

Chapter 1: An overview of utopian thought

OVERVIEW

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A general background to the concept of **utopia** in Western culture is provided in this chapter in order to contextualise historically the investigation of dystopia in the subsequent chapters. Seminal utopian texts, mainly pre-twentieth-century literary texts, are covered in this overview. However, in this chapter visual texts are not interpreted, since it is beyond the scope of this study to investigate pre-twentieth-century visual texts.

As indicated earlier, with regard to ideology and utopia the Sixties represent a kind of watershed between old and new thinking. The intention in this chapter, then, is to provide a construct (utopia as genre) against which to measure its deconstruction (dystopia). Such an investigation of dystopia as a human condition as well as an interpretation of dystopian visual texts will follow in Chapter 2. It is pointed out, however, that such an investigation is ambivalent in the sense that fundamentally utopia and dystopia share the same generic characteristics, since dystopia is grounded in utopian thinking.

I proceed then to identify some of the constants inherent in utopian thinking. Since it is impossible to cover and identify all theorists and contributors to the vast topic of utopia, especially as relevant to philosophies postulated with utopian intent, a comprehensive historical overview of utopias and ideological thought cannot be rendered within the scope of this introduction. Instead, there is a focus on those aspects of utopia found in key influential utopian constructs from the time of the Greeks that are relevant to the hypothesis of my thesis, as well as on twentieth-century manifestations of utopian thinking, such as [post-utopia](#) and dystopia, which demonstrate my hypothesis.

1.1 Defining utopia

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Art always reacts to the period in which it is made, and to the problems and issues of that period. Hence, strictly speaking, there is no such thing as “timeless” art. There never was. Any artist who refuses to accept this insight and attempts to escape from the present day, risks artistic failure. ([Ruhrberg](#) 2000b: 390)

In general, art production is always a reflection of and a response to the time in which it is created. Looking at the utopian genre in particular, artworks have always been engaged in one way or another with notions of utopian thinking, even in its deconstructed form, dystopia, which is the core focus of this study.

Utopia, in essence, is a fiction, an imagined design in space, time and place. In the introduction to Ligeia Gallagher's *More's Utopia and Its Critics* (1964) a useful definition of utopia is provided, namely "any place, state or situation of ideal perfection, any visionary scheme or system for an ideally perfect social order." Another interpretation of utopia is that it is a manifestation of the "anxieties and pessimistic perspectives as well as of unsatisfied hopes and dreams of people", a response that epitomises an "ideal and desired place which more or less sharply contrasts to the 'hic et nunc' of the place of reality" ([Munkner URL: www.georgetown.edu/bassr/exhibition/utopia/utopia.html](http://www.georgetown.edu/bassr/exhibition/utopia/utopia.html)).

It is interesting to note that in the utopian genre, [literary texts](#) that have appeared from the time of the ancient Greeks to more or less the Sixties display such stereotypical ideal order. (It is also interesting to note in this regard the twentieth-century sociologist, Dominic Baker-Smith's relativistic view of utopia, that is, that utopia should be contagious, designed to infect our reading of the world ([Baker-Smith](#) 1987: 1).)

Utopia as a 'good' and 'ideal' construct contains an imminent moral code as well as an implied dichotomy between the real and the imagined. Although utopian thinking is concerned with an 'imagined' world, German philosopher Herbert [Marcuse](#) in *Eros en Kultuur* (1968: 95) argues that fantasy is different from utopia in the sense that fantasy has to a large extent remained independent from the reality principle. He views utopian projections on the other hand as grounded in historical realities that instigate and shape the formulation of utopia. I differ from Marcuse in this regard and in this thesis interpret all forms of alternative reality, including illusion, fantasy and utopia, as entities that have validity only in their relationship to the sensory real. Comparatively, however, the fact that the utopian genre is underpinned by the concepts of improvement, advancement and progress sets it apart from fantasy as genre and validates the investigation of technology as the product of utopian thinking in this thesis.

For twentieth-century sociologist Karl [Mannheim](#), essential to utopian thinking is the fact that it seeks to change the present situation and the status quo ([Mannheim](#) 1936: 36) and propose something 'better' in the place of the existing. According to Mannheim, the utopian mentality is always flawed and tends to hide certain aspects of 'reality', since it "turns its back on everything which would shake its belief or paralyse its desire to change things" ([Mannheim](#) 1936: 36). Ironically, although in most utopian constructs there is a considerable degree of social control, its inhabitants are rendered as free.

It is useful to consider the summary [Runes](#) (1960, s.v. "utopia") provides for the origins of the term 'utopia', identifying Thomas More as coining the term in his 1516 publication *De optimo reipublicae statu deque nova insula utopia*. According to Runes, More derived the term from the

Greek, meaning 'no place' or 'land of nowhere'. According to [Tod & Wheeler](#) (1978: 19), the term is used tongue-in-the-cheek and becomes a pun by combining meanings of *both* the ideal *and* the imaginative, since, pronounced as 'eu-topia', the word means 'good place'. The word 'utopia' is a neologism that, according to analyses, can mean *both*: 'eu-topos' - denoting a region of happiness *and* perfection, as well as 'ou-topos' - naming a region that exists nowhere. However, although the origins of the term can be chronologically traced back to the Greeks in terms of concepts of cultural primitivism, there is a pun: no matter how the word is pronounced, one ends up referring to or (involuntarily) meaning an imagined, 'good place'.

1.2 Utopia and the dichotomy between the real and the ideal

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Inherent to the concept of utopia is the constant pull of the [dichotomy](#) between the [real](#) and the positing of an alternative reality, a fictional, imagined 'other' world or state, mostly ideal in nature. Translated into the context of visual culture, such dichotomy is probably its oldest imminent debate in the sense of the representation of the real, or various kinds of 'reals', in illusionistic form. Whilst such dichotomy is central to utopia, it will become apparent in this investigation that several other ambiguities and binaries are entrenched in any utopian (or dystopian) model, some of which will be uncovered in the course of this study.

The idea is already encountered in Platonic thought that the life of the citizen is inextricably interwoven with that of the polis as an ideal state ([Dreyer](#) 1975: 109). At the root of speculations on the ideal society is Plato's [Politeia](#) (*Republic*) (the first 'utopia') of approximately 394 B.C. Ironically enough, the Greek roots of the word 'utopia' mean 'no place', yet the search for utopia as the ideal place or state seems to be a relentless driving force within humankind which aspires to and strives for ultimate happiness and a perfect world. This endless search has taken us to the moon, the outskirts of civilization and back. It has inspired us to develop tools of all sorts and technologies of all kinds - all to improve the quality of life and devise a better, brighter, happier future, a paradise of some sort.

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four: Science between Utopia and Dystopia* (1984), the sociologist Helga Nowotny distinguishes between two types of future ([Nowotny](#) 1984: 3). Firstly, there is the 'inauthentic' future that exists already, articulated through daydreams, desires and unfulfilled wishes. It is a banal kind of future that can be imagined and almost known; it is only the journey that leads to it that is new and unexpected. The second kind of future is the 'authentic' future, a "precarious existence which is that of the not-yet" ([Nowotny](#) 1984: 3). It is so radically new that nobody has seen or heard or experienced it. Nowotny's distinction bears directly on the focus of the study in that the utopian account points to *both* kinds of future: it is premised in the experiences and knowledge of the real, but postulates a totally new real that will replace the existing one. It is a utopian dream that is grounded in various myths, beliefs and ideologies.

In utopian narratives, the concept of time is of utmost importance. It is a concept that relates to *both* the idealised *and* the real worlds, since the ideal construct is mostly a response to the historical horizon of the real. Utopian narratives are furthermore mostly future-oriented but inspired by the present real, a situation that brings on a type of "time-schizophrenia" ([Polak](#) 1973: 284) in which the pull of the future and the

drive towards an ideological impulse are unrelenting. Ironically, most writers on utopia seem to agree that although utopias are in principle Romantic projections of happiness and prosperity and thickly veiled in moral ideology, they are simultaneously always inspired by, coloured by and measured against the (unpleasant) experience of the present and historical or existential horizon of the here and now, the sick real.

In the past, the 'good ending', the ideal state, the 'ultimate truth', alternatively phrased as notions of utopia, have mobilised many theories and revolutions. Intimately linked to the concept of utopia, is the concept of [ideology](#) that, broadly interpreted, may be seen as a regulatory mechanism in the creation of culture. As such it indicates the norms and values that direct, motivate and underpin people's decisions and actions. Any visual rendering is informed and directed by ideology. In the case of the rejection or absence of extrapolating any particular ideological viewpoint, an artwork is still entrenched in certain ideological codes, even if only in the rejection of such codes.

Within the perspective of Western history, ideology must be considered in the light of the progressionalism grounded in rationalism that has dominated scientific and philosophical thinking for centuries. The term 'ideology' was virtually unknown prior to the twentieth century. It is only during and after the nineteenth century when scientific discoveries and technological inventions started having a major impact on culture, and when the consequences of political ideologies which had resulted in world wars were deeply felt, that the concept attained a historical contextualisation.

In Western culture visions of the ideal society have taken on two guises: on one hand a type of ideal construct that is a descriptive, dramatic portrayal of a way of life that is intrinsically 'good' and fulfils profound longings; on the other hand a more rationalistic kind of idealistic thinking in which the underlying principles of an "optimum society" are argued ([Manuel 1973: vii](#)). Such distinction between utopia and utopian thinking is valid, but it is more useful to cover all of these forms of utopian thinking in the generic. Within such a perspective it is more significant for instance to recognise the interplay of broad historical or ideological factors with the rhetorical patterning of utopian works, than attempting to create divisions or separations.

Most theorists on utopia agree that the utopist (whether working in a literary or visual mode) accomplishes his/her end by indirection, that is, by portraying through the ideal the imperfection and inadequacy of the existing real. Therefore the time or historical element is often presented in schizophrenic and ambivalent manner. Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* of 1516 is just such a vehicle for comment on his own Renaissance society. In *Utopia*, the fictional framework, the dialogue structure, the many ironies and the humorous deception of place names, lead to ambiguity and it has since been described as one of the most profoundly inconsistent of books in its mingling of social satire, socialist and communist ideology, and fantasy ([Gallagher 1964: 11](#)). Many theorists assume that in *Utopia* More intended to describe an ideal community or one as ideal as humanity would permit, since as [Gallagher \(1964: 11\)](#) argues, for "centuries some men, at least, have

entertained the hope that radical and lasting solutions to human ills may indeed be found, whether by starting afresh in some uninhabited place or by violent uprooting of the old, sick world".

At this stage, it might be useful to draw a distinction between the concepts of utopia and paradise, which are linked to the former idea. Mythologically, paradise is a *pre-deluvian* ('before the Flood') state where humans and nature were created in the likeness of God/the Creator and as perfectly divine, intelligent and beautiful. On the other hand, utopianism is a *post-deluvian* ('after the Flood') condition created by human beings in an attempt to parallel paradise. There is a substantial difference between the two terms and yet they connect in the shared idea of 'good place', 'better than the present'. Since Adam and Eve were expelled from paradise, or the Garden of Eden, it has always been an exotic dream-place, a faraway ultimate, often connected to the idealisation of nature and the wilderness. Utopia, essentially, is an ideal design of a state.

In the Babylonian myth of [Gilgamesh](#), the earliest recorded myth of humankind, there is mention of flood preceded by cyclones and it can be assumed that the Noachic deluge legend was drawn from the same source (Sykes 1953, s.v. "Babylonian Creation legends"). Within this perspective *Gilgamesh* is a post-deluvian tale and for the purposes of this study, the first tale of a search for utopia, laced with a dash of dystopia in the mention of cataclysm.

In *Gilgamesh*, the idea of utopia is encountered in the form of a travelogue. Other early master-narratives on utopia are those of the heavenly [Jerusalem](#) and [millennium](#) projections. The earthly paradise, the heavenly Jerusalem and the millennium personified essentially medieval ideals that persisted in playing their part in subsequent utopian fabrications. A whole canon of classical scholarship emerged with the revisitation of the model of the ideal state of the Greeks, providing inspiration and validation to the aspirations of new city states in Renaissance Italy. Plato and other Greek philosophers influenced More fundamentally, as was the case with most of the other Renaissance intellectuals, and the ideological projection found in *Utopia* must be interpreted against the backdrop of new humanist orientations prevalent in the Renaissance as well as predominant patriarchal notions in which a very closed system of mores and socio-moral codes was propagated. Renaissance humanism was premised on the [religious](#) morality which prevailed in the Middle Ages and intellectuals advocated the morality propagated by Christ as the ideal moral model for humankind to attain the ideal society.

In their systems of thinking, [Erasmus](#) and More were influenced by Greek thought in their moderation of the stringent moral ideology of the Middle Ages. In *Utopia*, More suggests a programme of communalism, a kind of utopia that posits a common Christian life for a whole nation but which at the same time depends on the character of its citizens who "must be as perfect in their Christianity ... as the utopians are in their rationality" ([Edward Surtz](#) 1964: 152).

Applying the history of utopian thinking to visual texts, ideals of beauty and perfection spring to mind, especially as found in Hellenistic and Roman art, as well as in Renaissance art in subsequent return to such classical standards. These classical standards went hand-in-hand with illusionism and the striving for naturalism and remained mainstream until the twentieth century, although many conceptual changes occurred. During the course of the twentieth century a radical deconstruction of traditional concepts and standards of beauty and so-called perfection in art occurred.

Twentieth-century sociologist Karl Mannheim's contribution to the understanding of utopia lies in his engagement with the legacies of idealism in cultural analysis and his hermeneutic attempts to understand and contextualise utopias as cultural objects ([Mannheim 1936: 59](#)). [Mannheim \(1947: 13, 65\)](#) developed the idea of utopia alongside a Marxist emphasis on ideology. It is interesting to note that he scarcely mentions More in his postulations on utopia. Mannheim was criticised by contemporaries such as Adorno and Lukács for undermining the critical force of the Marxist analysis of ideology since, in Mannheim's theories, Marxism is merely viewed as another set of beliefs ([Turner 1991: xxxviii](#)) and thus as undermining liberal values which at the time were seen as a necessary alternative to fascism. For Marx and Engels, such values, inherent in the proposed ideology or utopia, concerned concepts such as commodity (and the fetishism thereof), consciousness (that is, false consciousness), the determination of consciousness by social being, ideology as camera obscura, the base and superstructure metaphor and the dominant ideology thesis ([Turner 1991: xl](#)).

For Mannheim, in contrast to ideology that reinforces the status quo, utopia has to be revolutionary ([Mannheim 1936: 82](#)) in its implications. "Consolatory myths of heaven or paradise are ideology, because their effect is to reconcile people to the existing state of imperfection by proffering the hope of the better future in the next life" ([Thomas 1987:24](#)). [Mannheim \(1936: 96\)](#) argues further that a genuinely utopian vision will seek to inspire collective activity in an effort to change the world now, and, instead of aiming at pragmatic piecemeal reform, the utopian is animated by a vision of the whole and sets out to achieve goals which might be considered by contemporaries as impractical or undesirable, or even *both* ([Thomas 1987:24](#)) (cf. [Chapter 2](#) for ideology and dystopia; cf. [Chapter 4](#) for the dichotomy of the real and the ideal in late twentieth century).

1.3 Utopia and the collective

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Most of the seminal utopian constructions are predicated on the individual's place within the collective, that is, within a larger whole, and on a communalistic principle. These suggest that it is only in the convergence and compliance with the mores and codes advocated by society, that the individual will find happiness. This sociological slant is clearly illustrated in the Spider-Man narratives. Acting totally on his own and unsupported, Spider-Man directs his heroic actions at alleviating the prevailing crime and disaster conditions of modern-day New York in order to create better living conditions and uplift society in general.

In Plato's *Republic*, as in most other utopian constructs, the fundamental idea is that in the ideal society there should be strict control and regulation. The fundamental gist of *Politeia*, for instance, is that of state control and regulation in all spheres of life, including marriage, property, morals, education and commerce:

Citizenship, for instance, depended firstly on birth, secondly on success in education and military training, and thirdly on the ability to conform; and the two superior classes of men are expressly forbidden to have any kind of property (Taylor 1960: 276).

Such control of state and human beings in the most fundamental sense is premised in the desire to attain the 'good' that can only be attained through analysis and rationalisation. Nationalism and the modern [nation-state](#) (a concept born during the French Revolution), both ideological constructs, presuppose for their actualisation certain social and technological conditions. These would seem to be prevalent concepts with the intellectual classes, more so, in the cosmopolitanism (*Weltbürgertum*) among the educated classes of the Western world (Wiener 1974: 325). It will become clearer [later in the thesis](#) that modern-day globalism is grounded in exactly these impulses.

The central question of *Politeia* is a strictly ethical one predicated in goals of form and regulation: "What is the rule of right by which a man ought to regulate his life?" (Taylor 1960: 265). It ends with a myth of judgement and the question: "How does a man attain or forfeit eternal salvation?". Plato's methodology or discipline is dialectic, and it is the function of the dialectic to lead to the vision of the 'good'.

Utopias mostly seem to be commonwealth constructions with a significant slant towards the morally 'good' and communalism. According to [Baker-Smith](#) (1987: 7), the so-called ideal moral commonwealth attempts to perfect existing social structures by means of individual education and moral formation. They usually entail visions of social and political reform and descriptions of a design of a city and state that are entrenched in practical politics and aimed at the prosperity of the cultural grouping or state and not at the happiness of the individual. The individual should find happiness and fulfilment in playing a useful part in the bigger machinery of the state.

In *Utopia and the Ideal Society: A Study of English Utopian Writing 1516-1700* (1981), J.C. Davis distinguishes two major types of ideal society, utopia and [millennium](#), although in 'Science and Utopia: The History of a Dilemma' (1984) he distinguishes five types: utopia, millennium, , arcadia, cockayne and the perfect moral commonwealth (Davis 1984: 27). The [millenarian](#) ideal society is different from utopia in the sense that in millenarianism the problems of the present are shelved by invoking a force or agency that, from the outside, will miraculously change and perfect the old order. Davis (1984: 29) argues that dependence on a [deus ex machina](#) tends to "rob the millenarian of his capacity to visualize the new society in any detail and hence to record with any precision the place of science in that order". This statement is of interest for this investigation since the redemptive effect of the millenarian is to create a new heaven and earth, most probably as a post-cataclysmic act, and technology and science will again probably play no role in this. It would therefore seem that in a mythological context, science and

technology have no place, yet both are grounded in myth and in the belief in the enhancement of the fate and conditions of the human race through technological advancement.

The postulation of the utopian ideal society, on the other hand, does not rely on such intervention, and should rather be interpreted as a set of strategies to create and maintain social order and perfection in the face of the “deficiencies of nature and the willfulness of man [humans]” ([Postmus](#) 1987: 61). [Baker-Smith](#) (1987: 2) points out that it is difficult to distinguish between utopia and millennium, since, from its inception, the utopian tradition has been entangled with schemes and symbols of religious renewal. Such renewal can only have validity in the light of a kind of prior 'fallen' state, that is in a post-lapsarian context, and the dream to return or proceed to this or another, imagined, perfect state.

A postulated ideal order could be filtered through three channels: ethics (such as the social-moral codes of the Victorian period or the moral codes of an individual, such as the life of prophets or Christ), arts (for instance, in heroic portrayals such as Neo-Classical artist David's *Napoleons*) and government (for instance, in Hitlerism). This process also works in reverse, that is, that utopian literature or representation of a minority grouping can inspire the postulation of universal ideals ([Baker-Smith](#) 1987: 10). However the process works, the fact remains that the relationship between the real and the imagined, or the ideal, is a reciprocal one. As such, ideology may be approached as an understanding of the construction of ideology that depends on everyday lived experience and the process of typification.

1.4 Utopia and pleasure

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Most utopias as ideal states are designed not only to ensure ultimate happiness, but also to ensure pleasure and enjoyment. This is an ultimately ambivalent aspect innate in utopia, since, as will be demonstrated in the [next section](#) as well as in Chapter 2 on [dystopia](#), utopias are simultaneously seldom-pleasant places. In the histories of utopian construction manifesting in the creation of alternative reals, there seems to be a prevalent, continual moving in and out of realities of *both* a pleasant *and* unpleasant nature. The dichotomy between the unpleasantness of *both* real *and* non-real, and the pleasure and happiness projected upon *both* the real *and* the non-real are constants.

The critical point in any utopian fiction, according to [Baker-Smith](#) (1987: 2), is the position between dream and nature, which may be an explanation of why the concept of the garden is so consistently linked to utopian contexts. Particularly in Book II of More's *Utopia*, the island of Utopia represents desire and pleasure. To More, the chief concern within an ideal state is focused on the “happiness of a man [woman] and wherein it [happiness] consists” ([Gallagher](#) 1964:38). It is the desire for an ideal state and a morally uplifting condition, which is very similar to many other utopian constructs such as Bacon's *The New Atlantis* (1627). More argues that:

... no man would be so insensible as not to seek after pleasure by all possible means, lawful or unlawful; using only this caution, that a lesser pleasure might not stand in the way of a greater, and that no pleasure ought to be pursued that should draw a great deal of pain after it.... And what reward can there be for

one who has passed his own life, not only without pleasure, but in pain, if there is nothing to be expected after death? ... There is a party among them who place happiness in bare virtue; others think that our natures are conducted by virtue to happiness, as that which is the chief good of man. (More in [Gallagher 1964: 38](#)).

Within the utopian genre, the concept of the garden is tied to that of arcadia, both premised in the idea of a harmonious natural environment, which, according to [Baker-Smith \(1987:7\)](#), is really "a form of nostalgia for a pre-lapsarian Golden Age, with a minimum of political machinery." (The notion of arcadia is not a central focus in this thesis, since my focus is rather on the utopian concepts underpinning the post-industrial urbanised world.) A famous travelogue containing paradisiacal descriptions of arcadia and 'Elsewhere', the 'Other World', is Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). In Chapter II, after having been washed up on the island of Lilliput, Lemuel Gulliver opens his eyes and sees:

The Country round [appearing] like a continued Garden; and the inclosed Fields, which were generally Forty Foot square, resembled so many Beds of Flowers. These Fields were intermingled with Woods of half a Stang, and the tallest Trees, as I could judge, appeared to be seven Foot high. I viewed the Town on my left Hand, which looked like the painted Scene of a City in a Theatre ([Swift 1726: 29](#)).

Arcadia as utopian form seems to be quite different from the idea of the perfect commonwealth in its absence of reformation through political means. It is aimed rather at moral and social reform through reconciliation with nature and in that sense is closely related to the idea of paradise, alternatively phrased as the ideal of the 'green patch'. The utopian thinking underpinning the concept of the garden and nature in general reveals two-fold imagery: the one ordered and architectural, and the other natural, even wild. But in both kinds there is a marked emphasis on the principle of pleasure. The domain of culture is about design, order, control, and the collective, most evidently demonstrated in utopian visions of the reform of the city and the state; that is, the urbanised, industrialised environment.

In terms of 'ordered' nature, such culturisation is found in the idealisation around the cultivated garden as ordered structure. This notion reflects the Vasari idea of *natura*. At the same time, many utopian visions have been articulated which encompass a Romantic idealisation of nature and the landscape or forms of [Eden](#) and arcadia, revisioned in the form of 'wild' nature. Such utopian construction embodies the ancient nature/culture dichotomy in which *both* nature and culture show ideological derivation (cf. pleasure and dystopia in [Chapter 2](#), [Chapter 5](#)).

1.5 Utopia and unhappiness, disillusionment

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The ambivalence inherent in utopian constructs is partly due to the fact that the ancient desire for paradise, Eden, or an ideal place has always been grounded in a fundamental disillusionment with the real. In *A Definition of Utopia*, Patrick and Negley argue that utopists often attempt to influence or change the course of the 'sick real' by proposing a scheme of social reform or change ([Nelson 1968: 109](#)). [Tod & Wheeler \(1978: 7\)](#) argue that:

... utopias may be concerned with the happiness of the individuals in society, or with their ideal organization, and the two concerns don't always fit together very well. They are frequently associated with periods of great social upheaval, and so are concerned with the security of the body politic -- the state -- rather than individual happiness. Thus utopia, curiously, is rarely a very pleasant place to live.

Therefore the realisation that the imagined, ideal world is indeed an unattainable pipedream enforces an uncertain, ambivalent position.

[Mannheim](#) (1936: 17) describes this position as a kind of schizophrenia:

Men strove to know the world so that they could mould it to conform to this ultimate goal; society was analysed so as to arrive at a form of social life more just or otherwise more pleasing to God; men were concerned with the soul in order to control the path to salvation. But the farther men advanced in analysis, the more the goal disappeared from their field of vision, so that to-day a research worker might say with Nietzsche "I have forgotten why I ever began" (*Ich habe meine Gründe vergessen*) ([Mannheim](#) 1936: 18).

Similarly, despite Plato's analytical thinking resulting in postulations of strict control and other restrictions aimed at the higher 'good' of the state, his ideal state is not a very happy one, which is exactly what Mannheim argues. In *Timaeus* Socrates voices his dissatisfaction with the mere discourse on an ideal city as it had appeared in the *Republic*, as it is based on a set of presuppositions ([Plato](#) 1961: 23).

In *Utopia* More designed a state that was fraught with laws and rules, such as the privilege of marriage which is denied unless a special warrant from the Prince has been obtained (More, Book II in [Gallagher](#) 1964: 47). In the case of adultery, the guilty person must work as a slave (More, Book II in [Gallagher](#) 1964: 48). Both men and women should engage in war and fight as soldiers and may not call auxiliary troops to their assistance (More, Book II in [Gallagher](#) 1964: 51, 57), and a utopian who is travelling to see the rest of the country or to visit friends in some other town and is found to be without his passport will be severely treated and punished as a fugitive and sent home disgracefully (More, Book II in [Gallagher](#) 1964: 33). Yet Sir Thomas argues (tongue-in-the-cheek?) that:

There is no danger of commotion at home; which alone has been the ruin of many states ... but as long as they ... are governed by such good laws, the envy of all their neighbouring princes, who have often though in vain attempted their ruin, will never be able to put their state into any commotion of disorder (More, Book II in [Gallagher](#) 1964: 67).

In *Gulliver's Travels*, Swift describes how in Lilliput children are removed from their families to be educated by the State, and how parents are allowed to visit their offspring but not to fondle them. John Traugott in *The Alienated: Gulliver and Hythloday* (Raphael Hythloday is the story teller in Utopia) argues that both Swift and More create an ironic disjunction between the dichotomy between the real and the unreal, and the unattainable utopia and actuality ([Nelson](#) 1968: 114). This is the case in most utopian constructs (cf. nightmare and dystopia in [Chapter 2](#)).

1.6 Utopia and the 'chosen one'

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There is an embedded irony in the ontology of the word 'utopia'. If it is essentially a fictional construct but proposes certain ideology, the questions of authority and origin are immediately current. The concept of the chosen one, the genius, is related to that of the avant-garde, and indicates a similar kind of 'running-ahead', or 'showing the way'. In turn, these concepts are related to the concepts of utopia and ideology.

In the past intellectuals often determined and initiated political and ideological directions. They were always seen as 'avant-garde' although the term only acquired its present usage with Henri de Saint-Simon in his *Opinions Littéraires* (1825) ([Saint-Simon](#) 1856). In this sense all utopian writing can be interpreted as avant-garde, since it postulates a new alternative reality that breaks with the reality of the present.

The concept of the 'chosen one' postulates in essence that the creator or the author of the utopia is a (single) visionary who possesses special powers to contradict the conventions of the immediate experience and reality. The concept of vanguardism is related to the notion of novelty. The teleological aspect involved here is that vanguards idealistically believe that history is a process that can be manipulated, influenced and directed, although it remains a dialectical process.

As mentioned before, utopian projections are future-oriented and intend ameliorating and improving the present unhappy real. In this sense, such projections are related to vanguardism in that it purports to improve and advance the present. The Platonian cave myth can be viewed as one of the first articulations of these concepts in its concern with the ascent to true vision; that is, finding the truth and knowledge in the *Anschauung* of the Ideas, as well as with return and alienation. Central to Plato's scientific thinking are the mathematical sciences that are concerned with forms or predicates. In *Republic*, Plato demonstrates the cardinal influence of Socrates. According to the latter, the sciences form the ladder that leads up "to the vision of the 'good' as the clue to the whole scheme of existence" ([Taylor](#) 1960: 285-286). It would then follow that if the forms of things can be determined or understood, these would lead to the 'good'. These forms imply a vast plurality of forms that correspond with each universal predicate that can be affirmed by a variety of logical subjects. The 'form of good' is immediately recognisable to knowing itself.

Plato's cave myth as a figurative construct embodies notions of dichotomy; duality; dualism; a 'here' and a 'there'; two worlds: a real and a metaphysical and/or imagined one; travelling to another place to acquire knowledge and to return; and so forth, and has played a crucial conceptual role in many utopian constructs. Fundamental to this myth remains the question as it is articulated by Hythloday: what gain will there be in serving a prince if no one listens to him, let alone understands him? As such, it speaks of impotence in the sense of the realisation that the ideal model and the brute reality are irreconcilable. It speaks, too, of a 'chosen one' with the knowledge of the 'good', but who stands alone.

[Baker-Smith](#) (1987: 11) argues that the common ground of utopians and millenarians is that both have an "eye on the consumer or the extra-textual response". The prophet, the hero, the vanguard and the chosen one do not wish to be voices calling in the desert; they want to have an effect on their audiences. Within the perspective of posited ideologies through the afore-mentioned kind of figures, no utopia can satisfy in terms of such expected [teleology](#). With Spider-Man there is similar frustrated teleology in the sense of relentless infinite salvation to do; a never-ending attempt to maintain cosmic harmony.

Utopian constructs essentially stay unresolved since the conceived ideals remain impossible. Sensory, historical reals seem to be as imperfect and non-ideal as the non-real utopias. As such, utopian models are impotent because of the inherent component of desire - they cannot aspire to or claim anything else (cf. [Chapter 5](#) for the 'chosen one' and the deconstruction of genius in the late twentieth century).

1.7 Utopia and technological advancement

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Although in this study the focus is on so-called 'new' technologies of the late twentieth century, the relationship between utopia and technology is briefly introduced. In the past, the notion of utopia was, and still is, intimately related to technology and technical invention.

Philip [Hayward](#) (1990: 1) provides a useful background to technology and points out that the term, derived from the Greek *technologia* ('systematic treatment'), was introduced to the English language in the early seventeenth century. This initial definition was broad and dualistic and pointed to discourses on the arts as well as to the scientific study of the practical and industrial spheres.

Although technology is not concerned with a single utopian construct *per se*, it does reflect utopian thinking in the sense that it bears on cosmological vision, sociological ordering and psychological well-being. The ideology underpinning technology is often articulated in terms of the advancement and progress of the human race and the infallibility of the machine. In this sense the technologist, therefore also the artist as technologist, yearns for a utopia reached by means of a technological '[fix](#)'.

The belief that technique and technological inventions and devices will banish suffering and ease the discomfort of natural life has been firmly entrenched in the utopia and ideology underpinning developments in *both art and science*. Yet, in its earliest forms, the motivating force of technical invention was not simply strategies for survival but religious in nature. Indeed, as indicated before, most of the pre-twentieth-century utopian visions were constructed around principles of order, structure and rational thinking, postulating the belief that such principles will bring happiness and prosperity. The reordering and cultivation of the natural environment, including the land, plants and animals, on the other hand, were aimed not only at creating and providing shelter and defense, but also had a religious purpose which was often linked to utopian thought. Even the earliest forms of the domestication of animals and the ordering of nature were ideologically based, since these actions were initially religiously motivated and most religions have been proved to be shrouded in forms of political and ideological agendas.

From the time of Kepler and Newton, mathematical formulae, essential to industrial invention and development, were the magic ingredients required for any promising postulation on advancement of the human race. Therefore, science is most strenuously justified by the fact that it leads to economic benefits through technological innovation ([Ziman](#) 1976: 180). Yet, the one central encompassing tradition that seems to be enduring in the world is the academic distinction between science and technology. As Ziman argues, technology is largely independent of science in that it usually merely provides a "climate of basic ideas and general principles" ([Ziman](#) 1976: 188).

The Cartesian absolute dualism has had a far-reaching influence in the sense of grounding the mind/body, nature/culture, and subject/object dichotomies. In the period from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries the absence of technique in all areas but the mechanical is apparent and much less invention took place than during the Middle Ages and early Renaissance ([Ellul](#) 1964: 38). Treatises on archaeology, psychology, theology, literature, and so forth were proof that a new ideal had emerged, an intellectual ideal. During the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, intellectuals such as Descartes, Montaigne, Rabelais, Kepler, Galileo, Newton and Vasari, aspired to be universalists who attempted to understand the physical world through rational and analytical means.

Whilst rationalism seemed to have flourished during the following Age of Enlightenment, the emphasis on scientific and mathematical method impregnated philosophy with notions of mechanics, evolution and commensurability. British Empiricist, David Hume, stated in 1739 that: "As the science of man is the only solid foundation for the other sciences, so, the only solid foundation we can give to this science itself must be laid on experience and observation" (Hume in [Berlin](#) 1956: 164).

Spider-Man's endowment with superhuman and cyborg qualities (a fusion of organism and machine in a metaphoric sense) is intimately linked to utopian projections on the body itself; that is, the idea that the body is some kind of biochemical machine. This idea dates back to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophy in which the ideas of the cosmic order of perfection (Descartes in [Aune](#) 1970: 20, [Kriegl](#) 1967: 41), the universe as clockwork and human beings as mechanical machines (Julian Offray de La Mettrie, *L'homme machine* (1748) in [Berlin](#) 1956: 269, [Woesler de Panafieu](#) 1984: 130) are postulated. La Mettrie, a medical doctor, represents the core of French materialism and formulated his vision when the vogue of automata appeared ([Woesler de Panafieu](#) 1984: 130). He altered Descartes' postulation that human beings are *like* machines to the explicit claim that they *are* machines ([Woesler de Panafieu](#) 1984: 130).

An erotic basis for technology has been established in the work of the nineteenth-century French philosophers such as La Mettrie. This orientation was taken further by the Marquis de Sade, the Symbolists such as Baudelaire and twentieth-century French artists such as [Magritte](#) and [Duchamp](#). In this strain of thought in visual and literary texts that runs through almost three centuries up to the present day, a notable link between technology, mechanical movement and the sexuality of the human body can be observed (cf. 'cyborgs' in [Chapter 5](#)).

The enormous developments in mathematics during the latter half of the nineteenth century instigated rapid technological innovation and manifested in the grounding of quantum theory, soon appearing in a renewal of the scientific basis of the human sciences such as art and psychology. At the same time the liberally oriented bourgeoisie, who gained tremendous power during the rise of industrialisation, eagerly embraced the materialist theories of La Mettrie and his followers. In *The Vamp and the Machine* (1986), Andreas [Huysen](#) (1986: 65) of the University of Colombia notes that:

This extreme materialist view, with its denial of emotion and subjectivity served politically to attack the legitimacy claims of feudal clericalism and the absolutist state. It was hoped that once the metaphysical instances, which church and state resorted to as devices of legitimizing their power, were revealed as fraud they would become obsolete. At the same time, however, and despite their revolutionary implications such materialist theories ultimately lead to the notion of a blindly functioning world machine, a gigantic automaton, the origins and meaning of which were beyond human understanding. Consciousness and subjectivity were degraded to mere functions of a global mechanism. The determination of social life by metaphysical legitimations of power was replaced by the determination through laws of nature. The age of modern technology and its legitimacy apparatuses had begun.

During nineteenth-century Industrialisation, the rapid developments in industry and technology transformed the polis into an aestheticised metropolis. (In Chapter 3 the late twentieth-century [urban landscape](#) is investigated). Yet in many visual and literary texts of the early twentieth century, such as [The Wizard of Oz](#) by L. Frank Baum (1900), emerging dystopia in the sense of collapse of technology in the city is rendered. The impact of technology and industrialisation has been so far-reaching, however, that in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century metropolis the question is not posed as to whether the city-state is morally good; that is, its utopian conception has become unimportant. It is merely embraced as proof of scientific progress and technological invention that is to the benefit of humankind.

The nineteenth- and twentieth-century industrial worlds have become saturated with objects. These worlds of objects, whether controlled or uncontrolled, whether manoeuvred or unmanoeuvred, must be viewed as technology ([Delany](#) 1996: 267). [Delany](#) (1996: 266) even interprets science as “aestheticised technology”. He argues further that: “The working part of this suggestion is that science bears the same relationship to things in the world as an aspect bears to an object” ([Delany](#) 1996: 266). It is this rhetorical stage that has unfolded for debates on twentieth and twenty-first-century culture: a world consisting of objects conceptualised and manufactured through technology. The rampant influence of computer technology today, in all spheres of life, cannot be ignored (cf. [Chapter 3](#) for the technological impact in late twentieth century).

1.8 Conclusion

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It would seem that whatever form utopian thinking takes, it is always premised in the relationship of human beings with world. The pursuit of happiness and the improvement of quality of life seem to be further essential ingredients of utopian thinking. However, although the latter are meritorious ideals, utopian construction remains impotent due to various ambivalences such as the unresolved dichotomy between the real and the imagined ideal, and the irony of the prophet-hero without audience.

From the Seventies onwards, a different kind of utopian thinking has come into play, a subversive fragmented dystopian condition in which universals and ideologies are regarded with scepticism. In the next chapter, [Chapter 2](#), the dystopian world of the late twentieth century will be scrutinised.