

## Comparative Harmonies and Dissonances in Utopias from Other Cultures

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Harmony's Greek origins – *harmos* – have imbued its English offspring with connotations of “joining together”. It is harmony that underpins the ideals of the European mythology of the Golden Age described by Hesiod in *Works and Days*, a time of peace, prosperity and happiness, where humans are joined together with the gods and nature. However, words that are translated as “harmony” in languages other than English, may indicate different perceptions of harmonies and dissonances based on fundamentally divergent worldviews, such as 大同 (*datong*) in Chinese, or 和 (*wa*) in Japanese, or (*sahajart*) in Myanmar, or the related notion of “dreaming” in any of the indigenous Australian languages from central Australia: *Tjukurpa* in Pitjantjatjara, *Altyerre* in Arrernte.

This paper builds on my previous work on comparative utopias, which highlights the role of culturally specific foundational stories of peace and harmony in shaping future imaginaries of the ideal. In this presentation, I will focus on culturally specific interpretations of harmony, drawing on research by specialists on utopianism in the cultures mentioned above, including Zhang Longxi, William A. Callahan, Angela Yiu, Yoriko Moichi, Aung Myint-U, Jennifer Leehey, Darren Jorgensen and Jenny Green.

To illustrate the fundamental differences between understandings of harmony in these cultures, I will analyse a selection of recent representations of “harmony” from social and political, textual and visual contexts, ranging from Project Itoh's novel and film *Harmony* (2015), to the development of an Australia Research Council exhibition “Songlines: Tracking the Seven Sisters” (National Museum of Australia, Canberra, 2017-2018). In this way, I will attempt to open further avenues for research into comparative harmonies and dissonances in utopias from other cultures.

**Keywords:** Comparative utopias, Golden age, China, Japan, Myanmar, Indigenous Australia

## In Search of a Harmonious City: Sustainable Development as a New Utopia in Urban Design

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The principles of sustainable urban growth have been developed by researchers from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds. They all have tried to provide compelling visions of an economically, socially, environmentally and spatially balanced urban environment. In other words, they have striven for a concept of a city that is harmonious in terms of housing, spatial accessibility, preservation of cultural heritage as well as political stability. It appears that for some actors of urban life, the sustainable development model has become a blueprint for action while for others it represents a kind of utopia, a contemporary image of the ideal city and a state. Observing the course and dynamics of the processes of urbanization in various regions of the world, it is difficult not to ask the question about the possibility of determining unequivocally which spatial form of the city meets the criteria for sustainable development and whether there exists only one model. In recent years, we could observe the rapid development of social approach to planning and organizing urban space that focuses on the needs and expectations of the residents. At the same time, it is assumed that the concept of sustainable urban development is, by definition, socially conditioned. However, it might be worth considering whether the implementation of the principles of sustainable development in all their aspects will provide the inhabitants of the city with happiness, satisfaction and harmony; or maybe, it is yet another top-down attempt to arrange the city dwellers' living environment by planners and theorists.

**Keywords:** City planning, Social harmony, Sustainable development, Urban design

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Through a post-apocalyptic narrative, Margaret Atwood's novel *Oryx & Crake* (2003) delves into complex issues concerning genetic engineering, environmentalism, social polarization, and violence. This paper focuses on how the Society of Spectacle as articulated by the French philosopher and Marxist theorist Guy Debord is a reflection of the Liquid Modernity that prevails in the reality depicted by the Canadian writer Margaret Atwood in her novel *Oryx & Crake*. As the Polish sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Bauman explains, Liquid Modernity represents a society which is in constant change. This Liquid Modernity coexists with which Debord calls "The Spectacle," which is depicted in *Oryx & Crake* as a critique of Western society, which is portrayed as ruled by the industry of leisure and consumption, turning even the most intimate aspects of people's lives into commodities. Atwood combines the representation of two different realities. The first one is a polarized world in which the Sciences are more important than the Humanities. Concurrently, a different reality portrays a post-apocalyptic world where human beings eschew the law in favour of their own survival, while all along trying to find an explanation for the apocalypse. Moreover, this paper will prove that the author establishes a strong link between the evolution of modern society and its unavoidable development towards that plausible, extravagantly consumerist and lacking intimacy world that the novel envisions and portrays. *Oryx & Crake* is a novel that reflects both on the present of humanity and its future: it does not only act as a critique of Western capitalism and the problems deriving from the polarization of society, but also as a cautionary tale forewarning against a disastrous future for the human race.

**Keywords:** Liquid Modernity, Society of Spectacle, *Oryx & Crake* (2003)

## Everyday Sextopianism: Sustaining the Utopian Spirit of (Fictional) Sextopias

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500 years after Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), the utopian literary genre has adapted itself in diverse forms to meet the demands of new times. Yet, today, the demoralising dystopian climate of the twenty-first century means the demand for utopia, for alternatives to the present, is met with feelings of hopelessness and impossibility: how, in an era characterised by fear and dictated by the exclusionary and individualistic discourses of patriarchal-capitalism, can the spirit of utopia, of hope, kindness, community and equality, be (re)generated?

Sextopias – a new term I have coined to describe a body of twenty-first century, utopian fictional work – endeavour to (re)awaken the spirit of utopia by intersecting the libidinal economy of sexual pleasure with the utopian imaginary. That is, by (re)presenting new forms of erotic-sociality and utopian unity, fictional sextopias arouse the mind politically and promote new forms of collective, sexual-political agency and harmony. Typically, literary or filmic sextopias provoke such utopian desires through three distinctive characteristics: the establishment of, what I term, a sextopian an-*other* space, the representation of Dionysiac and/or carnivalesque sextopian bodies, and the imagining of new sextopian subjectivities which disrupt conventional binary models of subjectivity. Yet, beyond sextopian fiction and film, various counter-cultural practices, such as the Burning Man festival (which celebrates alternative, hedonistic ways of living), for example, embody or practise ideals which closely correspond to the features of fictional sextopianism.

This paper will establish the definitional terms of the sextopian genre and detail the conventions of its three main characteristics, before identifying their relation to or visibility within various instances of 'everyday sextopianism,' such as Burning Man. Then, the paper will examine what happens when sextopian practices materialise in the everyday, questioning what type of utopianisms are produced from/ within them as well as whether the utopian spirit of them can sustain itself within today's dystopian environment.

**Keywords:** Sexual pleasure, Queerness, Everyday utopianism

## The Overdriven Electric Guitar Sound as a Herald of Musical Utopia: Development, Ubiquity, Meanings

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In *The Principle of Hope*, Bloch ends his essay on “the Moment in *Fidelio*” thus: “[M]usic as a whole stands at the farther limits of humanity, [...] at those limits where humanity, with new language and *haloed by the call to achieved intensity, to the attained world of 'we'*, is taking shape.” Bloch's examples of such moments, like the trumpet fanfare in *Fidelio*, are from classical music. In this paper, I will consider the sound of an overdriven electric guitar, a common feature of so much Rock music in its various forms of 'aural distortion', as another example of 'achieved intensity'. Beginning with its arrival into the popular musical awareness in the opening riff of the Rolling Stones' *Satisfaction*, the overdrive sound, achieved through, first, massive amplification, and then increasingly through more direct manipulation of the signal chain of the instrument through the use of effects and pedals, seems to carry a promise of musical authenticity, that points to Bloch's utopian 'attained world of "we"'.

**Keywords:** Rock Music, Bloch, Electric guitar, Effects, Overdrive.

## Beyond the Harmony of the Family: Contemporary SF TV and the Futures of Citizenship

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This presentation examines the figure of the family in three contemporary SF TV dystopia series set largely in the United States. We contend that these series, all set in the ruins of an America invaded by other (sometimes alien) powers, align a crisis in governance with a crisis in the family, drawing on a mythology that imagines America as a family, following in the tradition of its “founding fathers.” These series thus use tensions and conflicts within the family to point toward stresses and lacuna in the American democratic social fabric. These family dramas also seek to negotiate a shifting American landscape that strives to reinforce traditional American ideologies even as the US’s place in the global order has changed, and the country itself is increasingly polarized between rural areas struggling with the consequences of neoliberalism, and so-called urban “elites” more oriented toward cosmopolitanism and diversity. These series thus often depict families split between political or other allegiances, with family members on both sides of their political conflicts.

*Colony* (2016-), for example, enacts a thematic of alien invasion in which members of the core family through which the story is narrated each chooses a distinct way to negotiate this crisis, from outright rebellion, to feigned collaboration, to reluctant complicity. These family strains are metonymic of geographical and other fissures in the American populace, revealed by recent electoral results and political protests. *The Man in the High Castle* (2015-), an adaptation of Philip K. Dick’s alternate history about a Nazi victory in WWII, disturbingly reveals how much our real twenty-first century resembles one imagined as the result of such a Nazi victory, pointedly illustrating the stark split between extreme left and extreme right factions; the show uses splits within families to emblemize conflicts within the political spectrum. And *The 100* (2014-) makes its primary conflict an intergenerational one, and similarly dramatizes a number of competing visions of how best to rebuild society in the wake of its collapse, with no clear “right” answer apparent in these struggles.

In each show, the dramatic drive to heal the family--and often the failure to restore communication across such differences--allegorizes splits within the community of America itself, across geographic, race, and racial lines. Displaced into these future settings, the fragmentation of once-hegemonic American myths of national identity become stories of families trying to accommodate a range of political and other identifications and passions, while still remaining one family. They thus offer an opportunity to maintain hope for the future value of family and intimate relations while recasting and reimagining those relations as tied to and, in some ways central, to political struggle

**Keywords:** Television, Family, Utopia

## Issues of human food and nutrition in the encyclopedic utopian pedagogy of the Portuguese philosopher Agostinho da Silva

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Published in 1942, *Human Nutrition* is one of the 96 volumes of the multidisciplinary collection *Initiation / Cultural Notebooks*, entirely conceived and produced between 1940 and 1944 by the Portuguese philosopher and utopian pedagogue Agostinho da Silva (see Reis, “The genealogy of the Utopian Millenarianism of the Oporto philosopher Agostinho da Silva” in *Spaces of Utopia: An Electronic Journal*, 2nd series). The announcement on the back cover of the first issue of this collection, states that the collection has been launched “without any kind of commercial purpose” so as to help to “popularize the knowledge that is indispensable for a broad and solid culture”. With this encyclopedic project, Agostinho da Silva aimed to provide, at a modest price, a course of general knowledge to a large public deprived of advanced levels of schooling, without, however, ruling out the possibility of further in-depth studies of the themes addressed. Our paper aims to assess the extent to which Agostinho da Silva’s visionary reasoning allowed philosophical issues regarding food to be raised from a utopian perspective - for example, of what does food actually consist, what can and should be eaten, how we know what is safe to eat, what constitutes good food, and how food is distributed.

**Keywords:** Utopia, Food, Pedagogy, Philosophy

## Disguise, Cohabitation, and Ritual: the Legend of the Barbus in France

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Brotherhoods of artists were an organizational prototype that would develop, taking various forms, throughout the nineteenth century. Through the formation of these groups based on ties of friendship and on the practice of shared rituals, artists started to understand the creation of a group identity as a fundamental part of their aesthetic projects.

This paper focuses on the first brotherhood of artists, formed around 1798 by a group of students of the painter Jacques-Louis David who rebelled against their teacher, condemning him for not being sufficiently “primitive”. The response of these young artists would be more experiential than pictorial: by their outlandish Ancient Greek attire and their long beards they would be nicknamed “Barbus” (the bearded ones), although they would prefer to call themselves “Meditators of the Antique”. After a period of Parisian meetings, around 1800 they adopted the abandoned monastery of Chaillot as their place for meeting and living together. Practising a vegetarian diet, grouping themselves around charismatic leaders, carrying out daily rituals and living together in a ruined building, the experience of the Barbus group can be understood as a case of utopian-artistic practice or as an example of how certain artists have tried to exercise the social imagination, combining innovation in life and in aesthetics.

In this presentation, sources are employed with full awareness of their myth-making character: a generation after the group disappeared, its history would be recovered in the context of Romanticism, which would find in them a precedent for its own forms of mixing art and life. This self-serving interpretation was not interested in the group itself but rather attributed to them a certain role of foundational legend related to a whole series of practices. Following the aesthetic, political, and spiritual ideas, the brotherhoods of artists of subsequent years will continue to understand common identity through ritual, symbol, performativity, and sometimes cohabitation. Group by group, they will lead towards the creative communities of twentieth-century avant-garde movements.

**Keywords:** Utopian practice, 19th Century Art, Communities, Collectivism.



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The satisfying correspondence between the charm of the land, the wisdom of its government and the beauty of its inhabitants, females especially, are all aesthetically-interrelated components of utopias, not least those written in the nineteenth century, the era particularly preoccupied with women's roles and functions in society. The near-perfection of the alternative realities is often conveniently reflected and distilled in the idealised female whose possession by the male protagonist both rendered the utopian ideal more approachable and provided for a marketable love-plot. In imitation of the logical connection between the society and the female individuals it produced writers of dystopias, usually male, often found themselves describing women strongly deviating from the ideal of the "angel of the house". Indeed, a dystopian female would frequently display features like "passionate ambition, verile energy, the love of strong excitement, self-assertion, fierceness, an undisciplined temper, [...] all qualities which detract from her ideal of womanliness, and which make her less beautiful than she was meant to be" (Eliza Linton, *The Girl of the Period*, 1883). Such "women without poetry" (Sara Ellis, *The Daughters of England*, 1842) who betray the female nature, defined by keen feeling, inaction and doting dependence on another, populate nineteenth-century dystopias and oftentimes display the telling contrast between beautiful appearance and socially-bred evil qualities, testifying to the ill-boding disharmony within the deficient worlds. An examination of several English-language dystopias of the time concentrates on the connection between the depicted realities and the characterisation of women shaped by the ideals of the era and the generic requirements of the texts.

**Keywords:** Femininity, Dystopia, 19th Century literature