

**UTOPIA SPACE**  
BY PAUL LAFFOLEY, 2001

In 1969 R. Buckminster Fuller [1895-1983] the preeminent engineer of 20<sup>th</sup> century United States –or perhaps the world- threw out a very personal challenge. It was in the form of a book entitled: “Utopia or Oblivion,” daring Earth to make a choice. Reading now as both a futuristic and nostalgic tract, it appeared in 1969 like a literary barn-burner manifesto of the 1920s classical modernist variety.

Agreeing with the spirit of his message, I believe, however, that not enough time has elapsed for the world to both absorb and accept the impact of this dare and to transform the soul of it into a completed cultural artifact. But, of course, we must do it now utilizing whatever means we can.

There have been, however, a few groups of futurists who over the past 32 years have heeded Fuller’s message, and have attempted a convergence of as many aspects of human knowledge as possible within their limits. The goal of the present endeavor is to produce a transdisciplinary world-view which will sustain human existence into a continuous future. This, of course, was the basic message of Fuller’s book.

Because time moves swiftly on Fuller’s Kairos [or crisis point] is now upon us. Decisions that will influence everyone are now inevitable and unavoidable. They must and will be made. As a practical example: from the study of contemporary demographics have come projections that by the year 2050, for instance, the population of the world may rise to the unbelievable height of 18 billion souls, and this is even within the circumstances of so-called “population controls.” More “conservative” estimates placed the figure at double what it is now – 12 billion. The image provided by the United Nations statisticians in order to mentally flesh out such monstrous declarations is that we should expect to see the phantasmata of several new continents rise from the floor of the ocean á la Atlantis ready to receive these teeming throngs.

Such an impending scenario I feel is motivation enough to change the world into a culture that no one throughout history has yet fully anticipated.

During these same 32 years, my own work has been an attempt to anticipate this new cultural artifact in the form of both a new world view conceived intellectually and a felt sensibility which has been the source of my art work. This combination has always been my way of entering into the process of living within Utopic Space. This is a space which I believe no longer deserves to be characterized as something vague or literary at base having no reality beyond the imaginative and chimerical. Instead we will begin to discover, as Fuller claimed, it is necessary in order for humanity to survive.

As a felt and lived sensibility Utopic Space has a generic religious base because the concept of Utopia, as Saint Thomas Moore [1478-1535], said in his book of 1516, who coined the term –Utopia means heaven on earth. This is an ontic state distinct from both heaven and earth, a situation that states: that which has no history connects directly with

that which has only history. What Saint Thomas Moore is describing is a reference to the major portal between eternity and time that the ancient Greek philosopher Plato [428-347 BCE] immortalized in one of his last dialogues – the Pythagorean cosmology of Timaeus. Space [or the Nurse of Becoming] provides the matrix for the Platonic forms from eternity to impress themselves into the multifarious copies of the forms which we experience in time. For humanity whether at the collective or the individual realm, Utopic Space expresses itself on the day to day basis as a total compassionate love for all living things including one’s self.

As a new form of space for the world Utopic Space has been hinted at all through history. But in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century this space began to take on a higher degree of ontic specificity as the result of the work of artists and scientists of the International Symbolist Movement. Eventually Utopic Space became defined as a multiplenum of an Octave of Spatiality and Temporality in the form of total continuity. While one can perceive distinctions, the plena ultimately merge into oneness.

Utopic Space presents from an objective point of view absolutely no aspects of internal structure –no holiarchies, no hierarchies, and no heteroarchies.

Only a few metaphors of Utopic Space come to mind and they center about the possibility of ones instantaneous immersion into this space: 1. Consider the physical space close to the Earth but extending up to a distance of about 20,000 feet above the surface; free falling through it evokes the sense of freedom and danger one would expect upon entering Utopic Space; 2. much further out into interstellar space is the condition of total anti-gravity in which there is no fear of falling, but there is the possibility of entering a space in which you are totally helpless and on the verge of a condition of unimaginable loneliness, and of course, imminent death.

While these two metaphors have obvious negative implications, that is not the point. The first entry into Utopic Space will be as frightening as an initial encounter with The Sublime.

A less subjectively poignant, but, nevertheless, perhaps more accurate metaphor is the spatial-energy of the Wheatstone Electric Bridge. In 1872 Sir Charles Wheatstone [1802-1875] an English physicist and inventor developed an electrical bridge for measuring resistances that consist of a conductor joining two branches of a circuit. One of the functions of the bridge –the most mudane- is to test the ohm rating of electrical resistance of an unknown resistor in relation to three that are known.

Across the diamond shape bride is placed a simple galvanometer. At a right angle to the galvanometer a power supply is connected to opposite corners of the bridge. If it turns out that all four resistors are equal in ohms, the galvanometer will read zero no matter how much energy is introduced to the system. In like manner the energy of Utopic Space [which can only be imagined from the world of traditional spaces] is known only by entering Utopic Space in a condition of total immersion. There exist no <sup>SYSTEMAL</sup> eternal clues as to the actual intensity of that energy, or even if the word or concept of energy is an

appropriate designation at all. While for instance, the concept of the power of the Holy Spirit from Christianity is often associated with the secular concept of energy in terms of nomenclature, theologically it is not.

Since Utopic Space has no natural directions such as those associated with Cartesian Coordinates, it can receive information of any kind and any amount without organization. This situation allows a complete merger of content without any loss of noetic integrity.

This is the true transdisciplinary, process of knowledge, similar to the child's mind that faces the cosmos with an eagerness for the authentically new, and makes no distinctions of time, values, or survival logic.

In fact logic is something not directly desired within Utopic Space, but something that emerges as a by-product of the structure of this space.

Those who have entered Utopic Space have reported a state that they describe as tantamount to a sense of absolute freedom. Such spontaneous entries into Utopic Space leave in doubt the larger question of how social groups or conventicles enter or depart from this space which is the clue to how to express to the world the advantages of Utopic Space in relation to all other spaces.

My personal mission as an artist has always been to explore Utopic Space in terms of both sensibility –that is how I react to it emotionally- and its ontic status –the analysis of its natural invariances.

I have developed this task by means of symbols, perhaps the only way an individual can approach such a project. Real symbols move the mind up to and through metaphor and finally beyond to a semiotic state that has never been successfully named – in other words through a true epistemic portal.

Symbols are different than signs, much different.

On the one hand a sign refers the human mind back to the space in which it now exists and becomes the basis of a closed and finished structure which shuffles meanings in a completely lateral manner. This is the basis of a code.

On the other hand the symbol creates a suggestion which moves one through imaginative projections to something beyond itself –a new reality, a new ontic status.

Utopic Space which is this new reality has been waiting for humanity since the beginning of time. It is the source of all mystical traditions from the East to the West. Since Utopic Space is completely at one with itself, therefore, it can when entered, merge all theological positions that appear contradictory in traditional spaces such as: Theism, Atheism, and Agnosticism [both dogmatic and methodological]. In Utopic Space it is possible to have a real religious syncretism combined with a personal faith commitment. An attempt in this direction has already begun. The end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the



formation of two Proto-Utopic styled religions: First, Theosophy which was created in New York City in 1875, attempted to integrate the findings of contemporary science with traditional Buddhist and Hindu theories of Pantheistic evolution; Second, in 1889 a new religious movement began in Iran which emphasized the spiritual unity of all human kind that described itself as glory on Earth – The Baha’i.

Because of this situation religious visual symbols that involve the Mandalic structure, which have been observed in all cultures, not just in the East, and at all times, have often been wrongly interpreted as inherently as past-oriented and not concerned with the future. Utopic Space is waiting to be entered as it is always the focus of humankind’s hopes and dreams. Symbols which often appear as diagrams describing an image of a Universe or a Pluriverse are, in my opinion, the best first entry points toward a real understanding of Utopic Space, and our true future as opposed to such false futures which have befallen the world.

The current false future, which has been long in formation, is the Christian description of the outskirts of Hell –Limbo. This is the abode of souls that live in perfect comfort and physical immortality, but without the experience of the beatific vision of God as a result of dying and not first receiving a Christian Baptism. Because these souls feel no pain from the direct loss of God’s presence, there is no anxiety desire or loneliness.

The secular science fiction world of the present that has spread slowly but surely around the whole earth like run away molasses is the first physical incarnation of limbo.

Over the past 150 years this “Earth-Limbo” has grown as much in its internal conviction, as it has moved away from the spirit of Utopic Space. If this secular space continues to proliferate, as the forces of nature are eschewed or overly manicured, and while the population rises, it could become the case that the entirety of our municipal infrastructures will resemble hospitals, as our private homes become intensive care units, accompanied by the almost silent hum of medical instrumentality. Political leaders and functionaries will assume the white coats of doctors as our physical lives are cared for from the womb to the tomb as we become gradually passive, infantilized and controlled as we pass through the soft but vicious nightmare scenarios first put forth by such 20<sup>th</sup> century writers as Henry Miller [1891-1980], Aldous Huxley [1894-1963] and George Orwell [1903-1950]. No wonder the Catholic Church itself has now abandoned Limbo - this vision of horror is too close to everyday and some like it.

There has been one 20<sup>th</sup> century writer who in my mind, made a noble attempt at describing the true vision of Utopic Space. This was Father Pierre Teilhard de Chardin [1881-1955], philosopher-priest and paleontologist. “Le Phénomène Humain” [1955], his magnum opus which was published immediately after his death, combined the history of biological evolution with a revival of Teleology which moved directly to Teleonomy [the quality of apparent purposefulness in living organisms that derives from their evolutionary adaptation]. Because of the fact that Teilhard was able to so successfully converge Theology with science his supporters declared that he offered the best vision of the future of humankind. In fact they designated his work a contemporary exegesis [a

true objective exposition of his case]. His detractors, of course, accused him of indulging in eisegesis [reading into the text of life –evolution- one’s own ideas]. But the sheer power of his concepts and his neologisms have carried the day and no longer is his work ignored, in fact Teilhard for the past forty years has been placed in the Pantheon of Modern Thinkers.

Teilhard’s two best constructs are: 1. The Noosphere – the sphere of human consciousness or mental activity that grows out of the biosphere of the various species of creatures that exist on the surface of the Earth, especially in relation to the force of evolution; and 2. The Omega Point – the convergence of evolution with the revelation of the godhead yielding the true definition of vitalism which is the realization that the processes of life are not explicable by the laws of physics and chemistry and that life is in some part self-determining.

Both ideas depend upon a topology of mysticism that uses a dynamic sphere as its basis in a manner similar to the way Plotinus [204-274AD] the neo-Platonic philosopher described the nature of absolute oneness.

In a certain sense, therefore, Teilhard is the modern spiritual heir to Plotinus because he is interested in the principle of continuity [one of the hallmarks of Utopic Space]. Only in this case the continuity he proposed is between the unique and the immiscible self of human individuals and the potential for total union of all those who enter Omega through the Noosphere. His phrase to indicate this fusion was simply “Union Differentiates.”

By this seeming paradox Teilhard avoids the deadening position of Solipsism [the self is considered the only existent entity] as well as the deadly interpretation of Pantheism [the doctrine of the Great All in which God and his or her creatures are equated with the forces and laws of the universe]. For many years in my reading of Teilhard’s works I could find no flaws in his version of Utopic Space until one day I noticed an obscure footnote which described a conversation with one of Teilhard’s friends, the gist of which declared that the Noosphere and the Omega Point was for the Earth only. Any reference to intelligent life in the rest of the universe was considered by Teilhard irrelevant, if not non-existent. I believe it is obvious to almost everyone today that the universe beyond our immediate locale will be as important to our personal futures as it will be to the collective future of the human species.

As futurist, Michael G. Zey has warned, unless we utilize our growing presence in outer space in a humanizing fashion, we can not hope to discover those positive ways to revitalize and retro fit the Earth. Existing in interstellar space has both physical and metaphysical aspects which blend together without destroying the integrity of each aspect. Entering a more comprehensive dimensional realm does not mean simply rising up.

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The final problem about Utopic Space is not to use the concept as a method of criticizing various visions of the future, but more as a neutral sounding-board for all attempts at plumbing or prophesying the future. The history of science-fiction has aptly demonstrated that its purpose is not to determine the absolute future, but to render an indication of the extent of the cultural lag to which any present world view is subject. Utopic Space, therefore, is the proper repository and the goal of all future-visions. Our survival as a species is directly related to the quality of these visions and the determining which are convergent with others and which are divergent. Achieving Utopic Space is like trying for the summit of the highest mountain in the universe. The convergence of visions is like arriving at various base camps and a sense of security. The divergence of visions represents that bold striking out on your own onward and upward, climbing toward Utopic Space and the final realization that when the terminus is reached we will all experience the end of the future.