinage *utopiques*, for example, Marin wants us to hear the topics of logic and rhetoric as much as the tropics of travel literature. In this way, utopian space for Marin conjoins microcosm and macrocosm, word and world. It does so in such a way as to produce an in-between, neutral, 'no-place'. This no-place lies between two places considered as contradictory. It is 'neutral' in that it is 'neither the one nor the other': it is neither England nor America, neither the Old World nor the New, but, as Marin puts it in *Utopiques*, 'l'entre-deux de la contradiction historique au début du XVI^e^ siècle de l'Ancien et du Nouveau Monde'.[6] At the same time, it is both England and America, a fantasized and fantastical conjunction of elements belonging in different spaces. The play that takes place between these spaces, and which Marin brings to the fore in the subtitle of his book, is not the conscious ludic activity of More the literary inventor of alternative worlds. It is, rather, the play of a mechanism that moves around in the spaces found between its interlocking parts.[7] These empty spaces are the 'utopiques' of Marin's title. They are produced unknowingly ('aveuglément') by inconsistencies or incongruities within the utopian signifying structure.[8] These take the form of internal gaps in the geography of the island of Utopia as described by More's traveller. For example, while Raphael lays out the plan of the Utopian city in great verbal detail, he neglects to mention where the governor of the city – the city's locus of executive power – is to be found. The market that lies at the heart of each district of each city is also marked by an absence, in this case the absence of money, which has been excluded from Utopian society. Power and money thus occupy gaps or empty spaces within the political geography of Utopia. These empty spaces mark Utopia's difference from the England criticized by Raphael. They also mark, for Marin, places of argument awaiting and prefiguring an as-yet unformulated theory of society – Marx's – in an era of capitalism.[9] They are, says Marin, '*terræ incognitæ* qui *figurent*, dans le texte de l'*Utopie*, ce que les concepts de la théorie sociale liront plus tard comme le texte même de l'histoire'.[10] The 'théorie sociale' in question is that of Marx.

Marin is here working between theory and the early modern.[11] His careful reading against the grain of More's text produces some brilliant insights in *Utopiques*. What I wish to observe though is that, even as it presents Utopia in terms of space, Marin's analysis is in fact driven by time: the historical time that produces

[5] Louis Marin, 'Le Maintenant utopique', in *Stratégies de l'utopie, coll. du Centre Thomas More*, ed. by Pierre Furter and Gérard Raulet (Paris: Galilée, 1979), pp. 246–52 (p. 250).

[6] Marin, *Utopiques*, p. 9.

[7] Marin, 'Le Neutre, le jeu: temps de l'utopie' [1978], in *Politiques de la représentation*, ed. by Alain Cantillon *et al.* (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 2005), pp. 11–28 (p. 12).

[8] Marin, *Utopiques*, p. 182.

[9] Marin, *Utopiques*, pp. 149–84.

[10] Marin, *Utopiques*, p. 185.

[11] On this topic see *Theory and the Early Modern*, ed. by Michael Moriarty and John O'Brien, *Paragraph*, 29.1 (2006). For a wider discussion of Marin's working method in this area, see Isabelle Thomas-Fogiel, 'Louis Marin philosophe?', in Cantillon, Fabre and Rougé (eds), pp. 163–84 (pp. 166–8).

Marx. That retro-projective approach imposes limitations on Marin's engagement with More's text and the tradition it inaugurates.

The first of these is that by focusing as he does on utopian space, Marin pays insufficient attention to utopian time, by which I mean both the place of time in utopian writing and the place of utopian writing in time. Much of what he has to say in *Utopiques* about the conception of utopian space is implicitly temporal in nature. To say – as we have seen Marin doing – that Utopia is neither England nor America and neither the Old World nor the New World, for example, is to rely on a temporalized conception of geographical space. This temporalized conception is self-evidently true in the case of worlds designated as 'old' and 'new': space is imagined here as succession in time. Equally, the fact that England and America are simultaneously present in space is a temporal matter, as all simultaneity is.[12] *Utopiques* does not fully acknowledge time as playing a determining role in respect of the spatial play it explores. In his later utopian writings (published in the period 1976–1993), Marin corrects this shortcoming of *Utopiques*, observing that 'l'utopie est prise, saisie, transie dans la catégorie du temps'.[13] How, then, does time relate to utopia? Marin approaches this question in the later articles by applying to time the concept of the 'neutral' that, as we have seen, he considered in *Utopiques* as organizing of utopian space. Descriptions of utopia locate it in the present tense, he observes, but this is a neutral present, in other words, a structure in which contradictions come into dynamic play. This play of contradictions marks the latent emergence in historical time of the new.[14] Utopia, through the play of its parts, thus produces a kind of warp in historical time: the space of a prefiguration.

Marin here reconceives the utopian tradition as engaged in a form of temporo-spatial, rather than purely spatial, play. But his conception of play has not substantially changed. That conception is the second of the two aspects of Marin's thought that impose limitations on the arguments of *Utopiques*. Marin in that study concentrates on the deconstructive play of the text. This form of play reveals itself to the critic in the form of slips, incoherencies and gaps in the space of the textual structure, which Marin sees as unconscious practices that prefigure a later theory, as has already been mentioned. Yet Marin, by focusing on deconstructive play, pays insufficient attention to the imaginative play that takes place at the surface of utopian texts and connects these texts in historical time. Marin, in *Utopiques*, can be sensitive to this form of play within the text of More's *Utopia*: he comments for example on all the suggestively self-deconstructing Utopian names invented by More – starting with the no-place of 'Utopia' itself – that I mentioned at the beginning of this article. It is telling, though, that Marin never asks how these two forms of deconstructive play – one conscious and the other unconscious – might be related to one another as part of a utopian tradition

[12] See Guillaume Pigeard de Gurbert, *La Fable du temps: l'espace, l'être et ses simulacres philosophiques* (Belval: Éditions Circé, 2023, forthcoming).

[13] Marin, 'Maintenant', p. 247. See also Marin, 'Le Neutre'.

[14] Marin, 'Maintenant', p. 251. See also, by Marin, 'Voyages en utopie' [1985], in *Lectures traversières* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1992), pp. 39–49 (p. 40); 'Frontières de Utopia' [1993], in *Politiques de la représentation*, pp. 29–48 (p. 35); and *Utopiques*, p. 344.

that exists in historical time.[15] My two reservations about Marin's utopian work – its conception of play and time – here converge. For it seems to me a potentially fruitful thought that More's *Utopia* makes itself available for the deconstructions and reconstructions of future utopian practitioners by modelling those very processes of serious play for all its readers. Or, put differently, that More's text inaugurates a quarrelsome and inventive tradition which continually looks back to his text in charting new ways forward. This is a tradition to which Marin's work, of course, belongs.

Temporo-spatial invention

Let me explain now in a little more detail why I prefer to see Utopia in terms not of spatial play but of temporo-spatial invention. I describe the invention as temporo-spatial, rather than spatial, to lend due weight to two observations, which are that *Utopia* temporalizes the imaginative space it occupies, and that utopia as a textual tradition inhabits the space–time of literary and philosophical history. And I speak of invention, rather than play, to bring into focus that history as it records responses to More's *Utopia*. In Marin's account, play tends to privilege unconscious processes accessible only to a retro-projective critical vision, and thus to neglect the conscious processes whereby texts in the utopian tradition relate to one another in history. Invention, by contrast, brings two of those relational processes to the fore and into tension. These are the processes of discovery and creation. The tension between these two processes, as Roland Greene has argued, is central to early modern conceptions of the word *invention*: it does not 'compromise' the meaning of the word but 'is that meaning'.[16] The invention of the word *utopia* – about which Marin writes with such insight – exemplifies that constitutive tension. It brings together two of the inventor's practices that are often kept asunder: discovery (discernible here in the selection of the classical root words) and creation (visible in the making of those root words into a fictitious place name). That the invention of *utopia* as a word combines discovery and creation is, I suggest, emblematic of a wider truth. It helps us to understand the travelling and shape-changing course of *Utopia* through history, for this is a travelling history of continuing invention, an invention that looks back to More's *Utopia* in the act of writing over it. Marin in his later publications asks questions about this history as it relates to the emergence of a utopian form of writing.[17] He describes these questions as important. But he never, to my knowledge, addresses them directly.

[15] Stephen Greenblatt makes a similar point in his *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago, IL and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 23–4. See also Eugene D. Hill, 'The Place of the Future: Louis Marin and His "Utopiques"', *Science Fiction Studies* 9.2 (1982): 167–79 (177–8).

[16] Roland Greene, *Five Words: Critical Semantics in the Age of Shakespeare and Cervantes* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), p. 19.

[17] 'Qu'est-ce qui nous permet de parler d'un genre de discours que l'on appelle utopique ? A quels traits textuels, discursifs, le reconnaît-on ? Qu'est-ce qui nous incite à dire d'un discours qu'il est semi-utopique, qu'il comporte des éléments utopiques ?' (Marin, 'Maintenant', p. 246).

Where might one start asking such questions of utopias? An appropriate place for me to do so in this volume, by way of a modest homage to the expertise of its honorand, is early modern France. Early modern French utopianism is shaped by the French humanist Guillaume Budé's response to More's text. Budé's response connects the early Latin reception of More's work to its translation and imitation in France and thus brings More's *Utopia* into the history of French thought. The second edition of More's text was published in 1517 in Paris. Thomas Lupset, who saw the Paris edition through the press of Gilles de Gourmont on Erasmus's behalf, elicited a long letter from Budé and added it prominently to the paratextual materials of his edition.[18] These paratexts included the title page and illustrations, letters and poems of dedication and congratulation, a map of Utopia and scraps of Utopian writing, book and chapter headings and marginal glosses. Budé's letter, having first appeared among these Latin paratexts, became central to the three complete French translations of More's *Utopia* that appeared in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: the 1550 version that Jean Le Blond published in Paris, the revised edition of Le Blond's translation that Barthélémy Aneau issued in 1559 in Lyons and the 1643 translation by Samuel Sorbière published in Amsterdam. Le Blond in 1550 singles out Budé's letter from its surrounding paratextual materials, translates it into French and advertises it in the title of his translation.[19] He thus lends Budé's letter the character of a single authoritative interpretation of More's work. Aneau in 1559 excludes the text of Budé's letter but quotes from it in his introduction to his revised translation of More's text.[20] Sorbière in 1643 repeats the gesture of commending More's work to French readers by looking back to its early reception by one of France's most distinguished humanists.[21]

Budé's letter interests me here for two reasons. It adds a temporal dimension to More's immediately spatial representation of the island and thus confirms Utopia as temporo-spatial in character. And it describes More's work as a process of invention that it both partakes in and prolongs.

It starts with a story of reading. Budé says that he took the book with him to his house in the country and became so absorbed by it that he neglected the management of his household affairs. For the work taught him (the famous legal commentator) to see that the law, as practised in Christian countries, only supports the material greed endemic in humans and that the Christian alternative is to be found in a surprising place – the far-flung island of Utopia – which has organized itself according to the three 'divine institutions' of equality, pacifism and contempt for money.[22] While developing in this way the moral import of More's text, Budé never loses sight of the imaginative play with which it is dexterously intermingled,

[18] See Thomas More, *Utopia: Latin Text and English Translation*, ed. by George M. Logan, Robert M. Adams and Clarence H. Miller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 271–2.

[19] See Terence Cave (ed.), *Thomas More's* Utopia *in Early Modern Europe: Paratexts and Contexts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), pp. 182–3.

[20] See Cave (ed.), pp. 190–3.

[21] See Cave (ed.), pp. 198–9.

[22] More, *Utopia*, pp. 6–19; Le Blond's translation of the letter is in More, *La Description de l'isle d'Utopie ou est comprins le miroer des republiques du monde, et l'exemplaire de vie heureuse*, trans. Jean Le Blond (Paris: Charles l'Angelier, 1550), preface, sigs *2^{v}-*8^{r}.

and he reveals this intermingling by participating fully, for example, in the fiction that More's work tells a true story of New World travel. In so doing, he uses the language of invention, describing Hythloday as having 'invented' (*inventum*) a model of the happy life by means of his foreign travel, and More as having merely adorned that model with his eloquent style.[23] Budé of course knows full well that behind Raphael's travel narrative stands More the creator of a fiction. Budé, we might say, here plays on the two senses of invention by presenting a creation (More's) as a discovery (Raphael's). He repeats the same play when he claims to have discovered that Utopia is also called 'Udepotia', Neverland, a coinage forged by Budé from Greek *oudepote* ('never'). Budé here adds a new item to the list of self-deconstructing names of Greek derivation for More's imaginary island that appear in the work's paratexts, where Utopia is recast as good place ('Eutopia') as much as no-place ('Outopia'),[24] and thus displays a turn of his own inventive wit in emulation of More's. Budé ends his letter by likening More's work to a 'seedbed […] of elegant and useful concepts' for present and future ages.[25] He thus establishes the heuristic value of More's island society to the makers and members of communities located in the here-and-now of the present age and its hereafter.

The early modern French translators and editors of More's text highlight different parts of Budé's response to More's text. Le Blond has Budé vouch for its usefulness and profitability to the state, thus foregrounding Budé's metaphor for the work as a seedbed, a metaphor that reveals a pragmatic conception of politics akin to that of Aristotle in the *Politics*.[26] Aneau, by contrast, recalls Budé's alternative name of 'Udepotia' and uses it to apply Plato's theory of Forms to political philosophy, suggesting that More portrayed in *Utopia* a Form the like of which particular governments strive to be, but in respect of which they are always an imperfect representation.[27] Le Blond and Aneau, then, draw out the contrapuntal energies of Budé's response to More's *Utopia*. They also echo the language of invention that Budé uses to characterize More's work. In 1643, Sorbière does the same, entrenching the language of invention in the early modern French reception of the text.[28]

The early modern French reception of More's text, in which Budé plays a shaping role, reveals the emergence of an inventive utopian tradition which continually looks back to More's text in charting a new way forward. Marin, I suggest, is a direct heir to that tradition. Yet he pays little heed to it. It is true that his later utopian writings, by contrast with *Utopiques*, direct some attention towards the

[23] More, *Utopia*, p. 16.

[24] More, *Utopia*, pp. 18–19.

[25] '[E]legantium utilitumque institutorum seminarium' (Budé in More, *Utopia*, pp. 18–19); 'une pepiniere d'elegantes et utiles institutions' (Budé, trans. Le Blond, in More, *Utopie*, sig. *7^{v}).

[26] For Le Blond, see Cave (ed.), p. 186; for Aristotle, see *Politics*, 6.1, 1289a1–7.

[27] 'Il [More] l'ha nommé, LA REPUBLIQUE D'UTOPIE, c'est-à-dire de nul lieu: et Monsieur Budé […] lha nommé, UDEPOTIE, c'est-à-dire, qui ne fut jamais. Tous deux donnans à entendre que en nul lieu, et en nul temps ne fut; et n'est et ne sera une telle et si bien formée Republique' (Aneau in Cave (ed.), p. 190).

[28] In *Utopia*, Sorbière says, 'on lit une fable aussi ingenieusement inventée qu'on en puisse trouver dans ces livres qui ne sont faits que pour le divertissement de ceux qui les lisent; […] et le jugement du lecteur se purifie et se forme au bon sens, lors mesme qu'il ne pense pas d'en tirer tous ces advantages' (Cave (ed.), pp. 198, 200).

paratextual materials central to that tradition in its emergence. Two of Marin's late utopian writings (first published in 1985 and 1993) focus on the maps found in the 1516 and 1518 Latin editions of *Utopia*. Both articles also mention Budé's coinage, 'Udepotia', along with the others – 'Outopia' and 'Eutopia' – that More places in the paratexts of his work.[29] The later of the two articles here points briefly to the two forms of deconstructive play – one conscious and the other unconscious – that one might hope to relate by reading More with Marin. In a note he added to the Anglophone version of the article, Marin describes the coinages as the fruit of a 'jeu de lettres humaniste', a conscious onomastic juggling that he says operates in two ways: as 'une façon humoristique de déconstruire ce que le nom désigne, un "nulle part"', and as 'une manière de présenter la force d'action de Utopia'.[30] By recasting deconstructive play as a form of humanist invention, Marin here offers an afterthought which stands in contrast with the main text of the article, in which he returns to the idea that he has detected a subterranean 'fissure' in *Utopia*.[31] I describe this as a return because, as in *Utopiques*, the analysis here focuses on an unconscious property of More's work which is produced by the play of its parts, is accessible only to a retro-projective critical vision and functions as the prefiguration of a modernity familiar to the critic. Marin does not ask, in this late article, how the two kinds of deconstructive play it identifies might be related. The approach that he used in *Utopiques* and to which he returned in 1993 thus continues to detach Budé's coinage and the other inventive elements of the early utopian tradition from their history. That history seems to have struck Marin as important even as his own approach took him elsewhere.

Notes on contributor

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[29] Marin, 'Voyages', p. 46; Marin, 'Frontières', pp. 45–6.
[30] Marin, 'Frontières', p. 46.
[31] Marin, 'Frontières', p. 34; compare his *Utopiques*, p. 186.