Introduction: Haunting Utopias

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Time is up. The world is burning, flooding, dying. Moving from crisis to crisis, four years after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the climate crisis manifesting more and more clearly, dystopia is approaching day by day, hour by hour. We are constantly confronted with the possibility of the end of the world as we know it. While this forces us to grapple with imminent doomsday scenarios, with the potential collapse of societal and economic systems all over the globe, and the exacerbation of often *already* fatal inequalities, it also opens up space for a utopian imagination—one that looks both backwards and forwards.

Utopia, both a no-place (outopos) and a good place (eutopos) (Marks, Vieira, & Wagner-Lawlor 2022, 1), is described by historian Gregory Claeys (2020, 13), as 'some variation of an ideal present, an ideal past and an ideal future, and the relation between them.' Utopia as an alternative system allows us to imagine an *otherwise*, an assessment of where we are and where we (don't) want to go (Claeys 2022, 4). Ever since the beginning of histories, humans have been concerned with utopias—apparently all along trying to conceive of better ways to organize life, better ways to live together, better ways to use the earth.

In *Utopia* (1516), Thomas More envisions a better society, more egalitarian and just than the western Europe of his time could offer. In his *Utopia*, everyone is equal, people only work six hours a day, and there is no unemployment. Some would say More's *Utopia* sounds like the ideal socialist state. However, this imagined society is by far not as idyllic as it may seem at first sight: To start with, the territory on which *Utopia* was founded was violently conquered from the island's indigenous population. Furthermore, while a utopian society might suggest a peaceful society, the citizens of Utopia wage wars with other nations, and enslave defeated soldiers after these wars (Jackson, 2022).

By its very definition as the no-place, utopia can never come into being and will always remain imaginary, aspirational, and idealistic. However, this does not mean that utopian imagination has not had and will not have very real impacts on past, present, and future. The 21st century is haunted by utopias, in their absence, failure, and dystopian manifestations. Sociologist Avery Gordon (2008, xvi) describes haunting as

one way in which abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life, especially when they are supposedly over and done with (slavery, for instance) or when their oppressive nature is denied (as in free labor or national security). Haunting is not the same as being exploited, traumatized, or oppressed, although it usually involves these experiences or is produced by them.

Furthermore, it 'alters the experience of being in time, the way we separate the past, the present, and the future' (ibid.), as they cannot be separated in any linear way, but interlink and condition each other. Looking at the past, the present, and (speculations about) the future then also reminds us about the fine line that separates utopia from dystopia, and that the former can quite quickly turn into the latter—or that both can be equally true at the same time.

Utopian aspirations have not only been a driving force for technological, political, economic, or social change; the consequences of these aspirations have also repeatedly shown their potential to become very dystopian for some, if not most people. It is often the side of hegemonic power structures that one finds oneself on that determines the utopian or dystopian nature of imaginations, ideologies, narratives, and political systems. Colonialism, the industrial revolution, and slavery constitute just a few examples where the utopian aspirations of some became and keep becoming dystopian realities for many. White supremacy, patriarchy, and global capitalism might be an elite few's ideal past, present and futures, but the majority of humanity and the world's ecosystems have been and will be oppressed and exploited for the sake of the maintenance of these dys-/utopian structures of power.

It is thus evident that utopianism cannot only mean imagining a better *otherwise* for the future, but also requires reckoning with the utopian and dystopian pasts and present(s) that have not (yet) come into being, are failing right now, or never will materialize. Industrial and technological innovations promise a utopian way of life, with more wealth, more efficiency, and more freedom. One effect of such innovations has of course been the growth in global carbon emissions, a warming planet, and a looming climate catastrophe. Additionally, automation and AI are facilitating loneliness and surveillance as well as stimulating unemployment and lower wages for workers.

The unfulfilled promises of AI and new technology are not the only things that are haunting, as the political attempts to fulfill the utopian ideals too have left us with, sometimes, rather dystopian outcomes. The utopian visions of a socialist state that some attribute to More's eponymous work appear in Karl Marx' influential work as well, theorizing about the emergence of a new type of utopian socialist state controlled by its workers. While the European socialist and communist

states of the 20th century have all disappeared, their memories remain. The haunting of the former Soviet states takes different forms for different people. For some, it is the promise and potential of what could have been, for others, it is the repression and violence that accompanied some of these states that haunts the most.

Utopias, in their imaginary ideal nature and their potential dystopian downsides, hence constitute the presence of an absent past, present or future, in the present. Because of its imaginary nature, utopia thus always haunts us as the would have/could have/should have of alternative pasts, presents and futures—very present in their absences—and through the violences that the attempts of their realization engender.

This issue of *Junctions* seeks to explore issues of utopianism and hauntology across the humanities. It seemed to the editing board that the theme of 'Haunting Utopias' could be made to fit a number of different topics and disciplines, and we are proud to present seven articles that each tackle the theme from very different topics and perspectives. This issue furthermore comprises a special section on the 2022 Utrecht Philosophy Graduate Conference.

CONTRIBUTIONS

In 'Beyond Grammars of Utopia: Crisis of Imagination and Utopianism by Negation or Affirmation in James Joyce's *Ulysses*', Yiorgos Podaropoulos negotiates the crisis of imagination in utopian thinking by undertaking a grammatical-conceptual reading of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922). The article specifically argues that *Ulysses* arranges a negative utopianism following Homer's *Odyssey* but during the narrative tests the logical necessity that excludes affirmative utopian thinking. Podaropoulos identifies grammatical structures that capture conceptual mechanisms guiding utopian worldbuilding as 'grammars of utopia'.

In 'Beyond A New World in Space', José Dorenbos, África López Zabalegui and Luna Njoku Domínguez ask if literary interplanetary dreams automatically engage in a colonial rhetoric of violent expansion, or if they can also serve the interests of oppressed and underserved groups. By comparing two narratives of space settlement, in Octavia Butler's *Earthseed* series and Adam Garnet Jones' *History of the New World*, the paper argues that both stories see space resettlement as a hopeful alternative to life on a collapsed and broken Earth. The comparison focuses on the organization of utopian societies and the role they fulfill in the present.

In 'Why Make Atlas Dance? Colonial Utopia that Persists in Contemporary Robotics', Soyun Jang reflects on the colonialist logic underlying the creation of the humanoid robot *Atlas* by

Boston Dynamics. The article examines especially how the concepts of extractivism and recognition construct the robot as a new, posthuman subject, reproducing colonial logic and practices via an analysis of a dance video of *Atlas* named 'Do You Love Me?'. Jang argues that the colonial utopia lives on not only in this dance video, but in robotics at large–rendered invisible through practices of extractivism and recognition.

In '"You Can Resurrect Me, but Only Piecemeal": Embodied Texts and the Heterotopian Regeneration of the Cyborg', Dominique Ubbels engages with Donna Haraways's cyborg through the concepts of heterotopia and prosthesis, reading it alongside Shelley Jackson's digital interactive novel *Patchwork Girl* (1995). Ubbels argues that *Patchwork Girl* manages to return the singularities and material contexts of the body to the cyborg via Jackson's distinctive use of prosthesis in its interactive literary form.

In 'Monstrous Mushrooms, Toxic Love and Queer Utopias in Jenny Hval's *Paradise Rot'*, Hannah Pezzack performs a close reading of Jenny Hval's novel *Paradise Rot* (2018), analyzing the utopian potential that the novel's understanding of the body as an interconnected network extending beyond its skin, offers. Pezzack argues that an understanding of the body as entangled, and society as made-up of interlinked, co-dependent entities, is crucial in order to start acting according to our reliance on each other.

In '"Recreating Katalin Street": Reenacting a Haunting Past Utopia as Testimony to Trauma in Magda Szabó's *Katalin Street*', Lisa van Straten brings together Cathy Caruth's work on trauma theory with Svetlana Boym's scholarship on nostalgia, to demonstrate how both their perspectives can be beneficial to studying traumatic experience, especially in close-knit communities. Alongside the analysis of Magda Szabó's novel *Katalin Street* (1969), van Straten argues that reading their theoretical approaches together opens up a trauma-spectrum that allows understanding trauma not only in terms of the acting out of the individual, but also a shared performance of a haunting past utopia.

In 'The Ghost of the Ottoman Scourge: Ottoman Hauntology and dystopia in Socialist Yugoslav History Textbooks (1945–1990)' Bakir Ovčina investigates the depiction of the Ottoman Period in history textbooks from Bosnia and Herzegovina during the time of Socialist Yugoslavia. Bosnia housed a substantial native Slavic Muslim population, which dated back to the Ottoman period in Bosnia (1463-1878) when a significant part of the population converted to Islam. Both nationalist and Marxist perspectives on the past considered Ottoman and Islamic civilization as a backward 'Dark Age'. Ovčina investigates history textbooks, as they can be seen as representation of

'official knowledge'. The textbooks used dystopian language to present Ottoman rule, while presenting the contemporary regime in a positive light.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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