3

Morus: The Generic Window

I

Can we invent a way of reading More's *Utopia* (1516) so as to recover something of the shock and freshness of its elegant new Latin for the first European readers? Not the components, however, nor even their individual modes, but rather the unaccustomed combination of hitherto unrelated connotations, make up this generic hapax legomenon; and a type of syntax which might ordinarily say "humanism" finds itself oddly transformed as part of a complex message which is itself a kind of semantic "one of a kind".

Even from the outset, however, we have a decision to make which will confront us with two distinct interpretations, inasmuch as Book Two, the properly Utopian part of the text, is known to have been written first. Are we then to reincorporate this philological knowledge, and to treat Book One as a kind of afterthought or cautious and politically prudent (but also daring) recontextualization of the account of the island itself, one which carefully distances Hythloday's enthusiasms and hedges all the bets? Or should we let the present order continue to dictate a processual dynamism in which the Utopian vision emerges dialectically from the very contradictions of both Part One and the historical present? This second alternative reading, and the interpretive decision it calls for (to take More's vision seriously), is reduced and caricatured by the revisionist and anti-Utopian position (which always seems to reemerge in periods of political stagnation) according to which "Utopia" is really a *jeu d'esprit* after all, and the idiotic names (Hythloday = Nonsenso, etc.)[1] are meant to be taken satirically. The best method is always to turn such a problem into a solution in its own right, and to make of this objective and incompatible alternation an interpretive phenomenon at some higher (meta) level.[2] Here reading and interpretation confront the fundamental ethical binary

1 See Paul Turner's translation of Thomas More, *Utopia* (London, 1965 [1516]), p. 8. This view of Utopia as a *jeu d'esprit* (More was a great joker, Erasmus tells us) is classically expressed by C.S. Lewis in *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century* (Oxford, 1954), pp. 167–171.

2 This is, I believe, what Adorno meant by "second reflexion" in *Aesthetic Theory* (Minnesota, 1997), translated by R. Hullot-Kentor, pp. 26–27; or, as far as that goes, what I call metacommentary in the essay of that name in my *The Ideologies of Theory* (Minnesota, 1988 [1970]).

with a vengeance; and are at once asked to take a position on that ideological question *par excellence* which is also the fundamental political one, namely whether Utopias are positive or negative, good or evil.

Yet this is not to be asked first but rather last of all: and the initial interpretive signals, those that revolve the hermeneutic wheel at some outside level of reading and decipherment, will be the generic ones. Genre presumably governs the interpretation of the narrative or representational details within its frame; and in More's text it again offers a relatively stark and global alternative between two possibilities. But they are not, I think, those proposed above between Utopia taken seriously as a social and political project and Utopian thought ridiculed as a pipe dream. Nor does that opposition correspond to Robert C. Elliott's great dialectical proposition that, as a genre, Utopia is the opposite and the structural inversion of satire as such.[3] For what Elliott meant by satire was not anti-political rejection of the unrealistic and fanciful Utopian programs such as the abolition of money and private property, but rather the passionate and prophetic onslaught on current conditions and on the wickedness and stupidity of human beings in the fallen world of the here and now. Put this way, we can see that Elliott's generic alternation rather corresponds basically to the opposition between the two books of *Utopia* itself:[4] and it follows that the generic interpretation of the text as a whole will very much depend on which part we take to be prior and to offer the fundamental hermeneutic key. Thus, if we posit the priority of Book One, we will want to foreground satire and its generic structure; if Book Two (and insofar as Utopia as a genre does not yet exist), it will be travel narrative that sets the generic agenda.

II

Whatever else it does, travel narrative marks Utopia as irredeemably other, and thus formally, or virtually by definition, impossible of realization: it thus reinforces Utopia's constitutive secessionism, a withdrawal or "delinking" from the empirical and historical world which, from More to Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia*, problematizes its value as a global (if not universal) model and uncomfortably refocuses the readerly gaze on that very issue of its practical political inauguration which the form promised to avoid in the first place. (These contradictions are clearly modified when Utopia is set in a temporal future rather than at a geographical distance, but after all today space is once again on the postmodern agenda.) Yet Utopian politics takes place within this gap between

3 Robert C. Elliott, *The Shape of Utopia* (Chicago, 1970), Chapter 1.

4 The definitive study of the relationship between Books One and Two (the latter having according to all evidence been composed *before* the former) is J.H. Hexter's *More's Utopia: The Biography of an Idea* (Princeton, 1952).

Utopus' newly created island and its non-Utopian neighbors: and this gap is the point at which More's Utopianism begins to seem indistinguishable from Machiavelli's practice (whose codification, as noted above, is virtually contemporaneous with More's text).

As with the imaginary construction of the chimera, however, even a no-place must be put together out of already existing representations. Indeed the act of combination and the raw materials thereby combined themselves constitute the ideological message. We cannot try to read Book Two as a generic travel narrative without making an effort to see the place and to sense that exoticism it uniquely offers. I think myself of the figures in Dante or Giotto: realistic statuary, but without any of the technical detail and complex and perspectival verisimilitude of the Renaissance – hooded forms, whose robes and folds mark a conceptual relationship to the classical world, while their monkish overtones retain connotations of the medieval and Catholicism. Yet the Utopians will have to learn about both these family likenesses from their visitor Hythloday, who brings with him both the Greek classics and the Christian gospels. They confirm the family likeness by recognizing Christianity as their ethos, and also by way of the revelation that in fact they are descendants of Greeks shipwrecked, many generations earlier. Yet if this island has nothing of the empirical exoticism of Cortez's Mexico, or of that China and Japan to which Columbus tried again and again to sail, it is nonetheless situated in the Pacific, between Ceylon and America, and deserves at least some quotient of a properly New World association. In fact, as Arthur Morgan has pointed out in some detail, the association suggests a distant identification with the Inca empire, whose "communistic" social system has not ceased to fascinate the West down to our own time (as in Godelier's reclassification of it under the category of Marx's Asiatic mode of production).[5]

Nor must we omit a final cultural association here: for despite his subsequent ferocious denunciations of Luther, there cannot but breathe through the text of Erasmus' friend something of the spirit of what will only later be called Protestantism, a milder fellow-traveling sympathy with reform easily chastened by very real political dangers and (at least in More's case) open to other incursions of the unconscious, particularly of a sexual nature (he seems to have ceased all sexual relations at a relatively early age, and to have worn a hair shirt the rest of his life). But this flavor of Protestantism, although registered in some practical details (the priests marry, for example), is rather to be understood in the cultural sense, as a return to that spirit of primitive Christianity which is also a discovery and a new intellectual enthusiasm (very much like that humanism with which it is at first intimately related).

Greece, the medieval, the Incas, Protestantism: these are the four crucial elements of More's Utopian text, the four raw materials of its representation.

5 Arthur Morgan, *Nowhere Was Somewhere* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1946). And see note 19 below.

Utopia is a synthesis of these four codes or representational languages, these four ideologemes, but only on condition it be understood that they do not fold back into it without a trace, but retain the dissonances between their distinct identities and origins, revealing the constant effort of a process that seeks to combine them without effacing all traces of what it wishes to unify in the first place. For these four reference points include superstructure and base, that is to say, contemporaneous or even modern intellectual movements and passions along with social institutions barely surviving from the past. Their combination is a whole political program and in effect implicitly identifies those still-existing social spaces in which the new ideological values might be incarnated.

Thus Greece clearly means humanism and the conceptual enthusiasm aroused by the rediscovery of the linguistic possibilities of the classical languages; it stands for a unique perspective in which language and thought are once again for one long moment inseparable, in which the philosophical richness of the ancient texts is grasped as being at one with the stylistic and syntactical richness of the culture languages of antiquity. Norbert Elias has observed that this extraordinary revival is comparable to nothing quite so much as to the rediscovery of Marxism and the great dialectical texts and traditions in the 1960s:[6] an excitement that identifies a forgotten or repressed moment of the past as the new and subversive, and learns the dialectical grammar of a Hegel or an Adorno, a Marx or a Lukács, like a foreign language that has resources unavailable in our own. The style of classical Greek is thus at one with the discovery of an alternate conceptual universe (even the very modern notion of a language revolution is faintly present in More, in the theme of the old and the new languages spoken by the Utopian population);[7] and this glimpse of the fleeting unity between thinking and syntax will rapidly generate the first new image of the role of the intellectual since the Augustinian vision of the priesthood and the emergence of the various orders. Indeed, these new humanistic intellectuals will, Max Weber tells us, lay their own claim to political power and entertain a brief but intense ambition to become a new ruling class comparable to that of the Chinese mandarins, equally text-oriented and prepared to assume the functions of a heroic bureaucracy.[8] Ironically, More himself prematurely fills just such a role, and his tragic end offers at least one figure for the general collapse of humanist intellectuals' political project (who are replaced by the more familiar and more successful

6 See Norbert Elias, "Thomas Morus' Staatskritik", in *Utopieforschung*, ed. Wilhelm Vosskamp (Frankfurt, 1985), Volume III, p. 114.

7 See, on Utopia's two languages, Emile Pons, "Les langues imaginaires dans le voyage utopique", *Revue de littérature comparée*, XIII (1931).

8 See *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (Oxford, 1946) "Politics as a Vocation", p. 93. The humanist failure is narrated in a somewhat different way by Lucien Goldmann in *The Hidden God* (*Le Dieu caché*) (Paris, 1959).

grande bourgeoisie). Paradoxically, although *Utopia* can in that sense be read as a kind of manifesto for just such humanist intellectuals, the society it represents does not contain any, for its realization is meant to spell the end of all such (Utopian) political projects.

This, then, is the point at which a humanist ideology gives way to a Protestant one, and in which the description of the political and economic features of the Utopian system (if one may call them that) give way to an account of its relationship to religion (pluralist and deist, but excluding atheism) and of its priests and lay orders. In effect, Protestantism adds a third language (Hebrew) to the twin arsenal of humanism; and it is crucial to grasp the way in which both these revivals (of the classics and of primitive Christianity) are felt to be avant-garde causes. Together they constitute the Novum of the day: that is to say, a conceptual and an ideological revolution whose innovation constitutively includes passion and excitement within it ("les grands âges sont révolus," as Gargantua puts it).

These are the superstructural impulses of *Utopia*. Its other two dimensions then correspond to an imagination of institutions, and in particular of institutions capable of embodying the spirit of the two intellectual movements (Plato's *Republic*, early Christian communism) and indeed of housing it in a space of possibility. In addition, the second set of options has the advantage of offering an already existent and fully realized world empire on the one hand, and an enclave structure on the other, which can persist locally within a social space of a wholly different type.

I am tempted to see the Inca model as a way of incorporating the economic into More's vision; but also as a strategy for effacing the political problem of the persistence of the ruler and the power center within an allegedly egalitarian republic (it will be remembered that some of the most powerful readings in Louis Marin's classic *Utopiques* turned precisely on the cartographic slippage between markets and administrative centers).[9]

As for what I have called the medieval element, however, it is to be understood as a uniquely European social institution, namely the monastery as such. More's youthful experiences in a monastery document his admiration for this institution, about which Weber said that in the early Middle Ages its various forms constituted enclaves within which rationality developed, in isolation from the surrounding agricultural society (think, for example, of the rationalization of time for purposes of orderly work and prayer alike, and also that of space in the way in which the buildings were constructed and the plantations laid out).[10] It may well have been Henry VIII's closing of the monasteries and his plundering of their collective treasures that generated More's ultimate refusal far more than abstract questions of belief or of papal authority. At any rate,

9 Louis Marin, *Utopiques* (Paris, 1973), Chapter 6.

10 See Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York, 1958 [1904–5]), p. 118.

the kinship of the Utopian structure with the monastery has often been noted, and the great Utopian experiments of the Jesuits in eighteenth-century Paraguay come as a belated confirmation of this common spirit (when they were not indeed themselves inspired by the example of the textual predecessor). In this sense, the surviving institution of the monastery may be said to play something of the role in More's imagination of Utopia that the institution of the traditional common lands – the *mir* in Russia, the *ejido* in Mexico – played in nineteenth-century socialist thinking (not least in that of Marx himself, as in the famous letter to Vera Zasulich).[11] Nor is it without significance that both these social realities – the Inca empire and the monastic compound – are in the process of wholesale dissolution in More's own time: the former by way of the Spanish conquest, the latter by way of Henry VIII's reforms. We can see, in the impact of globalization in our own period, that historical processes in which older institutions and cultures are tangibly being destroyed before our own eyes tend to arouse very special kinds of political passions and indignations, which it does not seem to me far-fetched to attribute to More himself (particularly in the light of his denunciation of enclosure in Book One).

It is also important to register an extraordinary interpretive moment in Christopher Kendrick's pathbreaking essay on *Utopia* in which what are essentially the same four dimensions or cardinal points in the text (he does not thematize them as such), are reread as reenactments of four distinct types of what Marx called precapitalist modes of production. The lengthy passage is important enough to be quoted in full:

> What are the ultimate elements of Utopian society? It represents an imaginary combination of modes of production, including major aspects of at least four distinct modes. First, its economic arrangements are partly modeled upon those of tribal communism: consider, for example, the utopian practice of sending retinues to the country to manage two-year farming stints, with the "communalization" of agrarian and urban labor that this entails; and consider the relative arbitrariness of the household or family that obtains in the Utopia, and the consequent predominance of a quasitribal group structure. The encounter with tribal communism in the New World doubtless provoked

11 March 8, 1881: "Thus the analysis given in *Capital* does not provide any arguments for or against the viability of the village community, but the special research into this subject which I conducted, and for which I obtained the material from original sources, has convinced me that this community is the fulcrum of Russia's social revival, but in order that it might function in this way one would first have to eliminate the destructive influences which assail it from every quarter and then to ensure the conditions normal for spontaneous development." Marx and Engels, *Selected Correspondence* (Moscow, 1975), p. 320. There has been a political revitalization of the theme of enclosure and the commons since globalization: see Midnight Notes Collective, "The New Enclosures", in *Midnight Oil* (Brooklyn, 1992); and Naomi Klein, "Reclaiming the Commons", *New Left Review*, No. 9 (May/June 2001).

> Utopian communism, yet More's island – mirror for England that it is – hardly takes the print of New World tribalism in any sort of serious way; the more important subtext, which might be considered to be activated by the New World experience, is that of Germanic communal society (and this is especially obvious not so much in the economic as the political sphere, i.e. in the resemblance of the utopian system of political representation to the immemorial English municipal system). Yet, utopian communism can hardly be accounted for as a modernized version of the tribal system, it must also be drawn from the representation of "accomplished" communism, a mode which may be assumed to exist in More's time insofar as its social relations inhere in the feudal mode of production. The accomplished nature of utopian communism pronounces itself in such features as the insistence upon the social rights adhering to work, the militant rejection of any form of private possession, the assumption of an existing abundance of goods as the system's premise, and so forth. Third, *Utopia* "regresses" to the classical mode of production for its emphasis upon urban crafts, for the sweet reason of the hedonistic utopian philosophy, and – perhaps most obviously – for its slavery. Fourth, the description builds mainly upon feudalism in its representation of the household as the central social institution, and of religion as the naturally dominant force of social cohesion.[12]

Kendrick thus identifies a kind of substructure within the Utopian text in which all the precapitalist modes of production live on in a residual way (as for capitalism, Louis Marin has famously detected its absent, impending emergence in the holes in the Utopian map, most notably the missing space of the market).[13] The argument is that late feudalism constitutes a chaotic transitional period in which traces of all these modes survive, and thus in which what is positive (or "Utopian" in the customary sense of the word) in each of them can be separated off by the political Imaginary and combined to produce a synthesis of desirable social features. In the preparatory 1857 notebooks for *Capital*,[14] indeed Marx identified what seemed to be five distinct precapitalist modes: primitive communism or tribal society; the Asiatic mode (later vulgarized by Wittfogel as "oriental despotism"); the ancient mode, which is to say the *polis* and the slavery on which it is based; the Germanic mode (yeomen farmers who meet periodically in an assembly or *Ding*); and feudalism. In fact, it would seem that Marx theorized the Asiatic mode as an organic development out of primitive communism, on the basis of the continuity in

12 Christopher Kendrick, "More's *Utopia* and Uneven Development", in *boundary two*, XIII, 2/3 (Winter/Spring 1985), p. 245. (This text is not included in his important recent book, *Utopia, Carnival and Commonwealth in Renaissance England* [Toronto, 2004]).

13 See note 9 above.

14 Marx, *Grundrisse* (London, 1973). The section of these notebooks that Marx himself entitled "Forms which Precede Capitalist Production" is to be found on pp. 471–514.

agriculture production as such.[15] In any case, any future theory of the periodic reemergence of the Utopian text (and not only this inaugural one of Thomas More) needs to take into account the Marin/Kendrick proposition that such apparently substantive visions arise from the "kaleidoscopic" vision of a class "without a project or nation",[16] that is to say, without an articulated analysis of the situation (Marin) and without the lineaments of a political strategy (this might well characterize our own post-Cold War and post-neoliberal positions). At any rate, what is productive about the Utopian text can on this view best be grasped if we take it to be a registering apparatus for detecting the feeblest positive signals from the past and the future and for bricolating and combining them and thereby producing what looks like a representational picture. I would only want to add that these elements and impulses need to be translated into cultural or ideological representations in order to be effectively mediated into the present situation.

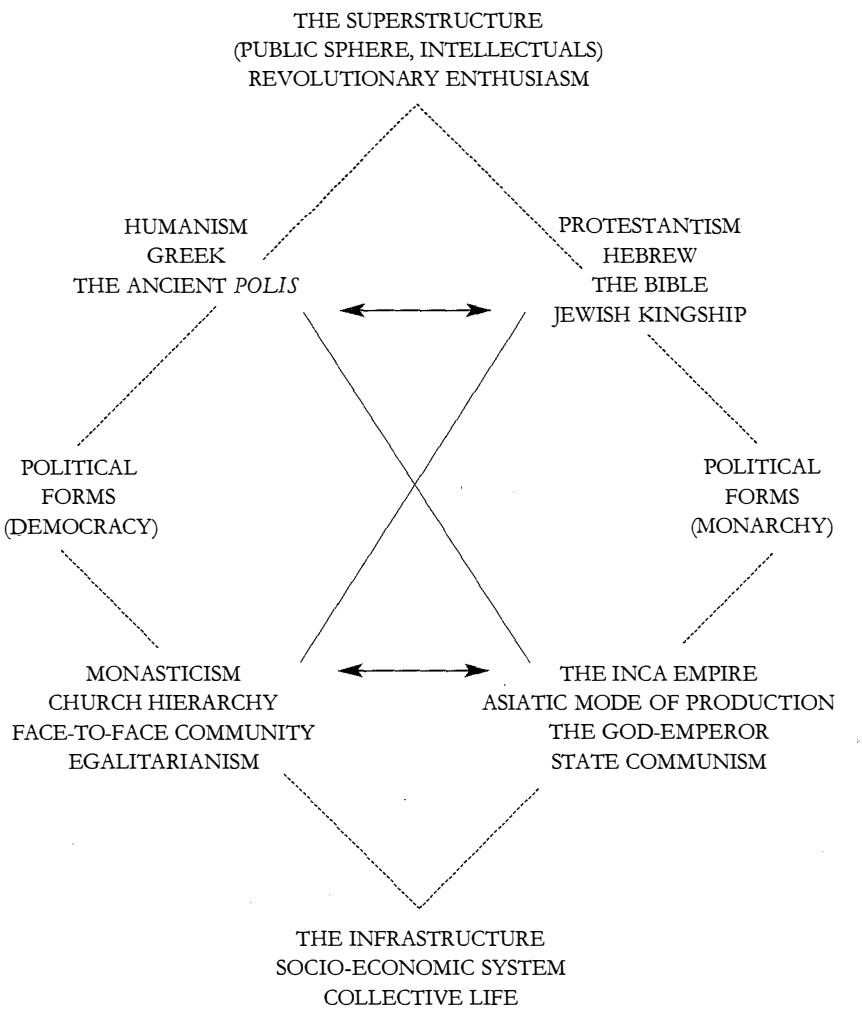
Thus I would want to reinterrogate my own picture of the fourfold ideological mediations in More for their relevance to later Utopias and to Utopian thought in general. Is it enough to identify two groups of subjective and objective components, where the first includes the example of conceptual and linguistic speculation and excitement alongside a vision of subjective purification and action on the self; and the second includes global and local institutions, an economic structure and a self-contained machine for organizing and living the everyday?

Let us then map out these four poles as follows, according to the Greimas semiotic square.[17] We will first grasp the twin impulses of humanism and Protestantism as related yet contradictory poles, on the one hand the rediscovery of Greek and on the other the acquisition of Hebrew. Both of these positions and passions are thus text-based, and indeed mark out the historical possibilities of intellectuals in this early Renaissance era. Their Utopian reconciliation or resolution is certainly that of humanism itself – after all,

15 Engels published his own version of the pre-capitalist modes of production in 1884 after Marx's death, under the title. *Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*, significantly omitting the Asiatic mode from his enumeration. Obviously, the existence of a properly Marxian theory of the latter could not have been known until the first publication of the *Grundrisse* in 1939: since then, debate on the subject has been extensive, not to say interminable.

16 Kendrick, pp. 245–246; and see below. And on the relationship between Utopia and the construction of the nation, now see Phillip Wegner, *Imaginary Communities* (California, 2002).

17 This encapsulates the principal thesis of Marin's *Utopiques*, namely that (following the terminology of the Greimas semiotic rectangle) the Utopian text is not a synthesis of opposites or what Greimas calls a complex term; rather it is a synthesis of their negations or in other words a neutral term. (I will provide a reading of such neutralization in Chapter 11.) At any rate, the Utopian text is accordingly not to be seen as a vision or a full representation, but rather as a semiotic operation, a process of interaction between contradictions and contraries which generates the illusion of a model of society. I have discussed Marin's book in an earlier essay, "Of Islands and Trenches", in *The Ideologies of Theory* (Minnesota, 1988), Volume II, pp. 75–101.



More's friend Erasmus encompassed both languages, both cultures and texts, his mediation seeming to offer some Utopian possibility in its own right, until history and the ferocious factionalisms and religious wars of the age demonstrated the fragility of this achievement (and determined a singular prudence in the conduct of the scholar himself). But I believe that the Weberian account gives us a more striking version of these contradictions and the syntheses in which they were unable to be resolved and *aufgehoben*. For this whole dimension of our semiotic square is that of superstructures: of the intellectual missions and vocations of the emergent secular intellectual: but it might be even better described in terms of a nascent public sphere. It is that public sphere that is in reality and in history unable to come into being: that situation of mandarin governmental power and authority that the humanist

intellectuals are unable to achieve (owing not least to the very virus of Protestantism which the contradiction underscores).[18]

Yet there is another Utopian element we must not omit in articulating this first level: for both elements are driven by an intellectual passion – that of reappropriating the original text, whether in Greek or in Hebrew – an element characterized by that highly suspicious word *enthusiasm*: this is the intellectual vocation at its most feverish and committed, at the very height of its potential excitement, in a mission that more than any other seems to concentrate what defines the intellectual as such, namely the relationship to writing. Not the Socratic commitment to ideas, but rather this one of the text and its translation – Dürer's image of Saint Jerome toiling over his version of the sacred pages – marks out the space and function of the modern intellectual. Is this to say that Utopia is defined (and limited) by its social determination as the expression of intellectuals as a caste? Not necessarily; but this one certainly is, and it is no accident that More's career – uniquely, in the early modern – runs the gamut of possibilities of intellectuals as such, from humanist and counselor to princes all the way to dissident and martyr.

This choice of terms (and I have observed elsewhere that it is the initial positioning of the terms that constitutes the interpretive act as such) then assigns the remaining pair to that dimension in which they are mere cancellations of the first two (contradictory) terms. I posit the Inca empire as the negation in exoticism of everything the classical world stands for in the Western tradition: discovering the New World is indeed a rather fundamental cancellation of the classical tradition, inscribing a very different kind of empire and a very different kind of political formation in the place of everything codified in Greece and Rome. Indeed, that it should be assigned, by Maurice Godelier,[19] to Marx's early category of the Asiatic mode of production suggests that, repositioned in the context of the Western classical references, the Incas could only be fantasized in terms of Asia, the great other of both Greece – the Persian empire – and Rome – the Carthaginians (as in Flaubert's *Salammbô*).

As for monasteries and Protestantism, it is only too clear how the latter cancels the former – the liquidation is a physical one and underwrites the separation from the church of both Luther himself and Henry VIII. I want to understand the process in a more general way, not as the opposition between two religious principles, but rather as that obtaining between a kind of individualist inner-directedness and the communal forms taken by the orders. For it is this last essentially social element that will bind together the pair of lower forms: both

18 See note 8 above.

19 Maurice Godelier, *Horizon, trajets marxistes en anthropologie* (Paris, 1973), pp. 83–92 and 343–355. Godelier is among the most eminent anthropologists to defend the value of Marx's concept of the "Asiatic mode", which he has rescued from Orientalism by application to the Inca empire.

are socio-economic representations, and their juxtaposition along this particular semiotic axis underscores the uniqueness of both as modes of social organization and forms of economic production and distribution, rather than as forms of power. Thus, in this semiotic context (that of the lower level of the square), the Inca empire becomes visible as a kind of state-organized communism (rather than as a structure of imperial power crowned by a god-king); while not the hierarchical organization of the order and the Church itself is foregrounded in the other term so much as the egalitarian nature of the monastic community. This level then expresses what in the previous chapter I called a socio-economic system, rather than the thematics of a form of government.

It is thus this last – or the political in its most specialized form – which is inscribed in the two lateral axes of the square, the twin negations of each of the two positive terms. For here the combination of the terms *Protestant* and *Inca empire* draws the first of these into the realm of the content of Hebrew scripture, namely the history of the Jewish kings; while now the vision we have of the Incas rotates until its properly political dimension, that unique form of imperial power minimized in the lower or neutral axis, comes preeminently into the light.

Meanwhile a comparable semic reorganization takes place on the other side of the square: as C.S. Peirce puts it in another context:

> a conception is framed according to a certain precept, [then] having so obtained it, we proceed to notice features of it which, though necessarily involved in the precept, did not need to be taken into account to construct the conception. These features we perceive take radically different shapes; and these shapes, we find, must be particularized, or decided between, before we can gain a more perfect grasp of the original conception.[20]

So now, a humanism considered primarily as an intellectual passion, and a project of the public sphere, becomes reoriented around its political content, namely the structure of the ancient *polis* (including, or not, its evolution into the unique political organization of the Roman empire); and by the same token, the monastic order now begins to exhibit its essentially spatial nature as a small face-to-face political community, a kind of medieval version of the *polis*.

We thus observe the emergence of a medial band which cuts across the square, and in effect separates the superstructure (humanism in its two linguistic forms, Greek and Hebrew) from something like an infrastructure in the twin forms of socio-economic communism. This medial band is the place of the political in our earlier sense, and its position here dramatizes its isolation from a daily life in which superstructure and infrastructure commingle. For unique historical reasons, in other words, the political dimension of More's

20 C.S. Peirce, *Collected Papers* (Harvard, 1931), Volume I, p. 262.

Utopia has been disjoined from society, very much after the fashion of the royal court itself, and has thus, as a kind of enclave, been opened up for the play and reconstruction of the Utopian imagination, which indeed combines small political groups with monarchies of utterly different dimensions, in a federalism which exemplifies Polybius' mixed forms of government in a very different way from the standard recipes of the tradition.[21] The heterogeneous elements of More's peculiar text, all the while combining to produce the prototypical Utopian image we inherit from him, at one and the same time betray the peculiar and infrequent constellation of historical elements that make the emergence of that text possible in the first place.

III

But now we need to turn to *Utopia*, not as travel narrative, but as satire: which is to say that we must now reorganize the text around Book One. For however the text emits its various signals of otherness and difference, the obvious has often been remarked, namely that the fifty-four cities of Utopia replicate the fifty-four boroughs of London, so that More's imaginary island is simply a literal inversion of the actually existing kingdom of Henry VIII. The alleged Utopian vision is therefore little more than a point-by-point commentary on English affairs and the English situation, and its structure falls apart into so many opinions and punctual thoughts for improving laws, customs and conditions, at which point Book Two begins to resemble the later Book One in form and effect. This is certainly the case, and there can have been few "satiric" texts quite so savage (and Science-Fictional) as the famous one:

> Your sheep ... which are usually so tame and so cheaply fed, begin now, according to report, to be so greedy and wild that they devour human beings themselves and devastate and depopulate fields, houses and towns.[22]

It is a grim inversion of LaBruyère on the peasants;[23] and a swift and figurative operation in which the sinful passions of the human beings begin to infect placid animals, while the former have become themselves implicitly bestialized.

21 Polybius, *Rise of the Roman Empire* (Penguin, 1979), pp. 303–318. This traditional classification scheme has been revised and applied, with extraordinary originality and suggestiveness, to present-day globalization by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in *Empire* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 162–164 and pp. 314–316. See also Antonio Negri, *Insurgencies* (Minnesota, 1999), pp. 67–69 and 107–110.

22 Thomas More, *Works* (New Haven, 1963–1997), Volume IV, p. 65–67.

23 Auerbach quotes the famous passage from the *Caractères* in *Mimesis* (Princeton 1953 [1946]), p. 366: "One sees certain ferocious animals, male and female, scattered over the countryside, black, livid, and burned by the sun, bound to the soil which they dig and turn over with unconquerable stubbornness; they have a sort of articulate voice, and when they stand up they exhibit a human face, and in fact they are men [et en effet ils sont des hommes]."

Yet the interest of the two books and their radical distinction in mode lies primarily in the problem of the transformation of the one into the other, and according to our present scheme (the alternative reading according to which we deduce Book Two from Book One) poses the question of how the fantastic and Utopian representation has been somehow derived or generated from the incisive and "realistic" debate on current conditions. Here again I think Kendrick is on the right track when he asserts that England "provides [Utopia] with the raw material from which [the text] is spun":

> The content of the political unconscious is largely composed of a group of received social representations ... The political unconscious may be imagined ... as working something like a kaleidoscope: compulsively breaking down, scrambling, and reassembling its collection of "social images" from the past of ideology, in response to the recurrent dilemmas, conflicts, traumas appertaining as a matter of course to the daily life imposed by all hitherto existing modes [of production].[24]

It is worth pausing at this point to underscore the production process of the Utopian text: that process has a conceptual level (as Lévi-Strauss taught us long ago for the case of tribal stories or myths), in which it not only thinks through figures but also solves contradictions. *Utopia* thus has a specifically aesthetic level, about which most of the literary critics have been singularly unhelpful, and eager to agree with the stereotypical boredom of the form; but what if there were also a level in which the text proves not only to be what Plekhanov called the "social equivalent", the correlative namely of ideology and of a class standpoint, but also a kind of gestural equivalent? Here the Utopian text and its mechanisms would correspond to something like an activity in daily life, and would constitute a rehearsal of the latter on the purely symbolic level, offering a kind of supplementary pleasure derived from the latter's imitation. I would want at least provisionally to distinguish this pleasure from what obtains on the representational level, where I want to suggest that it is to be theorized in terms of miniaturization. The activity satisfactions of Utopia are to be sure closely related to that aesthetic or representational process; but we gain something in the way of insight by trying to classify the operations involved, which it is far too general to subsume under the old aesthetic catchall of play (Marin's work targets a very specific kind of spatial play, geometrical and cartographic, which is theoretically and diagnostically distinct from the old anthropological category).

I have already observed above that we need to grasp the Utopian operation in terms of home mechanics, inventions and hobbies, returning it to that dimension of puttering and active *bricolage* from which Lévi-Strauss' source in

24 Kendrick, "More's *Utopia* and Uneven Development", pp. 243–244.

Dickens immediately distanced it (Mr Weller is a naïf artist, building a garden like the inspired planners of the Watts Towers or the Chandighar Rock Garden).[25] For it is precisely this dimension of a hobby-like activity, which anyone can do in their own spare time, at home, in your garage or workshop, that organizes the readership of the Utopian text, a better mousetrap which you also can emulate, thinking of new twists on existing laws and customs and coming up with ingenious models of your own. (More was a most unlikely candidate for the launching of this peculiar new form, into which generations of crackpots have enthusiastically plunged.) Utopia is thus by definition an amateur activity in which personal opinions take the place of mechanical contraptions and the mind takes its satisfaction in the sheer operations of putting together new models of this or that perfect society.[26] Perhaps the printing press and the enlargement of literacy in the early Tudor period encouraged such activities among More's contemporaries (just as the later industrial age will do in the late nineteenth-century US, one of the most fertile moments for the propagation of Utopias of all kinds).

I would not want this to serve as a sketch for some more immediate definition of Utopia as a genre, however, for I suspect that it is rather an ad hoc combination of various genres at any given time; while Elliott's notion of "satire" seems best taken as the designation of a mode.[27] In fact, just as the travel narrative presided over our discussion of Book Two, without ever coinciding absolutely with the genre in question, so also here, in the political commentary and motivation of Book One, a number of traditional genres propose themselves (either positively or negatively) which may help to specify the problem of the Utopian genre more sharply even if they do not "define" it. It seems to me that it is helpful to juxtapose the Utopian process of production with two other discursive operations which have received a certain analytical attention in contemporary or post-semiotic times: these are, on the one hand the writing of constitutions (an activity which will reach its paroxysm in the eighteenth century, but which is not extinct even today, in the two periods of decolonization and of the post-communist states), and on the other the political manifesto, in terms of which Althusser attempted to reread Machiavelli's *Prince*. Alongside these discursive modes, two others may be adduced, namely the Mirror for Princes, of all these genres the closest to More's own time, and all the more relevant for Hythloday's passionate refusal to assume that vocation of courtier and counselor to the king that the real-life More himself was about to embrace; and that of great prophecy, a discourse which equally combines Elliott's two modes of satiric denunciation of a fallen present and the evocation of a society transfigured, and whose strange lack of fit with *Utopia* itself ought to suggest a useful differentiation between the prophetic and the Utopian.

25 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *La Pensée sauvage* (Paris, 1962), p. 26.

26 But see, on Utopian opinion, Chapter 4.

27 See note 3, and also Robert C. Elliott, *The Power of Satire* (Princeton, 1960).

The genre of the written constitution would seem best initially approached by way of a distinction with that other discursive form which is the individual law, and which is presumably constructed as an interdiction on specific anti-social acts (if not a way of clarifying exchanges and agreements).[28] In that case, it would seem as though the constitution as such were devised to forestall certain kinds of political and historical events and catastrophes: most notably revolutions, but also more limited types of power seizure and power imbalance. Constitutions are thus structured, not to define and judge individual acts, but rather to prevent historical events of specific types. The question is thereby raised, for the Utopian text, whether this kind of management of history is at all comparable with the form of a text of which it has so often been asserted that it is designed to preclude history altogether. Must Utopia then not implicitly or explicitly define history itself by way of a splitting or a reduction in which it is bad history – political history – which is channeled into that category and neutralized (what Marx calls "pre-history", for example), while what remains – something like Utopian everyday life, perhaps – then emerges as truly utopian? More's text assuredly gives us something like a constitution of Utopian society, including any number of laws and customs; but it is an imaginary constitution and a thought experiment which is designed to forestall, not historical events as such, but rather private property as such.

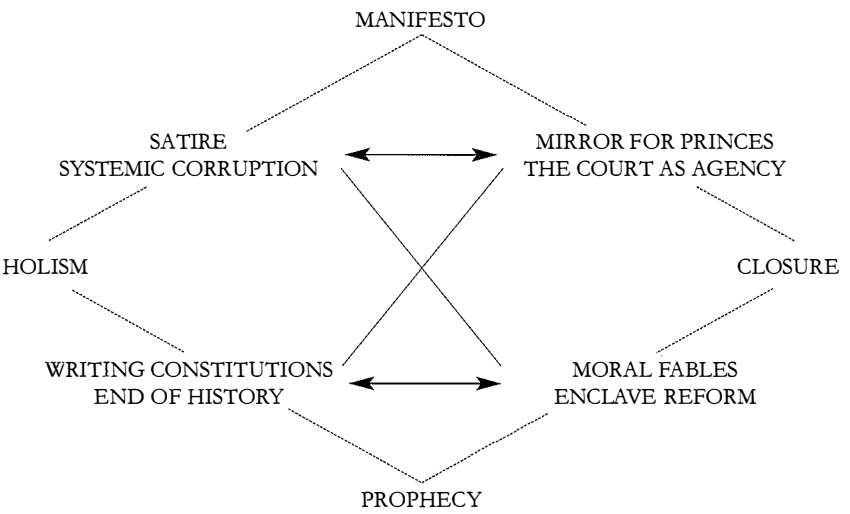
Meanwhile, it is clear enough that Utopus' foundational gesture is not meant to be a call to practical political action or to emulation; and that whatever its undoubted impact, More's text is fundamentally different from Machiavelli's in its effects and consequences (it was not even translated into English until 1551). To be sure, we must at least try to separate the historical and structural uniqueness of Machiavelli's own discursive position from that implied in other manifestos; so it is not clear whether Althusser only and exclusively has Machiavelli in mind when he defines a manifesto as a focus simultaneously on the nature or knowledge of the political in general and on a specific and concrete political problem in particular such that this focus includes the identification of agency and the question of political practice as such.[29] At any rate this shifts the problem of the Utopian text in a new direction, displacing the old anti-Utopian objection that the practical question of implementation is never raised in the standard Utopias (or is at least given over to some pious liberal hope for reasoning and persuasion, for a peaceful common-sense transition), and foregrounding on the contrary the question of whether Utopia has any formulable relationship to the political in the first place. It is a question which then yet again replaces that of the nature of the political on the agenda:

28 And see on constitutions, Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley, 1969), Part Three, Chapter 1, pp. 323–401; and on laws or the "casus", André Jolles, *Einfache Formen* (Tübingen, 1982).
29 Louis Althusser, *Écrits philosophiques et politiques*, Volume II (Paris, 1995), p. 59.

thus, if one follows Carl Schmitt's formula, that the political is first and foremost the decision about friend and foe,[30] it is clear enough that this is a central and constitutive issue both in Machiavelli and in Marx and Engels, but less certain how it could be raised on the occasion of More's vision of Utopia or even of his positions in Book One.

There at any rate politics and the political are framed by the absolutist court as such, a context which sunders means from ends far more decisively than in the two classic manifestos (in which the means – nation or proletariat – are at one with the ends). Utopus must somehow abolish himself and his monarchy in order to allow Utopia to come into existence; nor is the prophetic voice and the individual prophet more clearly in evidence in the new collective scheme. The two final generic references are thus somehow shortcircuited by the gap they imply between the individual leader and the collective state of things.

Thus in some sense the Utopian form (genre or not) comes into being to complement these various imperfect genres and to fulfill or to forestall each of them in unexpected ways. It is a paradox that a form so absolutely dependent on historical circumstance (it flourishes only in specific conditions and on certain rare historical occasions) should give the appearance of being supremely ahistorical; that a form which inevitably arouses political passions should seem to avoid or to abolish the political altogether; and that a text so uniquely dependent on the caprice and opinion of individual social dreamers should find itself disarmed in the face of individual agency and inaugural action. Yet perhaps the generic question has some further lessons



30 Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (Rutgers, 1976 [1933]).

for us; in any case we have not yet fully combined the problems of representation with those of ideological analysis in understanding how Utopia can be grasped as having necessarily to emerge from the more purely political discussions of Book One.

For the first of these lines of inquiry, it will be formally crucial to interrogate the interpolated narratives, those involving yet a different genre, namely the moral fables about non-existent states, the Polylerites, the Achorii, and the Macarenses: for these interpolated episodes should tell us two antithetical things, namely why More needed to have recourse to non-existent or imagined places, and then why none of them could have fulfilled the function that the fourth and final, but very different non-existent state of Book Two, namely Utopia itself, was called upon to fill. Why, in other words, does the image or full figure of Utopia necessarily emerge from previous but local and analogous figures? The latter are, to be sure, imagined as enclaves within our existent world; whereas, despite the positioning and the supplementary explanations, Utopia is somehow felt to replace our world altogether.

Our three enclave states (or examples), whose nonsense names seem to take the measure of the reforms,[31] demonstrate (in reverse order): how to limit the king's finances (the Macaranses, translated by Turner as Happiland); how to discourage foreign conquests (the Achorii, or Nolandia); and most extensively, how to turn the severe English penal system to the advantage of the citizenry (the Polylerites, or Tallstoria). The two initially mentioned imply common-sense rules and limits for monarchs: they are thus both situation-specific in their reference, and not unrealizable. Nor, when we come to the longest example, the Polylerites, are the more moderate punishments and the forced labor of the convicts unrealizable either, although they obviously collide with widespread prejudice and popular doxa, as the heated discussion shows.

But, as Marin has demonstrated,[32] this longest extrapolation is internally contradictory in two distinct ways, and this constitutes the formal interest of the episode. The first problem has to do with the very existence of theft itself: if this country is so happy and peaceful, why does it generate the poverty and misery which impel people to steal? If on the other hand, there is very little theft, in comparison to the societies we are familiar with, in what way can its penal system be exemplary for us? How, in short, to demonstrate that it is the penal system which is responsible for reducing crime rather than the other way round? We, who have read Book Two, know the answer to these questions, which turns on the continuing presence of private property and therefore the continuing existence of goods and money to steal.

This suggests that in effect More's extrapolation, by its very internal contradiction, is still bound up with the real empirical world, and that it can only solve

31 See note 1.

32 Marin, *Utopiques*, Chapter 7 (and also see Wegner, *Imaginary Communities*, pp. 40–45).

that representational contradiction by generating and producing a purer one (Utopia proper) from which the links to historical reality have been more absolutely sundered. (Or, if you prefer to read the text according to its compositional chronology, More has here, in the later Book One, excavated the representational precondition for the earlier model of Book Two.) We can say all this in a rather different way by pointing to a principle of totality at work in such representations, one based on the overdetermination of the historically real itself. One cannot – such is the lesson of these extrapolations – change individual features of current reality. A reform which singles out this or that vice, this or that flaw or error in the system, with a view towards modifying that feature alone, quickly discovers that any given feature entertains a multitude of unexpected yet constitutive links with all the other features in the system. In the area of representation, the symptom of this discovery is to be found in what we have called a representational contradiction. Thus, in order adequately to represent such changes, the modification of reality must be absolute and totalizing: and this impulsion of the Utopian text is at one with a revolutionary and systemic concept of change rather than a reformist one.

In Utopia, however, the mark of this absolute totalization is the geopolitical secession of the Utopian space itself from the world of empirical or historical reality: the great trench which King Utopus causes to be dug in order to "delink" from the world, and to change his promontory into an island – surely an extraordinary anticipation of the great public works projects of modern or socialist times (and perhaps also the well-known hydraulic society projects that anticipated them),[33] including the marshalling of the army and the suggestion of forced or slave labor. This brings us to the second contradiction, or at least the second representational symptom betrayed by the Polylerite extrapolation. For in that example there is no trench: the Polylerites are separated from the Persian empire by a mountain range, and they pay tribute to the Persian monarch for protection – a dependency quite different from the Machiavellian foreign-policy system of the Utopians themselves, and one which puts a different kind of burden on what remains a money economy. This geopolitical dependency seems to me to constitute an autoreferential allegory about the structure of the representation itself, which still depends on external references and empirical contents. If you like, it is still protohistorical and not yet sufficiently aesthetic, in the sense of its autonomy from reality contexts – something which will be achieved only with Book Two and the representation of Utopia itself, and which may well shed new light both on the aesthetics of the Utopian text itself and on the Utopian character of aesthetics (as Marcuse developed it in his great essay on the "affirmative character of culture").[34] Utopia is thus in that sense a representation which

33 The classic (anti-Marxist) text is Karl Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism* (New Haven, 1957).

34 See the brief discussion of this essay in the Introduction.

has become a closure, as far as possible (and it is of course impossible) autonomous and self-referential: at some outside limit, purely formal and without content, or rather, whose content has been sublimated by itself becoming self-referential.

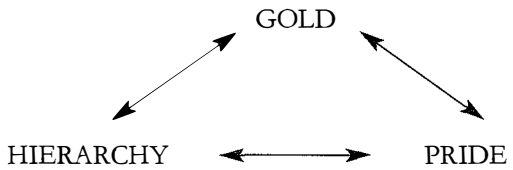
This is, however, so far merely a formal account of the text, which seems interminably to postpone the essential, namely any discussion of the wish at the heart of More's invention. It will no doubt be even more frustrating to learn, as we will in the next chapter, that wish-fulfillments are themselves internally contradictory, and therefore scarcely to be taken at face value. They are, moreover, necessarily clothed in ideology and as inseparable from the latter and its historical determinants as the body from the soul (an issue to be confronted only much later on, in Chapter 10).

None of which means that nothing of significance can now be said about the wish-fulfillment that drives *Utopia* and that lends it its transhistorical freshness. Yet it does so by way of a unique structure, which can be identified as a slippage around three ideological themes, which it amplifies and neutralizes all at once. The first of these themes is clearly that of money itself, and the evils of gold, a commonplace that absorbs a tradition of prophecy and invective whose beginnings are lost in the mists of time along with those of money itself. Marx effectively demolished the presuppositions of these denunciations of money in his attacks on Proudhon and in the *Grundrisse*.[35] That in More they lead to a form of "communism", that is to say, to the abolition of private property, is less significant than the triangular movement whereby the theme of money is ideologically neutralized.

For the conceptual vice of the critique of money and gold is that it is neither political nor economic but rather ethical in its ultimate sources and consequences. But in More the place of the ethical is occupied by a different theme or ideologeme, namely pride as a psychological and indeed "theological" phenomenon. This displaces the evils of money and its accompanying sins (most notably greed) with a rather different set of social phenomena, namely vainglory, ostentation, social position, hierarchy and the like; and the latter lead us on to the third term in More's ideological triangle, namely the emphasis on equality and egalitarianism. Yet the latter is not simply a correction or cancellation of the effects of pride; it is a move from one dimension to another, from the realm of the self and the soul to that of social existence, both of these being in their turn distinct from the realm in which money and gold hold sway. As Luhmann has shown, these various realms of the psychic and the social and the economic are not yet in traditional societies (or even in societies like More's which are emerging from the traditional and the feudal) fully differentiated. The rotating movement from one to another is in part a

35 See Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy* (New York, 1963 [1847]), especially pp. 69–79; and also the *Grundrisse*, chapter II (the chapter on money).

reflection of that lack of differentiation: no single realm can define its elements completely in its own terms, but must borrow from the other ones at the same time that it differentiates itself from them. This makes for a welcome multiplicity of consequences and effects for More's representations themselves, which can be interpreted in the light of their social implications, but also for their consequences in terms of the individual subject, and not least for the practical policies they seem to entail particularly in the principle of the abolition of private property. The ambiguity of the tripartite framework is such that we can overlook the ethical origins of this principle and take it for a whole political program and a way of realizing Utopia as such. The rotation of these three ideologemes is itself the source of Utopia's seeming autonomy on the representational level, and rescues the text from the status of a mere tract on any one of the themes (a pamphlet against money, for example, or a theological treatise on pride, a revolutionary broadbill denouncing social hierarchy).



This rotational operation forestalls the thematization or reification of any single factor into an ideological system or vision of human nature (a problem to be discussed in Chapters 10 and 11). This is, I believe, what Louis Marin termed "neutralization" in his fundamental work on Utopias, and it will require and receive an explanation, at the appropriate time, of how neutralization can be grasped as production, rather than as simple cancellation or effacement. Most immediately, however, it demands subsumption into the structure of wish-fulfillment itself.