

Heterotopias and Utopias in Movement

It is deeply rooted in the thought and the narratives of those who intend to change the world, the agony to define the borders of the current system and consequently to imagine their differentiated view of the future as a totally outside, hostile and oppositional to the current. The unbelievable capacity of capitalism to assimilate the majority of the practices and the narratives which seem to be oppositional or revolutionary has the effect to produce counter narratives which lay on a far, unspoiled ideal and perfect place and time. Utopias primarily have been theorized either as ideal spatial arrangements of emancipation, harmony and happiness, or as temporal processes in which space and place are excluded while at the same time they present history as a process which is moving by a specific reason. In such a context and through the rising of postmodernity the concept of utopia has been imbued with pejorative connotations that led to the partial abandonment of the concept either as romantic and not-applicable or as dangerous and totalitarian. Nevertheless, the "*postmodernity trap*" is the output of such a process which in the effort to avoid the errors of a glorious and dangerous past led to the negation of any kind of effort for a more equitable and better society. Recently, many scholars argue that utopianism should be reconsidered for its transformative and emancipatory potential, in a different "spatiotemporal" context that can avoid the errors of the past.

So we come with the following questions which we will try to highlight in this short text. Can we imagine spaces of utopia here and now and simultaneously in the future? Can we imagine "other" spaces and practices which are already here but are absent from our future social dreams? Can we imagine the future as a future in making which we cannot know from now but we can imagine possible differentiations based on existing social practices? Can degrowth constitute a utopia which can accelerate social transition without to be transformed into an ideology or reduced into a set of desirable policies? Finally can we imagine those social imaginary significations which can empower free imagination play in the seeking of alternative futures without narrowing the possibilities and the dialogue but by opening them?

Michel Foucault tried to conceptualize these mysterious existing spaces of "otherness" by naming them "heterotopias". For him these spaces are spaces in juxtaposition with the spaces of normality and are also essential for any society because they define the norms depending on the degree of divergence from this. On the contrary with utopias, heterotopias are existing spaces, institutionalized spaces where the social norms are represented, challenged and reversed. As Harvey notices the concept of heterotopia is of major importance as it allows us to think of utopia not as something far and unachievable but as a continuous process grounded on existing social processes. Furthermore it encourages the idea of simultaneity of spatial plays that highlights choice, diversity and difference and notices the importance of having such spaces as possible places where alternative might flourish not only as mere fragments of imagination but as embodied social practices. Apart from Foucault, there are more scholars who tried to conceptualize the utopian project in a way that it is grounded to existing social practices. Lefebvre's and Bloch's "Concrete utopias" as well as Carlsson and Manning's "Nowtopias" constitute only some of these efforts.

All these efforts are very important because they disrupt from the concept of utopia as an immaterial blueprint of an ideal spatial or social form, they avoid the mistakes of the past by avoiding foreseeing social change as something which can be constructed only with materials of the present and highlight the spatiotemporal character of every social change. Unfortunately they seem to fall to another trap.

By highlighting only the possibilities which could occur through alternative social interaction and by avoiding trying to identify which elements of the existing society should be reversed or maintained by a future society they fail to stimulate the imagination play for alternatives, they fail to engage with power relations and finally they constitute part of the aforementioned postmodernist trap which by avoiding naming alternatives, unconsciously, has the performative effect to empower the lack of any alternative and consequently the domination of the existing social order.

Going back to the concept of heterotopia Foucault seems not to answer to the question, how the heterotopias are constructed and assimilated by normality through history. Are the heterotopic spaces in each society intrinsically heterotopias? How heterotopias are becoming the norm and how new heterotopias are being born? How much radically different can be something that is born in heterotopic spaces in comparison with the normal?

Heterotopias seem to be intrinsically transitional spaces which operate as social laboratories where are tested new forms of social life. They are not intrinsically marginal or heterotopic spaces but they can host both the empowerment of the existing social order or its radical transcendence. They can generate new heterotopias or constitute the new social norm.

Finally the question can be formulated as such: how a utopian project can be grounded on existing spatiotemporal, heterotopic practices without to be reduced into a simplistic theory of practice and at the same time can still inspire imagination play by opening possibilities, establishing these practices and transcending existing reality?

Degrowth is a political proposal for a different society and as such it constitutes a contemporary utopia. Its logic is in opposition with the drive logic of capitalism. At the same time constitutes a heterotopic idea within the growth society which challenges the core of the imperative of growth and suggests a different way, this of frugal abundance. The alternative is grounded in existing spatiotemporal processes and social practices like the eco-villages, urban gardens, co-housing, squatting, neo-ruralism, reclaiming the streets, alternative energies, waste prevention and recycling. It cannot constitute a final goal because it is by its nature an intermediate goal between the capitalist growth society and a post-capitalist one and as such operates as a threshold which at the same time can separate and unify different worlds in the making of a new one. Starting from a recognized outside can leave space for a negotiable inside and the formation not of a single solution but of a matrix of solutions as well as the formation of a peculiar “we”, possibly the “we” of the multitude. This is not a “we” which survives because of the exclusion of the others or in other words because of a supposed ideological superiority which is “scientifically” defined. It is an inclusive, a multiple one for a world that contain many worlds in communication and negotiation to each other. Finally, we could suggest that degrowth can be the ship for a different future, an umbrella which can link and bring in negotiation different movements both in the global north and south and at the same time can inspire the creation of new ones . It is a heterotopia par excellence or a utopia in movement.

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