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# Frontiers of Utopia: Past and Present

**Louis Marin**

Visitors to the observation deck of the Sears Tower—"the highest tower in the world"—can buy, when back on the ground, some slides that commemorate their visit and keep it in their memory. One of them (fig. 1) recalls the prospect they have discovered from the top floor of the building, from its western side, the plain stretching away as far as the eye can see, the others (fig. 2, for example), the views of the tower from the ground at a distance. Two prospects, two visions of the world confront each other: the one from above, the highest viewpoint possible on earth from a building, opens up space to the stupefied gaze led to its visual limit and to the spatial frontier of the horizon where gaze and earth seem to coincide. In the slide, taken at dusk, space up to its ultimate background is crisscrossed by a linear network of light spots that imperatively, in the coming night invading the image, leads the gaze if not toward a vanishing point at least to a plane where sky and earth fade and vanish into each other.<sup>1</sup> The spectator's eye, in the position of a bold bird's-eye view,<sup>2</sup> is located in a dominating position and at such an alti-

1. Such a regular grid tracing space, seen only at night, appears less to define loci and individual properties than to indicate possible movements across space, an abstract set of directions for moving objects, all potentially moving towards the horizon line.

2. A position that the cartographical fictions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries never dared to offer to their "readers." See *Discovering New Worlds: Essays on Medieval Exploration and Imagination*, ed. Scott D. Westrem (New York, 1991); P. D. A. Harvey, *The History of Topographical Maps: Symbols, Pictures and Surveys* (London, 1980); Louis Marin, *Utopics: Spatial Play*, trans. Robert A. Vollrath (Atlantic Highlands, N.J., 1984); Michel de

tude that his gaze “collects” a space that he “really” totalizes, the plain up to its extreme frontier.<sup>3</sup> As a dominating eye, a totalizing view, a scopic or theoretical controlling power of space, the beholder, in one moment through his gaze, identifies himself with the tower’s master<sup>4</sup> and metonymically with the master of the world. This process of totalization at work through the beholder’s gaze is nevertheless displaying its practical weakness, its cognitive uncertainty, its ontological trouble from its beginning to its end. What is the real (or true) “content” of the eye’s point?<sup>5</sup> What is the affective power by which this totalization is apparently made and moreover by which this mastered space, this *imperium*, could be authorized and legitimized?<sup>6</sup> We can only answer these critical

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Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley, 1984); and my analysis of seventeenth-century maps of Paris in *Portrait of the King*, trans. Martha M. Houle (1981; Minneapolis, 1988).

3. In fact, the image of the prospect of the western plain is an emblematic one. On the observation deck of the tower, the visitor contemplates *successively* the four sides of the world according to the four compass points. The “vision” of the western space is at the same time one of the four “real” visions of the world and an iconic symbol—or a synecdochic emblem—of them all.

4. The visitor does not care if Sears exists as a living, individual, real person. He has only the vague feeling that the name *Sears* symbolically (that is to say, legally) designates a fictive persona of an important international company.

5. The image and its referent are confused in such a way that even when the visitor is really on the observation deck of the tower, the external “real” prospect of the plain appears to him already transformed into its imaginary view, into its image, first because of the completely nonnatural abstract position of the beholder’s body and eye, and second because it is already framed by the window edges and panes of glass.

6. This may be the major question that can be asked of all kinds of powers, not really the one of their “origins” that is embedded, as Rousseau has already profoundly observed, in imaginary or fictitious “real” beginnings, but essentially the deeper and more decisive question of the processes of their legitimation: How can a de facto dominating position that imposes necessary constraints be changed into a de jure one, that is, into legal obligation? The Pascalian (and before him the Montaignean) explanation through a semiotics and pragmatics of imagination and custom seems to me the most coherent and effective one. See Marin, *Portrait of the King*, and Christian Lazzeri, “Le Gouvernement de la raison d’état,” in *Le Pouvoir de la raison d’état* (Paris, 1992).

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FIG. 1.—Photo: Illinois Distribution Company (CH-1189B).

questions<sup>7</sup> by discerning a mass anonymity, an empty simulacrum of fullness, the lure of an illusion fascinating the imagination through its all-powerful sublime effects. On the other hand, what is the function of this limit at the extremity of the gaze and the space if not to signify that, as an “estate” in an imaginary way, space, over there, can be possessed and appropriated through the gaze, whose limit would be its bound—as if the world itself can be the object of a final land survey registered in an exact cadastre.

The other image, also snapped at dusk, would allow us in a sense to answer those critical questions, at least the first one. The tower is standing up to its full height as a shadowy giant, dominating all the smaller buildings, outlined against the vanishing light. The highest tower in the world is just *here*, watching over the city, unless as a monster coming from another world, it comes to annihilate it: strange or frightening ambiguity, the *monster* as a word is itself etymologically ambiguous.

7. A critical question, in the Kantian sense, is a question intending to found in a rational metadiscourse (historical and theoretical a prioris) the processes acknowledged and described by social sciences; in other words, critical in the sense that it establishes the limits or the frontiers of a specific scientific discourse within which that discourse is scientifically validated or legitimized.

*Monestrum* is that which warns, predicts, announces; *monstrum* is that which shows itself and makes itself be seen in the stupefying obviousness of the wonder, of the incredible marvel.<sup>8</sup> The highest tower in the world stands up against the twilight glow at the same time to warn and announce the marvelous, the wonderful, the extraordinary and also to show itself, to exhibit itself, by its very presence, by its erection, as *this* marvelous and extraordinary thing it announces. If we follow Émile Benveniste's admirable analysis of the word *praesens*—what comes just before being, what precedes it as little as might be<sup>9</sup>—the tower, springing up at dusk, would announce its very and proper presence with the image of the Sears Tower in its absolute height,<sup>10</sup> on the shore of the lake as an impending everlasting present, a present to come and to subsist forever, a simulacrum of eternity. As for the subject of the "other" gaze, the spectator's eye pushed down in an uncertain site, in the shadow, at a distance from the *monstrum*, it appears less beholding the nocturnal giant than being seen by it, by its eye, an invisible eye as if the whole space organized by this erected center was becoming a diffuse power of vision. The spectator looks at the tower, but what does he see? He sees that

8. *Monstrum* is derived from *monestrum* (*moneo*) according to Sextus Pompeius Festus, a second-century grammarian who summarized Marcus Verrius Flaccus's *De verborum significatu*. The basic meaning of *moneo* (radix *memini*, *mens*) is "to remind someone of something, to make someone remember"; then "to warn, to inform, to involve, to exhort, to urge." *Monstro* signifies "to show, to indicate, to designate, to prescribe, to give advice." This etymological ambiguity is semantically and philosophically quite productive. It points out the close and sophisticated relationships between the self-presentation of the object (*monstrum*) and its temporal representation (*monestrum*) that is the sign that precedes and announces its presence. I must underscore, nevertheless, the critical—and problematic—move that is made when questioning an etymological ambiguity (whose philological foundations are themselves uncertain) through a semantic interpretation that obviously possesses philosophical (or ontological) overtones.

9. See Émile Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek (1966; Coral Gables, Fla., 1971), pp. 115–19.

10. The observation made by Kant in the "Analytic of the Sublime" on the absolute magnitude of the Egyptian pyramids could be applied precisely here. Referring to Claude Savary's observations in his *Lettres sur l'Égypte* (1785), Kant writes

that in order to get the full emotional effect of the size of the Pyramids we must avoid coming too near just as much as remaining too far away. For in the latter case the representation of the apprehended parts (the tiers of stones) is but obscure, and produces no effect upon the aesthetic judgement of the Subject. In the former, however, it takes the eye some time to complete the apprehension from the base to the summit; but in this interval the first tiers always in part disappear before the imagination has taken in the last, and so the comprehension is never complete. . . . For here the feeling comes home to him of the inadequacy of his imagination for presenting the idea of a whole within which that imagination attains its maximum, and, in its fruitless efforts to extend this limit, recoils upon itself, but in so doing succumbs to an emotional delight. [Immanuel Kant, "Analytic of the Sublime," bk. 2 of *The Critique of Judgement*, in *Kant's Critique of Aesthetic Judgement*, trans. and ed. James Creed Meredith (1790; Oxford, 1911), ¶26, pp. 99–100]



FIG. 2.—Photo: Illinois Distribution Company (CH-1189E).

what he sees is looking at him from above, from everywhere.<sup>11</sup> He sees from only a point (of view), but he discovers that in the *imperium* constituted by the highest tower in the world, and in the space necessarily built around it, that is, in this *panopticon*, he is visible from everywhere, he is the object of a powerful and virtual omnipresent gaze.<sup>12</sup> The two images that Sears, Roebuck, and Company offers to visitors to its tower give them two views that confront each other through all their characteristics: on the one hand, a dominating gaze in its imaginary mastery, totalizing space as far as it erases its particular divisions by a perspective grid of lights that dissolve its “loci” into a universal horizon; on the other hand, an overpowerful center endowed with the complete control of the undifferentiating processes and of the overhanging mastery of all possible exteriority by absorption of their geographical, historical, and cultural parts. However, if in our critical metadiscourse we attempt to consider this opposition between the two visions of the world not by separating the opposite terms of the relation, but by seeing them all together at the same time and moment of thinking, by locating one term into its opposite or reversely,<sup>13</sup> the opposition as such could constitute a visual decisive emblem of the “frontiers of Utopia” understood in two ways (that are the two meanings, objective and subjective, of the genitive): the frontiers that limit utopia if such frontiers “really” exist and the frontiers that any utopia traces if any utopian is capable of tracing such frontiers. Moreover, to consider and see the two images within each other is to make us feel and discern the extreme intensity of their confrontation<sup>14</sup> and think of it as a historical and cultural symptom (or symbol, to speak

11. See Maurice Merleau-Ponty's notes on the “chiasm” of the visible and the invisible, that is, man as simultaneously a seeing being and a body that is looked at (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, ed. Claude Lefort [1964; Evanston, Ill., 1968], pp. 214–15). See also Jacques Lacan's interpretation of the scopoc drive, which he derived directly from Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and ontology of visual perception, in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (1973; New York, 1981), pp. 70–73.

12. See Michel Foucault, “Panopticism,” *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Sheridan (1975; New York, 1979), pp. 195–228.

13. On a deeper level, such a “critical” experiment of thought (belonging, I would emphasize, to a metadiscursive level) consists in thinking *relatio* prior to its *relata*, producing them or their matrix, a construction that constitutes a powerful tool for the critical analysis of the so-called originary or primitive contradiction of a given society in its structure and history. Needless to say, that is one of the basic axioms of structural analysis. See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (1958; New York, 1963), pp. 215–41.

14. It is at this level that our “critical” questioning and apparatus (intending to ground particular “sciences” by tracing the epistemological frontiers of their cognitive validity and legitimation) is revealed to be a deconstructive experiment through which frontiers as limits are divided and their subject split, the interval of such a gap being the epistemological site of the utopian fiction.

like Erwin Panofsky)<sup>15</sup> of the end of our century and millennium. How not to read in this opposition the deep-rooted American will, fantasy, dream, or utopian drive, of a completely homogenized world,<sup>16</sup> a world without differences through a generalized entropy, unbound (*ab-solutus*) from any exteriority through a natural, "spontaneous" assimilation, as if, to paraphrase what Edmund Husserl said of Europe in his *Krisis* in 1938, America were at home everywhere (*bei sich*), finding or believing to find no bounds, within the limits that the other cultures would give themselves to realize their end.<sup>17</sup> These two visions indeed correspond quite well to what the name *Utopia* has constantly and repeatedly signified since 1516, the year of its appearance as the title of Thomas More's book at the very dawn of our modernity: on the one hand, a free play of imagination in its indefinite expansion measured only by the desire, itself infinite, of happiness in a space where the moving frontiers of its philosophical and political fictions would be traced; on the other hand, the exactly closed totality rigorously coded by all the constraints and obligations of the law binding and closing a place with insuperable

15. See Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (New York, 1939), chap. 1. On this point see Hubert Damisch, "Panofsky am Scheidewege," and Marin, "Panofsky et Poussin en Arcadie," in *Cahiers pour un temps: Erwin Panofsky* (Paris, 1983), pp. 101–16, 151–66. It would be interesting to analyze the neo-Kantian iconological symbol in Panofsky's first works as an attempt to construct a "critical" analytical tool of history in the particular domain of art history.

16. The model of the American melting pot deserves a careful historical and ideological analysis that exceeds the limits of this paper. Let me cite in passing, however, J. Hector Saint Jean de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, ed. Albert E. Stone (1782; New York, 1981), in which, through the example of a particular family, he evokes (without naming it) the American melting pot, where "individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men. . . . They are a mixture of English, Scotch, Irish, French, Dutch, Germans, and Swedes. From this promiscuous breed, that race now called Americans has arisen" (pp. 70, 68). And more recently, in 1980: "Can we doubt that only a Divine Providence placed this land, this island of freedom, here as a refuge for all those peoples in the world who yearn to breathe free? Jews and Christians enduring persecution behind the Iron Curtain; the boat people of Southeast Asia, Cuba and of Haiti" (Ronald Reagan, speech accepting the Republican Party's nomination to the presidency, *New York Times*, 18 Aug. 1980, p. A8). The explicit and contradictory dialectics consisting in reducing the suffering world to the American "utopian" blessed island is the political and ideological counterpart that conceals the assimilating American power of the whole world to American norms.

17. In fact, in the *Krisis*, Edmund Husserl, studying European history from a teleological point of view, intended (at the height of Nazi expansion in Germany) to show that Europe's accomplishment of its own telos would be the end of the world, in the sense that that achievement would encounter no limitation in other cultures. For Husserl, Europe alone has an "infinite" task that is one and the same as the movement of the Infinite-Spirit. See Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. David Carr (Evanston, Ill., 1970), and François Guéry, "Le Dieu terme et nous," in *Frontières et limites: Géopolitique, littérature, philosophie*, ed. Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris, 1991), p. 179.



frontiers that would guarantee its harmonious functioning.<sup>18</sup> More remarkable is the fact that when the two visions of the Sears Tower are considered and seen together, the subject of the gaze occupies simultaneously the imaginary dominating position of the one who sees and spreads out the external space all the way to its horizon and the no less imaginary dominated, bound position of the one who is visible from everywhere, from the fictive place of a ubiquitous and all-perceiving gaze, the symbolic gaze of the Law. Where to situate the subject of Utopia if not, by a theoretical fiction of the analytical metadiscourse, in the place of a gap, an interval where our attempt of seeing together the dominating term and the dominated one, the beholding process and the fact or feeling to be seen, would change itself into a neutral or neutralizing relationship.<sup>19</sup> Where is

18. The list of publications on Utopia, Utopian Thought, and on the history of utopia is endless. I have profited from the following: Joseph Rykwert, *On Adam's House in Paradise: The Idea of the Primitive Hut in Architectural History* (New York, 1972); Françoise Choay, *L'Urbanisme: utopies et réalités* (Paris, 1965), and *Les Utopies à la Renaissance* (Brussels, 1963); Raymond Ruyer, *L'Utopie et les utopies* (Paris, 1950); Roger Mucchielli, *Le Mythe de la cité idéale* (Paris, 1960); Joyce Oramel Hertzler, *The History of Utopian Thought* (London, 1923); Claude G. Dubois, *Problèmes de l'utopie* (Paris, 1968); Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*, trans. Louis Wirth and Edward Shils (1929; New York, 1936); Raymond Trousson, *Voyages aux pays de nulle part: histoire littéraire de la pensée utopique* (Brussels, 1975); Christian Marouby, *Utopie et primitivisme: essai sur l'imaginaire anthropologique à l'âge classique* (Paris, 1990); Geoffroy Atkinson, *The Extraordinary Voyage in French Literature before 1700* (New York, 1920); Alexandre Ciocanescu, *L'Avenir du passé: utopie et littérature* (Paris, 1972); Centre culturel international de Cerisy-la-salle, *Le Discours utopique* (Paris, 1978); *Utopie, Marxisme selon Ernst Bloch: un système de l'inconstructible: hommages à Ernst Bloch pour son 90<sup>e</sup> anniversaire*, ed. Gérard Raulet (Paris, 1965); Richard Gerber, *Utopian Fantasy: A Study of English Utopian Fiction since the End of the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1955); *Stratégies de l'utopie: colloque organisé au Centre Thomas More*, ed. Pierre Furter and Raulet (Paris, 1979); Robert C. Elliott, *The Shape of Utopia: Studies in a Literary Genre* (Chicago, 1970); Émile M. Cioran, *History and Utopia*, trans. Richard Howard (1960; New York 1987); Arthur Leslie Morton, *The English Utopia* (London, 1952); Pierre-François Moreau, *Le Récit utopique: droit naturel et roman de l'état* (Paris, 1982); Georges Duveau, *Sociologie de l'Utopie, et autres essais* (Paris, 1961); Martin Buber, *Paths in Utopia*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (New York, 1950); Percy G. Adams, *Travelers and Travel Liars, 1660–1800* (Berkeley, 1962).

19. For a logical and philosophical analysis of the neutral relationship, see my *Utopics*, pp. 12–28. In Greimas's terms for the elementary structure of signification, the neutral relationship is the one that connects two "contradictory" terms—non-A/non-B—and the "complex" relationship articulates two "contrary" terms—A/B. See A.-J. Greimas, *Du sens: essais sémiotique* (Paris, 1970). My theoretical (and experimental) move consists in deconstructing the complex relationships through which the subject of Utopia, constituted as an imaginary one, would be the autonomous Kantian or Rousseauist subject, simultaneously political and ethical sovereign law-giver and law-given subject. Our deconstructing gesture operates (1) by negating the "contrary" terms of the relation making them "indefinite," "undetermined" terms without any logical limit, except that they are neither A nor B and (2) by relating them as "contradictory" terms by the neutral relationships. To take an example, More's *Utopia* is simultaneously a representation of both England and America, but its creative energy, its performative force, springs from the fact that Utopia is neither

the subject of Utopia located if not in the place of that split and like its figure appearing on, or in, this internal frontier<sup>20</sup> that scars from the beginning the face of Utopia, a split between the scheme of productive imagination and the idea of Reason, to speak like Kant, since the times when this strange historical and cultural formation appeared at the historical frontier of our modernity. However, this frontier, internal to the very shaping of Utopia in 1516 as well as its constant repetition in the utopian genre developments for five centuries in various modes, demands to be seriously considered today at the end of our modernity, an end that was perhaps already present in its beginning. Is it not that contemporaneity, that the frontier we are just speaking about is marking in a more or less dissimulated way?<sup>21</sup> The present moment in world history and especially in European history prompts us to raise the problem of the horizon of Utopia and its frontiers and more deeply that of the very figure of that frontier between image and idea: a question that is perhaps the fictive but efficient manner in which to question the suspended end of the modern times. Since 1989, indeed two centuries after the French Revolution (there is sometimes a bizarre humor in the historical unconscious), suddenly in the East a great void has opened up. Or something that was considered and shaped as a void by the prognosticators of the historical "après coup" and interpreted by political commentaries in newspapers as the melancholic emptiness of the end of "ideologies." As we all know today and as everyone everywhere repeats, these ideologies, through their historical and cultural variations as well as their pathological forms, carried on, sometimes in a caricatural way, sometimes in an epic mode (remember Sergei Eisenstein), but soon in a monstrous manner, in a kind of desperate degeneration, the *Prinzip Hoffnung*, the "principle of hope" as Ernst Bloch said.<sup>22</sup> This *principle of hope* is one of the possible names that can be given

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America nor England (it is at the same time non-Europe and non-America). In other words, it is the name and the figure of their indefinite interval. The subject of utopia is located neither at the summit of the tower, in the dying western light of the sun, nor at its base, in the twilight invading the space of the lake.

20. The phrase "in the place of" must be understood as "in the site, the locus of that split" but also "instead of it, substituted for it." In this last sense, the "figure" (the subject of Utopia as the figure of the interval) is the result (or the product) of that process of substitution taking *place* in the spatial sense of the phrase within the indefinite interval between the contradictory terms (between "non-Europe" and "non-America").

21. The various problems raised by the notion of "le contemporain" are considered in a special issue of *Traverses* (1992). What does it mean to be in the same time of somebody or something else? What is the common temporal measure that allows such a "contemporality" to be asserted? And so on. Modernity could be characterized by the remarkable conjunction of its birth and its death. From this point of view, the poignant melancholic overtones of More's *Utopia* cannot be underestimated.

22. See Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight (1959; Cambridge, 1986).

to the utopian drive whose figure and concept made their appearance with Thomas More at the dawn of modern times, the end of which, with postmodern culture, we are said to be living today. However, that so-called emptiness has never been so traced, marked, remarked, and divided by frontiers. We do observe that new and old frontiers rise, linguistic, religious, cultural, political frontiers, those that were traced by wars, those that were kept up or dissimulated by totalitarian powers, those that appear simply by means of the terrible gift of political or ideological freedom. It seems that the collapse of the communist "Utopia," in some of its ideological *representations* that in the past gave it absurd and bloody frontiers, allows the return of Utopia itself in the shape of its first apparition at the beginning of the sixteenth century in Europe with the great explorations and travels, with the discovery of a new world that will soon become the New World, with the frightening change from the *closed* world to the *infinite* universe that Alexandre Koyré has so well described.<sup>23</sup> It seems, and it is not surprising, that the tension we observe generally in the modern Utopia and that runs across it even in its most degenerate examples can be found at a semantic level in the emblem of the two images of the Sears Tower, a tension between frontier and horizon, totality and infinity, limit and transcendence, closure and liberty. It is remarkable indeed that the changes in the signification of *horizon* from the Middle Ages to modern times or the variations of meaning of the term *frontier* work at the same time on utopian thought and imagination to make them produce, in history, society, and culture, effects of signification that call into question their developments and processes, their changes, and their most unexpected revolutions, if not to modify their course, if not to change the "real," at least to problematize the discourses that attempt to take them into account.

The use of the term *horizon* is in evidence from the second half of the thirteenth century onward. But at the early stages, it signified "limit," the limit of the gaze, the limit of sky and earth. By metonymy in the seventeenth century, it was used to designate the part of the landscape close to this line, and in the eighteenth century and the romantic epoch, *horizon* meant the opening of vision to the "extreme" of the gaze, the mystery of a remote space concealed from view, and, finally, the infinity of space. Oddly enough, *horizon*, which originally meant a limit, the power of circumscribing a place, connotes at the end, immensity, infinity: such is the limitless horizon of the ocean. The conquest, through the discovery of mountain landscape at the end of the eighteenth century, of higher and higher viewpoints makes the horizon move further and further back

23. See Alexandre Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe* (Baltimore, 1957).

until its vanishes into infinity.<sup>24</sup> In his essay "Utilité du beau," Victor Hugo writes:

*Le sentiment de l'infini plane sur le monde moderne. Tout y participe de je ne sais quelle vie immense, tout y plonge dans l'inconnu, dans l'illimité, dans l'indéfini, dans le mystérieux. . . . L'idéal moderne n'est pas la ligne correcte et pure, c'est l'épanouissement de l'horizon universel.*<sup>25</sup>

The limitless horizon is one of the main characteristics of the romantic landscape, an indefinite extent related to the display of a transcendence at this extremity where it seems possible to have a glimpse of the other side of the sky, a "beyond-space" encountered through the poetic and rhetorical figure of the twilight, in terms of which a bridge seems to be established between the visible and the invisible.<sup>26</sup> Then beyond the horizon, in the imagination, there appear, as the end of a voyage without return home, Utopias that, from the sixteenth century onward, paradoxically attempt to define the infinite by a harmonious and rigorous totalization: Utopias that could be considered as historical and philosophical "play" with the concept of the frontier that is pushed towards the extreme limit.

As we already understood, the terms *horizon*, *frontier*, and *limit* have a semantic value and a historical status quite different from those of *Utopia*. *Utopia* is a proper name, and in two senses, so to speak, first as the title of More's book published in 1516, and second as a toponym, the name of the island described in book two of *Utopia*. This name was fabricated by More as a Latin neologism from a fictitious Greek word: *ou-topia* or *eu-topia*. It is remarkable, however—this clue seems to me important on the historical and "ideological" levels—that the proper name became quite rapidly a common noun. It first named texts (or images) representing a genre of discourse (literary, political, polemical, and so on), of which More's book would be the first example or progenitor. Second, it named a fictitious geography, the territories, islands, kingdoms, and states described in

24. See Michel Collot, *La Poésie moderne et la structure d'horizon* (Paris, 1989) and *Horizon fabuleux*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1988), esp. 1:31–72.

25. Victor Hugo, "Utilité du beau," vol. 12 of *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris, 1969), p. 369.

26. For example, Madame de Staël, in *De l'Allemagne* (1810): "Quand, le soir, à l'extrémité du paysage, le ciel semble toucher de si près la terre, l'imagination se figure par-delà l'horizon un asile d'espérance, une partie de l'amour et la nature semble répéter silencieusement que l'homme est immortel." Or Alphonse de Lamartine, in "En Syrie," *Voyage en Orient*: "Le Sannin . . . domine toutes les cimes inférieures, et forme . . . le fond majestueux, doré, violet, rose, de l'horizon des montagnes, qui se noie dans le firmament, non comme un corps solide, mais comme une vapeur, une fumée transparente, à travers lesquelles on croit distinguer l'autre côté du ciel." Or Maurice de Guérin, who considers that the horizon at twilight is a symbol of man "écartelé à deux mondes, . . . un pied dans le fini, et l'autre dans l'infini" (all quoted in Collot, *L'Horizon fabuleux*, 1:48–49).

those utopias.<sup>27</sup> It should be noted that the term *horizon* becomes infinite at the very moment when eighteenth-century dictionaries admitted *utopia* as a common noun. The terms *horizon* (like an infinite frontier?) and *utopia* (as the generic name of a textual, visual, literary, political generality) are related to each other through the historical and semantic relationship between the infinite and universality, and because of such a relationship are separated by a strange frontier.

This kind of hypothesis needs to be tested. Within this interval—a lexical and a historical one, which is the largest and apparently the most arbitrary—within this place we attempt to locate our thinking. *Frontier as a polemical notion and the locus of the neutral*. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when the great national monarchies were being constituted, the notion of frontier is first of all understood as a “front” opposed to intruding enemies: “the extremity of a kingdom that enemies encounter in front of them when they invade it.” But during this period the defensive front of the “frontier” is immediately displaced from interior to exterior by a dynamic expanding thrust. Take the example given in a French dictionary: “By his conquests, the King has expanded and moved forward the frontiers of his kingdom.”<sup>28</sup> The frontier defines a state of equilibrium and balance between the opposing forces of expansion and resistance, as in a recent admirable film by Angelopoulos, *Le Pas suspendu de la cigogne*, which is entirely devoted to the notion of frontier (the military, political, ethnic, and emotional frontiers), involving a wedding ceremony celebrated on the two sides of a frontier river, in between the two patrols of a police car; or when in order to celebrate the marriage of the king in 1665, Charles Le Brun constructs the whole scenography of the kings of France and Spain meeting, on the border of the Pyrenees, precisely on the Île des Faisans on the Bidassoa River, an island crossed by the frontier between the two kingdoms.

Thus the frontier is the limit that separates two states. The limit is the abstract notion of the frontier, its juridical meaning.<sup>29</sup> The limit is just a

27. On Utopia as a literary genre, see Dubois, *Problèmes de l'utopie*, pp. 30ff. In any case, it is a complex problem to decide whether “utopia” can characterize texts or images produced before More’s *Utopia*. For example, is Plato’s *Atlantis* described in *Critias* a utopia? Or Plato’s *Republic*? Should we think, as I do, that Utopia as such, through the sophisticated model constructed by More at the beginning of the sixteenth century, defines certain modes and modalities of literary, political, and philosophical imagination and thinking in modern times, modes and modalities themselves related to specific historical and ideological contexts in Europe?

28. *Dictionnaire universel*, ed. Antoine Furetière (Rotterdam, 1690), s. v. “frontière”; my trans.

29. Denis Diderot and Jean d’Alembert, *Encyclopédie* (Paris, 1751–80) elaborates the relationships between the three terms *frontier*, *limit*, and *boundary marker* [*borne*]. *Frontier* can be synonymous with *limit*; limits are the bounds [*bornes*] of any kind of power or inheritance; boundaries are legally any kind of natural or artificial separation that marks the border or the dividing line between two adjoining (contiguous) inheritances. As Guéry

line, the boundary line between domains and territories. But even as a mere line, the limit makes manifest an interval between contiguities and vicinities, at least in its etymon.<sup>30</sup> The Latin *limes* signifies in its etymological origin a path or a passage, a way between two fields; the *limes* is the distance between two edges, like those “chemins creux” passing in Brittany without trespassing on the enclosures of their hedges, or like that cartage way for wagons on top of the Great Wall enclosing the Chinese Empire—or, as in the aforementioned film by Angelopoulos, the deserted river between its two banks. The limit would be a way between two frontiers, a way that would use their extremities to make *its* way. The limit is at the same time a way and a gap. Often in the seventeenth-century dictionaries the “moral” or “figurative” sense of *limit* appears in sentences that negate it: “la bonté de Dieu est sans limite”; “l’ambition du Prince est sans limites,” that is, “without measure”; “Être déraisonnable, c’est sortir des limites de la raison.” When mathematics deals axiomatically with infinity,

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underlines it in “Le Dieu terme et nous,” the three notions are ranked from the general meaning (“limit”) to the particular (“boundary marker”) through the term *frontier*. Moreover, the article on “bounds” and “boundary markers” complicates this hierarchy. The same can be said of the article in the *Grand Dictionnaire universel du dix-neuvième siècle*. There the convenient distinction consists in the juridical opposition: limits are prohibited passages (prohibited vs. allowed), bounds are prevented ones (prevented vs. possible). “Bounds are used as limits” when “limits distinguish what belongs to each of two powers (inheritances, temporal and spiritual powers).” “Bounds are obstacles placed by nature or men preventing to go beyond. Limits are lines traced to mark the space into which we must withdraw ourselves” (*Grand Dictionnaire universel du dix-neuvième siècle*, ed. Pierre Larousse, 1866–78 ed., s.v. “borne,” “frontière,” and “limite”). The whole question that frontiers, limits, and bounds raise is that of the passing or the crossing through them, a question I will deal with later while discussing the notion of travel or journey.

On the notion of the limit as the legal abstraction of the frontier and the spacing of the *limes* as the interval of polemical encounters as well as of peaceful exchanges, see the fascinating essay by François Béguin, “Stratégies frontalières dans les Pyrénées à la fin de l’ancien régime,” *Frontières et limites*, pp. 49–67. It confirms, with its particular example, my observations on the complex legal, geopolitical, and ideological dialectics of frontier, limit, boundary, tracing, marking, and so forth. To cite again Guéry, bounds mark a distinction that limits operate (trace) without marking them except by writing or registering them in the property’s cadastre. The boundary marker materializes, in and on the ground, an estate, a domain, an inheritance that law has already delimited or distinguished from other ones. The boundary stone represents, with its stone, the representation of entities existing in the potential space articulated by laws. In a sense, the basic question being founded in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century political economy (with Giovanni Botero and the *Encyclopédistes*, respectively) is the ways and manners of regulating the crossing of frontiers (openings and closings) by trade (goods, men, ideas) between social groups and nations. The question raised by utopia and utopian thought and imagination is the very question of the “frontier” as such, its deconstruction.

30. *Limes, -itis*: a path, a passage, a boundary, an edge between two fields or estates; a fortified boundary, a rampart; any path, passage, road, or way; a trace, a furrow signifying a frontier, a limit. See *A Latin Dictionary*, ed. Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short (Oxford, 1879), and the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, ed. P. G. W. Glare (Oxford, 1982), both s.v. “limes.”

the limit is a magnitude that other magnitudes approach indefinitely without ever surpassing it; to take the example of the *limes*, it is as if one of its edges were tending toward the other without ever reaching or attaining it. The way of the *limes* does not go indefinitely towards the infinite horizon. Constantly, at every moment of its travel, it maintains and keeps the difference between the two edges of the limit.

As a last word on those notions of frontier, interval, limit, I suggest we look at the term *selvage* (used for textiles) or *edge* (for a wood or a village), combined in the French *lisière*. This is no longer a way; it is rather a no-man's-land, the fringe of an edge. The *lisière* is the space of a gap, but uncertain of its limits, as when a land, an estate, a forest have simply their own edge, with no other limit in front of it, just a wild or an undetermined space. Here again the seventeenth-century French dictionary examples trace a remarkable network of significations. It is a no-man's-land, a limit blurred by destructive or wild forces: "les champs qui aboutissent au grand chemin ont souvent leurs lisières mangées par les moutons"; "les bites fauves endommagent fort les terres qui sont sur les lisières des forêts"; "les ennemis voulaient entrer dans cette province, mais ils n'ont ruiné que ses lisières."<sup>31</sup> My semantic journey, adrift on the term *lisière* (edge, fringe, selvage), points out a notion I will call a *neutral place*, a locus whose characteristics are semiotically negative, whose specificity consists in being neither one nor the other, *neither* this edge *nor* the other. It is the place where two kings meet to make peace after having been at war with each other for many years, a neutral place where they negotiate on an island that, in the middle of the Bidassoa River, one bank of which is French and the other Spanish, is the "common place," the locus of a peace, like the raft that was the place of the meeting between Czar Alexander and Emperor Napoléon, or a ship off an island itself, which were places where American and Soviet presidents met. The island was on those occasions (Iceland, Malta) the neutral place *par excellence* between the two halves of the world, in the same measure in which today the separating gap, the neutral place, the interval structure, is in the process of becoming a *lisière*. It is becoming a fringe structure that consists on the one side in a well-determined edge and on the other side in an edge fraying so as to become a chaos of frontiers that do not limit anything but manifest an obscure need for having frontiers, for making closures, linguistic, racial, nationalistic, economic "enclosures" like those that are denounced in the first book of *Utopia*, made by the sheep breeders, that gave birth to the urban crowd of unemployed starving people, future criminals fearing nei-

31. "Ce qui forme le bord d'une étoffe dans le sens de la longueur . . . ; parties extrêmes d'un champ, d'un pays, d'un bois. . . bord, extrémité, frontière, ex.: la lisière d'un bois" (Émile Littré, *Dictionnaire de la langue française*, ed. Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1957 ed., s.v. "lisière").

ther God nor men, people precisely without frontiers.<sup>32</sup> But the opening of this strange "apeiron" is perhaps at the same time the advent of a new horizon. *Lisière*, the *indefinite*, *horizon*—these three terms seem to me related to each other today. Their semantic network presently may constitute the chance of Utopia just as in the past, at the beginning of modern times, when it suddenly manifested itself in 1516 between a newly discovered America and an old, tired Europe, between the opening of the Western space of a New World and those terrible confrontations—national, political, religious ones—those bloody outbreaks and encounters of the Protestant and Catholic reforms. This is the merging place of Utopia, a neutral place, an island in between two kingdoms, two states, the two halves of the world, the interval of frontiers and limits by way of a horizon that closes a site and opens up a space, the island Utopia merging in the "indefinite." As everyone knows, the term *utopia* was coined by More in about 1516 to name the island he describes in the second book of his work. *Outopos*, *Outopia* is a paradoxical, even giddy toponym since as a term it negates with its name the very place it is naming. If we translate the Greek term it does not mean a place that is nowhere, that is, an island that exists only in More's imagination or a place that does not exist; the term as the name of a place designates a no-place; it designates *another* referent, the "other" of any place.<sup>33</sup> When More said "Utopia," this name performatively created that "otherness." In this sense *Utopia* is the neutral name, the name of the "neutral." It names the limit, the gap between two frontiers or two continents, the old and the new worlds; it names the way of the *limes* travelling between two edges that will never join together as an identical line.<sup>34</sup> Utopia at the dawn of our modernity could be the name of the horizon that, as we have seen, makes the invisible come within the finite, all this by a strange nominal *figure* of the frontier (horizon, limit), that is to say, a name that would constitute a distance, a gap neither before nor after affirmation, but "in between" them; a distance or a gap that does not allow any affirmation or negation to be asserted as a truth or a falsehood. *Ne-uter*, this is the radical of the frontier (limit, horizon) as well as that of Utopia. At the end of a millennium, an end that does not cease to end, when singing out loud the end of the ideologies and the end of frontiers seems to be accomplished in a universal totality—when, in recent debates, there is confusedly and loudly forecast, in the manner of Hegel and Alexandre Kojève, the end of history, no longer however in the extreme and alternative terms of material animality or abstract

32. See Thomas More, *Utopia*, ed., Edward Surtz (New Haven, Conn., 1964), pp. 21ff.

33. See Marin, *Utopics*, pp. 85–98.

34. See my analysis of Aristotle's text *On Interpretation* 16a2.30, about a substantive like "nonman" compared to the proposition (like "He is a man") capable of truth or falsehood in *Utopics*, p. 13.



formalism,<sup>35</sup> but as the universal mode of high-tech democratic hyperliberalism<sup>36</sup>—it is precisely at this moment, while new or very old and frightening frontiers appear or reappear, those of nationalistic, racial, or religious exclusions—precisely at this moment it is worthwhile to recall the fiction of an island appearing at the dawn of a period for which the present time would be the twilight.

In the case of the island of Utopia, the frontier is the infinity of the ocean, its border, a boundless space. Utopia is a limitless place because the island of Utopia is the figure of the limit and of the distance, the drifting of frontiers within the “gap” between opposite terms, neither this one nor that one. Utopia is the figure of the horizon. If in the functioning of a city, in its structure formed by streets and dwellings, and if in the functioning of a landscape, in its partition between nature and culture, forests and fields, waters and rocks, *space cannot exist without limits and frontiers*, Utopia as a city or a landscape develops and displays a virtual or potential spatial order in its text, it offers to the beholder-reader an ambiguous representation, the equivocal image of significations contrary to the concept of “limit”: on the one hand the synthetic unity of the same and the other, of past and future, of this world and the beyond (and the frontier would be in this case the place where conflicting forces are reconciled), and on the other hand the active tracing of differences, the indefinite fight between opposite forces (in this case the frontier would open a gap, a space “in between” that could not exist except by the encountering of violent and resisting forces).<sup>37</sup>

I think, and I alluded to it before, that Utopia refers the immense questions raised by Thomas More’s island through what Kant constructs on the border of sensibility and understanding as the schematism of the transcendental imagination. Utopia could be considered as a scheme of pure a priori imagination here displaced into ethics and politics, into aesthetics and religious matters.<sup>38</sup> As in the Kantian scheme, Utopia is not an

35. See Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel* (Paris, 1947), esp. p. 434 n. 1, where he asserts and displaces the Hegelian notion of the end of history. See also Marin, “Animalité ou snobisme,” introduction to Kojève, “Deux notes sur ‘la fin de l’histoire,’” *Politique fin de siècle* (Paris, 1985), pp. 194–98.

36. See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York, 1992).

37. For a more detailed analysis of these dialectics and counterdialectics of synthesis and difference, see Marin, *Utopics*, pp. 14–18.

38. As Kant writes, “This schematism of our understanding, in its application to appearances and their mere form, is an art concealed in the depths of the human soul, whose real modes of activity nature is hardly likely ever to allow us to discover, and to have open to our gaze. This much only we can assert: the *image* is a product of the empirical faculty of reproductive imagination; the *schema* of sensible concepts, such as figures in space, is a product and, as it were, a monogram, of pure *a priori* imagination, through which, and in accordance with which, images themselves first become possible” (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith [1787; New York, 1965], div. 1, bk. 2, chap. 1, A 141–42 / B 180–81, p. 183).

image or a representation. It does not belong to a definite ideology. It is the monogram of the art of pure fiction on all these borders and frontiers that human thought sketches out so as to achieve a knowledge shared by several human beings,<sup>39</sup> that human will marks and displaces to become a collective power and to accomplish itself in a common action.<sup>40</sup> As "horizon," moreover as a scheme of the horizon, Utopia does not transform the sensible into the intelligible, or reality into ideology. Utopia is the infinite work of the imagination's power of figuration. Utopia is the infinite *potentia* of historical figures: it is this infinite, this "work," this *potentia* that the Greek negation *ou* allows to be understood as a prefix to the name *topos*. Utopia is the plural figure of the infinite work of the limit or frontier or difference in history. *Totality and infinity: Utopia at the horizon of a voyage (travel)*.

It seems worthwhile to call Utopia back as such in the philosophical field, and in order to deal with the return of Utopia it seems opportune to think about the epistemological conditions of that coming-back. It will be useful tentatively to grasp utopia in *its process*, what I called some years ago in an homage to Ernst Bloch, its "fiction-practice,"<sup>41</sup> and not to catch it as an icon or an image, in its monumental formalist organicity, in its architectural system, in a word, in its representation. As a representation Utopia is always a synthesis, a reconciling synthesis. It decodes its image, it deciphers its icon. It stands as a perfect idea above any limit, it asserts an originary or eschatological projection beyond any frontier, its universal validity by making all details explicit. Utopia as ideology is a totality; and when political power seizes it, it becomes a totalitarian whole. The utopian representation always takes the figure, the form, of a map. In the complex unity of its ensemble, with its names, numbers, colored fields all exactly coded according to the rules of representation, it gives a location to all journeys, all itineraries, all voyages and their paths: all are potentially present because they are all there, but implicitly it negates them all. The eye that sees it is an abstract eye, since it has no viewpoint: its place is everywhere and nowhere.<sup>42</sup> Utopia as representation defines a totalitar-

39. The basic condition of any kind of "meaning" consists in tracing a difference in a "continuum," in "articulating" it. This is the way in which God is operating in one of the versions of the "creation" of the world in *Genesis*: by separating elements from themselves before using the performative force of His word.

40. If the "pure" tracing of difference, the "architrace" (per Jacques Derrida) is the founding (and deconstructing) epistemological condition of knowledge, it would remain to be thought how differences and their tracing could be the basis of a philosophy of human action. This paper on the frontiers of utopia can be read as a preliminary approach to such an attempt.

41. See Marin, "Rêveries: la pratique-fiction utopie" (1976), *Lectures traversières* (Paris, 1992), pp. 99–125.

42. On maps and the "mapping impulse," especially in seventeenth-century capitalist Dutch culture, see Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing* (Chicago, 1983), pp. 119–68. For the political and ideological implications of maps and mapping, see Elias Canetti, *Crowds*

ian power, an absolute, *formal*, and abstract power. But at the very moment that I look at the map—when I follow with my finger the route of a road, a contour line, when I cross here and not there a frontier, when I jump from one bank of a river to the other—at this very moment, a figure is extracted from the map ground, the figure of a projected journey, even if it is an imaginary one, a dreamed one. With that figure a narrative begins, with a before and an after, a point of departure and a point of arrival, a happy coming-back or a final permanent exile. The locus has become space: directions, speeds, travel-timing give motion to the map with the tracings of various routes. With all these temporal processes, these potential action programs, with all these proximities and distances, space “awakens” to narrative and *loci* are opened up to various practices that change and transform them through variations, transgressions, and so forth.

All narrative is a space narrative, said Michel de Certeau.<sup>43</sup> All narrative is a travel narrative; all travel consists in going from a place to a no-place, a route to u-topia, from a starting point that, in a narrative, always describes a peaceful order of things and loci, of copresences regulated by the laws of a kinship system, a local organization, a geographical articulation, a political system.<sup>44</sup> Narrative proceeds from a place and a moment that narratologists call the “schema of incidence”<sup>45</sup> that is the trespassing of a limit, the crossing of a frame, of a threshold. Narratives in that way demarcate space, and travels—as departures and passages, beginnings and crossings in the narrative they produce and by which they are produced as well—determine frontiers that they trace when encountering them in order to cross them in some of their parts. As de Certeau has superbly shown, the travel narrative authorizes frontiers to be established *and* displaced, founded *and* trespassed over.<sup>46</sup> Travels and voyages as a result of their movements are “located” in the gap of the limit, on the *limes way* and trespassing over its double edge. Travel would be the “work” of the horizon, the neutral space, the space of limits and frontiers it traces or demarcates while crossing them: this is the typical form of the utopian process. From the time of More’s book and for centuries later, utopias tend to begin with a travel, a departure and a journey, most of the time by sea, most of the time interrupted by a storm, a catastrophe that is the sublime way to open a neutral space, one that is absolutely different: a mete-

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*and Power*, trans. Carol Stewart (London, 1962).

43. See de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, chap. 9.

44. See *ibid.* along with Marin, *Utopics*.

45. See Käte Hamburger, *The Logic of Literature*, trans. Marilynn J. Rose (1957; Bloomington, Ind., 1973).

46. See de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, pp. 122–29, along with Marin, “Pas-sages,” *Traverses*, nos. 21–22 (May 1981): 123–29, and Georges Dumézil on the ritual of *fetialis* in Rome in *Idées romaines* (Paris, 1969), pp. 61–78.

oric event, a cosmic accident that eliminates all beacons and markers in order to make the seashore appear at dawn, to welcome the human cast-away. In fact, even if the travel does not end with a storm and arrival in an unknown land, the process of travel may be a way of displaying, just in the front, a utopian space (or the utopian *chora*, as Plato would have said).<sup>47</sup> Any travel is, first of all, a moment and a space of vacancy, an unencumbered space that suspends continuous time and the ordering of loci. *The ideology of the travel* implies a departure from a place and a return to the same place. The traveller enriches this place with a large booty of knowledge and experiences by means of which he states, in this coming back to the "sameness," his own consistency, his identity as a subject. *The utopian moment and space of the travel*, on the contrary, consists in opening up, in this ideological circle, in the tracing out of its route, a *nowhere*, a place without place, a moment out of time, the truth of a fiction, the synecopation of an infinity and paradoxically its limit, its frontier.<sup>48</sup>

When Peter Giles, More's friend, introduces Raphael, the traveller and narrator-descriptor of Utopia, to Thomas More, he narrates precisely Raphael's travels; he tells More of Raphael's motivation to travel, his desire to visit the world; he informs More on the subject of Raphael's travels, his departure from Portugal, his participation in Amerigo Vespucci's expeditions. Raphael's travels, in fact, would have been very similar to Vespucci's if during the fourth journey, instead of coming back to Portugal, he had been one of the twenty-four men left at Cape Frio, on the Brazilian coast.<sup>49</sup> Fiction in this location on the American shore is exactly tangential to the geographical routes on the maps of the time and the "real" world. This place is, in a sense, a minimal space at the limit between what is known and what is unknown. Giles draws our attention to this point; he locates the sailors' fortified camp *ad fines postremae navigationis*, at the limits of the "last" voyage. And on this frontier—which is also an initiating threshold, strangely enough—human abandonment, the desire of travelling, and the encounter with death merge together. Giles and More sum up all these notions with two classical mottoes: Raphael, while being happy to be left on the extreme edge of the world, is less concerned with pursuing his travels than he is with finding a tomb where he can definitely rest. He is in the habit of saying that the "sky is a tomb for the one who is deprived of an ultimate dwelling"; he says too that "from every place in

47. The reference here is to the *Timaeus* 52b-d. See Julia Kristeva's interpretation of the *chora* in between what she calls the semiotic and the symbolic levels in *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller (New York, 1984).

48. See Georges Y. van den Abbeele's work on the relations between critical thinking and the metaphor of the voyage in the context of French philosophical literature from the late Renaissance through the enlightenment in his *Travel as Metaphor: From Montaigne to Rousseau* (Minneapolis, 1992). Van den Abbeele also edited a special issue of *L'Esprit créateur* on the discourse of travel. See *L'Esprit créateur* 25 (Fall 1985).

49. See More, *Utopia*, pp. 12–13.

this world there is a route that leads to heavens.”<sup>50</sup> A horizon, this edge of the world joins, onto another edge, that of the other world, and on this limit between the two, a space, a gap is opened up that belongs neither to the one nor the other, a gap between the interior space that is enclosed by the routes of travels (the *terrae cognitae*) and the unknown outer space. This is the indiscernible gap that is the imaginary site of the voyage. Raphael, the hero of More’s *Utopia*, is the figure of that imaginary site on the frontiers, on the limits, on this gap. The narrator of *Utopia* displays the very space where the imagination will create the mysterious island and bring it into the world. Nevertheless, Raphael’s story is less concerned with narrating a travel than it is with displaying a map, but a map whose essential characteristic consists in not being another map; or, being in maps, it cannot exactly be found in them. This means that only Raphael can travel to Utopia. He is the only one who will manage it. As a utopia, travel cannot be repeated; but as an ideology, as an ideological representation, it demands to be repeated.<sup>51</sup> The story that Giles tells Busleyden about the geographical location of the island is well known. At the very moment when Raphael gives More that information, a servant comes up to More and says something to him while one of the members of the party who has the flu coughs so loudly that Giles cannot catch the traveller’s words. Thus in the ironic fiction of an accident, the possible inscription of the island on a map disappears completely. But should it not already be on the existing maps? Giles does not come across it either among the ancient cosmographers or the modern. Maybe it exists under a name other than its Greek name, *Utopia*, *Nowhere*? Perhaps is it an “unknown” island? This would not be surprising when today (that is in 1516) everyone knows how many new lands, that the ancients did not know, are being discovered. If so, the island map is caught up in a displacement process within the mapping representation, constantly, unceasingly displaced; it is about to be inscribed at the very moment when it is about to be erased amidst all the

50. *Ibid.*, p. 13. It is remarkable that the two mottoes are in themselves contradictory: the sky as a grave is a nontomb insofar as the kind of dwelling that it provides belongs to an indefinite space. The second motto is also “strange”: travels and journeys find their point of departure everywhere insofar as they do not intend to go all over *this* world, horizontally, so to speak, but vertically to reach heaven. Raphael’s motto could be considered as a condensed commentary on Nicholas of Cusa’s famous (and paradoxical) view that the infinity of the world is an image of God’s immensity. It is a circle (an emblem of a closed world) whose center is everywhere and circumference nowhere (that is, the conversion of the “closed” locus of the world into the “infinite” space of the universe; see Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe*, chap. 1). With that “nowhere” we find again the place of utopia somehow related to “heaven,” the transcendent beyond.

51. Repetition is one of the basic characteristics of an ideological formation. Better, it is through repetition that a discursive formation acquires its ideological stance, that the dominating discourse, by the endless presentation of its signs—one feature of a sign is that it can be repeated—operates and maintains its domination as if it possessed a “natural” obviousness and contained ahistorical evidence.

real islands that travellers register when they find them, among all the potential islands that other travellers will discover, an island that exists at the frontier of all travels as their dream or as their hidden figure. If the name of the island, or its map, can be condensed within the term that introduces it to the universal map of all the places that are known and into the dictionary of their names, the name of the utopian island, in its turn, is going to be named, inscribed, and erased in terms of the displacement of the letters that compose the name: *Outopia*, *Eutopia*, *Oudepotia*, three names that circulate in the surroundings of the text, or from Giles's foreword to Budé's letter to Lupset, three terms in which the *e* of happiness (*eutopia*) is substituted for the *o* of the nowhere (*outopia*) to cross the infinitely small and infinitely great distance that separates a geographical fiction from a political and social one; or where the permutation of a *p* and *t* (*potia* / *topia*) makes time and space equivalent. Displaced letters, displaced names (displacing their significations), a displaced map displacing all maps and really finding none—Utopia as process is the figure of all kinds of frontiers, displacing, by the practice of its travels, all representation, secretly duplicating any kind of real geographical voyage and any kind of historical and temporal change.<sup>52</sup>

To conclude, I will confront the two images of the Sears Tower I described at the beginning with two other images, the frontispieces of the first and second editions of *Utopia*, in 1516 and 1518 (figs. 3 and 4). The first one is by an unknown artist, the second by Ambrosius and Hans Holbein. If the two images of the highest tower in the world had been for me an emblem, an example and a symptom or a symbol anticipating what I intended to express, the two frontispieces would be a good summary of what I said. In 1516, the caravel is anchored just in front of the interior harbor and on the deck a little silhouette looks at the island and/or its map. The little man contemplates in the landscape the topographical view of the capital city and reads its name, *Civitas Amaurotum*, inscribed in its map. In 1518, the caravel is the accurate reproduction of the one of 1516, but inverted, its mirror image. The ship, no longer moored in the utopian waters, forges ahead toward our world, a cliff on the ocean where three men are standing up. The little man on the ship's deck now turns his back to the island; he looks at his homeland. None of the three men on the cliff is looking at the island; one of them, Raphael Hythlodæus, the narrator, points out the island to More (without looking at it); he makes the marvelous island visible *with words*. The third man is a soldier with a sword by

52. This humanistic play on letters within the name *Utopia* is the humorous way of deconstructing what that name designates: a "nowhere," but also a manner of displaying the performative force of Utopia as a scheme of transcendental imagination producing (and not reproducing) all the possible images and figures of freedom in its infinity.



FIG. 3.—Unknown, frontispiece to Thomas More, *Utopia*, 1516 edition.

his side; he listens to the dialogue; he is ready to conquer the marvelous place. The faraway island is now *here*, but as a text, and the image we see is just the result of a fiction, a description. The festoons and the medallions with the names of the places, the frontal mapping of the island, all these show that Utopia, the island, the map, is just a representation, an image



FIG. 4.—Ambrosius and Hans Holbein, frontispiece to Thomas More, *Utopia*, 1518 edition.

of things made by words. But they show also that every representation conceals and harbors, through its frontiers, frames, borders, edges, and limits, a utopia, that is, a utopian drive, a desire for an elsewhere that nevertheless would be realized here and now: a representation within which, around which, desires, wishes, hopes, and expectations are longing for blissful achievement. Nevertheless, Holbein's frontispiece includes,



almost hidden in the image, a terrible warning: *The Ambassadors'* skull, the emblem of death that is also the emblem of any totalitarian power attempting to recuperate utopian freedom. In the term invented by More to name the best possible republic, in his fiction of the perfect state, we can read today, in 1992, the limits of any state, any institution—I mean that which limits their totalitarian desire for absolute power: in Utopia, we can see the unfigurable figure of Infinite Liberty. Maybe this infinity has to be thought and experienced at the suspended end of a century and millennium not as the “great” infinite but as the small one, as the “infinitely” small. It is perhaps this infinity and its mysterious frontiers (where the *Geist der Utopie* manifests itself) that Bloch in 1938 intended to approach in this text read in *Spuren*:

Everything is a sign and assuredly signs realize themselves only in the infinitesimal. We first admit a measure, a well-bound series of good and bad lucks. . . . There is a measure, but as soon as the measure is full, the tiniest drop is enough to make its contents overflow. Somehow it is the *mechanical* function of the infinitesimal with regard to measure; measure suggests a container, a bourgeois-measured rationing . . . but moreover it transforms the infinitesimal that is a sign into a cause of the end. More important indeed is the *second*, the *qualitative* mode of the infinitesimal, that is, the fact that it appears at the *end of the journey*, at the end of a course . . . the sign of what happens at the end of the passage, of what is coming to a close. . . .

The infinitesimal here is not that which can be loved elsewhere. It is not an imperceptible thing where the best can be hidden or the last issue. It is even less the true enchanted world and the true sign after which change comes to a stop. The sign of the authentic end opens into emptiness. . . . The infinitesimal then does not announce a new series. It leads out of the series . . . . *These* signs of the infinitesimal . . . just give the signal that we are coming out of the series . . . , that we are entering into the possible, the unfated [*Schicksallose*], at least into a fate that can be modified.<sup>53</sup>

53. Bloch, *Spuren* (Frankfurt am Main, 1959), pp. 59–61; my trans.