3 · From the Middle Ages to the (W)Hole of Utopia

But who could have handed down to us
The story of those times of innocence?
Did they inscribe their happiness
In the temple of memory?
The vanity of the art of writing
Would soon have made it fade away;
So without a thought of describing it,
They were satisfied with its mere enjoyment.

—Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Le siècle pastoral

A moment must come when the contradiction between the visible and the occulted becomes insuperable. A seemingly insoluble conflict arises. A hole gapes open where neither meaning nor practice seems any longer possible. Perhaps we occupy such a moment in our own time, and therefore the exploration of how it arises and how it has in the past been overcome is by no means a matter of indifference.

The present chapter will try to show how More's Utopia writes itself into an insoluble conflict of this kind. It is a response to a crisis in the episteme that seals off for us a whole area of discourse: what I have been calling patterning. More's text itself is neither medieval nor modern. It is the mark of a moment when the very possibility of discourse finds itself, so to speak, teetering before an abyss of non-meaning (as Dr. Johnson was to put it with regard to an author who should be placed rather at the moment when a new discursive practice is finally consolidating its dominance: John Dryden).

Subsequent chapters will show how a new dominant discourse model gradually emerged. They will show how such a model had first of all to uncover and differentiate the specific form of the earlier dominant model (that of patterning). They will show how it produced from within that very form the elements of its own dom-
inance, and how, in doing so, it overcame the 'hole' created by a work like *Utopia*, set aside forever that kind of textuality.

This chapter will therefore also suggest that *Utopia* was not only the first of its kind, but that it was unique of its kind: a joke, a carnival repudiation of discursive authority doomed to disappear with the discourse it placed in question.¹ For if we may say with Robert Elliott, following Dostoevsky, Berdyaev, and Zamiatin, that utopia is a product of the Euclidean mind, we must take it as a most ambiguous and subversive one.² And that is certainly the case of the nominal ancestor of the genre, *Utopia* itself. I would say that this text makes the invention of the 'Euclidean' mind necessary, but that it is not itself a product of it. It may be, here, that the Euclideanism of the interpretive critic betrays its textual victim.

*Utopia* partakes simultaneously of the satiric rejection and of the affirmative vision of a humanly created and, at least to some degree, obtainable Golden Age.³ It is, however, doubly paradoxical. For there is a necessary 'failure' involved in any 'hope' inspired by the nostalgia for a Golden Age, whose 'proper' place is the no-time and eternity of a discourse of patterning. The linear achievement (involved in the term "Euclidean") of such a Golden Age would in that sense be a contradiction in terms. And indeed, it is that contradiction which leads to the inescapable paradox to be discussed in the rest of this chapter. For the logic of linearity demands not only a first term and its product (which are), but also the process making such a product possible and filling the gap between the first and 'last' terms (except that such a 'last' term is supposed to be at infinity). It needs the process of *becoming*. Yet we know that there can be no such process leading from the finite to the infinite, from the temporality of *now* to the atemporality of *then* (and of the 'yet to come'), from the present geographic situation of, say, sixteenth-century London to the absent, unsituated, and atemporal Amaurotum.⁴

³. Elliott, *Shape of Utopia*, pp. 3–24 ("Saturnalia, Satire, and Utopia"), and pp. 30ff. ("The Shape of Utopia").
⁴. The concept of Euclideanism is explored more fully at the beginning of Chapter 11. Delaying such discussion seems appropriate because the concept itself is part of the discursive development this volume is examining.
Furthermore, once it has been written into existence, utopia presents a signifier that may be—and generally is—inserted in at least two different types of discourse: that of literature, as a self-referential kind of text, and that of politics or of polity. In turn, both of these “insertions” participate at once in the satirical and in the ‘utopian’ modes (the term ‘utopia’ indicating both a genre and a more general, almost ethical, characteristic). At least in the so-called traditional utopia, both these types of discourse are frozen.5 Given their accession to textuality, this is necessarily so.

The discourse of polity, to the extent that it is satirical, is a circular discussion around an already existing sociopolitical situation (or one that is at least assumed to exist). We may take this existing situation as the ‘mathematical’ base. In so far as such a discourse is visionary, it is a static (and ideal) end product. The discourse of literature, inasmuch as it is satirical, has a structure composed of similar sets of syntactic arrangements that repeat themselves, not in an open-ended series, but rather in a kind of parallel process.6 They reproduce themselves, so to speak. The utopian mode of the literary discourse repeats this structure: the difference being that it is not based on an externally observed (referential) situation (implicit with regard to the text itself), but on an internally posited hypothesis, the ‘vision’ itself (explicit with regard to the text).7

5. In view of what I have been arguing, I would clearly deny that one can find any such thing as “traditional utopia” prior to More’s. The Atlantis of the Timaeus and Critias is not even ambiguous in this respect, though the unexplored ‘archaic’ Atlantis may have been ‘utopian.’ It is the conqueror, ancient Athens, that is presented as the epitome of the ideal republic in what small reference there is to it (Timaeus, 23d–24d; Critias, 111e–112e), though its destruction, together with that of Atlantis itself (Timaeus, 25d), suggests the impossibility of ever attaining it. Even in that the ambiguity is maintained: “Well, then, said I, do you admit that our notion of the state and its polity is not altogether a daydream, but that though it is difficult, it is in a way possible and in no other way than described” (Republic, vii, 54od—Paul Shorey’s translation). There is still further ambiguity in Plato’s city: it is at once a myth of origins (the city is supposed once to have existed, inhabited by “the fairest and noblest race of men which ever lived” [Timaeus, 23b–c—Jowett translation]), associated with a nostalgic Golden Age (Laws, 713b–714b), and at the same time a myth of a future utopia (Republic). Projected into the past, it has much in common with the Christian paradise; into the future, it participates in the structure that produces the City of God, unattainable on earth (cf. Northrop Frye, “Varieties of Literary Utopias,” in Utopias and Utopian Thought, ed. Frank E. Manuel [Boston, 1966], p. 39). The satirical mode, not emphasized by Plato, comes between these, as a commentary on and corrective for an extratextual condition in the present. Still, we cannot speak of a utopian text in Plato’s case, because, excluding the Republic (which may be of utopian intention but is not a utopia), there are only scattered remarks in texts whose design lies elsewhere.

6. I.e., not as A/B/C/... , but as A/B, A/B... . In this sense, it clearly takes the form of a patterning order of discourse, as opposed, for example, to the analytico-referential (which would correspond more to the first situation).

7. If we were to consider the text in terms of polity and of its political ‘meaning’ (signified), we would have to reverse the places of the explicit and the implicit.
In the case of both types of discourse, it can readily be seen that there is no possibility of process, of continuity as we will see it, for example, in Bacon’s *New Atlantis*, in Cyrano’s *Voyages*, or in Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*. Here, the discourse of polity is broken between the base and its product, the textuality is ruptured in that its two identical structures are set on two different bases. More’s utopian discourse would thus seem to be characterized first and foremost by an *absence*, by the default of process embodied in its very text, by a lack of becoming. It has a hole at the core. As a product of the Euclidean mind, it would be inescapably scarred by its inability to grasp what will be the most original aspect of that mind: the capacity to ‘know’ logical progression, to make will into action, to mathematize the process of becoming. Both probability theory and the infinitesimal calculus will be the marks of that achievement. More’s *Utopia* textualizes a discursive paradox that will remain an insuperable contradiction until its two sides are separated: we will see this in Kepler as an opposition between ‘process’ and ‘entropy.’ *Utopia* condemns medieval discursive practices, and its successors will escape the dilemma of its paradox by passing into another class of discourse. *Utopia* is less the product of the Euclidean mind than it is its producer.

It is in this light that the kind of opposition invoked by Alexandre Cioranescu between Machiavelli’s *Prince* and More’s *Utopia* needs important revision: “On the one side there stands the champion of political realism, on the other the out-and-out idealist. On the one side, the State conceived as will expressing itself in action; on the other, the republic viewed as a devout beehive. There, government as personal power and as a way to climb up the ladder; here, the State as communal duty and as sanctity in civil life.” It is certainly true that *Utopia* can be read in many ways as a late medieval treatise on civil life. But it also shows the impossibility of the very society it is taken as idealizing. One could almost say that it renders Machiavelli inevitable.

For the Florentine is among the first moderns to make his matter conform to a certain kind of textual exigency, in which the subject has complete control over his progressive system: hence his concern with personal possession of the other, with mastery, with conquering by force, with overcoming bodily (concepts expressly belittled and dismissed by such as More and Erasmus, Elyot and Budé, for exam-

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8. Cioranescu, *L’avenir du passé: Utopie et littérature* (Paris, 1972), pp. 87–88. While Cioranescu does try to palliate this opposition, he does so by reference to More the statesman (despite his constant insistence that he is concerned only with textual structures) and not to the text of *Utopia* itself, whose discussion he in any case bases on an inexact and tendentious description.
That is why Machiavelli places his text under his own aegis, under the weight of his own “knowledge of the actions of men” and his own “long experience of contemporary affairs.” But Machiavelli’s text is not only homologous with the possessive society whose practice it analyzes and makes significant, and whose will to action it seeks to express. It also has a ‘monetary’ role to play within the exchange systems of that society: “Will Your Magnificence [Lorenzo de’ Medici], then, deign to accept this little gift in the same spirit that I send it?” Machiavelli wants some return. That dedications are a commonplace may well be, but what is important here is that the text is not so much a mediation (though it is also that) as a value in its own right: the system seeks now to replace what it ostensibly merely relates. With Machiavelli we are already passing into a new class of textuality. It is with reason that Bacon’s discourse of knowledge is often identified with the Florentine’s discourse of politics.

More’s text is constantly torn. On the one hand it fits into that textual production demanded (and determined) by the society of humanists (a production with which Hythlodaeus risks ‘contaminating’ the Utopians). On the other, it strives at all times (unlike The Prince) to maintain a strict use value, and a function of pure mediation that seeks to deny its own literariness and to express a condition (here, of the Utopians) of the pretextual. That opposition perhaps explains why the narrator of Utopia divides the text physically and structurally at precisely the point of process:

So we went in and dined. We then returned to the same place, sat down on the same bench, and gave orders to the servants that we should not be interrupted. Peter Giles and I urged Raphael to fulfill his promise. As for him, when he saw us intent and eager to listen, after sitting in silent thought for a time, he began his tale as follows.

THE END OF BOOK ONE
BOOK TWO FOLLOWS [P. 57]
The first book was presented very much in terms of policy (More the statesman being sent to Flanders as Royal Commissioner), in terms of travel, and, above all, in terms of "dispute," "discussion," and public "eloquence" (pp. 9-10). Indeed, the first book is a dialogue throughout. The second book becomes an individual narration ("he began his tale"). Instead of movement (around the Continent, after the negotiations with Charles collapse), there is syntopy (we remain seated in a garden—on whose 'sameness' More insists). Instead of dialogue, there is to be uninterrupted narration. Instead of extroversion and a looking outward, there is introspection and introversion ("after sitting in silent thought for a time"). Furthermore, it is a narration twice sealed and blocked by its own structure: it is a narrated 'history,' presupposing foreknowledge; it is told in accordance with a "promise." I have suggested elsewhere that the promise (or the vow) represents an absolute term to the process of discourse, that it seals it off utterly from any progression. 12

Here, then, what follows is preset. It is already known: "There is nothing," says Hythlodaeus, "I shall be more pleased to do, for I have the facts ready to hand" (p. 57). There can be no development. The tale is twice-told. Raphael indeed, quite unlike the narrator of New Atlantis, for example, makes no voyage, discursive or otherwise (in the text): it has already been done. We are placed directly on the "island of the Utopians" (p. 59), even more abruptly than we will see Campanella's reader obliged to engage the City of the Sun. 13 The absence I have remarked upon cannot be filled. The text itself insists that there is no becoming, no process to get us from here to there, from now to then. Utopia implies, too, that the apparent movement of social and physical reality as perceived cannot be grasped in the text.

No doubt it may be affirmed that this is a necessary condition of all textuality (though a discourse of mediation would certainly deny it). Even if this were the case, it is clear that post-Renaissance discourse has succeeded in occulting that condition. That is clear in The Prince, in New Atlantis, in a text such as Robinson Crusoe. The novel in general, until quite recently, always purported to possess some external referent and justification, which it 'followed' as it represented


it. Writing was claimed as report. And it was not simply a mediation, for it asserted that it ‘made sense of’ what it described, that it systematized the otherwise ‘incoherent’ mass of sensible and intellectual data. It had its own particular value in the lines of production and the systems of exchange. It could become a surrogate for any and all experience. Romantics and symbolists, realists and naturalists, classicists and revolutionaries, all may have claimed a special and separate, an isolated and privileged, status within society for themselves (setting themselves in a way outside society), but they did not assert such absolute separateness for their production (if only because they needed a public). The text had a role to play in the social process: its system repeated that of society, of history, of science (assuming these to be other than identical).

_Utopia_ shows the impossibility of such a claim at the time when it was written (1516). But it also shows the ambiguous tension of a growing desire to act out such a claim—as we will see. _Utopia_ emphasizes the distance between a patterning discourse and some other that it is yet unable to produce, because the attempt to produce it loses itself in unredeemable contradictions. Patterning discourse is in movement to the extent that it can continue to incorporate new elements, but such elements merely confirm a fixed overarching structure: dialogue repeats itself. The other progresses formally, again in the repetition of certain linear elements, but it is utterly static epistemologically—we can learn nothing new from it at all; it is a series of tautologies. Furthermore, it is undermined from within by its attempt to grasp elements that appear to belong in a different logical or discursive space. Both systems come out as equally hollow.

The stasis of the promise seeks to enforce an affirmation. It seeks to oblige the reader or listener to accept a particular sort of verity (a fact that explains why the Utopians make no use of treaties, pp. 116–18). This is made clear from the outset. In the prefatory letter to Peter Giles, More (and I mean ‘More’ as textual presence) is almost exclusively concerned with the truthfulness of the narration concerning the “state of Utopia,” and with the unreadiness of readers and listeners to accept any discourse that does not coincide with their own. As Bacon will do a century later, More remarks that such unfamiliar discourse will appear to the Other as quite incoherent: “Very many men are ignorant of learning: many despise it. The barbarian rejects as harsh whatever is not positively barbarian. The smatterers despise as trite whatever is not packed with obsolete expressions” (p. 7). Therefore, he writes, the present narration must at
least be internally coherent: “Just as I shall take pains to have nothing incorrect in the book, so, if there is doubt in anything, I shall rather tell an objective falsehood than an intentional lie—for I would rather be honest than wise.”14 The term “incorrect” here refers to some ‘objective’ referent, but the phrase “objective falsehood” indicates that such an idea may be unattainable and that even if it were not, there would be no way of knowing. From the start, then, the status of any new discourse is thrown into question, at the very moment its necessity is recognized.

The prefatory letter serves only to lead the reader into the circular dialogue of the first book through its own circular structure, and through its own contradictions as to the nature of this writing. On the one hand, the writer remarks: “Certainly you know that I was relieved of all the labor of gathering materials for the work and that I had to give no thought at all as to their arrangement.” Or again: “there was no reason for me to take trouble about the style of the narrative” (p. 3). Yet on the other, he comments: “since I have gone through the labor of writing . . .” (p. 8). Indeed, the very effort to maintain narration as affirmation is itself tautological (as I implied above), because, in itself as predication and in its very sequentiality, the narrative discourse is necessarily affirmative. It creates what it seeks to affirm by its own internal process; but Utopia also tries to deny this, as a signifier with no signified other than itself:

We forgot to ask, and he forgot to say, in what part of the new world Utopia lies. I am sorry that point was omitted, and I would be willing to pay a considerable sum to purchase that information, partly because I am rather ashamed to be ignorant in what sea lies the island of which I am saying so much, partly because there are several among us, and one in particular, a devout man and a theologian by profession, burning with an extraordinary desire to visit Utopia. [P. 6]

In another way, too, this preface emphasizes the text’s ‘circular’ limits. Its speaker (‘More’) proceeds from simplicity and eloquence (Hythlodaeus’s), to proper public intercourse (the speaker’s own official life), to happy home life (pp. 3–5), all of these placed under More’s control. But the preface concludes with a loss of control, with

14. “Potius mendacium dicam, quam mentiar.” Surtz explains that the “objective falsehood” is self-deceiving, while the “lie” deceives others (Selected Works ed., p. 5 n. 5). It is self-deceiving because it is absolutely coherent within its own discourse. (It is perhaps worth repeating that I consider this prefatory letter to be a part of the whole discourse of Utopia: ‘More’ here is the textual personage, the inscribed writer of Hythlodaeus’s discourse.)
unhappiness, ingratitude, discourtesy, and the confusion of the critics (pp. 7–8). This pattern forms a chiasmus with the order of the two books of the text 'proper,' which proceed from the satirical dialogue concerning political, social, and conceptual confusion of the first book, to the visionary and well-ordered narrative of the second.

From the very outset, then, the text denies, as it were in spite of itself, both process and reference. Like Montaigne's later *Essays*, the discourse of *Utopia* paints its own passage as it goes, for according to its own premise the most solid base (the situation of the island itself) is *absent*: not only is it out of memory, but it is forgotten by discourse itself ("we forgot to ask, and he forgot to say"). *Utopia* cannot be placed within the very text whose discourse it names, other than as a mere act of naming. And that naming is, as we have just seen, a denial, a negation. *Utopia* 'exists' only to the extent that it is promised in the narration that seeks to predicate it, by the simple act of naming. The process of the narrative, affirmative as it may be in itself, fails to make possible an imposition that would be external to itself. That is why this particular narrative, far from progressing, even within its own textual limits, constantly circles back upon itself. The beginning and end of discourse is identical: from the naming of "the island of Utopia" at the beginning (p. 59), to the naming of "the Utopian commonwealth" at the end (p. 152). The name, the promise, corresponds precisely to the discourse that it makes possible and by which it is made possible. Can we not see in this a fundamental questioning of the name/object-concept relation we saw as dominant during the Middle Ages? It is not, here, a formal questioning, but one of practice. (One may perhaps add that in other popular writers of this period, such as Pierre Fabri, Geofroy Tory, and John Palsgrave, attempts to delineate the relation between the sign and a 'referent' led to the invention of ever more intermediary levels of signification and to a potentially insoluble infinity: a certain indication that the nature of discourse is becoming increasingly problematic.)

In *Utopia* the city-states, "identical in language, traditions, customs, and laws," are also as similar in material layout as the land permits (p. 61). The same applies to the physical cities themselves, "exactly alike insofar as the terrain permits" (p. 63). The textual repetitions I mentioned as characterizing the first book are resumed in book two, where it may be observed in every aspect of the description: clothes are of "one and the same pattern" (p. 69), families are identical,
skills are the same, streets, houses, gardens, and the rest are all of a piece.

The introduction, inasmuch as it speaks of the text that is to follow, speaks only of the narrative (affirmation of Utopia) and of making that narrative internally coherent. Yet, as I suggested, the dialogue is formulated in the letter by means of More's personal and public life:

I am constantly engaged in legal business, either pleading or hearing, either giving an award as arbiter or deciding a case as judge. I pay a visit of courtesy to one man and go on business to another. I devote almost the whole day in public to other men's affairs and the remainder to my own. I leave to myself, that is to learning, nothing at all.

When I have returned home, I must talk with my wife, chat with my children, and confer with my servants. [P. 4]

The circularity of this constant exchange ("the day, the month, the year slip away" without any change), its repetitive nature ("pleading or hearing," "giving or deciding," "pay a visit," "go on business," "talk," "chat," "confer"), characterizes the first part of this text in both its aspects: the circularity of the sociopolitical discourse in its satirical mode; the repetitiveness of the literary discourse in the same mode.

It is time, I think, to show rather more precisely how all this applies to the dialogue book of the text. I have suggested that the satirical political aspect of the text is circular and referential to the extent that it sends the reader to the present state of English polity. This state is characterized as aristocratic, composed of essentially separate small (still 'feudal') societies each out for its own advantage: the rich, the idle, the luxurious; societies in which a philosopher/councilor could find no place, argues the writer (thus denying the text any effective purpose, as we have seen him do for any external referent or process).

The microcosm of this situation is Raphael's account of his time spent in the circle of Cardinal Morton, a circle presented by the narrator as the best and most outstanding—at least with respect to its leader's own qualities (p. 19). Those who surround the Cardinal are classified as flatterers, jealous, self-serving (p. 18). The talk quickly centers on the condition of thieves in England, before it passes on to other circles in which the philosopher/councilor might hope and be supposed to find a useful place. The structure of the entire subse-
quenent discussion may be indicated as follows (the finer details being omitted):

First discussion
I. Base: Morton’s society (paradigm of all, despite its central figure)
II. Proposition: Raphael unacceptable as councilor in such a society
III. Discussion: 1. Condition of thieves
   Cause A: Idle, possessive rich
   Result: Servants, idlers turned out = beggars = robbers
   (pp. 21–23)
   Cause B: Greedy rich
   Result: Farmers turned off grazing land = beggars = robbers (pp. 24–26)
   Cause C: Luxury
   Result: Desire for ostentation = robbers (p. 27)
2. Hytholoeaeus’s proposed cure (pp. 29–34)
   Example of Polylateres (pp. 31–34)
   i. refused by lawyer (p. 34)
   [2a. Cardinal’s agreement with Hytholoeaeus (pp. 34–35),
    and addition of vagrants
   ii. Accepted by all flatterers (p. 35)]
   2b. Jester’s agreement with H. and Morton, and addition of
    friars, etc. (pp. 35–36)
   iii. General dispute, violent argument, break-up of discussion
IV. QED II, given I.

Second discussion
I. Base: French king’s council (pp. 40 ff.)
II. Proposition: same as II above
III. Discussion: 1. Cause B above: ways for king to possess more lands
   (pp. 40–42)
   2. Hytholoeaeus’s proposed cure (pp. 42–43)
   Example of Achorians, near Utopia (pp. 42–43)
   i. Refused by council (p. 43)
IV. QED II, given I.

Third discussion
I. Base: Any king’s council (pp. 43 ff.)
II. Proposition: same as II above
III. Discussion: 1. Cause A above: ways for king to possess more money
   (pp. 43–45)
   (Structure of discussion identical to above)
   2. Hytholoeaeus’s proposed cure (pp. 45–47)
   Example of Macarians, by Utopia (pp. 47–48)
   i. Refused by council (p. 48)
IV. QED II, given I.
It is hardly necessary to belabor the matter by observing how this structure always returns to what I have termed the base (which rules the proposition), how it always, and necessarily, returns to its own point of departure. The form is that of the syllogism. Changes are out of the question.

It is worth observing, however, that Hythlodaeus's examples gradually bring us toward Utopia itself, that this tends to make of the discussion in the garden and of the narrative of Utopia yet a fourth general discussion on the acceptibility of Hythlodaeus as a philosopher/councilor, and finally that the recorder of this narrative (More) concludes with a rejection analogous to those that followed the other discussions: "though in other respects he [Raphael] is a man of the most undoubted learning as well as of the greatest knowledge of human affairs, I cannot agree with all that he said" (p. 152). Repetition is compounded: the second book becomes an expanded version of a segment of the first, the longest proof that even in the very best humanist society Raphael's healing would be unacceptable.

In terms of the text's 'literary' organization, one can easily see how each small system repeats the one before it, sometimes down to the very words: those who become thieves as a result of idleness (p. 22) and those who do so through greed (p. 25) are described in an almost identical way. And the above model is scarcely more schematic than is the text itself. This is simply underscored when the lawyer who first proposes to answer Hythlodaeus says that he will do so by repeating what has just been outlined: "First, I shall repeat, in order, what you have just said..." (p. 28). The model also indicates clearly how the second two discussions, while repeating in themselves the overall structure of the more extended first one, duplicate at the same time the two major causes (A and B) put forward in the first example.

At this point, More signals in effect all the difference between this organization and Hythlodaeus's efforts to break it by means of his proposed exemplary cures. This difference is precisely why Raphael's advice cannot be heeded, unless he tries half-measures—which can naturally only lead straight back into the aforementioned discursive contradictions:

So it is in the commonwealth. So it is in the deliberations of monarchs. If you cannot pluck up wrongheaded opinions by the root, if you cannot cure according to your heart's desire vices of long standing, yet you must not on that account desert the commonwealth. You must not abandon the ship in a storm because you cannot control the winds.
On the other hand, you must not force upon people new and strange ideas which you realize will carry no weight with persons of opposite conviction. On the contrary, by the indirect approach you must seek and strive to the best of your power to handle matters tactfully. What you cannot turn to good you must make as little bad as you can. For it is impossible that all should be well unless all men were good, a situation which I do not expect for a great many years to come! [Pp. 49–50]

That impossibility is confirmed by More’s own refusal at the end to “agree with all that he said.”

Throughout the first book, Raphael’s very proofs demonstrate that the discursive circularity can never be other than self-sustaining, unless it permits the necessary rupture. But such a rupture would destroy the discourse itself and replace it with a new structure. Raphael’s tactful strategy is therefore to approach Utopia slowly and without making the fact evident: through the Polyclerites in Persia, to the Achorians (“without place, region, district,” p. 42, n. 95), and to the Marcarians (“The Happy, Blessed Ones,” p. 47, n. 106), “a people not very far distant from Utopia” (p. 47). Tact makes the narration of the second book a repeated element of the first. Narration itself makes it ‘incommensurable’ with the entirely dialogized first book. It is as though we were confronted with a new kind of discursive practice, but without its being presented as such; as though the new were entirely contained in the first, even if, both by what it seeks to say and by how it says it, that new discourse fundamentally undermines the old.

For the world is mad, says Raphael. It speaks only to its own habitual systems: “I should accomplish nothing else than to share their madness as I tried to cure their lunacy” (p. 50). Raphael, emphasizing the example of Court, underlines the impossibility of breaking the circle from the inside (p. 52). All these small societies are closed structures: but so, too, is Utopia itself. Its very difference, signified as equality, abundance for all, pleasure, and so on (p. 53), is possible only so long as it retains the very organization that is being put in question. The will to action and possession that is placing these mini-societies in jeopardy is answered in Utopia only by a ‘return’ to an older nostalgia, and by an affirmation of the very discursive structure whose efficacy is now in doubt.

It is perfectly accurate to remark that Utopia appears to open up that structure: hence, for example, the tale of the shipwrecked Romans and Egyptians, “twelve hundred years ago,” whose knowledge is absorbed. In Europe, it is said, the contrary would be the case: just as Raphael’s advice is refused, so such knowledge would be
quickly and completely forgotten (p. 56). We should, however, be wary of this. In Utopia, too, what can be absorbed is only what already coincides in some way with the system, just as More's critics can accept only what they have already heard, only what is habitual with them (pp. 7–8). The Utopians are as frozen in the text as all writing (écriture) seems to require:

You know, Phaedrus, that's the strange thing about writing, which makes it truly analogous to painting. The painter's products stand before us as though they were alive, but if you question them, they maintain a most majestic silence. It is the same with written words; they seem to talk to you as though they were intelligent, but if you ask them anything about what they say, from a desire to be instructed, they go on telling you just the same thing forever.\(^{15}\)

There is no discussing with written narrative, and what it affirms there is therefore no “hope of seeing realized” (p. 152). The dialogue of the first book admits discussion, but its only outcome is refusal of the very difference advanced in the narration. The issue remains ever the same.

The entire theme of Utopia, indeed, is the uselessness of the writing of it. At every moment, Hythlodaeus remarks that the new cure he brings will necessarily be refused by the (European) reader. The new word, separated from its true ‘father’ (Utopia itself, where Raphael's dead text would have been replaced by the living organism), cannot but remain without offspring. Caught, like Plato's Phaedrus, as both remedy and poison,\(^{16}\) it is bound to remain outside the two organisms it describes, outside both Europe and Utopia: hence the absence at the center.

The entire text—or, more precisely, the bringer of the tale as inserted into the dialogic social situation the text presents—attempts to endow itself with a higher self-sufficiency than that of mere textual circularity. It strives to attain a particular kind of nonreferentiality: “One day I had been at divine service in Notre Dame. . . . Mass being over, I was about to return to my lodgings when I happened to see him [Giles] in conversation with a stranger” (p. 11). The text endeavors to place itself, as it were, under the sign of the Divine Word. That would permit the begging of the whole question of absence, in so far as for the Divinity the problem of reference or of

\(^{15}\) Plato, Phaedrus, 275d—Hackett translation.

\(^{16}\) Cf. Jacques Derrida, “La pharmacie de Platon,” in La dissémination (Paris, 1972), pp. 92–93. My debt to this work in the following dozen paragraphs is sufficiently obvious and extensive as to allow me to dispense with further acknowledgments.
signified is without meaning: for the Divinity the sign would be 'whole' and 'entire' (that is, it would not be a sign at all). The desire to report that Divinity in the text is why Utopia is 'impossible.' For it will be apparent that such divinity is the would-be role of Utopia itself. (I will note in passing here that the effort to incorporate some unmediated 'divinity' in the text is utterly different from what we will see as Kepler's project of organizing the diverse and multiple manifestations of some unmediatable "world soul" that characterizes the Somnium. It is just precisely that difference that makes Kepler a fruitful point of departure, for a new discourse of the future, while Utopia remains the mark of an inescapable discursive contradiction.)

If Utopia were able to achieve such incorporation, then the question of any logical becoming, of process founded upon an idea of difference, would be avoided. Though the problem of process may be present surreptitiously (and potentially subversively) in the text, the writer/narrator/reader here bypasses it by not naming it: it occurs between dialogue and narrative. The Utopians' own efforts to escape such process are indicated by their refusal of mediation, by the exclusion of money and usurers, of lawyers, by the search for the perfect given of "Greek" literature and for a language that seeks not to mediate but to be what it says. All these elements express a striving to incorporate the Word in the text—and with respect to Utopia the religious overtones are unavoidable. All these diverse efforts remain only approaches to such a goal. Their eventual failure is inescapable.

In Derrida's terms, Utopia is a genuinely "patricidal" text. The island itself cannot be precisely located (or even located at all). As I suggested earlier, it is in a sense absent from the very text that tries to narrate it. It has to be. The attempt to make present in the text the very denial of mediation is clearly doomed to failure. Utopia's presence would be the death of More's text, which exists nonetheless to relate the constant attempt to make Utopia present. But a text that genuinely denied the mediation which is all communication could be neither written nor read. Still, Utopia is not the only absent 'father' of the text: Hythlodaeus himself is gone from his own narrative. It is More who must relate him to us, in the third person. The text of Utopia seems remarkably torn between what it endeavors to do and what it is obliged to be. Part of what I will attempt to show in this volume is how the Renaissance and neoclassicism found a discursive solution to the 'impossibilities' of Utopia.

Utopia strives, then, to incorporate the 'Divine Word.' But mass is over, it has been said, and the word is passed not in church but in a garden. The Word cannot be attached directly to the text. No longer can any text have the virtually eucharistic posture of Abelard's cor-
respondence. Only the separation can be written. More can only recapture a logos. He works, to adopt Derrida's terminology, on the interest, on the product of a capital that can no longer be touched. The description of Utopia will conclude with the divine service whose primary characteristic, we will see, is the attempt to dispense with discourse as mediation (p. 145). Unfortunately, the text that relates such an effort cannot do so.

Raphael, "healing of God," "most learned in Greek" (p. 12), is the doctor who would heal his listeners/readers by overcoming the absence subversively underscored in the text. Hythlodaeus, whose "sailing has not been like that of Palinurus but that of Ulysses or, rather, of Plato" (p. 12), is the would-be purger of humanity. He would rid humankind of its separation from the Divine. He would overcome the dichotomies of system. Indeed, the very combination of his name, Raphael ("healing of God") and Hythlodaeus ("learned in trifles"), eludes the utopian dichotomy of satire and vision that has been mentioned.

Raphael, however, is twice absent. He has related the tale to More who, in turn, writes him for us, the reader. Once the mediator and his mediation are introduced, there is an immediate proliferation—and I will recall here my earlier note about such writers as Fabri, Tory, and Palsgrave, with their production of an increasing number of "intermediary levels of signification." Raphael, like Theuth and Hermes, belongs in the no-place of Origin, denying mediation. Originally "Portuguese," now (perhaps) in the Low Countries, Hythlodaeus is a constant traveler (or he is said to be), who strives to reside in the infinite: "These two sayings are constantly on his lips: 'He who has no grave is covered by the sky,' and 'From all places it is the same distance to heaven'" (p. 13). His two sayings retreat beyond the two Delphic commands reported by Plato in the Charmides (164d–165b), whose "Know thyself" and "Nothing in excess" mark the accession to a certain kind of selfhood. Indeed, Colin Morris has referred to the Delphic "Know thyself" and to its duplicate in the Song of Songs ("If you do not know yourself, go forth") as "the two foundation-texts of the movement for self-exploration" in the twelfth century.17 I argued that this self-knowing was not in any way a discovery of the self in a modern sense, but that it was entirely a mediatory passage to God. In retreating beyond these sayings, it is as though Raphael seeks to rediscover a 'wholeness' that would dispense with such mediation.

For the angelic Raphael is not the visitor of oracles, like More and

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his reader. He is the oracle, right hand and messenger of God, mediator between God and man (Tobit, 12), bringer of the Word and, therefore, original introducer of mediation. Like Hermes, like Theuth to the Egyptians, like Prometheus to the Greeks, like his namesake to the Jews, Raphael has born the Word to the Utopians as he would now wish to do to the Europeans. Plato writes of Theuth: “He it was that invented number and calculation, geometry and astronomy, not to speak of draughts and dice, and above all writing” (Phaedrus, 274d). Like him, Raphael has sought to make the Divine Word available to the Utopians as human discourse. He has brought them Greek literature (whose language, it is asserted, is derived in the first place from that perfect source—along with Persian). In that, Raphael is not simply the bearer of origins; he is the healer who will return the Utopians to their own original condition.

The role is an ambiguous one, because like Hermes he risks destroying that condition in the very quest to restore it. It is also the role More would have him fill toward the Europeans, with the same risks. Not only does Raphael bring the Utopians ‘their’ literature, he brings them printing, the record of writing and yet another twice-removed mediation (pp. 106–7), similar to More’s recounting of Hythlodaeus’s tale of Utopia. Though the Utopians already have two games “not unlike chess,” Raphael brings them knowledge (like Theuth) of dice, a kind of game they were “not acquainted with” prior to his arrival (p. 71). Since the aim of dicing is to make money it, too, is a double form of mediation (money itself being a mediation). When Raphael leaves Utopia, it is no longer clear that its inhabitants did not know the game before he came, since it is a “madness they know not by experience but by hearsay only.” They now know it well enough to pass a condemning judgment upon it: “What pleasure is there, they ask, in shooting dice upon a table?” (p. 97). Yet inasmuch as both are forms of double mediation, we may well find ourselves inclined to ask why their knowledge of dicing should turn out to be any more innocent than that of printing, which they have put into operation without the slightest delay or hesitation.

Hythlodaeus has brought technology to the previously unmediated order of the Utopians with whom he was left by Vespucci (unmediated both internally, in respect to the discursive class, as we will see, and externally, because they were, until now, quite unknown). Without Raphael’s continued presence, without the constant influence of the ‘father,’ it is carefully noted that these people may only too easily end up on the shoals of a misused technology: “there is a risk that what was likely to be a great benefit to them may, through
their imprudence, cause them great mischief” (p. 15). The medicine is also a poison. This ambiguous contradiction runs right through the lesson in systematic combinations that is Raphael’s discourse (now becoming text): “To be sure, just as he called attention to many ill-advised customs among these new nations, so he rehearsed not a few points from which our own cities, nations, races, and kingdoms may take example for the correction of their errors” (p. 15). These “corrections,” we have just seen, may, however, cause “great mischief.”

Raphael is the angelic man, bearer of a lost knowledge. In that sense he is not unlike his ubiquitous successors of following centuries; Cartesian man bearing knowledge to humanity. But his knowledge is not the self-created willful science of analytico-referential discourse. That is no doubt why, like the monstrous strangers in Racine’s later tragedies who must be cast out before a new political society can be safety constituted, Hythlodaeus remains a “stranger” (p. 11), absent from what would have been his own text. He possesses no I expressed in that text. Once his “promise” is made, the text has been sealed and no further process is possible. Raphael himself is the nonmediatory discourse whose expression is by definition impossible: hence both his absence and his apparent superiority to those with whom he comes in contact. He enjoys more “wit” and knowledge than those about him, needs no more of anything: “desirous neither of riches nor of power” (p. 17), he represents a perfect equilibrium. Carrier of the Divine Word, he has need of nothing and of no one, he is freed of all ostensibly social demands. Thus he must be absent, too, from his own text.

The pattern for the ‘perfect state’ is similar. The first thing the Utopians have done is cut off their land from any intercourse with the Other (by removing the neck of land that connected them to the mainland, p. 60). No state with any real material existence, it is implied, would (or could) do this, and that is why the second-best social system is both half-present in the text (it can be found “in Persia”) and half-absent from it (“among the people commonly called the Polylerites”). The Polylerites compose

a nation that is large and well-governed and, except that it pays an annual tribute to the Persian padishah, otherwise free and autonomous in its laws. They are far from the sea, almost ringed round by mountains, and altogether satisfied with the products of their own land. In consequence they rarely pay visits to other countries or receive them. In

accordance with their long-standing national policy, they do not try to enlarge their territory and easily protect what they have from all aggression by their mountains and by the tribute payed to their overlord. Being completely free from militarism, they live a life more comfortable than splendid and more happy than renowned or famous, for even their name, I think, is hardly known except to their immediate neighbors. [P. 31]

The ambiguous intermediary position of this Persian state of the "people of much nonsense" is indicated by the constant hedging: "except that . . ., otherwise," "almost ringed round," "rarely." And what are we to make of a people whose name is "hardly known" being yet "commonly called the Polylerites"? They seem in fact to bear much the same relation to Utopia as does archaic Atlantis (before its imperialist impulses) to Plato's Ideal State or, again (and perhaps more to be emphasized here), as More to Hythlodaeus. These are the secondary mediators—or tertiary, if we start with the 'Divine Word.'

Hythlodaeus is presented to the reader as one who has the cure to the present ills of European politics and society. The entire discussion of the first book concerns the efficacy of this healer. Raphael asserts that Europe is already so far from common sense and the original justice of the rediscovered "new" world that no such cure would be accepted (the now-familiar opposition nature/culture, primitive/civilized is apparent here [p. 56], and "new" has not only the sense of unfamiliar, because previously unknown, but also that of being closer to its origins). The "stranger" speaks of Europe as of "sick bodies which are past cure [and which] can be kept up by repeated medical treatments" (p. 54). We have already mentioned More's reaction to such a view: "If you cannot pluck up wrong-headed opinions by the root, if you cannot cure according to your heart's desire vices of long standing, yet you must not on that account desert the commonwealth" (p. 49). But his own disagreement with Raphael at the end of the second book confirms that Hythlodaeus is right to reply as he does at this point.

His response seems in all ways inevitable. If he turns his back on the cure he has, on his immediate bearing of the Word, he will simply be including himself in the contradictory but fixed discourse that characterizes European practices of all kinds, practices which, by their very nature, betray the reality to which they supposedly refer and which they claim to present unproblematically. These practices have forgotten they play an entirely mediatory role:
“By this approach,” he commented, “I should accomplish nothing else than to share the madness of others as I tried to cure their lunacy. If I would stick to the truth, I must needs speak in the manner I have described. To speak falsehoods, for all I know, may be the part of a philosopher, but it is certainly not for me. Although that speech of mine might perhaps be unwelcome and disagreeable to those councilors, yet I cannot see why it should seem odd even to the point of folly. What if I told them the kind of things Plato creates in his republic or which the Utopians actually put in practice in theirs? Though such institutions were superior (as, to be sure, they are), yet they might appear odd because here individuals have the right to private property, there all things are common.” [P. 50]

Raphael wants to resolve a discursive contradiction by excluding an element that is becoming increasingly important as the only begetter of meaningful relations. He wishes to remove the I as enunciator and possessor of its own discourse, as creator and supporter of conflictual relations with other such enunciators. The future Euclidean mind is his enemy, and that is the real reason why Raphael must remain an exile from the courts of kings. Nations that seek to impose themselves (as certain kinds of text do as well), “where whatever a man has acquired he calls his own private property” (p. 53), must be hostile. As referential text would seek to trap the Word in the particular tale of its own telling, so the possessive I grasps the other. (It is perhaps worth recalling here that theological discourse held that all property was ultimately the King’s, and therefore in effect common to society as a whole inasmuch as the King was both society’s microcosm and the direct mediator of God: society’s laws, society itself, the King, God, and eternal Law could all be called by the same term, anima.)

Raphael’s ‘communist’ state is the necessary analogue of what we may call his ‘antitext.’ The very fact of its being written down is a denial of its own postulate. That is why the absence of all process is emphasized by the rupture at the center (between the first and second books). Plato snared Socrates in his text, the first in truth absorbing the second: why, in modern editions, does the death of Socrates invariably precede his subsequent dialogue? More has denied Raphael in his. For the written text, it is suggested, must deny ‘real’ communication (“telling you just the same thing forever”), just as the individualist state must deny ‘real’ society:

Where every man aims at absolute ownership of all the property he can get, be there never so great abundance of goods, it is all shared by a
handful who leave the rest in poverty. It generally happens that the one class pre-eminently deserves the lot of the other, for the rich are greedy, unscrupulous, and useless, while the poor are well-behaved, simple, and by their daily industry more beneficial to the commonwealth than to themselves. I am fully persuaded that no just and even distribution of goods can be made and that no happiness can be found in human affairs unless private property is utterly abolished. While it lasts, there will always remain a heavy and inescapable burden of poverty and misfortune for by far the greatest and by far the best part of mankind. [Pp. 53-54]

More must perforce write this into his text and deny both it and its proponent as he does so: just because this “principal foundation of their whole structure” (p. 151) negates the very contradiction upon which his own discourse depends even as it strives to get around it. To cast aside conflictual possessive practices and return to an unmediated totality: there is the ideal. But the necessity of human mediation to achieve it demands that the discourse bearing that ideal be discarded in favor of some other, more efficacious. For, remarks Hythlodaeus, there cannot be “a cure and a return to the healthy condition as long as each individual is master of his own property.” The one contradicts the other: “Nay, while you are intent upon the cure of one part, you make worse the malady of the other parts” (p. 54). Such will be the case, Raphael insists, until there can be a reciprocal healing, an overcoming of the contradiction, a return to the unity of organism: that is, by the existence of a situation that would deny any posture of mediation, and therefore the very existence of a text such as this. More, as writer, is constantly questioning the goals of his own text, closed upon itself in a permanent self-contradiction.

It is revealing that the question concerning the reliability of his text as a true affirmation of things, as an overcoming of the distance between words and things, should be put in terms of a dispute concerning the length of a bridge (p. 5). What is still more significant, however, is the decision simply to efface all doubts about it and allow the discourse itself to affirm the length, a discourse that will likewise choose to change it should it deem that useful: “If you agree with him, I shall adopt the same view and think myself mistaken. If you do not remember, I shall put down, as I have actually done, what I myself seem to remember” (p. 5). The bridge as an object is, of course, indifferent. It is the bridge as a sign of potential textual mediation of the exterior that is of interest, as a sign of the relation between system and things systematized. The uncertainty over the bridge’s length corresponds, if you will, to the proliferation of me-
diatary signifying levels to which I have already referred. The con-
tradictions become insoluble, and discourse passes out of its depth.
The bridge, the distance, the relation, fluctuates according as the
text requires. The very imperiousness of this requirement is what
Hythlodaeus rejects. It is why he, in turn, is rejected. The inescap-
ability of that fluctuation is also why Utopia itself must cast out and
annul all the would-be arbitrators of difference, all the potential
mediators of such distance. The exemplary forms of such arbitration
here are money, language, society itself, and literature. We must
take a look here at how these concepts and the practices accompany-
ing them are dealt with by the Utopians.

The passage of money from measure of value to store of value
(from token to capital), marked by the mercantilist ethic spreading
throughout Europe since before the sixteenth century and clearly
signaled, for example, by Copernicus only ten years after the pub-
lication of Utopia, is evidenced in More's text.19 For Raphael (or rather,
Utopia), money as capital and interest, as possessing any other than
simple use value, is the cause not only of all economic ills but of
every vice current in a capitalist society: "it appears to me that wher-
ever you have private property and all men measure things by cash
values, then it is scarcely possible for a commonwealth to have justice
and prosperity" (p. 52). That, too, is why, among the Polylerites, the
further corrupting gift of money to a prisoner (already guilty of
having attempted to corrupt society in some way) is considered a
capital offense (pp. 32–33), and it is why

in Utopia all greed for money was entirely removed with the use of
money. What a mass of troubles was then cut away! What a crop of
crimes was then pulled up by the roots! Who does not know that fraud,
theft, rapine, quarrels, disorders, brawls, seditions, murders, treasons,
poisonings, which are avenged rather than restrained by daily execu-
tions, die out with the destruction of money? Who does not know that
fear, anxiety, worries, toils, and sleepless nights will also perish at the
same time as money? What is more, poverty, which alone money seemed
to make poor, forthwith would itself dwindle and disappear if money
were entirely done away with everywhere. [P. 149]

For the Utopians, treasure in gold and silver has only such value
as the use to which it can be put: as chamber pots, as chains for

19. On Copernicus's theories and for a translation of his principal text on the
matter see Timothy J. Reiss and Roger H. Hinderliter, "Money and Value in the
Sixteenth Century: The Monete cudende ratio of Nicholas Copernicus," Journal of the
History of Ideas, 40 (1979), 293–313.
prisoners, and as symbols on the convict's person of his misdemeanors. Money is given no chance to proliferate usuriously or create activities whose sole purpose is in such proliferation: "For, in a society where we make money the standard of everything, it is necessary to practice many crafts which are quite vain and superfluous, ministering only to luxury and licentiousness" (p. 72). The absence of money from the Utopian system comes up many times in the course of the narrative (pp. 63, 77, 85, for example). It is indeed a major factor in the "principal foundation" of their society: "their common life and subsistence—without any exchange of money" (p. 151).

The Utopians keep a store of treasure only because it can be used to buy mercenaries on behalf of nations who work by money. It is kept uncoined until it is so needed: that is to say, though the Utopians accept gold and silver in foreign trade, it is kept quite out of circulation within their community and has no opportunity to pass from use to capital. But this storage of precious metals is not a means to prevent its leaving the country; it is not the measure of the island's wealth, as a later mercantilist ethic might maintain. It is merely that the Utopians have no internal use for it. Internally, indeed, money can never even become mediation (pp. 84–89): the inhabitants are too well aware of its "true nature." For the same reason, treasure must never be merely hoarded (simply for its own sake, that is; p. 97).

The Utopians are possessed by the wise fear lest money become the only meaning of production (what a later analysis will refer to as its "fetishization"). They are apprehensive lest the text replace what it can at very best only hope to mediate: "They wonder, too, that gold, which by its very nature is so useless, is now everywhere in the world valued so highly that man himself, through whose agency and for whose use it got this value, is priced much cheaper than gold itself... as if he were a mere appendage of and addition to the coins!" (p. 89). In every other society, Raphael asserts, money has indeed replaced human necessities or human pleasure as the sole meaning of production and of the circulation of goods. The system of mediation has replaced what it mediated. It is just because money is 'patricidal' in this way that it must be banished from Utopia.

The same holds true of language. Inasmuch as systematic communication is necessary, language is necessary. Nonetheless, that of the Utopians strivies to come as close to something like direct apprehension as it may. Their entire effort is concentrated on reducing language to a minimal mediation, which is why "Greek" comes so easily to them.
Throughout the sixteenth century, Greek (along with Hebrew, no doubt) was considered by the humanist grammarians, poeticians, and philologists to be the nearest thing to a natural ‘unmediated’ language known to men. It was supposed to allow so precise an expression of, to be in so perfect a correlation with, concepts and things immediately apprehended as to come very close to not being a symbolic system at all. For Greek, argues Ramus (or, as he would have it in this case, “old Gaulish,” which he claims to be early Greek), dates from the time when “languages were still whole,” when raison and oraison, parts of speech and ‘parts of reason,’ were coincident, not conventionally or arbitrarily, but essentially.20

The terms used by Raphael to describe the Utopians’ language are almost identical to those used later by so many writers to describe Greek: “their native tongue . . . is copious in vocabulary and pleasant to the ear and a very faithful exponent of thought. It is almost the same as that current in a great part of that side of the world, only that everywhere else its form is more corrupt, to different degrees in different regions” (p. 90). Words, however, remain nothing but insufficient surrogates (despite their approach to perfect presentation), and as far as possible should give way to the thing itself: “If a person does not regard nature, do you suppose he will care anything about words?” asks Raphael, as he discusses the Utopians’ refusal to make use of written treaties (which are therefore already a dead letter, p. 116). The same attitude is held toward laws (p. 114)—a point that will later be stressed by Montaigne among many others (in “De l’expérience,” for example): laws should be few, simple, and pleaded by those most immediately concerned so that the situation is more in evidence than the law whose interpretation may concern it.

No innate mediatory power is granted to language. It has no value of its own, any more than has money. It has what is strictly a use value, and any meaning apart from that use is eschewed. Yet here, too, the contradictions are apparent, for the effort to avoid mediation leads straight back into it. Thus even (or especially) the word

20. Pierre de la Ramée, Traité des meurs et façons des anciens Gaulois, traduit du latin [de 1559] par Michel de Castelnau (Paris, 1581), p. 53. See also, e.g., Henri Estienne, Conformité du langage françois avec le grec [1562], ed. Léon Feugère (Paris, 1853), pp. 18–19, and his La prééminence du langage franois [1579], ed. Edmond Huguet (Paris, 1896), pp. 10 ff. The same arguments are to be found in the Italian and English writers on the subject, particularly those around Roger Ascham (see, e.g., diverse remarks scattered throughout The Scholemaster [1570]). The terms raison/oraison (ratio/oratio) are used by (among many others) John Palsgrave, L’eclaircissement de la langue française [1530], ed. F. Genin (Paris, 1852), pp. xxivff. See also Geoffroy Tory, Champ fleury ou l’art et science de la proportion des lettres [1529], ed. Gustave Cohen (Paris, 1931), passim.
denoting the Divinity is held to be arbitrary and conventional, not able to become capital in itself, or interest either: “They invoke God by no name except that of Mithras. By this word they agree to represent the one nature of the divine majesty whatever it be” (p. 143, my italics). The whole difficulty of textualizing the Word may be seen in this confrontation between the avowedly conventional and arbitrary name Mithras and the supposed unnameable totality which is God. As soon as mediation is admitted, essence (“whatever it be”) disappears and becomes utterly unattainable.

The effort to overcome that flaw remains, however. It is because language is viewed in this way that the Utopians are so far “from ability to speculate on second intentions” (p. 90) that only the direct apprehension of the nature of things in “first intentions” is meaningful to them (though the term “meaningful” is perhaps misleading here: for the Utopians, things are before they acquire meaning—as we saw in the case of Augustine). Since their language is viewed by them as at best an inefficient mediation, the second intention, which may be held as residing only in discursive systematization, has no role in their conceptual process. It might well be asserted, indeed, that pure sound would be the only means by which second intentions could be avoided: for words inevitably produce the intellect’s reflection upon itself, upon its manner of comprehending, and upon the manner of the existence of a thing in the intellect. And the Utopians’ ‘universal’ language does tend toward such a pure ideal. Only thus could there be an expression and communication of immediate (unmediated) sensible apprehension:

All their music, whether played on instruments or sung by the human voice, so renders and expresses the natural feelings, so suits the sound to the matter (whether the words be supplicatory, or joyful, or propitiatory, or troubled, or mournful, or angry), and so represents the meaning by the form of the melody that it wonderfully affects, penetrates, and inflames the souls of the hearers. [P. 145]

In so ideal a situation, words serve no purpose at all.

Unfortunately, the ideal situation is somewhat elusive. Utopia has found itself obliged to cross the threshold of a ‘Euclidean’ textuality even before Raphael and More combine to kill the ideal for good.

21. Surutz, p. 90 n. 9: “Whereas the first intention is the direct apprehension of a thing according to its nature, the second is the form resulting from the intellect’s triple reflection: upon itself, upon its way of apprehension, and upon the manner in which the nature of a thing exists in the intellect.”
Despite all its efforts to remain in the realm of the pharmakon, Utopia in the text is among the most repetitively systematized of all ideal states. Nor is it the least militaristic, the least aggressively willful—even if only in its external relations. Nonetheless, within the limits of its own 'geographical' (and discursive) boundaries, it does strive toward the complete reduction of mediation. There, its system seeks (in vain, once textualized) to cancel the bonds of mediated System.

For the very structured social organization of Utopia also corresponds to such a search to reject mediation. The patriarchal society is founded on a kind of pyramidal familial organization (always ruled by the father), according to which the family 'proper' is the basic form of increasingly large units: family, agricultural groupings, sets of thirty families, of three hundred, city, state, each under its own patriarch (pp. 61, 67). The goal of the state is the equal satisfaction of the material and intellectual needs of all its citizens, and the highest aim is a "pleasure" that signifies a complete harmony with "nature": "The Utopians define virtue as living according to nature since to this end we were created by God" (pp. 92–93). Ideally this pleasure would cancel all dichotomies, and humankind, considered both as 'individual' and as society as a whole, would be absorbed into the patterns of an enfolding totality, the Divine itself.22

It is not without reason that Guillaume Budé, in his letter-preface to the 1517 Paris edition, remarks that primitively organized society, Utopia, "is itself divided into many cities, but they all unite and harmonize in one state, named Hagnopolis" ('pure' or 'sacred' city).23 Yet it is in fact striving for a lost unity. Utopia was once named Abraxa, while the unknown Deity is named Mithras, two words once supposed to be in some unmediated contact with the Divine: Abraxas, whose component letters in the Greek numerical system make 365, was the name given by Basilides the Gnostic to the highest of his 365 heavens; while Mithras, a name with the numerical value of 360, denotes "roughly the number of days it takes the sun to complete its cycle."24 The words are both sacred and contain in their very composition an immediate relation (supposed) with the yearly and seasonal cycles.

The society strives to avoid becoming a system of mediated process. It functions as a single, totalizing organism that seeks as few

bonds as possible with an exterior. That is why its entire ‘exchange’ system is internal (if, indeed, it may be called ‘exchange’ at all). From other lands it needs scarcely anything but iron (p. 84), while its own list of exports is relatively large: “a great quantity of grain, honey, wool, linen, timber, scarlet and purple dyestuffs, hides, wax, tallow, leather, as well as livestock” (p. 83). Apart from iron, the only appreciable imported commodity is “a great quantity of silver and gold” (p. 84). As we know, this is quite useless to them as a merchandise for the internal market and, because it is obtained simply to be in accord with their neighbors’ systems of exchange, cannot really be classified as an ‘import’ at all (that they receive it as bullion though the process would rather require they obtain it in the form of coin is another sign of contradiction).

This bullion can be used, again, only in an outgoing direction, and even then in a peculiarly pure and direct form of ‘exchange’ that in effect maintains the Utopians’ own absence from it. They use this bullion only to pay off foreign mercenaries in wars fought on behalf of those other peoples from whom they acquired the gold and silver in the first place (pp. 84, 122–23). So little need have they of exchange with the exterior that the greatest percentage of the trade balance takes the form of “credit,” for most of which “the Utopians never claim payment” (p. 84). As a social and economic organization, Utopia strives toward the ‘original’ state of nonmediation, just as it does with respect to those other forms of mediation of which it is perforce obliged to make use.

As such a social organism, Utopia remains decidedly ambiguous. Though it may be removed (both formally and topically) from the emerging ‘Euclideanism’ of European societies, it remains very far distant from the perfected, nonmediated totalizing organism of theocratic theory. Utopia does need its healer, if less than most. The medical works brought by Hythlodaeus and his companion (the gods of mediation are also those of medicine), while of considerable interest to the Utopians as “a branch of philosophy,” are of no physical use to them: “there is scarcely a nation in the whole world that needs medicine less” (pp. 105–6). Real medicine in the eyes of the Utopians is a kind of ‘pure’ mediation between the world and humankind—‘pure’ because it operates with things instead of with the names of things. That does not make it an unmediated form, and while the island inhabitants may need medicine “less,” they still need it.

The Utopian social organization pursues an urge toward ‘primitivity.’ But it is a highly sophisticated organization and can therefore only strive in vain. That is why it does have some need of a healer.
Inscribed within More's text (and Raphael's before him), it is already seized in writing. It has no option. Yet it strives at all points to deny that it is so seized.

Emile Durkheim, among others, has studied at some length the ritual exile of the new initiate into primitive societies. The initiate must expiate the diverse interdictions that help compose society's structure. Marcel Mauss, in his turn, showed how in ancient Rome, for example, the very nonstatus of the slave represented a permanent exile from the structure of the civil organization in equilibrium.25 Exile, in some more or less ritualized form, seems to be the manner in which 'organic' societies maintain a 'perfect' equilibrium: as though it were expelling the destabilizing or sick element (let us recall once again Raphael as a "stranger" and Racine's asocial monsters). So, at least, is the manner in which they signify the maintenance of such equilibrium. Again, the ideology of such societies would affirm that the doing and the signifying are identical. It is no doubt the case that any system will have to find some way of excluding whatever threatens its order. In an analytico-referentially organized society, the solution tends to be enclosure. It is a perfectly logical solution. For such a society claims to be open-ended and always in expansion. The only way, therefore, to be certain of protecting itself from elements of menace is by sealing them up within the system: if it merely excluded them, it would always run the risk of catching up with the threat once again. A society that conceives itself as a self-sufficient total organism can use exclusion: either exile or slavery. Moreover, as in Utopia, such exile is redeemable, for the reabsorption of once undesirable elements then occurs when society wishes and not simply as part of an irrepressible process (p. 112).

In Utopia slavery is so much the standard punishment for what society takes to be crimes against itself that it may almost be said to be the only one (p. 112). It is genuinely a civil exile, slaves being the only ones who are totally excluded from the entire set of civil relationships. In them the social organization is turned on its head: they work constantly and as a punishment, instead of intermittently and as a pleasurable service to the commonwealth (p. 108); they wear chains of gold as a sign of disgrace, while citizens wear nothing to restrict their freedom and no signs of rank whatsoever (p. 86). Slaves are truly a mirror image of society. Death, the only other punish-

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The discourse used as a rule by Utopian society as a public discipline, is only inflicted for repeating a fault already punished by slavery (p. 112).

One exception is recorded, and it is extremely revealing. It concerns the single case of an attempt to persuade the Utopians to institutionalize difference within their social organization, to create and accept a definitive dichotomy in the civil organism. The case is that of a zealous new Christian who tries to convince them that his belief is the only one corresponding to reality. His argument, then, does not only demand that social divisions be installed; it also insists upon the referential truth of sign systems as it can be instituted by human decision (what Hobbes will later refer to in his introduction to *Leviathan* as the human “Fiat”).

The guilty verdict is automatically followed by the offender’s exile. Indeed, adds Raphael, there was no choice in the matter for his judges: exile or slavery being the obligatory punishment for such an offense (p. 133). All the punishments mentioned are, clearly, forms of exclusion, whether slavery, exile, or death. They represent the social means of maintaining that wholeness of the organism of which the refusal of money and the search for a language that denies its mediatory role are also characteristic. We may perhaps, though hesitantly, add literature to the types of discourse just mentioned, though there are few references to what we may call ‘literature.’ Raphael’s remarks about reading and writing seem to be concerned with ‘moral’ and ‘philosophical’ letters. Prior to his having brought them printing and the *given* of Greek, public literature seems to have consisted only in reading aloud to accompany meals. This oral/written opposition in the present context tends to confirm what we have seen elsewhere: a striving to escape mediation confronted with its inevitability (on “literature,” see pp. 81, 89–90, 106). The three (or four) types of discourse, then—money, language, society, and literature—all attempt to remain as near as possible to a state of ‘undifferentiation,’ to a condition where there would be no division between self and other, between individual and society, between object and value, between the Word and the world, between the human and the Divine. The Utopians strive toward the wholeness of an organism that they seem nonetheless to recognize obscurely as belonging to an irrecoverable past. Raphael must mediate to them, just as through More he mediates to us.

More’s writing is the most tense, indeed the most embarrassed, of utopias. Striving to return to a nostalgic no-time (*illud tempus*), to the theocratic wholeness of a ‘medieval’ organic society, or to an ever postponed process of Derridian *différance* (perhaps), Utopia is already
trapped in the text necessary to mediate it: hence the circularity of that text, with its lack of process signaled by the hole at the center—circular dialogue, repetitive narrative, the latter sealed in the former by the barrier of Raphael's promise and its repetition of the structure that already controls the dialogue.

The text that seeks to embody some nontextual Reality concludes by being able to signify only itself. In effect More concludes: "I cannot agree with what I have just finished writing." And that disagreement focuses on the very "feature which is the principal foundation of their whole structure. I mean their common life and subsistence—without any exchange of money" (p. 151). No doubt More, the real person, is now commenting satirically upon his own text; but that simply reinforces our point: he is echoing a general view that such a society as sought by the Utopians belongs, if anywhere, in a past that is no more than a memory. Indeed, the satire that the text is comments not only on the society of More's time but also on that of the Utopians. Utopian organicism is no more possible than the 'new' European societies are desirable. The satirical aspect of the text, therefore, by the "shifting of the traditional values of words," succeeds in subverting the text from within:

he says that Utopian communism would deprive a commonwealth of "nobility, magnificence, splendor, and majesty, which are, in the estimation of the common people, the true glories and ornaments of the commonwealth" [p. 151]. The reference to the "estimation of the common people" only reinforces the satirical thrust of this list of "true glories." For earlier in the book More has already switched the signs on three out of four of these traditionally honorific terms—nobility, splendor, majesty. Of commonwealths they are not the true but the false glories.26

This ambiguity, this subversion from within endemic to More's text, will later be seized upon by Swift, who turns it inside out and makes the medicine overtly a poison (but he is unable, as we shall see, to switch the signs at all). Even in that case the ambiguity is not entirely evacuated, as the endlessly contradictory critical lucubrations over and 'clarifications' of Gulliver's Travels testify only too well. Gulliver after, like Utopia before, brings the profoundest of critiques to bear on such texts as New Atlantis and Robinson Crusoe. But Gulliver criticizes a class of discourse without being able to break out of its

limits. *Utopia* necessitates the development of it. In More's text the tension is essential and inescapable: it is the contradictory attempt to mediate what cannot be mediated. The writing appears to want to show that Utopia itself *is* the inexpressible. It cannot be mediated. Nor can it mediate, and that is no doubt the reason for More's ultimate 'disclaimer.'

*Utopia* is a far cry from the 'paternalistic' texts of a later era. More seeks to deny the linear textuality of his writing: they will its imposition. Utopia would have been the unmediated, pretextual Word, the rediscovered organic, patterned, and conjunctive society. To attempt its embodiment in the texture of *Utopia* is necessarily a contradiction. No more than any other text of the period can More's writing rediscover the soul's transcendent passage to God or society's to wholeness. The real absence at the center of this text is the no-place of Utopia itself, the antitext that denies More its inscription. And before the event, it denies the possibility of the narration of knowledge in the neoclassical sense of some permanent truth concerning a reality not itself discursive.

The "antitext" asserts that society cannot be simply the result of a contractual agreement between equally possessive individuals, an arrangement to put a halt to the constant struggle for "power after power" characteristic of Hobbesian natural man and of the Machiavellian state. It gives the lie to the later practice of literature as the self-assured moral and didactic discourse of an educated elite. It repudiates the use of money as capital 'replacing' the commodities whose exchange it facilitates—and if the travels of a Sir Walter Raleigh become the future metaphor of a new concept of knowledge and action, so too his exemplary mercantilist opinions about money run quite counter to the Utopians': "Where there is store of gold, it is in effect nedeles to remember other commodities for trade." Such a view would clearly be anathema to Raphael, and utterly foreign to the Utopians.

*Utopia* suggests that any discourse that occults its own discursivity (as analytico-referential discourse will eventually do) is merely blind to what is most essential to it. Terence Cave has recently proposed that in certain kinds of Renaissance writing this blindness is de-occulted. At first this leads to a kind of outpouring of discursivity itself, a flood of writing whose lost totalizing meaning is not yet

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27. Sir Walter Ralegh, *The Discoverie of the Large, Rich, and Beuiful Empyre of Guiana, With a Relation of the Great and Golden City of Manoa . . .* (London, 1596), p. 95. The exemplary representatives of views such as these are, of course, writers and traders like Gerard Malynes and Thomas Mun.
replaced by any specifiable direction of signification, taking its origin for example in the intentionality of a subject. He thus writes of Montaigne: “All that the *Essais* can do, with their ineradicable self-consciousness, is to posit paradigms of wholeness as features of a discourse which, as it pours itself out, celebrates its own inanity.” On at least one occasion, this leads Montaigne to imagine the existence of a mediation-free society not entirely dissimilar to what we have seen in *Utopia*:

> It is a nation, would I answer *Plato*, that hath no kind of traffike, no knowledge of Letters, no intelligence of numbers, no name of magistrate, nor of politike superioritie; no use of service, of riches or of poverty; no contracts, no successions, no partitions, no occupation but idle; no respect of kinred, but common, no apparell but naturall, no manuring of lands, no use of wine, corne, or mettle.

The emergence of analysis out of patterning as we will see it in Kepler, its elaboration in Bacon and his successors, its consolidation as the dominant discourse at the end of the seventeenth century: all this development is a response to the contradictions of an earlier discourse that is no longer able to function satisfactorily as a whole conceptual system. *Utopia* was an exemplary case.
