

DAVID LEOPOLD:

BEYOND THE 'GRAND DESIGNS':
OWENISM, ARCHITECTURE, AND UTOPIA

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'When I am asked where I would like to live, my standard answer is: deep in the virgin mountain forest on a lake shore at the corner of Madison Avenue in Manhattan and Champs Elysees, in a small tidy town.'

Leszek Kolakowski, 'The Death of Utopia Reconsidered' (1982)

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INTRODUCTION

Discussions of utopia – including my own – frequently begin by pointing out the word play between 'happy or good place' and 'no place' in the neologism coined by Thomas More (1478-1535). Rather less often do they notice that utopia, on both accounts, is a place (a 'topos').

Indeed, utopias – understood here as ideal societies which do not exist, and are described in some detail – have a location, and are often preoccupied with the built environment. That location has shifted over time; originally utopia may have been an island in some unknown part of the new world, but as the world grew (metaphorically) smaller, *terrae incognita* tended to be displaced to the future or sent out into space. Yet, wherever it is found – and however much its economic arrangements, governance, social structures, and cultural norms might vary – few utopian authors can resist describing its built environment in some detail.

In this, as in much else, More has a certain responsibility. He gave shape, as well as a name, to the utopian tradition. When Raphael Hythloday is asked to describe Utopia, he quickly turns to the built environment. The island contains fifty-four city states, all spacious and magnificent, whose cities are similar to, but less worthy than, the capital city named Amaurot. The original layout of the latter was sketched by Utopus himself, but the inhabitants have made many subsequent improvements. Situated on a gentle slope, nearly two miles wide and slightly more than that long, Amaurot is divided into four equal districts, each with its own market. The city is highly fortified; enclosed by a high and broad wall with towers and battlements at intervals and a moat and thorn hedges on three sides, and the river Anyder on the fourth.¹ Streets are laid out in a grid system both to facilitate traffic, and to protect inhabitants against the winds. Terraced houses, three stories high, face the street, with flat roofs, and exterior walls of stone or cement or brick. Windows are made of glass or sometimes of a very thin linen smeared with translucent oil. To the rear, each block has a communal garden; the utopians are very fond of their gardens – which contain vines, fruits, herbs and flowers – and

compete over which is the best kept.²

It is the architecture of utopia which forms my topic here, but I am concerned with the plans and blueprints of communitarian socialists in the nineteenth century, and not the literary constructions of renaissance humanists. By 'communitarian socialism' I mean a socialism which identifies the creation of intentional communities – small voluntary settlements of individuals living and working together for some common purpose – as both the means to, and the final institutional form of, the socialist future. Communitarian socialism often gets squeezed out of (impoverished) accounts of socialist history which revolve around the real and imagined competition between Marxism and social democracy, as if that exhausted the possibilities. This is regrettable, not only for reasons of historical accuracy, but also because there is much to learn from a socialism whose notion of the future was sufficiently open that it required imagination and experimentation if it was to be achieved.³

More precisely, I am concerned with some architectural dimensions of the communal plans put forward by Robert Owen (1771-1858) and his followers.⁴ Notwithstanding the respectful neglect which is his current fate, Owen is rightly identified as '[t]he central figure of British Socialism in the first half of the nineteenth century'.⁵ I begin with Owen's grand design for the built environment of a socialist 'home colony' (his occasional term of art for communal settlements), and then survey some critical responses found in alternative plans emerging from within the Owenite movement, one from its leadership and two from its rank and file.

OWEN'S GRAND DESIGN

Owen occupied a variety of different roles in his life, including: manager and owner of cotton mills; philanthropist and reformer; radical social critic; communitarian socialist; participant in the nascent cooperative movement; trade unionist; and spiritualist.⁶ There are, of course, connections between these different phases of his life, and some constants in his views – his account of the formation of character, and, perhaps, a certain naivety about power. However, it is the communitarian socialist that I am interested in here.

Owen's communitarian phase emerged around 1817, as he began to develop a more critical understanding of the contemporary social world – condemning existing forms of religion, marriage, and property, as irrational and inhumane – and a more ambitious account of the remedies that might be required to avoid its failings. Owen initially promoted communitarian solutions as a way of alleviating the condition of the poor during economic crises. However, the more that he considered the advantages of communitarian life, the more he became convinced that *everyone* would be better off living inside intentional communities of the right kind. In a 'Further Development of the Plan' (1817), Owen portrayed communal settlements as providing the basis of a new kind of society based on cooperation.

The benefits of communitarian life would be many. Domestic duplication, for instance, would be avoided, with better food being prepared at a fraction of the effort and cost of

individual family arrangements. Indeed, Owen seems to have found it hard to imagine any disadvantages, except perhaps the danger of too many of those living under the old order rushing precipitately into the new communal arrangements.⁷ However, the crucial advantage of these rational social circumstances would be their transforming effect on the physical, intellectual, and moral character of humankind. The ignorant, irrational, and miserable, population of the old world, would be replaced by ‘intelligent, rational, and happy’ persons.⁸

Communal settlements would usher humankind into, and form the social framework of, what Owen would come to call the ‘new moral world’. This millenarian language was not a slip. Where Christian prophecy predicted that a ‘period of universal virtue and happiness’ would emerge at some unspecified and distant point in the future (and last for a thousand years), Owen now identified a ‘Millennium state of existence’ (which would last forever) as near at hand, awaiting only the social changes that he recommended.⁹

Owen was associated with several practical attempts to put communal plans into practice. Most significant were the settlements at New Harmony (1825-27) in Indiana, America – on which Owen lost most of the fortune he had acquired from the mills at New Lanark, in Scotland – and Harmony or Queenswood (1839-45) in Hampshire, England. Both communities had a complicated and short-lived existence, but the proximate causes of communal collapse included inadequate preparation, undercapitalisation, inappropriate skills of membership, poor internal accounting, and disputes about property arrangements and governance.¹⁰

My interest here, however, is in the aspirations, and not the reality, of Owenite community. More precisely, I focus on the architectural dimensions of Owen’s vision for the new moral world, especially in *A Development of the Principles and Plans on Which to Establish Self-Supporting Home Colonies* (1841), supplemented by detail from Owen’s architectural collaborator, Thomas Stedman Whitwell (1784-1840).¹¹ Owen and Whitwell worked closely together on this design, and Owen was subsequently happy to acknowledge the collaboration of ‘a talented scientific architect’.¹²

Whitwell was an English architect and civil engineer, responsible for a number of buildings, mainly in Birmingham and Coventry; perhaps most famously the ‘Pantechnece’ in New Street, Birmingham (an ornate manufacturers’ showroom built in Greek Revival style). He travelled with Owen to America in November 1825, together with an elaborate six foot square model of a ‘home colony’. It was unpacked at the Patent Office, installed in an anteroom of the White House, and shown to President John Quincy Adams, on 3 December 1825.¹³ The model was also displayed in New York and Philadelphia, and may have formed the basis for the panoramic engraving – the frontispiece for the first issue of *The Co-operative Magazine and Monthly Herald* (1826) – which has formed a staple illustration for trade books and exhibitions on utopianism ever since.¹⁴ Whitwell’s subsequent professional career was damaged by his architectural involvement in the rebuilt Brunswick Theatre, Whitechapel, London, which collapsed, with loss of life, in 1828.

As well as elaborating Owen’s communal designs, Whitwell came up with an idiosyncratic nomenclature for new settlements (or, indeed, the renaming of existing

ones). His system – provoked by the ‘confusion, uncertainty, and error’ of discovering that so many places in America had the same name (nine Oxfords, sixteen Columbias, eight Petersburgs, and so on) – involved associating degrees of latitude and longitude with combinations of vowels and consonants.¹⁵ The first four letters expressed latitude, and the remainder the longitude, although it appears that a certain amount of *post-hoc* flexibility was needed to avoid unpronounceable or disagreeable combinations. Those averse to ‘novelty in orthography’ are unlikely to be reassured by Whitwell’s examples from the existing world, which include ‘Lafa-Tovutu’ (London), ‘Oput-Tedou’ (Paris), and ‘Otke-Notive’ (New York).¹⁶

The details vary a little from text to text, but the grandness of Owen’s design for settlements is never much in doubt. His comparisons with the contemporary built environment reveal the scale of his ambition. The representative ‘home colony’, he maintains, would be ‘what may be fairly termed a magnificent palace, containing within itself the advantages of a metropolis, an university, and a country residence, without any of their disadvantages, and situated within a beautiful country park’.¹⁷

The settlement would occupy some two to three thousand acres, the estate laid out as four farms, each with their own agricultural buildings as appropriate. This estate would support some two to two-and-a-half thousand inhabitants, made up of the ‘usual proportions’ of men, women, and children.¹⁸ They would live in a single central building, at the heart of the ‘colony’, and it is this structure – located at, or very near, the centre of the estate – that really captures Owen’s imagination.

This enormous building would combine housing and public rooms, forming an impressive square. Owen says little about its architectural form, although the engraving (mentioned above) has a suggestion of Gothic Revival (at least in its many arches and gables).¹⁹ Whitwell recommends that one of the diagonals of the square be situated on or parallel to a meridian line, not only for astronomical and geographical convenience, but also in order to ensure an equal amount of light for inhabitants.²⁰ Commentators sometimes draw comparisons with Oxford or Cambridge Colleges, but such analogies – amongst other failings – understate the scale of this quadrangle, which would enclose an area of sixty-five acres.²¹ On Owen’s account, each side of the building would measure some 1650 feet in length, and be five storeys high (including basement and attic dormitories) in its residential parts.

On the outside, running around the entire building, is a broad raised walkway, a ‘noble esplanade or terrace’, one hundred feet wide, and standing twelve feet above the natural level of the surrounding ground (and level with the ground floor of the central building). From this terrace the estate of the colony would be visible, presenting ‘the appearance of a park, with its hills and dales, its wood and water’.²² There are steps down from the esplanade at frequent intervals, and the four fronts of the whole raised structure might be furnished with fruit trees grown on espaliers (both tying it into the landscape and minimising its visual impact on the building proper).²³

The building itself is perhaps best discussed in terms of the arrangements of its different functional parts. Public rooms are placed at each corner and at the centre of each side of the building. Between these – forming eight sections (two on each side) in total – are the

residential parts of the building.

At each outside corner is a large educational building; either a school or college. The four together are said to constitute something like a 'university' for the formation of character – physical, intellectual, moral, and practical – from infancy to maturity.²⁴ The inner angles of these four corners are, on Whitwell's account, occupied by gymnasia (for infants, children, and youth) and an infirmary.²⁵

At the centre of each of the four sides would be a diverse group of public rooms. Owen lists: assembly and concert rooms; libraries and reading rooms; museums; laboratories; artists' studios; lecture rooms; committee rooms; and places of worship.²⁶ Whitwell's parallel account includes: 'the libraries, museums of natural history, etc., theatre for lectures, exhibitions, ball and concert room, reading rooms, conversation rooms, rooms of management, etc.'²⁷

Also at the centre of each side, but projecting into the internal quadrangle, would be four refectories, each attached to a kitchen. The communal dining arrangements, Owen assures us, would be 'superior' to those of 'the best Club-Houses in London or Paris'.²⁸ Whitwell stresses the natural lighting in the main refectories (there are also dining apartments for infants and children), and the use of labour-saving devices – service would be provided 'in a rapid, quiet, and cleanly manner' by unspecified 'mechanical means' which in the refectories look like 'handsome sideboards in recesses'.²⁹ To the rear there would be storage rooms for 'glass, table linen, spices, and other condiments'.³⁰

On the side of these internal projections are more public spaces, including gymnasia and baths. Warm and cold baths are accessible from both the cloister and terrace (see below), and segregated by gender. Whitwell teases that these baths 'will contain accommodations of a novel and peculiar character' combining the utility of collective provision with 'privacy of retirement'.³¹

Attached to these four central projections into the quadrangle (containing the refectories, gymnasia, and baths) would be 'four massive towers', each 240 feet in height. These tall round chimneys have three distinct functions: they carry off 'smoke and effluvia' from the heating and cooking arrangements; they support observatories for astronomical, meteorological, and other, purposes; and they secure the powerful new 'Koniaphostic' lights which would 'brilliantly illuminate the whole square'.³² The four towers, being visible from a very great distance, consequently act as 'so many beacons to the surrounding country'.³³ Access to the observatories, Whitwell adds, would be facilitated by the 'commodious spiral staircase' that would surround each tower.³⁴

The residential parts of the building are divided into eighteen 'dwelling houses' on each side (seventy two in total). These parts of the building are five storeys high, including basement and attic levels. That basement would contain storage spaces together with the utilities – including the various (unspecified) apparatuses that would supply heating and ventilation, hot and cold water, and artificial light, to 'every apartment throughout the whole square'.³⁵ (Whitwell recommends 'air-warmers' as best for maintaining the temperature 'at an agreeable degree' no matter what the weather outside.)³⁶ The next three storeys contain the apartments or adult residences. Each 'house' would be

organised around a central 'spacious geometrical staircase', with each floor containing four large rooms and four smaller ones, with two water closets (toilets).³⁷ An engraving illustrates some variant options here: you might have a floor with four apartments (each with double bedrooms and sitting rooms); a floor with eight apartments (four double bedrooms and four single bedrooms); and so on.³⁸ At the top, forming a fifth storey, are the dormitories, and other sleeping rooms, for children and young persons. Whitwell recommends that arrangements should be especially flexible; allowing vast apartments or tiny rooms, as circumstances (and age) required.³⁹

The basement storey is especially impressive. Accessible by inclined planes, it would run round the entire building offering a circular underground route for carriages (some running, Whitwell suggests, on railway lines) to convey fuel, provisions, and so on, to the working parts of the building – breweries, gas-works, washhouses, laundries, and kitchens – without hindrance from, or deleterious impact on, either the esplanade or the residential parts of the building.⁴⁰

The whole of the quadrangle would be laid out in 'the most tasteful and scientific manner', with gravel walks connecting botanical, horticultural, floricultural, gardens, together with experimental plots, all laid out in complex and attractive geometrical patterns.⁴¹ These various arrangements would have an educational role as well as affording 'abundant space for cheerful out-door exercise'.⁴² At its centre there would be a vast conservatory 'of *light and elegant* construction', with forcing houses attached.⁴³ It would, Whitwell suggests, specialise in the 'reception and cultivation of exotics'.⁴⁴

Running round the inside of the buildings at ground level would be a spacious open but covered cloister, giving access to any part of the building, and in wet or hot weather providing a space for sheltered exercise. These cloisters have a terrace on top, thus forming two parallel walkways, both furnished with seats, but with the lower one protected from the weather. Both would facilitate communication between different parts of the building and offer a 'delightful promenade'.⁴⁵ Whatever his differences with Charles Fourier (1772-1837), it is clear that Owen was not willing to be out-colonnaded by the Frenchman.⁴⁶

Finally, separate from the central building would be the agricultural buildings mentioned previously, and – at a convenient distance, and surrounded by plantations – the 'Manufacturies'.⁴⁷ Here, using the latest machinery, are situated such manufacture and trades as might be suitable for the locality. Also placed here are variously: the 'gas apparatus; washing, bleaching, and dyeing arrangements; with stables and coach-houses'.⁴⁸ In a yet more remote location would be a slaughter house, at least for as long 'as it shall be found to be advantageous or necessary for health and happiness, for any portion of the colonists to subsist on animal food'.⁴⁹

These architectural plans tell us much about Owen and the movement he founded. Here I make three brief observations.

First, the ambition of this architectural vision should not be underestimated. In Owen's socialist future we would live, not, for instance, in More's improved terraced streets, but in an ambitious synthesis of palace, university, and English Country House. The social

basis of the Owenite movement is complex, but was dominated by skilled working and lower-middle classes. That audience might have seen illustrations of, or heard a lecture about, let us say, St James Palace, Trinity College Dublin, and Chatsworth House. Owen now suggests that, by following his recommendations, they could very soon be living in some harmonious combination of all three. This home colony would support four times the population of a comparable sized contemporary settlement in 'twenty-fold more comfort'.⁵⁰ And Owen does not hesitate to call the resulting arrangements a 'New Jerusalem' and an 'earthly paradise'.⁵¹

Second, Owen's model suggests a certain cultural conservatism. The contemporary social world might have been turned upside down, but the future built environment embodies some familiar component parts. This is true variously of: the little that Owen says about the architectural form of the building; the account of the public spaces (where the concerts and lectures sound rather like the contemporary social activities of the Rational Society);⁵² and, of course, the description of the estate as synthesising elements of extant buildings with very different social origins (palaces, universities, and country houses).

Third, there are significant connections between Owenite architecture and Owenite doctrine. The built environment of the new moral world reflects and reinforces certain threads in Owen's social theory. There are lots of possible examples, but I will discuss education, science, family, and the relation between town and country.

The role that education plays in Owen's work would be hard to exaggerate, given his emphasis on the formation of character. He holds that human nature is sufficiently plastic that, with the right means, it can be moulded into either the best or the worst of characters. These 'right means' consist of education in both narrow (usually involving the training of the young in specialised institutions), and broader (synonymous with the social environment in which we are circumstanced) senses. Both kinds of education are articulated in the built environment of the new moral world. The most obvious narrow examples are the various schools, lecture rooms, and libraries, found throughout the central building. The broader educative dimension of the built environment is less obvious, but consider, for example, the specimens planted systematically and decoratively inside the quadrangle. A stroll through this garden would give pleasure, but also educate, not only by schooling directly about rare species, but also symbolically reminding walkers of the importance of structure. The 'gratifications of the garden', Whitwell remarks, would combine with both 'new accessions of information' (about the horticultural specimens) and the subtle reinforcement of 'precepts of order' (in its systematic design).⁵³

The importance of science and technology should not be obscured by Owen's enthusiasm for agriculture (worse still, for spade cultivation) and a large measure of autarky. The new moral world is only possible because of recent breakthroughs in three scientific disciplines. First, the 'science of human nature' which understands that the character of individuals is *wholly* formed for them by natural and social circumstances, and, seemingly as a consequence, that individuals are not accountable for their own sentiments and habits (the practice of punishment and reward embodies a fundamental and pernicious error on Owen's account). Second, the 'science of society' which studies 'the architectural materials with which to build up a new state of human existence';

designing the institutional and other arrangements which embody the principle of union governing the new moral world (replacing the principle of individualism which governed the old immoral one), and forming the best of human character.⁵⁴ Third, the ‘new inventions and discoveries’ (especially in ‘mechanics, chemistry, and other sciences’) of the last hundred years or so, which have increased the ability of humankind to satisfy their material wants.⁵⁵ Owen allows that scientific and technological progress has often generated unwelcome results, but maintains that in suitably altered social conditions this ‘new scientific power’ would create abundance beyond ‘the imagination of ordinary minds’ without harmful effects.⁵⁶ The ‘Koniaphostic’ lights and mechanical table service, it seems, are just the start.

Similarly, consider the ways in which Owen’s controversial views on the family explain the structure of some of the residential parts of the building. There are separate dormitories for children, organised according to the different needs of different ages, because childcare in the new moral world would be partially collectivised. Owen criticises existing family arrangements – of single pairs and their immediate offspring – in two respects. They damage society by providing such a narrow focus for fellow-feeling; and they damage children by having them brought up by those frequently unsuited to the task. In the new moral world, parents would maintain connections with their own children, but the crucial task of education (in both senses) would fall primarily to the wider community. Owen is sensitive to the charge that he is an enemy of family feeling, and maintains that this modest collectivisation would result in less separation of parents from their own children than occurs at present (less separation than currently results from the privations of the poor, the work demands of the middle classes, and the use of boarding schools by the wealthy).

Lastly, the built environment of the new moral world embodies an attempt to overcome the antithesis between town and country. There are many different approaches to this persistent demand in nineteenth-century socialism, but the goal is typically to mitigate the starkness of the contrast between rural and urban life; for instance, introducing something of the natural world into the city, or something of the vitality and intelligence of urban life into the rural environment. From one angle, Owenite communities look rather agricultural affairs, preoccupied with spade cultivation and crop rotation, and I do not want to deny that one of the motivations here is to escape the city (elsewhere so often the locus of utopia).⁵⁷ However, the intellectual and other examples of (traditionally urban) culture that thrive in the home colonies should not be underestimated; libraries, concert halls, theatres, reading rooms, and all the other ‘advantages of a metropolis’, flourish in the heart of a pastoral idyll.⁵⁸

MODEST REVISIONS FROM ABOVE

Owen’s own grand design dominates the architectural landscape, but it did not go unchallenged within the wider movement. In what follows, I discuss three Owenite plans offering critical engagement with the master’s synthesis of palace, university, and English country house.⁵⁹ The first of these comes from another Owenite leader, and, architecturally at least, might be described as a modest supportive revision of Owen’s own design.

William Thompson (1775-1833), was an Irish socialist, political economist, and, in his own description, ‘one of the idle classes’.⁶⁰ Born into an ascendancy family, Thompson’s views estranged him from some of his family, and he ran his estate (some 1400 acres in Cork) in a reforming manner (providing long leases, encouraging cooperation between tenants, and building a model farm to promote best practice). A shared interest in education led to a five month stay with Jeremy Bentham in the winter of 1822/1823, at Queen Square Place, Westminster.⁶¹ It was probably here that he first met both Robert Owen and Anna Wheeler. Thompson and Wheeler criticised James Mill’s claim that the interests of women were subsumed in those of men in their *An Appeal to One Half of the Human Race* (1830). Thompson was influenced by Owen in numerous ways; not least, coming to endorse communitarian socialism as a solution to the failings of contemporary social life, and rising to a position of influence within the Owenite movement. Thompson’s ‘social scientific’ writings on political economy – including his lengthy *An Inquiry into the Principles of the Distribution of Wealth* (1824), and *Labour Rewarded: the Claims of Labour and Capital Conciliated* (1827) – identify competition as involving the coercion and exploitation of the many by the few.⁶² Later versions of the *Inquiry* (1850, 1869), edited by William Pare (also Owen’s literary executor), are (mercifully) shorter but remove some of Thompson’s more radical remarks, including those about religion. Thompson suffered from a respiratory illness and lived a very temperate life; he was single, non-smoking, teetotal, and vegetarian. Thompson’s death was followed by lengthy legal and other disputes about the fate of his estate and, less predictably, his bodily remains.⁶³

Thompson maintained that previous settlement attempts – not excepting Orbison and New Harmony – had failed to apply Owenite communal principles in practice. They had lacked a manual providing ‘a fixed plan of operations with reasons for all the detail’, which would ‘enable well disposed and intelligent persons to carry the plan of cooperative industry into effect’.⁶⁴ Thompson’s *Practical Recommendations for the Speedy and Economical Establishment of Communities* (1830) is precisely such a volume, crammed full of constructive ‘how to’ advice to would-be communitarians.

My focus here on the built environment does not capture the entire range of Thompsons’s disagreements with Owen. In particular, they disagree about the governance and property relations of *transitional* communities – that is, communities in which, at least, some settlement members have characters, at least partly, formed under the irrational social arrangements of the old world.

Owen recommends that the governing minority in such communities be selected only from full members.⁶⁵ (Full members were only one of the four classes of inhabitants, and might number 360 out of a community of 1980 adults.)⁶⁶ Indeed, those chosen should already be ‘in the practice of directing extensive operations in old society’, and Owen acknowledges that this means ‘middle class’ leadership for the time being.⁶⁷ In contrast, Thompson, whilst allowing that those raising the founding subscriptions should have initial direction of a community, insists that once underway all the ‘working members’ must have a say.⁶⁸ Crucially, Thompson suggests that it is only by letting them discuss and arrange their own collective affairs that the ‘industrious classes’ will develop the skills and dispositions for self-government.⁶⁹

Owen was also willing to defer, and obscure, issues of ownership. Common property might be an eventual aim, but private property, class division, and inequality of condition, would all continue in transitional communities.⁷⁰ In contrast, Thompson insists that it 'cannot and ought not to be disguised' that unless and until the community, and thus each adult 'man or woman' in it, 'acquires the proprietorship of its own premises, land and stock', it is vain 'to talk of personal independence'.⁷¹ This link between ownership and freedom is striking; as long as 'landlords or capitalists' control the land and stock of a community, Thompson maintains, they 'indirectly' control the actions, the expression, and even the opinions, of the labouring members.⁷²

The differences between Owen and Thompson regarding the built environment of communitarian settlements might look less remarkable. Broad similarities in their designs include: the eventual size of the community; a central single building around a square; the integration of residential and public spaces; separate communal provision for children; and concern for light, ventilation, and warmth. Moreover, Thompson happily recommends some of Owen's architectural ideas; for instance, insisting that 'Mr. Owen has proposed a very magnificent way of lighting the whole exterior by means of gas burners round the top of 4 common circular chimneys'.⁷³ And, in a letter written to Robert Owen in the same year as *Practical Directions* was published, Thompson does not hesitate to speak of a third party as advocating 'our views'.⁷⁴

In places, *Practical Directions* might be described as, in many respects, providing a supportive elaboration of detail to Owen's architectural account. First, Thompson often elaborates Owen's recommendations, but provides more detail. Thus, where Owen recommends an apparatus for warming apartments, and Whitwell suggests a heated air system, Thompson gives us a dozen pages variously: investigating the advantages of steam-heating pipes; discussing the size and placement of boilers; recommending the best kind of coal; considering recent experiments involving hot water for circulating heat; broaching the possibility of using excess heat generated by manufacture to warm residences; and much more.⁷⁵ Second, Thompson fills in gaps left by Owen, but does so in a manner sympathetic to the whole. Thus, where Owen endorses agriculture and gardening as 'the most necessary and the most healthy occupations that can be provided for human nature' but says little about what this employment might involve,⁷⁶ Thompson gives us pages of detail, including: a proposed pattern of rotation for field crops; a monthly calendar for the kitchen garden (carrots to be sown in March on the sandiest soil available); an account of the possible uses of the 'yellow-beet-root' (a species of Mangel-wurzel) as a source of sugar; advice on how to cook potatoes; and much more.⁷⁷

However, it would be a mistake to think of Thompson's discussion of the built environment as only containing supportive elaboration of these kinds. There are, in addition, some substantive and quasi-methodological differences with Owen. The substantive disagreements here include scale, manufacturing, and baths.

Under the heading of scale, I have in mind Thompson's views on the size and ambition of the built environment. To generalise: everything in Thompson's plan seems that little bit smaller, simpler, less ambitious (than Owen's grand design). The great square, for

example, mixing domestic and public buildings would enclose something like thirty-six to forty acres; still larger than Lincoln's Inn Fields, but smaller than Owen's sixty-five acres. The buildings themselves are just that bit more modest too. There is, for example, no extensive basement level, with circular railway system, to keep the working parts of the building separate from the residential. In addition, Thompson warns against extravagant (and expensive) architecture; given that a chief constituent of the utility of a building is 'prudence as to pecuniary means', he concludes that 'extensive ornamentation is out of the question'.⁷⁸ Lastly, the place of high culture looks a little less certain. There is a mention of a library and lecture-rooms in one of Thompson's lists, but in the accompanying engraving they appear to have been displaced by more utilitarian spaces (book-keeper's room, printing office, chemical laboratory, and so on), and there seems to be little comparable to the museums, artists' studios, and concert rooms, promised in Owen's plan.

Regarding manufacturing, Thompson suggests that we might learn from Fourier, whose writings 'notwithstanding his extravagances' contain 'many valuable suggestions and profound views'.⁷⁹ Where Owen places the 'Manufactories' separate to, and at a convenient distance from, the central buildings, Fourier holds that 'all the buildings of a community, domestic, agricultural, and manufacturing, should be intermixed, under one roof'.⁸⁰ Thompson thinks he can preserve the advantage of the Fourierist solution – namely the convenience of proximity and safe travel between work and home – whilst avoiding its disadvantages – the increased risk of 'noise, dust, and effluvia' impacting on the domestic parts of the community.⁸¹ Essentially, Thompson recommends connecting the manufactories to the main building, not scattering them throughout it. Imagine a square smaller than the 'great domestic square' (perhaps a quarter of its size), but then remove one side of it and imagine the resulting u-shape being placed (open end first) against the outside of one side of larger square. In short, Thompson recommends a second smaller 'industrial square' abutting the 'great domestic square', with the cleanest and quietest industrial tasks (perhaps the dairy) being placed where the former meets the latter (thereby minimising any harmful impact on the residential and other public spaces).

Lastly, Thompson is sceptical of Owen's enthusiasm for warm and cold baths, located on the projections into the quadrangle, and easily accessible from both cloister and terrace. Thompson suggests that Owen is too quick to generalise from his American experience (where the warmer climate meant less clothing to cover bodies and keep them clean), and too ready to accept contemporary medical promotion of baths (forgetting that doctors in the old immoral world prefer palliatives to cures). In contrast, Thompson recommends fewer baths, better located where the industrial and domestic square join. Of course, Owen's baths might always be installed later if they proved desirable, but meanwhile they fall foul of the rule that 'it would be quite premature to erect extensive permanent buildings for any purposes, the utility of which is not clearly ascertained'.⁸²

In addition to these substantive disagreements, there looks to be a quasi-methodological difference. The writings of Owen and Thompson are pitched, we might say, at rather different levels of abstraction.

Some care is needed here. I do not mean to suggest that Owen's self-image – as a successful practical reformer and emphatically not a speculative armchair theorist – is entirely misguided. However, a practical concern with the real world can take a variety of different forms. To use a modern distinction, we might think of Owen as thinking more about *feasibility* concerns (asking whether communal arrangements are compatible with human nature and what is known about social design), and Thompson as preoccupied more with *accessibility* concerns (asking how particular communal arrangements might be reached by particular people in a particular location).⁸³ No doubt this difference between the two is a matter of degree, but it helps explain both the subject matter of *Practical Directions* – its obsession with practical details carefully arranged – and some of its tone, with Thompson implying that Owen is insufficiently attentive to the kind of accommodations required when contemporaries start communities in existing circumstances.

Consider the following architectural examples. Thus, Thompson acknowledges that the available topography might necessitate adjustments to the site and shape of ideal Owenite model; for instance, constraints of landscape might mean that the main buildings cannot be central to the site, or take the form of a square.⁸⁴ In addition, Thompson recognises that the order and progress of works might impact on the success of a settlement; recommending, for instance, a community start with two hundred initial members who build manufacturing sheds producing wool, cotton, or flax items (which are always in demand), and whose lofts might also provide initial and temporary sleeping quarters.⁸⁵ Moreover, Thompson emphasises the importance of paying attention to the cost, availability, and merits, of materials; for example, providing a recipe (involving forge dust, gravel, and lime) for a cement flooring 'cheaper and better' than the stone paving that it could imitate.⁸⁶

Hovering in the background of this preoccupation with accessibility are certain 'realist' concerns about expectations and funding, which reach beyond the built environment but surely help explain Thompson's reservations about Owen's grand design. Thus, Thompson worries that communitarian socialists often underestimate the sheer hard work involved in settlement-building, especially in its early stages, and that Owen might occasionally, and irresponsibly, have lent support to the counterproductive idea of 'an immediate paradise'.⁸⁷ In addition, Thompson holds that the initial costs of settlement-building have to be minimised (especially at first), since although 'the rich classes' could facilitate communal development, there is no reason – despite Owen's optimism – 'to hope for' any such help (indeed, Thompson notes that those with the most to give would seem to have the least enthusiasm for socialist transformation).⁸⁸

(The cost of Owen's grand designs are hard to calculate. In 1841, he estimated the price of establishing a representative home colony at £700,000.⁸⁹ It is, of course, famously difficult to convert historical prices of this kind. However, a standard modern convertor suggests that the historic opportunity cost for such a project translates to some £68 million, and that its economic cost is nearer to £2.6 billion (thousand million).⁹⁰ Either way, there is no doubting the huge costs. For a contemporary comparison, Owen's 1841 estimate was interestingly close to the 1840 estimate – £724,986 – for building the new Palace of Westminster.)⁹¹

SOCIALISM AND NOAH'S ARK

The second Owenite engagement with Owen's grand design is provided by an otherwise unknown correspondent to the *New Moral World* (a weekly Owenite paper running from November 1834 to August 1845). The letter is from one 'J.C.', who describes themselves as one of the 'humblest' of Owen's followers, living in London. The floating community that it describes combines a refuge and a proof of concept.

There is more than an echo of the biblical narrative of Noah's ark here. (Versions vary, but in the Torah, Noah is said to be a righteous man who walked with God, but lived in a corrupt age. God invoked a flood to wipe out all existing things from the face of the earth, excepting only Noah and those with him in the ark that he had built. When the waters subsided, God made a covenant that, the Talmud explains, established the seven Noahide commandments that apply universally to the children of Noah; that is, all of subsequent humankind.) Writing in November 1834, the correspondent to the *New Moral World*, appeals to the biblical flood myth, in order to ask a striking question: just as a huge vessel, with humble origins, once achieved the remarkable feat of preserving humankind, might not, a similar vessel, in similar circumstances of widespread corruption, now achieve the 'regeneration' of humankind?⁹²

The letter writer sketches an intriguing transitional settlement, a 'floating co-operative community' located in 'the very heart of the British metropolis'.⁹³ It might help to think of London here as Cobbett's 'Great Wen' – a pathological swelling on the face of the nation – and recall that many areas close to the Thames were a dumping ground for human and industrial waste alike. It would be hard to think of a more striking contrast between the site and the ambition of a settlement.

It is important to realise that J.C. is not suggesting that the social order of the future should be a water-borne one. Rather, this floating experiment is put forward as a constructive response to the difficulties that Owen and others had experienced in seeking to raise sufficient capital and suitable volunteers to establish a full-blown trial settlement on an appropriate terrestrial estate. J.C. identifies a real danger that Owen's cooperative proposals will be judged 'impracticable' because 'as in the time of Abraham, there cannot be found a sufficient number of righteous minded men in the devoted city'.⁹⁴ The author observes that, whilst not personally doubting the prophecy of a righteous sun which will one day rise and bind the 'wounds of suffering society', prophecy needs 'verification' if it is not to be 'a promissory note without effects'.⁹⁵ No 'unprejudiced' observer, J.C. insists, could doubt the 'rectitude' of Mr Owen's views, the difficulty is 'to bring them into operation'.⁹⁶ A much more modest experiment is required; one which is smaller, cheaper, and does not require its members to abandon entirely their ties with the old immoral world. In short, what J.C. proposes is perhaps best thought of as a proof of concept; a demonstration that 'the social principle' can be exemplified 'on this small scale'.⁹⁷

Subject to early checks that no establishment body – such as the City corporation or the Company of Watermen and Lightermen – might legally block it, 'the practical experiment of a floating community' could be established on the Thames 'without

detriment to any individual' and without 'any very extraordinary means'.⁹⁸ J.C. recommends the purchase of a large 'old man-of-war', or similar vessel, which might be moored fore and aft, in any given part of the river 'towards the middle of the stream'.⁹⁹ The capital of the community, the author cautiously notes, 'might be in common', and any subsequent profits could be 'divided', or left to 'accumulate' for the benefit of all.¹⁰⁰

The ship would provide habitation for a given number of families (men, women, and children) of 'nearly equal circumstances' who would 'associate together on cooperative principles'.¹⁰¹ In short, this would be communal living between equals, but without much in the way, at least initially, of communal working. More exactly, although some women might remain aboard engaging in housework, childcare, and chores in the dairy – the contemporary gendered division of labour is barely challenged here – the overwhelming majority of men and the remainder of the women, being of different trades, would pursue their business as usual 'landing in a body early in the morning, and returning in the evening to the enjoyment of a cheerful home and a comfortable supper, where there shall be none to make them afraid'.¹⁰² A small boat, and a larger barge, might operate safe and convenient communication between ship and shore.

The living arrangements aboard would include 'sleeping apartments', 'separated in the most convenient manner', and made 'as non-combustible as possible'.¹⁰³ The ship might also variously provide: space for the operation of certain 'sedentary trades'; a ballroom; a lecture room; fresh air; a play deck for children; fishing; cellar space for dry or heavy stores; easy access to coal and other articles (barges could moor alongside); a dairy of two or more cows; and, perhaps most ambitiously, some mechanism to convert the tide into a source of power (similar to the mills found in Mainz and worked by the Rhine).

The advantages of such a floating community were many, with the author emphasising security, comfort, and convenience. The ship would provide 'good lodging, cheap food, comfortable society, protection in sickness, a home in hard times at an easy rent, no great anxiety about the rent, furniture, and fixtures', whilst all the members would be at liberty 'to follow their usual avocations in London, and their employers would always know where to find them in case of need'.¹⁰⁴ Education is also stressed, with the author noting that a school might be formed for 'the rising generation'.¹⁰⁵ Convenient plots ashore might be located for recreation, or the instruction of children in horticulture, agriculture, and botany. Warming to the theme, J.C. suggests that the benefits of the food and fuel arrangements alone might fill a book to 'delight the imagination'.¹⁰⁶ In time, visitors attracted by 'the novelty of the system' could be charged for sightseeing trips, and money raised by selling them refreshments and small articles 'manufactured by cooperatives'.¹⁰⁷

The central Owenite aim is, of course, character formation, and J.C. insists that improvement in the circumstances of those who lived in the 'wretched hovels' housing thousands of families in the vicinity of the river, would result in 'moral reformation' in a 'short time'.¹⁰⁸ The floating community would succeed in removing its inhabitants from 'the present sinks of misery, disease, and crime' which run along the Thames.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, the author envisages 'an Elysian prospect' as, in these the changed surroundings, 'men would acquire social habits; children would be well trained; principles of probity would be inculcated; bad example would cease'.¹¹⁰

J.C. recognises that Noah is not the only association that this floating community might evoke amongst contemporaries, and emphasises the distance between this aquatic idyll and the prison hulks of the period. (The Thames prison fleet between 1776 and 1857 used converted seagoing ships as cheap criminal jails, and had a merited reputation for inhuman conditions and high mortality rates.) 'Our vessel', J.C. explains, 'is not to be a prison-ship'; its inhabitants will enjoy not only 'perfect liberty', but also 'the elegancies' and 'the comforts, of life'.¹¹¹ They will be neither 'battened under hatches', starved, and 'destroyed by scurvy', nor debarred from visiting friends on shore.¹¹² Instead the river will offer a protective barrier; the inhabitant will be safe from the 'extortion' of shopkeepers, landlords, pawnbrokers, and from the many 'diseases' to which they were exposed in their previous lives ashore.¹¹³

The article closes with another biblical allusion. The formation of this floating community would not only create a safe haven in the present, but also act as a proof of concept for the future. Opposition to cooperation would quickly cease, full-blown communities would be established, and 'Mr Owen will not only see the promised land, but shall reside upon it'.¹¹⁴

Given his usual unwillingness to consider alternatives to his own, much grander, communitarian plans, Owen's reaction here was remarkably positive. He describes the floating community as 'deserving the consideration of all the friends of the rational or new moral world who are impatient to remove, as speedily as possible, from the ignorance and corruptions of the old irrational and immoral world'.¹¹⁵ In particular, the plan was 'by far the most practical scheme that has yet been proposed' for giving those within the metropolis, and still required 'to work in and for the old world', many of 'the advantages of the social state of existence'; not least, providing circumstances which might help remove 'ignorance, poverty, vice and crime'.¹¹⁶ Owen recommends the plan for a floating community 'to the serious consideration of naval and marine officers on half-pay' as well as 'all the industrious, intelligent, and well-disposed, engaged in nautical affairs' or, indeed, those 'in any reputable occupation on or near the river'.¹¹⁷

Owen responds positively presumably because he understands that the ark is offered as a proof of concept, and not as a challenge to his own account of the future built environment. The floating community is a 'practical experiment' designed to undermine current resistance to a full-blown trial settlement on dry land.¹¹⁸ J.C. explicitly articulates the hope that landed proprietors, once they had learnt of the ark's success, would happily welcome 'such tenants for their estates as they now contemptuously call visionary lunatics'.¹¹⁹ There is no suggestion that subsequent community building should proceed upon anything other than the lines proposed by Owen himself.

SOCIALISM AND THE SPIRIT WORLD

The third and last of these critical engagements with Owen's plans is also from the rank and file of the movement. It might appear even less likely than the ark to reassure contemporary landowners sceptical of the sanity of contemporary communitarians, but it raises – albeit in a distinctive context – the conservatism of form evinced by Owen's

grand designs.

Owen's last years were dominated by his (1853) conversion to Spiritualism, and the publication of *The Life of Robert Owen Written by Himself* (1857-8). That conversion embarrassed many of Owen's subsequent admirers, but he would always insist on the links between socialism and spiritualism. Not least, a spiritual communication from the former Duke of Kent – the most punctual of a series of distinguished spiritual visitants to Owen – had confirmed that there were no titles in the afterlife.

This last communal design has its origins, not in a biblical narrative, but rather the spirit world; that is, the sphere said to be occupied by the spirits of those who have passed beyond the veil, and which interacts, in obscure but tangible ways, with the human world. More prosaically, it originates in a letter in the 1 July 1856 issue of the *Millennial Gazette*, one of a number of short-lived Owenite journals of the 1850s (published from March 1856 to June 1858).

This interesting architectural communication from the spirit world, via Boston, Massachusetts, consists of some 'imperfectly drawn' diagrams and accompanying notes, recorded by S.C. Hewitt.¹²⁰ The diagrams supplied are '*rude efforts only*' but are said to reflect the work of the talented constructors and draughtsmen that can be found in the spirit world.¹²¹ The author, or perhaps messenger, could not be said to undersell the resulting proposals, characterising them as 'an entirely new, more beautiful, and, in every way, more perfect system of architecture, than the world has yet known, cared for, or thought of'.¹²²

Hewitt emphasises the importance of the built environment, and domestic architecture in particular. A house, he maintains, has both pragmatic functions, such as providing 'a comfortable, cheerful, harmonious place of abode' for its inhabitants, and an expressive role – constituting 'the sacred *locale* of his affections, the embodiment of his tastes, and, if not the symbol of his actual attainments, at least that of his aspirations and his more ennobling desires'.¹²³

The correspondent implicitly criticises the conventional architecture, towards which Owen tends, as failing both of these tests, but perhaps especially the expressive one. Owen has failed to understand that: 'The new order of society will call for a *new architecture*, corresponding to its wants, its aspirations'.¹²⁴ The buildings of the future that Hewitt goes on to detail would certainly be, for instance, warm and well-lit, but more importantly, they would embody and express the cooperative spirit of the new moral order. It would be an architecture that articulated 'association', 'cooperation', and 'harmonious *group life*'.¹²⁵

Hewitt records his willingness to provide more information, to interested parties, on issues of location and materials, but focuses his remarks on the *organic* form of the new architecture. The buildings appropriate to a more harmonious and cooperative life would themselves embody the same 'variety' within 'unity' that can be found in nature, and which is articulated, in particular, in its '*circularity of form*'.¹²⁶ Hewitt suggests – not entirely persuasively – that the forests, the earth, the planets, even the human structure itself, 'exhibit circularity of form'.¹²⁷ Future architecture should embody the 'charming and

agreeable rotundity of form' found in nature; indeed, he predicts that both future humans and future houses will evolve into 'rounded, all-sided, beautiful' entities.¹²⁸

This pleasing circularity of form would apply both to individual structures and to the organisation of '*circular cities*', organised around a central zone of 'educational, religious, and commercial structures'.¹²⁹ That said, Hewitt's communication focuses on domestic residential structures rather than the cities that they form a part of. He offers a series of residential plans, which embody 'simplicity of style', 'beauty of form', and 'harmony with nature'.¹³⁰ The *Millennial Gazette* reproduces three plates, each illustrating the ground floor plan of three different homes, each slightly grander – or, at least, larger and more complex – than the previous one. Here I describe the middling example; the ground floor of a three storey home of fourteen rooms.

The relevant floor plan shows four large oval-shaped rooms whose walls touch at their narrower ends. (You might visualise four egg shapes radiating out from a central point, arranged along the lines of a four point star.) In the outside gaps between these ovals are four much smaller organic triangular spaces; one of them left as it is, the three others filled by a smaller circular space (containing storage closets). The large ovals meet at the centre, where there is a circular space filled by a spiral staircase giving access to the rest of the house (and providing more storage).

Perhaps the most striking feature of these spirit-based plans is the contrast between the futuristic organic shapes and the conventional uses to which they are put. For instance, they appear to be residential spaces, rather than buildings mixing residential, public, and manufacturing functions. In addition, these residential spaces seem to form separate dwellings for individual families, rather than being designed for communal living. And, lastly, the uses to which the internal spaces of these individual buildings are put are reassuringly familiar to the nineteenth-century reader. In the plan discussed here, the four large oval rooms are a drawing room, parlour, sitting room, and kitchen (whose gas cooking arrangements and chimney extend into the one small triangular space), respectively. The three surrounding small circular spaces form an entrance hall, ladies dressing room, and back hall, respectively. These futuristic structures might involve organic shapes putting Gaudi, and Catalan modernism, to shame, but there is a parlour, and ladies are still dressing for dinner.

Owen's response to Hewitt's plans was predictably polite but unyielding. Owen was encouraged 'to find that spirits versed in architecture have commenced giving knowledge to mortals on this subject', and notes that there is 'much to be admired in what they have enabled you to do'.¹³¹ However, he clearly reaffirms the essentials of his own original grand design. The ideal communal settlement is to be 'a united or combined arrangement for a federative family society of three thousand', whose architectural outlines have already been developed by himself and Whitwell (indeed, Owen promises to try and forward his earlier pamphlet and an engraving to put Hewitt straight).¹³² The only scope for refinement of those original plans that Owen allows, is with regard to certain, unidentified, 'scientific improvements' connected with domestic buildings, and the 'new experience' gained by building large hotels in the United States and elsewhere.¹³³ The function and form of communitarian buildings, it seems, are to remain as they were.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

I have been concerned only with the plans and not the contrasting realities of Owenite settlements. I don't doubt that the gulf between theory and practice, in this context, is considerable and important, but it is not my subject here. Moreover, I have not looked beyond Owen's proposals and broadly Owenite responses to them. Consequently, much interesting and often foundational criticisms from outside the Owenite and communitarian fold falls beyond my purview. And lastly, my architectural focus undoubtedly leaves some significant issues untouched. Thompson's disagreements with Owen on democratic governance and property, for instance, are not primarily disagreements about the built environment. Despite all those constraints, I think there is much of interest here.

The built environment of a society – real or imaginary – reveals a lot about its social relations. Architectural spaces organise and direct people in particular ways, and in the utopian case typically reveal the ideas and aspirations of their authors. Owen's social theory is built, so to speak, into his designs for a home colony. The architectural spaces here variously embody: the importance of education in both narrow and broader senses (for instance, in the chimney-borne observatories, and the order of the quadrangle gardens, respectively); the often underappreciated significance of science (not only in the 'Koniaphotic' floodlights, but in the science of character formation that underpins the built environment as a whole); the complex revision of familial structures (evident in the shared sleeping and dining spaces for the children of the community); and the attempt to mitigate the tensions between town and country (with the intellectual culture previously associated with cities now flourishing in a largely pastoral environment).

Owen's architectural ideas are criticised and challenged by the other authors considered here; both Owenite leaders (Thompson) and rank and file supporters (J.C. and Hewitt). Despite shared commitments – to communitarian socialism, in general, and the importance of character formation, in particular – these alternatives embody significant revisions of the master's grand design. Their critical concerns include: Owen's substantive recommendations; his architectural conservatism; the level of abstraction at which his proposals are located; and his potentially self-defeating ambition.

Owen's substantive recommendations for the built environment are frequently challenged. Hewitt's apparent attachment to individual family dwellings might function as a reminder that supporters and sympathisers could understand the central communitarian idea – of living and working together for some common purpose – in a variety of ways.¹³⁴ Even if we (sensibly) treat Hewitt as an outlier, Thompson's scepticism about Owen's views on scale (the museums and concert rooms), the separate location of manufacturing, and enthusiasm for baths, show that plenty of substantive disagreements obtain within the Owenite movement (indeed, even within its leadership).

Other criticisms challenged the conservative architectural form of Owen's 'home colonies'. Hewitt implies that there is a disjunction between Owen's radical questioning of familiar social institutions – such as marriage, religion, and property – and his backward-looking aspirations for the form of the built environment. The question of

whether, and to what extent, Owen's grand designs fail to appreciate the ways in which a new moral world would require a new kind of architecture is a serious one, whatever one thinks of utilising organic forms (embodying simplicity, beauty, and harmony with nature) recommended by the spirit world.

These critics also raise the issue of the level at which Owen's discussion of the built environment operates. For all his confident self-identification as a practical man, Owen was not really offering the kind of close, practical, detailed advice that would enable people to establish a settlement. What is needed, Thompson and others suggest, is not an abstract defence of the feasibility of communal designs, but rather an account of how particular contemporaries working in specific locations might get from here to there.

An adjacent Owenite worry (implicit in the proposals of both Thompson and J.C.) is that the grandeur and ambition of Owen's communal aspirations risks making them self-defeating. That is, given the scale of Owen's best-known architectural plans, the need to raise appropriate funds might delay the building of a trial community indefinitely. The concern here, in the slogan popularised by Voltaire, is not to let the best become the enemy of the good; or, as the Owenite Charles Rosser less snappily has it: 'If we cannot obtain all that we wish, let us endeavour to obtain all that we can'.¹³⁵

Whatever one makes of these particular criticisms, I hope that this sample of Owenite architectural discussion also conveys a little of the imagination and spirit of experimentation which sometimes flourished in communitarian socialist movements. For Owenite and other communitarians, socialism was the future, but that future still needed to be designed. And these various competing utopian plans are one way of discussing and thinking through those issues of socialist design.

We might typically think of socialism as involving both a commitment to certain values (equality and community perhaps), and some understanding of the kinds of institutional and other arrangements that might best promote those values. Utopian plans explore these values and institutions; helping us to reflect not only on issues of feasibility and accessibility, but also of desirability. The description and detail that these various designs involve can help flesh out socialist commitments in a way which, in certain respects, makes it easier to reflect on whether and what makes them attractive. Simply put, thinking about these competing designs for the future can help us to work out whether we want to live there.

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¹ This dry description risks obscuring the complexity and humour here. More's puns include Hythloday (distributor of nonsense), Amaurot (the unknown city), and the river Anyder (without water). See, for example, Eric Nelson, 'Greek Nonsense in More's Utopia', *The Historical Journal*, 44/4 (2001), pp. 889-917.

² See Thomas More, *Utopia*, edited by Edward Surtz, S.J., and J.H. Hexter, volume 4 of *The Yale Edition of the Complete Works of St. Thomas More* (New Haven, 1965), pp. 117-123.

³ On socialism as historical experimentalism, see Axel Honneth, *The Idea of Socialism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2017), chapter 3.

⁴ Recent discussions of Owen and the built environment include: Tessa Morrison, *Unbuilt Utopian Cities 1460-1900: Reconstructing their Architecture and Political Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2016), chapter 7; José Ramón Álvarez Layna, Andrés Maidana Legal, and Iván Vélez Cipriano, 'Owenite Architecture and Urban Rationality: Notes and Reflections on Class and Utopia', Clint Jones and Cameron Ellis (edited), *The Individual and Utopia. A Multidisciplinary Study of Humanity and Perfection* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 85-98; and Duncan Bowie, *The Radical and Socialist Tradition in British Planning: From Puritan Colonies to Garden Cities* (London: Routledge, 2017), chapter 5. Bowie also discusses Thompson.

⁵ Max Beer, *A History of British Socialism*, volume 1 (London: G. Bell, 1929), 160.

⁶ For more detail, see J.F.C. Harrison, 'Owen, Robert (1771-1858)', Joyce M. Bellamy and John Saville (edited), *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, volume IV (London, Macmillan, 1982), 205-216.

⁷ Robert Owen, 'Development of the Plan for the Relief of the Poor' (1817), *Selected Works of Robert Owen*, edited by Gregory Claeys, volume 1 (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1993), 219.

⁸ Robert Owen, 'A New View of Society' (1813-16), *Selected Works of Robert Owen*, edited by Gregory Claeys, volume 1 (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1993), 62.

⁹ Robert Owen, 'A Development of the Principles and Plans on Which to Establish Self-Supporting Home Colonies' (1841), *Selected Works of Robert Owen*, edited by Gregory Claeys, volume 2 (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1993), 347-8. (Henceforth 'Development'.)

¹⁰ On Owenite communities see Arthur Eugene Bestor Jr, *Backwoods Utopias. The Sectarian Origins and the Owenite Phase of Communitarian Socialism in America, 1663-1829* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1950); Edward Royle, *Robert Owen and the Commencement of the Millennium. A Study of the Harmony Community* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998); and R. G. Garnett, *Cooperation and the Owenite Socialist Communities in Britain 1825-45* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1972).

¹¹ From the pamphlet *Description of an Architectural Model from a Design by Stedman Whitwell, Esq., for a Community Upon a Principle of United Interests, as Advocated by Robert Owen, Esq* (London: H. Chance, 1830). Reprinted in *Cooperative Communities: Plans and Descriptions. Eleven Pamphlets 1825-1847* (New York: Arno Press, 1972). (Henceforth 'Description'.)

¹² *Millennial Gazette*, 1 July 1856, p. 12.

¹³ Bestor, *Backwoods Utopias*, 129.

¹⁴ See, for instance, Roland Schaer, Gregory Claeys, and Lyman Tower Sargent (edited), *Utopia: The Search for the Ideal Society in the Western World* (New York/Oxford, 200), p. 211; and Frank Podmore, *Robert Owen* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1923), opposite 290.

¹⁵ Stedman Whitwell, 'New Nomenclature Suggested for Communities etc.', *New Harmony Gazette*, 12 April 1826, p. 29.

¹⁶ Whitwell, 'New Nomenclature', *New Harmony Gazette*, 12 April 1826, p. 29.

¹⁷ Owen, 'Development', 377.

¹⁸ Owen, 'Development', 275.

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- ¹⁹ Perhaps foreshadowing the enthusiasms of his son Robert Dale Owen. See Bestor, *Backwoods Utopias*, 129 fn. 126; and the discussion of the Smithsonian in Robert Dale Owen, *Hints on Public Architecture* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1849).
- ²⁰ Whitwell, 'Description', 5.
- ²¹ Whitwell suggests a more modest twenty-two acres, but even this, as he notes, is three times as large as Russell Square in London. Whitwell, 'Description', 5.
- ²² Owen, 'Development', 376.
- ²³ Whitwell, 'Description', 18.
- ²⁴ Owen, 'Development', 375.
- ²⁵ Whitwell, 'Description', 15.
- ²⁶ Owen, 'Development', 375.
- ²⁷ Whitwell, 'Description', 10.
- ²⁸ Owen, 'Development', 375.
- ²⁹ Whitwell, 'Description', 11.
- ³⁰ Whitwell, 'Description', 11.
- ³¹ Whitwell, 'Description', 11.
- ³² Owen, 'Development', 376. 'Koniaphostic' was a term used to refer to the new 'limelight' burners, or 'Drummond lights' (after Thomas Drummond (1797-1840), which were beginning to be used in event and stage lighting.
- ³³ Whitwell, 'Description', 14.
- ³⁴ Whitwell, 'Description', 13.
- ³⁵ Owen, 'Development', 375.
- ³⁶ Whitwell, 'Description', 9. Whitwell was the author of *On Warming and Ventilating Houses and Buildings by Means of Large Volumes of Attempered Air* (1834).
- ³⁷ Owen, 'Development', 375.
- ³⁸ Plate II, Owen, 'Development', 420-1.
- ³⁹ Whitwell, 'Description', 8.
- ⁴⁰ Whitwell, 'Description', 11-13.
- ⁴¹ See the plate, Owen, 'Development', 418-419.
- ⁴² Owen, 'Development', 376.
- ⁴³ Owen, 'Development', 376.
- ⁴⁴ Whitwell, 'Description', 17.
- ⁴⁵ Whitwell, 'Description', 15.
- ⁴⁶ On Fourier's enthusiasm for covered walkways see Jonathan Beecher, *Charles Fourier. The Visionary and his World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 244.
- ⁴⁷ Owen, 'Development', 376.
- ⁴⁸ Owen, 'Development', 376.
- ⁴⁹ Owen, 'Development', 376-377.
- ⁵⁰ Owen, 'Development', 360.
- ⁵¹ Owen, 'Development', 364.
- ⁵² On which, see Eileen Yeo, 'Robert Owen and Radical Culture', Sidney Pollard and John Salt (edited), *Robert Owen. Prophet of the Poor. Essays in Honour of the Two-Hundredth Anniversary of his Birth* (London: Macmillan, 1971), pp. 84-114.
- ⁵³ Whitwell, 'Description', 16.
- ⁵⁴ Robert Owen, 'Book of the New Moral World', *Selected Works of Robert Owen*, edited by Gregory Claeys, volume 3 (London, 1993), 86.
- ⁵⁵ Owen, 'Development', 347 and 390.
- ⁵⁶ Owen, 'Development', 347.
- ⁵⁷ William Thompson describes towns and especially large cities as 'the premature graves of the human race.' William Thompson, 'Practical Directions for the Speedy and Economical Establishment of Communities' (1830), in *Owenite Socialism. Pamphlets and Correspondence*, edited by

Gregory Claeys, volume III (London: Routledge, 2005), 55. (Henceforth 'Directions'.) For a wide-ranging discussion of utopia and cities, see David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), chapter 8.

⁵⁸ Owen, 'Development', 377.

⁵⁹ To be clear, I hold that these writers can plausibly be read as critically engaging with Owen's designs, not suggesting that they necessarily understood, or presented, themselves, in this way.

⁶⁰ Thompson's self-description on the title page of *Labour Rewarded* (London: Hunt and Clarke, 1827).

⁶¹ On the intellectual relationship to Bentham, see Mark J. Kaswan, *Happiness, Democracy, and the Cooperative Movement. The Radical Utilitarianism of William Thompson* (New York: SUNY Press, 2014).

⁶² On Thompson's economic thought, see Gregory Claeys, *Machinery, Money and the Millennium. From Moral Economy to Socialism* (Cambridge: Polity, 1987), chapter 4; and Noel Thompson, Noel Thompson, *The Real Rights of Man. Political Economies for the Working Class 1775-1850* (London: Pluto Press, 1998), chapter 6.

⁶³ On Thompson's life see Richard Pankhurst, *William Thompson (1775-1833). Pioneer Socialist* (London: Pluto Press, 1991); and Dolores Dooley, *Equality in Community. Sexual Equality in the Writings of William Thompson and Anna Doyle Wheeler* (Cork, 1996), chapter 1.

⁶⁴ Thompson, 'Directions', 3-4.

⁶⁵ For a discussion of Owen's views on governance, see David Leopold. 'Scientific Socialism: The Case of Robert Owen', *Scientific Statesmanship, Governance and the History of Political Philosophy*, edited by Kyriakos N. Demetriou and Antis Lozides (London: Routledge, 2015), chapter 12.

⁶⁶ See synoptic table in Owen, 'Development', 381.

⁶⁷ Owen, *New Moral World*, 11 July 1838, 595.

⁶⁸ Thompson, 'Directions', 246.

⁶⁹ Thompson, 'Directions', 347. See also *Proceedings of the Third Co-operative Congress*, edited by William Carpenter (London: William Strange, 1832), p. 93.

⁷⁰ Owen, 'Development', 378.

⁷¹ Thompson, 'Directions', 33

⁷² Thompson, 'Directions', 33

⁷³ Thompson, 'Directions', 65

⁷⁴ Letter from Thompson to Owen. 18 March 1830, *Owenite Socialism. Pamphlets and Correspondence*, edited by Gregory Claeys, volume IX (London: Routledge, 2005), 18.

⁷⁵ Thompson, 'Directions', 66-77.

⁷⁶ Owen, 'Development', 393.

⁷⁷ Thompson, 'Directions', 83-141.

⁷⁸ Thompson, 'Directions', 49-50.

⁷⁹ Thompson, 'Directions', 53.

⁸⁰ Thompson, 'Directions', 53.

⁸¹ Thompson, 'Directions', 53.

⁸² Thompson, 'Directions', 62.

⁸³ For adjacent distinctions, see Allen Buchanan, *Justice, Legitimacy, and Self-Determination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 38 fn. 44; and Erik Olin Wright, *Envisaging Real Utopias* (London: Verso, 2010), 20-25.

⁸⁴ Thompson, 'Directions', 48-49.

⁸⁵ Thompson, 'Directions', 50-51.

⁸⁶ Thompson, 'Directions', 58.

⁸⁷ Thompson, 'Directions', 270.

⁸⁸ Thompson, 'Directions', 271.

⁸⁹ See Owen, 'Development', 402.

⁹⁰ Both in 2016 prices. See <https://www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/>

⁹¹ The eventual price of the latter was, unsurprisingly, much higher.

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- ⁹² *New Moral World*, 22 November 1834, p. 31.
- ⁹³ *New Moral World*, 22 November 1834, p. 31.
- ⁹⁴ *New Moral World*, 22 November 1834, p. 32.
- ⁹⁵ *New Moral World*, 22 November 1834, p. 30. The allusion is presumably to the Christian hymn, 'Thou Glorious Sun of Righteousness', written by Charlotte Elliott (1789-1871).
- ⁹⁶ *New Moral World*, 22 November 1834, p. 31.
- ⁹⁷ *New Moral World*, 22 November 1834, p. 32.
- ⁹⁸ *New Moral World*, 22 November 1834, p. 31.
- ⁹⁹ *New Moral World*, 22 November 1834, p. 32.
- ¹⁰⁰ *New Moral World*, 22 November 1834, p. 32.
- ¹⁰¹ *New Moral World*, 22 November 1834, p. 32.
- ¹⁰² *New Moral World*, 22 November 1834, p. 32.
- ¹⁰³ *New Moral World*, 22 November 1834, p. 32.
- ¹⁰⁴ *New Moral World*, 22 November 1834, p. 31.
- ¹⁰⁵ *New Moral World*, 22 November 1834, p. 32.
- ¹⁰⁶ *New Moral World*, 22 November 1834, p. 32.
- ¹⁰⁷ *New Moral World*, 22 November 1834, p. 32.
- ¹⁰⁸ *New Moral World*, 22 November 1834, p. 31.
- ¹⁰⁹ *New Moral World*, 22 November 1834, p. 31.
- ¹¹⁰ *New Moral World*, 22 November 1834, p. 31.
- ¹¹¹ *New Moral World*, 22 November 1834, p. 32.
- ¹¹² *New Moral World*, 22 November 1834, p. 32.
- ¹¹³ *New Moral World*, 22 November 1834, p. 32.
- ¹¹⁴ *New Moral World*, 22 November 1834, p. 32.
- ¹¹⁵ *New Moral World*, 22 November 1834, p. 30.
- ¹¹⁶ *New Moral World*, 22 November 1834, p. 30.
- ¹¹⁷ *New Moral World*, 22 November 1834, p. 30.
- ¹¹⁸ *New Moral World*, 22 November 1834, p. 32.
- ¹¹⁹ *New Moral World*, 22 November 1834, p. 31.
- ¹²⁰ *Millennial Gazette*, 1 July 1856, p. 3. In quotations from this journal italics are substituted for the original small capitals. It seems likely that this is the same Revd. S.C. Hewitt who edited the Boston *New Era*, a spiritualist periodical, and supported John Murray Spear (1804-1887) whose 'Electricizer' movement hoped to construct a mechanical New Messiah.
- ¹²¹ *Millennial Gazette*, 1 July 1856, p. 11.
- ¹²² *Millennial Gazette*, 1 July 1856, p. 3.
- ¹²³ *Millennial Gazette*, 1 July 1856, p. 4.
- ¹²⁴ *Millennial Gazette*, 1 July 1856, p. 4.
- ¹²⁵ *Millennial Gazette*, 1 July 1856, p. 4.
- ¹²⁶ *Millennial Gazette*, 1 July 1856, p. 4.
- ¹²⁷ *Millennial Gazette*, 1 July 1856, p. 4.
- ¹²⁸ *Millennial Gazette*, 1 July 1856, p. 4.
- ¹²⁹ *Millennial Gazette*, 1 July 1856, p. 11.
- ¹³⁰ *Millennial Gazette*, 1 July 1856, p. 11.
- ¹³¹ *Millennial Gazette*, 1 July 1856, p. 12.
- ¹³² *Millennial Gazette*, 1 July 1856, p. 12.
- ¹³³ *Millennial Gazette*, 1 July 1856, p. 12.
- ¹³⁴ Individual family dwellings are also a feature of John Minter Morgan's community involving 300 cottages, for 300 families, in a square surrounding an area of 34 acres, outlined in *The Christian Commonwealth* (1845), *Owenite Socialism. Pamphlets and Correspondence*, edited by Gregory Claeys, volume VIII (London: Routledge, 2005), 362-63.

¹³⁵ Charles Rosser, 'Thoughts on the New Era of Society' (1831), in *Owenite Socialism. Pamphlets and Correspondence*, edited by Gregory Claeys, volume III (London: Routledge, 2005), 366.