UTOPIA
zawia#01: utopia

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# Utopia

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“... From the realities of excessive construction of public housing in Mexico to the brutal destruction of entire towns to make way for major infrastructural developments in China, from the extravagant technologically weird of Archigram to the serene vernacular on the Uruguayan coastline, and from the idealism of Bagdad’s round city to the surrealism of Dubai’s fantasy world, this volume of Zawia navigates, cautiously, through the domain of ‘the incomplete perfect’. It questions and highlights both extremes of the Utopia paradox with the objective to find the hairline balance between triviality and inevitability.

zawia#01:Utopia critiques rather than displays utopia. It is not a collection of utopian/dystopian views and ideals, but rather a trial to devour both. Perhaps it is within this dismissal that we can accept the diversities and complexities of life, and simply aim to make life better. Perhaps it is within this dismissal that architecture and urbanism can be sought with renewed strength, and where the discourse can claim a new position. Perhaps it is within this complete and total loss of Utopia that it can actually be found...”
Noémie Goudal

Born in Paris, 1984, she lives and works in London. She has long been drawn to the meeting point of nature and culture, or as she puts it, the organic as “invaded” by the man-made. Goudal also feels a strong attraction to the theatre, and combines the two leanings in the series Les Amants (the Lovers), in which Cascade and Promenade play a part.

Peter Cook

founder of Archigram, former Director the Institute for Contemporary Art, London (the ICA) and Bartlett School of Architecture at University College, London has been a pivotal figure within the global architectural world for over half a century. His ongoing contribution to architectural innovation was recognised via the conferral of an honorary doctorate in April 2010 by the Lund University, Sweden. Peter’s achievements with radical experimentalist group Archigram have been the subject of numerous publications and public exhibitions and were recognised by the Royal Institute of British Architects in 2002, when members of the group were awarded the RIBA’s highest award, the Royal Gold Medal. In 2007, Peter was knighted by the Queen for his services to architecture.

Zhang Xiao

Born 1981 in Yantai, Shandong Province, China, graduated from the Yantai University, Art Design of Architecture Department. He received numerous awards for his photography including Houdengke Documentary Photography Award, Three Shadows Photography Award, The Prix HSBC Pour La Photographie, France, MIO Photo Award, Japan. He participated in numerous exhibitions including: FORMAT International Photography Festival, UK, Contemporary Chinese Photography, Museum of Art, New York, Galerie Baudoin Lebon, Paris, Dali International Photography Festival, Blindspot Gallery, Singapore International Photography Festival.
Rem Koolhaas

founded OMA in 1975 together with Elia and Zoe Zenghelis and Madelon Vriesendorp. He graduated from the Architectural Association in London and in 1978 published Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan. In 1995, his book S,M,L,XL summarized the work of OMA in “a novel about architecture.” He heads the work of both OMA and AMO, the research branch of OMA. Koolhaas has won several international awards including the Pritzker Architecture Prize in 2000 and the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement at the 2010 Venice Biennale. Koolhaas is a professor at Harvard University where he conducts the Project on the City.

Amale Andraos

founded WORKac in 2003 with Dan Wood. The office has achieved international acclaim for projects that reinvent the relationships between the urban, the rural and the natural, as well as between preservation and projection. Andraos received her B.Arch from McGill University and her M.Arch from the Harvard University Graduate School of Design. She is an Assistant Professor at Columbia University’s Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation and has taught at numerous institutions including Princeton, and Harvard university.

Nicolas Guiraud

is born in Bayonne, France, in 1970. He lives and works in Paris. He graduates with a degree in Economics and philosophy. His photographic works explore the indefinite transition that separates reality and fiction. Photography digs a space in between imagination and reality. He exhibited his work at the Arles photo festival, The Paris contemporary Museum - Palais de Tokyo, The GZ gallery and the Colette gallery in Paris. He works for various Newspaper and magazines: Le Monde, M- Magazine, Elle, Stiletto, Jalousie, Le Figaro ...
CONTRIBUTIONS
VISIONARY URBANISM AND ITS AGENCY
Amale Andraos

The power Visionary Urbanism operates differently from the concept of ‘Utopia’. In contrast, Visionary Urbanism is very much embedded within the realities it aims to transform. It is this small, yet important, difference that continues to render the topic so appealing: a productive tool to reshape our environment. Analysing 5 myths that plagued Visionary Urbanism and its inevitable future across built Arab environments, necessitating the polemical and the radical.

A ‘STATE’ OF SCHIZOPHRENIA
Yara Saqfalhait

The idea of a ‘state’ becomes a symbol for popular struggle towards freedom; an embodiment of hopes and aspirations. In Palestine, the state keeps getting declared but remains far from even the preconditions of actual realization. Palestine is getting dangerously close to a Utopia, ‘a placeless place’; where instead of trying to physicalize a planned utopian vision, translating utopia on the ground is happening through mediating between a collective utopia and a dystopian physical environment.

UTOPIA STATION
Rem Koolhaas

Utopia is a state, not an artists’ colony. It is the dirty secret of all architecture, even the most debased: deep down all architecture, no matter how naive and implausible; claims to make the world a better place. Rem Koolhaas describes in 9 scenes his visit to the Russian Capital in 2003.
A VERNACULAR UTOPIA
Nicolas Guiraud

A rootless, timeless community, a settlement of sea dogs that seem to have landed in this wilderness like migrating birds: able to leave at any point. No cars, electricity or running water. An intriguing constellation of haphazard constructions built along two kilometres of Uruguayan coast that resembles a cross between Irish moorlands and the Sahara Desert. The 35 photographs series showcases an architectural utopia with no architect. The beauty and simplicity of these seemingly chaotic constructions proclaim the inhabitant's aesthetic, and reveal a living architectural geology as successive layers are added to the dwellings over time. Each construction tells its story and reveals its author.

BERLIN: THE - LABORATORY OF UTOPIA
Noel David Nicolaus

Nowadays, Berlin can be read like a comprehensive catalogue of (failed?) urban utopias. A series of all possible forms of capitalistic utopia, from the progressive modernist landscapes of the Hansaviertel to the sanitized streets of Potsdamer Platz. However, the most promising form of all urban utopias has risen over the past few decades, emerging from the cracks between such contrasting urban discourses, in the desolation of no-man's land and the brownfields of economical break-down.

LANDSCAPES OF DEBT
Daniel Fernández Pascual

We still project the idea of a better life in a distant time, imagining an ideal future, as if nothing could be done or fixed now. Meanwhile, our precarious generation has to survive with the support of past structures. Therefore, I would argue that they have no present within this everyday survival primitivism. In this prolonged post-crisis era, the notion of time must be inverted for this generation to create a feasible solution.
Dubai appears a very symptomatic place, quite transparent about social and ideological characteristics that have determined the artificial construction of its landscapes. Such processes are being emulated globally, increasingly melting the idiosyncrasy of different cities. The core reflection in ‘Dubai land’ covers the process of dissolution rather than the ‘topos’ of the place. This series outlines the need to finally assume how the symptomatic landscape of Dubai defines us.

... You know I still believe that architecture CAN make people’s life better, NOW, doesn’t necessarily make it better in a revolutionary sense or even in a Utopian sense. Even sticking the bloody door in place is making life better. And anything upwards from sticking the door better... to housing Port Said, or beyond, how do we irrigate the desert, how can we make good use of recycled water ... ”

A critical appraisal of social housing in the African context and how it is influenced by political and power relations. Would the Utopian idea for this result in a bungalow in a peaceful neighborhood, with a so-called ‘efficient’ government? How can the Third World follow developed nations? Will we fit in global utopian ideas – or shape our own?
VOYAGING THE OTHER UTOPIA
Damon Kowarsky

The works of Damon Kowarsky explores themes associated with the city through prints, paintings and drawings. Real and imagined, stone, brick, clay and concrete, first and developing world, ancient and modern. He set out to explore 20th Century ‘utopian’ landmarks– Ankara, Canberra, Chandigarh, Islamabad, and Lilongwe. However, Kowarsky found inspiration in the unplanned cities; Aminabad, Cairo, Istanbul, Khiva, Lahore, Sana’a.

THE UTOPIA OF REALITY
Silvia Malcovati

The failure of socialist realism and the crisis of its architectural image is emphatic and monumental. This clearly depicts the utopian character of the realist’s “dream”, but also his imaginative power to build a ‘better’ world. Perhaps that’s the reason that after the Second World War, the question of realism is discussed, especially in Italy, as an alternative to the modern paradigm, no less utopian, seeking absolute laws to define form and space. Using a survey on the Twentieth century realisms as a tool to reflect on the current state of architecture; this essay questions if realism is today’s great Utopia?

TOWARDS THE NEW URBAN COMMONS
Tamer Elshayal

The article will discuss community-shared resources as primarily manifested in the Western world, particularly in the UK and US, because it has been fairly well discussed and documented. However, an international extension of the debate on the relevance of the commons to our contemporary world (polarized between public, chiefly state, and private, predominantly corporate, ownership) is inevitable. More future work should then be directed towards exploring potential relationships between general formulations, mostly western, of collective ownership of assets with different local socio-cultural, economic and political contexts.
PHOTOESSAY: SUBDUE
Zhang Xiao

Kaixian (county town Kai), located in the North-East of Chongqing, is the last demolition in the Three Gorges reservoir area. It is also the largest county submerged in the entire area. On November 4, 2008, the Three Gorges Dam water storage pilot 172.3 meters, the old town, holding an 1800 year history, was slowly submerged by rising river floods.

IDEOLOGICAL.SPATIAL.POLITICAL.
Hamed Khosravi

Whilst sovereignty is identified by its supremacy, cities are the physical representation of an absolute power - marking their territory. The political projects initially subjectify the others; then demonstrate the sovereign’s absoluteness. During Baghdad’s period of al-Mansur, The Circular City appears in its utmost development in design, planning and construction. This brings architecture to a crucial point; the absolute spatial apparatus of the sovereign power, giving resolution to the state of exception.

NOTIONS OF HETEROTOPIA
Noémie Goudal, introduction by Raffael Argiolu

“Heterotopias are sites that have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, or reflect”. Noemie’s work can be considered a representation of how we can capture places that can’t be fixed geographically, or over time.
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NOTES ON AN EMPIRE
Saverio Pesapane

What remains of various attempts to realize a Utopian Empire? This essay, supported by imagery, represents reportage from Russia, along the southern part of Siberia, from Saint Petersburg, through Moscow, and arriving to Irkutsk.

PHOTOESSAY: TWO MILLION HOMES FOR MEXICO
Livia Corona

The two million low-income homes proposal laid grids of 20 to 80,000 identical homes across Mexico. On the ground; they are not the neighborhoods of a “Home Sweet Home” dream fulfilled, but are ubiquitous grids of ecological and social intervention on a scale with consequences difficult to grasp.
The image of Baghdad that one tends to have is of an immemorial city. City of Mirage. Baghdad from Wright to Venturi is the most complete study to date on the subject of Modern Western architecture in Baghdad, in the 1950s and at the beginning of 1980s. Presented as a travelling exhibition along with a publication, the study puts forward different points of view on a model of urban renewal entrusted to big architectural firms, and on the relation of East and West, modernity and its idioms.
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