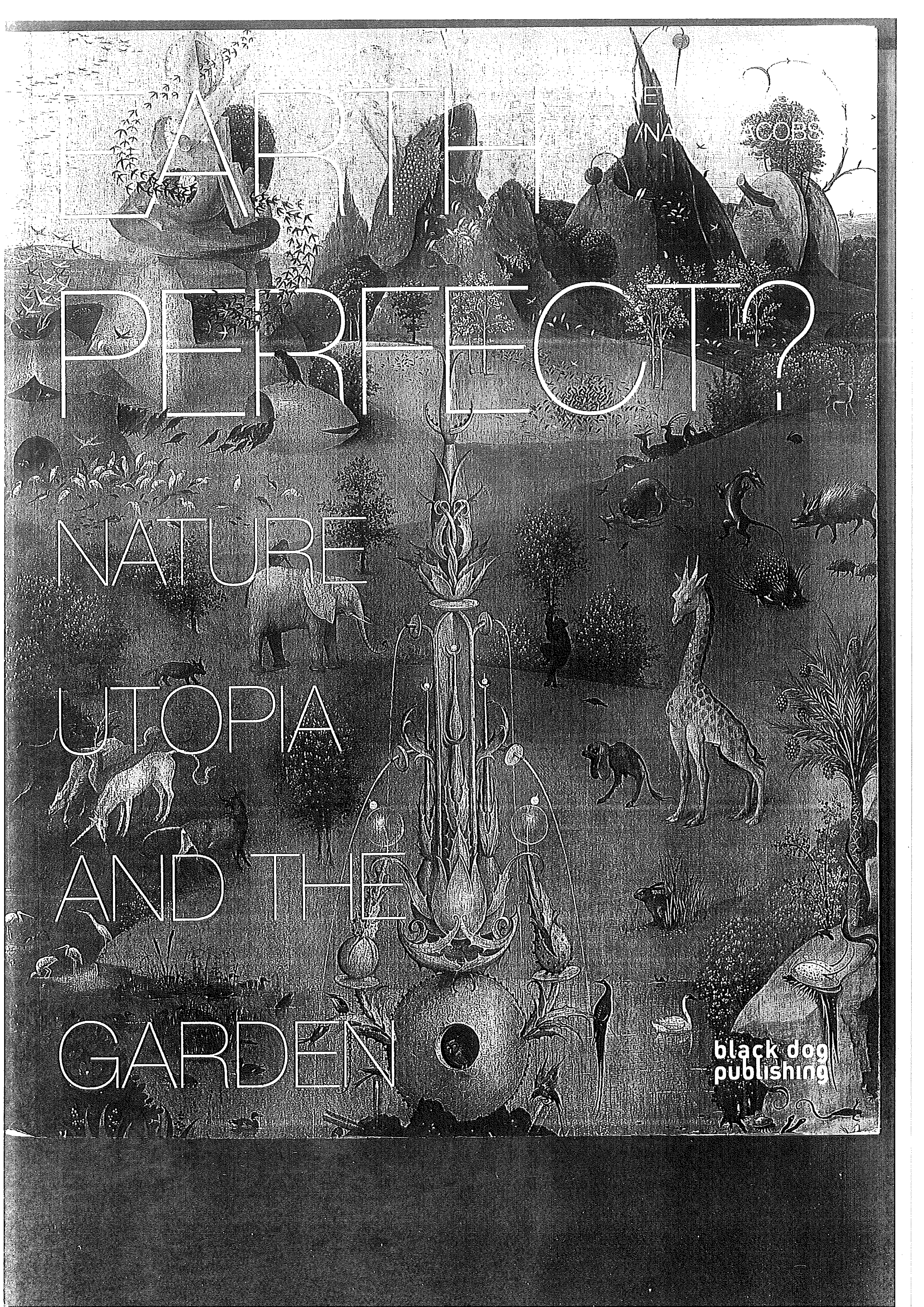
EARTH PERFECT?
NATURE
UTOPIA
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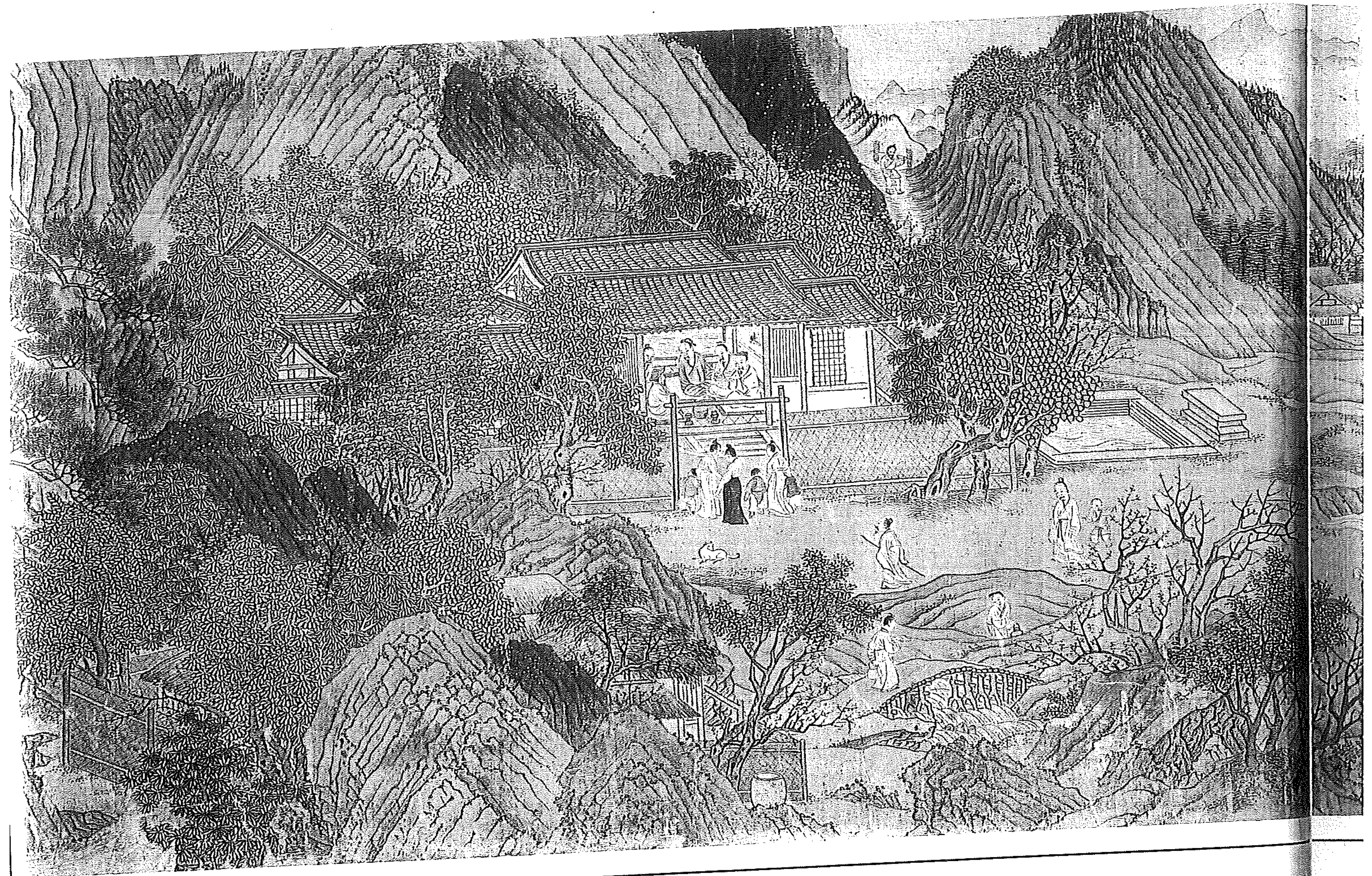


There was a poor fisherman of Wuling who lived in a time of violence and corruption. One day he was out in his boat, rowing upstream to look for a place where the fish would bite, and keeping his eyes on the water. Then a luscious fragrance filled the air. Looking up, he realized that he was entering an immense grove of blossoming peach trees, covering both banks for as far as he could see. Intrigued, he rowed up the stream to its source, a crystalline spring bubbling up from a mossy basin and carpeted all around with peach blossom petals. Behind it was an opening in the mountain. Leaving his boat, he squeezed through the narrow crevasse and was amazed to see before him a vast, peaceful valley with elegant houses and well-tended fields, orchards, and ponds. The cheerful villagers greeted him kindly and fed him well. Long ago, their ancestors had taken refuge in this place from the war and chaos of their time. Still following the old ways, the villagers didn't even know how much time had passed, and they sighed to hear that the world outside had not improved. The fisherman decided that he would be a happy man if he could live in this place, but first he wanted to retrieve his possessions. Promising the villagers that he wouldn't reveal the existence of their utopia, he left the valley, leaving markers along the way to help him find the place again. But as soon as he had returned to civilization, he went directly to the prefect to tell what he had seen. Accompanied by soldiers and curiosity-seekers, he tried in vain to find his way back to this bucolic paradise. The way was lost, and never found again.

NATURE, UTOPIA, AND THE GARDEN

6

/ANNETTE GIESECKE
/NAOMI JACOBS

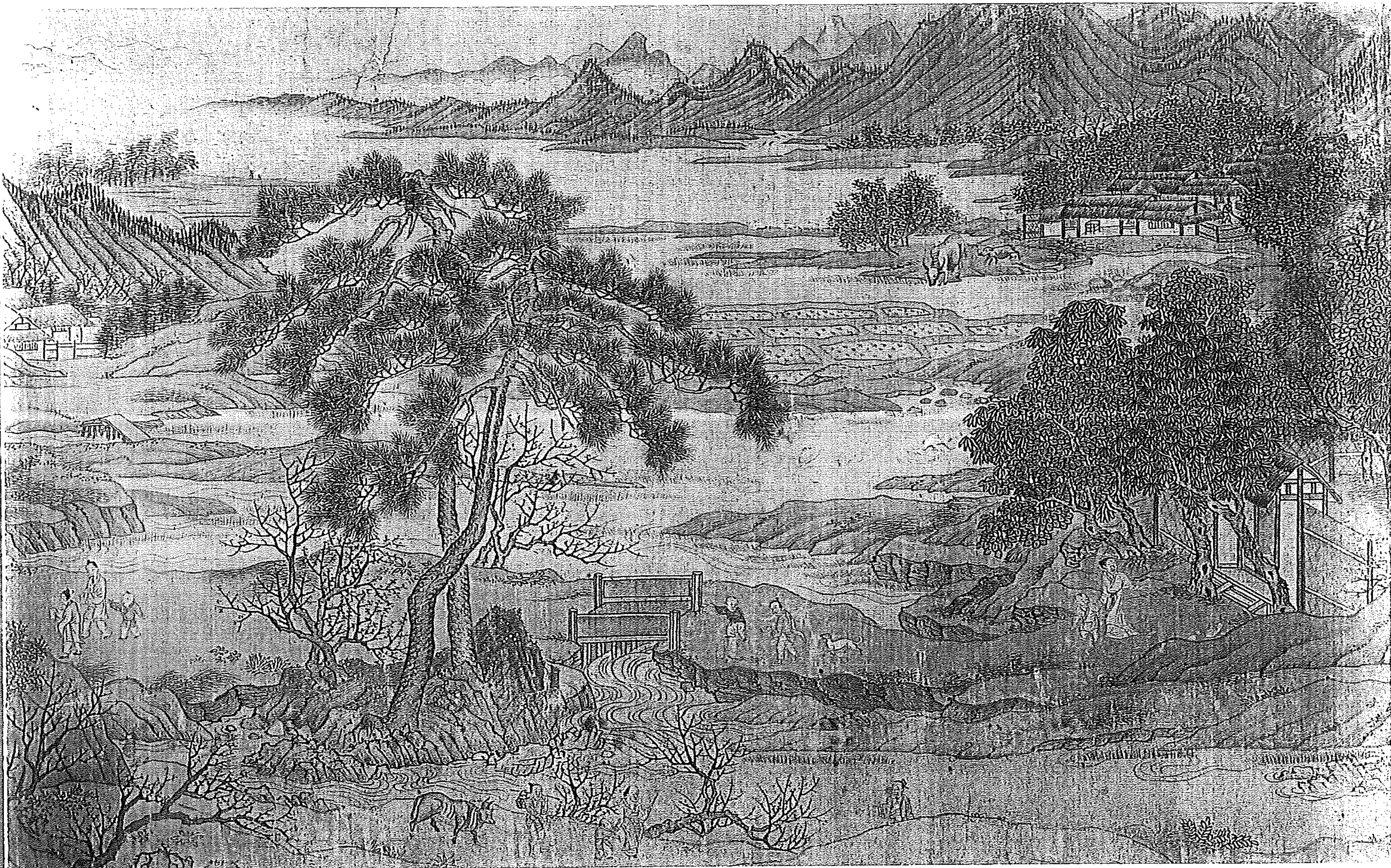


Figure 1/ *Peach Blossom Spring*, detail. Qiu Ying, Chinese, c. 1494–1552.
A garden place where people live in harmony with nature. Photograph © 2012, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

In this beloved tale of the "Peach Blossom Spring", the Chinese fable first written down by Tao Yuanming in 421 CE, we encounter a familiar vision of utopia as a perfect place, set apart from the complexities and difficulties of modern life. Significantly, it is also a garden place, where human beings live in harmony with nature. They work the land, but the labor is not burdensome, and their care is abundantly rewarded with good food, physical comforts, and beautiful surroundings [Figure 1].[1] The way to the secret entrance is marked by blossoming fruit trees—plants that are not only useful, but pleasing to the eye, nose, and taste buds. In China, the peach is known as the "Fairy Fruit"; its tree is associated with long life and protection from evil. One magical peach tree of Chinese legend blooms only once every 3,000 years and brings immortality to those who taste its fruit, recalling the Tree of Life in the book of Genesis. Like Eden, the paradise of the Peach Blossom Spring is forfeited if one does not treasure it; the fisherman breaks his promise and breaks the faith because he is too attached to the things of his world and cannot be satisfied with what this paradise offers. His punishment is to live out his life as an exile, knowing that somewhere in the mountains, the gardens of a lost utopia continue to bloom.

THE GARDEN

The links between gardening and utopian dreaming are ancient and deep. In Judeo-Christian mythology, and also in the beliefs of Islam, the Garden of Eden was the site where the first man and woman lived in harmony with nature and with God—a place and condition lost, and therefore replete with nostalgic yearning. Justifiably so, for in the words of the Syrian monk John the Damascene (c. 676–749 CE) this garden, planted by the hands of God,

> is temperate and the air that surrounds it is the rarest and purest: evergreen plants are its pride,

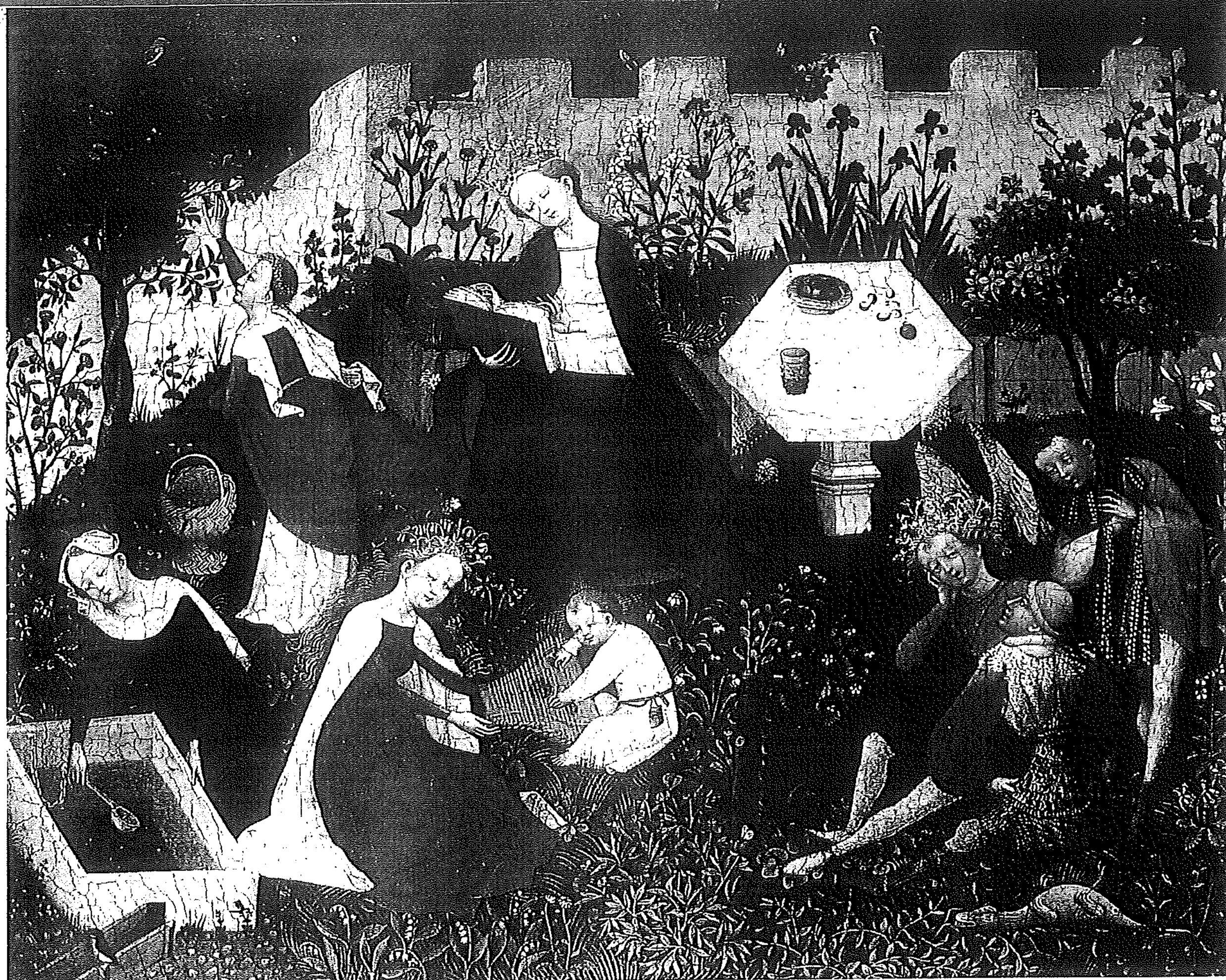


Figure 2/ Eden transformed into a *hortus conclusus* (enclosed garden) symbolic of the Virgin Mary's fecund chastity.
Das kleine Paradiesgärtlein (*The Little Garden of Paradise*). Master of the Upper Rhine, c. 1410.
Photograph, The Art Archive at Art Resource, NY.

> sweet fragrances abound, it is flooded with light, and in sensuous freshness and beauty it transcends imagination... a suitable home for him who was created in God's image.[2]

So great has been this yearning for the original paradise that, since antiquity, Eden has repeatedly been identified with the heavenly paradise of the hereafter.[3] This evocative place of creation was seen as the ideal place of redemption, though only in the teachings of the Qur'an has the heavenly paradise, *djanna*, unambiguously remained a garden.[4] It is a place abounding in shade-giving and fruit-bearing trees, green pastures dotted with cool pavilions, and fountains of gushing water.

Far from a unique concept, the idealized, Biblical sacred garden has parallels and connections with the sacred gardens of a range of ancient Near Eastern civilizations, among them those recounted in the Sumerian myths of the god Enki and of the hero Gilgamesh as well as the mountaintop garden of the mythical Persian king Jima.[5] Indeed, the roots of Eden likely extend to tales such as these from the kingdoms of the western Orient in the third and second millennia BCE. Once formed, the idea of Eden would fuse readily and seamlessly with Greco-Roman beliefs in a lost Golden Age—a belief also very probably stemming from Near Eastern sources—when a generous nature provided for human needs. And it would fuse as well with Classical visions of the Elysian Fields and the Isles of the Blessed, landscapes blessed by the gods. Both were originally earthly paradises, relocated in the netherworld only in the passage of time.[6] These remote places, enjoying as they did Golden Age conditions, could be reached only by a select, pious or heroic few and that, for the most part, only after death. In the fifth century BCE, the Greek lyric poet Pindar extolled the Blessed Isles for their profusion of golden flowers and sea breezes. The Roman poet Horace (65–8 BCE) fleshed out this description, focusing on the Islands' abundance and preternatural fertility:

> ... every year the land, unploughed, yields corn, and ever blooms the vine unpruned, and buds the shoot of the never-failing olive; the dark fig graces its native tree; honey flows from hollow oak; from the lofty hill, with plashing foot, lightly leaps the fountain.[7]

Similarly, the Elysian Fields, as described in Virgil's *Aeneid* (c. 30–19 BCE), are beatific "lands of gladness, glades of gentleness" graced by "dazzling light" and fragrant, shady groves of laurel as well as by "soft riverbanks and meadows where fresh streams flow".[8]

It has been observed that "paradise in its Judeo-Christian form has to be accepted as the deepest archaeological layer of the Western utopia".[9] Thus vestiges of Eden and of the ancient myths closely related to it may be sought in every Western utopian endeavor. It has also been observed that every garden may be viewed as a reflection of Eden [Figure 2]. A garden is always a utopian construct, for its creation is predicated on hope—hope that what one has planted will grow, that one's plantings will provide nourishment for the body and for the soul. But what precisely is a garden, and what is meant by the term "utopia"? Both concepts are instinctively comprehensible and readily used in conversation and print, but are not often actually defined.

Though humans are necessarily part of nature, the relation of humanity to nature has never been a simple one. The Roman statesman Cicero (106–43 BCE) called the garden a "second nature" (*altera natura*), and so indeed it is.[10] For the garden is a human creation driven by the desire to find an ideal place in nature—a second, kinder nature as opposed to a nature that can be unpredictable and harsh. Whether it takes the form of a field of wheat, a Zen exercise, or a collection of exotic plants, the garden is what the ancient Greeks termed a *temenos*, an off-cut from the larger natural environment. The very word "paradise" derives from an ancient Persian word for a walled enclosure; it came to take on a more specific reference to an enclosed natural area, whether orchard, ornamental garden, or wild animal park.[11] All such enclosures were designed to bring nature under human control and to fence out those natural elements that might endanger people as well as the plants and animals upon which their sustenance depended. It is instructive in this context to reflect that Eden had not only mythological but also physical models or parallels, in walled gardens such as those created in the sixth century BCE by Persian king Cyrus the Great at Pasargadae in Iran. Cyrus' lush, amply watered gardens would have been an improbable oasis of intoxicating fragrance, bright blooms, abounding orchard produce, and refreshing shade in a vast, inhospitable desert. As such they embodied the ruler's godlike status, his defiance of the elements and the change of seasons, as well as his consequent ability to feed his people. Cyrus was not the first Near Eastern monarch to use the garden as a symbol of his divine fecundity; among his predecessors were Assurbanipal II (883–859 BCE), who founded the Neo-Assyrian Empire; Assyrian king Sargon II (722–705 BCE) together with his successor Sennacherib (704–681 BCE); and King Nebuchadnezzar II (604–562 BCE) of Babylon, famous for his elusive hanging gardens.[12]

By contrast, an overriding fear of wild nature, discouraging love even of its gentler counterpart, is perhaps the reason why gardens have no place in the ideal society represented by Greek philosopher Plato (c. 429–347 BCE) in his *Republic*, a work often cited as the *de facto* origin of the utopian tradition in literature. The characteristic form of social organization in Plato's Classical Greece was the city-state or *polis*, comprising a town and the surrounding countryside that sustained it. Realizing an ideal mapped out by Homer in the eighth century BCE at the dawning of 'urbanism' in Greece, the *polis* contained few gardens within its walls.[13] Gardens in Classical Athens, for instance, were located almost exclusively in the urban periphery and were entirely utilitarian; outside the fortified urban center lay market gardens in which fruit, vegetables, herbs, and flowers were grown. Temples contained plantings that were pleasing to the gods and served to secure their continued favor. Trees were planted in *gymnasia* not for aesthetic purposes but in order to provide shade for those at exercise and rest. There were no pleasure gardens. Greeks of the Classical period, particularly the Athenians, celebrated humanity and its triumphs over both nature and the barbarian, which were believed—not coincidentally—to be closely aligned.

THE GARDEN AND UTOPIA

A garden, then, is the result of humanity's attempt to carve out an ideal place in nature, thereby fashioning a 'perfect' Earth. But what of utopia? In common parlance, utopia is regarded as an unrealizable dream of a perfect place—such as the idyllic village of the Peach Blossom Spring. Utopian thinkers have been considered wild-eyed dreamers at best, and dangerous megalomaniacs at worst. Utopian communities have been seen as laughable, utopian hopes as futile. This collection is grounded in an understanding of utopia *as process* that is set expressly against this dismissal of utopianism as foolish or deluded.

In the discipline of utopian studies, the utopian impulse is seen as an essential element of the human drive toward a better life. The concept of utopia and the practice of utopian projection have had a remarkably lively history in Western culture since Thomas More coined the term

in his 1516 *Utopia.*[14] This founding text, a description of a society supposedly existing in the New World, was not intended to be taken as a blueprint. The very word "utopia" is a neologism evoking both *eu-topia* (Greek for "good place") and *ou-topia* (Greek for "no place"). More further signaled that his work was a thought experiment, a *jeu d'esprit*, by such sly hints as naming its river *Anydrus* (waterless) and its ruler *Anander* (without people). And no one could regard as a serious proposal the utopians' practice of making chamberpots and prisoners' chains out of gold. Over the subsequent centuries, thousands of writers and thinkers have proffered their own visions of an ideal society, solemn or satirical, and some have even attempted to bring them into being. In addition to literary utopias, a great many political philosophies, social movements, intentional communities, and cultural phenomena can be understood as fuelled by utopian longings.

A number of flexible and capacious taxonomies have been proposed for understanding utopia as more than a literary form. The field of utopian studies' premier bibliographer, Lyman Tower Sargent, has defined utopianism as "social dreaming", an activity manifesting "three faces": literary utopias, political programs, and intentional communities.[15] Political theorist Ruth Levitas argues that utopia must be variously understood as a literary form, a specific kind of content, and a specific cognitive function, all of which arise from and express "desire for a better way of life".[16] Perhaps the most influential theorist of utopianism in postmodern culture, Fredric Jameson, addresses the ways in which utopian works bring us face to face with our inability to break free of our assumptions and fully imagine the transformed reality for which we long.[17]

Central to these new understandings is the link between *ou-topia* and *eu-topia.* To envision the "no place", whether eutopian or dystopian, is a way to move toward the "good place", or at least, a better place. One need not accept a eutopian vision in all its details in order to be so moved; rather, one must simply remain open to what that vision tells us about the insufficiencies of 'our place': the way things are, which we need not take as inevitable. Similarly, one need not believe that the horrors depicted in a futuristic dystopia will come to pass in order to be moved to take action against the tendencies that such a work illuminates in the present day. For East German philosopher Ernst Bloch (1885–1977) this "Principle of Hope" could be traced in phenomena as varied as fashion, film, music, and religion.[18] He argued that unconscious longing for the "not yet" (*noch-nicht-beworden*) motivates every emancipatory social change, and visions of better ways of life always arise from a critique of the "something missing" in the present.[19] Crisis, not contentment, breeds utopias. It follows that eutopia and dystopia are versions of the same mental operation. The eutopian dream of a better world can be assessed and appreciated only against the backdrop of the less-perfect world we inhabit. The nightmare of dystopia implies a possible better world that has been lost and might be found again, if the darker tendencies of the present can be defeated. In both forms, the desire for a better world is the driving force.

Whether its expression takes a literary, concrete, or purely speculative form, utopia is the expression of a social ideal, and it is inextricably entwined with the garden. In the Western world, the formal 'invention' of utopia by Thomas More went hand in hand with a waning belief in the enduring physical existence of Eden, an earthly, God-given paradise that could be recovered by humankind.[20] Utopia is a form of paradise created not by a god or gods but by 'man'. From More's *Utopia* onward, most utopian fictions, proposals, and experiments have recognized the importance of the cultivation of plants for human happiness as well as human survival [Figure 3]. More himself was an enthusiastic gardener, and his utopian traveler Raphael Hythloday tells his tale while sitting on a grassy bank in an Antwerp garden. The householders in Utopia all love to garden, not only because of the pleasure they find in the activity itself but also because of their desire to outdo their neighbors. We are told that "he who founded the town seems to have taken care of nothing more than of their gardens", such that "every house has both a door to the street, and a back door to the garden". Raphael notes that the utopians "cultivate their gardens with great care, so that they have vines, fruits, herbs, and flowers in them; and all is so well ordered, and so finely kept, that I never saw gardens anywhere that were both so fruitful and so beautiful as theirs... there is indeed nothing belonging to the whole town that is both more useful and more pleasant".[21] More's models for these gardens were both sacred and secular: the enclosed monastery gardens of his time and the river gardens of London, including his own.[22] Similarly, in Francis Bacon's *The New Atlantis*, 1626, the narrator notes the "large and various orchards and gardens" cultivated by the scientists of Bensalem, who devote their efforts to improving existing varieties of useful plants.[23]

When Scottish industrialist Robert Owen (1771–1858) created his model village at New Lanark, he encouraged self-sufficiency through domestic gardens and allotments. Magnificent gardens on a larger scale were an important feature of Harmony, the utopian system envisioned by French Socialist Charles Fourier (1772–1837). The imagined day of his typical working-class Harmonian Lucas was to include a 5 AM pre-breakfast session with a group of gardeners, and a 9:30 AM session with the "vegetable growers' group, under a tent". The wealthy Mondor would have a morning session with a group of horticulturalists and afternoon sessions with the "greenhouse group" and the "group of exotic plant growers".[24] Whatever one's class level, Fourier stipulated that "workshops, field, and gardens

12 VTOPIAE INSVLAE TABVLA.

Figure 3/ Map of the Island of Utopia. Frontispiece to *Utopia*, Sir Thomas More. Woodcut by Ambrosius Holbein, 1518. Image, Private Collection/ The Bridgeman Art Library.

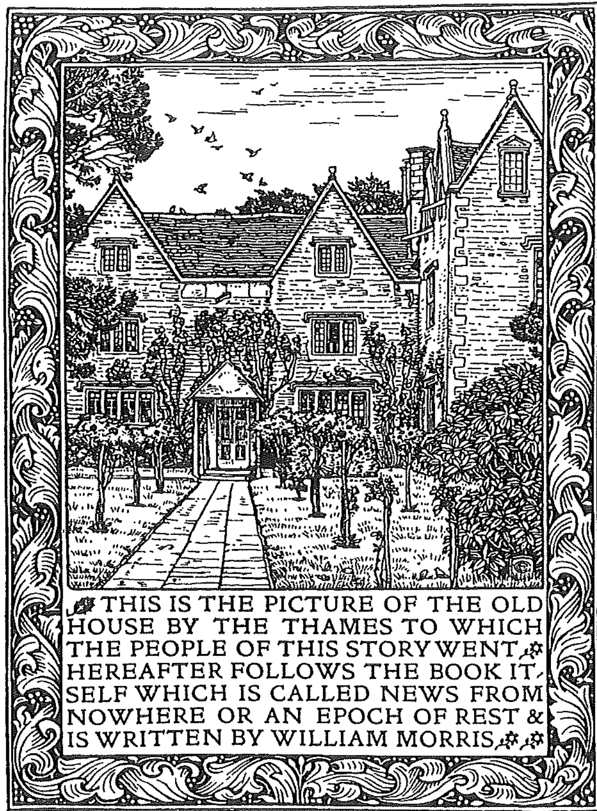


Figure 4/ Gardens of the east front of Kelmscott Manor, home of William Morris. Frontispiece to *News from Nowhere*, William Morris. Woodcut by W. H. Hooper, 1892, after a design by C. M. Gere. Photograph, Private Collection/ The Bridgeman Art Library.

must offer the worker the enticements of elegance and cleanliness".[25] For Fourier, time spent tending to plants was an essential element in a happy life and a prime example of "attractive labor" designed to combine social and sensual pleasures with productive activity.

By the late nineteenth century, the garden appears as a central metaphor for the ideal society envisioned in William Morris' *News from Nowhere*, 1890. Gardens are mentioned 56 times, and gardening is named among the pleasant kinds of work that keep people from becoming too bookish. The houses are all surrounded by flowers as well as vegetables, herbs, and fruit trees [Figure 4]. Morris' narrator mentions cabbage, strawberries, apricots, plums, pears, and lavender, as well as many gardens "stuffed" with flowers. Even the mills have gardens that are "marvels of loveliness". Indeed, in Morris' ideal future, the fields themselves were "everywhere treated as a garden made for the pleasure as well as the livelihood of all", and all England has become "a garden, where nothing is wasted and nothing is spoilt".[26]

Morris' book had been written in reaction to Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, 1888, whose vision was largely an urban and industrialized one. Yet even Bellamy had hoped for a world in which "the earth would bloom like one garden".[27] Bellamy's book strongly influenced British visionary Ebenezer Howard, who put forward his ideas for a utopian community combining the best of city and country in *To-Morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*, 1898, later reprinted as *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*, 1902.[28] Howard's ideas would provide the guiding principles for urban and suburban housing developments in the English-speaking world throughout the twentieth century, and continue to find expression in town planning schemes today. Meanwhile, as Howard and his followers sought to unify the garden and the city, others had abandoned urban settings to re-create an Eden in the countryside. The Cambridge-educated Socialist Edward Carpenter (1844–1929) made a life for himself as a market gardener in Derbyshire; his home became a pilgrimage site for intellectuals including novelist D. H. Lawrence and 'sexologist' Havelock Ellis. The impulse to 'return to the soil' was expressed on a more modest scale in the allotment gardens to be found outside many European cities in this period.

In their darkened mirrors, the dystopian novels of the twentieth century also reflect the importance of gardens to the good life, for the absence of gardens, or indeed of any vegetation, is a prominent feature of works such as Evgeny Zamyatin's *We*, 1921, and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 1948.[29] The nightmare city of *We* is made of glass; Orwell's is made of steel and concrete. But for the rebellious citizens of both cities, a beautiful and fertile natural world—the wilderness outside the Green Wall in the former, and the more domesticated "Golden Country" in the latter—provides glimpses of an ideal life in contrast to the oppression of the dystopian society.

The utopian energies of the 1960s in the United States fueled a revived Back to the Land movement for which home vegetable gardening was an essential element of rural self-sufficiency. Many of these hippie homesteaders were inspired by elders such as Helen and Scott Nearing, whose books advocating the "simple life" dated back to the 1950s.[30] This was the time of the 'flower children', who found in the beauty of nature an inspiration to peace and harmony and sang about getting "back to the garden". Such views and practices inform the utopian fictions of the period. The villages of Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*, 1976, are rich with bloom and mostly "own-fed"—self-sustaining in food production. Their collaboration with nature extends to the breeding of spiders that spin and mend garden fences.[31] In Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia*, 1975, there are roof gardens in the large cities, children work gardens to produce food for their school meals, and home gardens are placed next to bathrooms so that grey

water can be used for irrigation.[32] Utopian citizens in fiction of this period tend to be expert composters, avid botanists, and eloquent opponents of waste. They protect nature for its spiritual and aesthetic qualities as well as for its essential role in supporting human life.

The ethos expressed in these works of fiction was hardly confined to the United States. The Findhorn spiritual community in Scotland, founded in 1962, became famous for the enormous vegetables it succeeded in growing on formerly barren ground. Today, the 450 residents of the contemporary eco-village at Findhorn are said to have the lowest ecological footprint in the industrialized world.[33] A 25-acre organic farming enterprise provides the majority of the residents' fresh vegetables and also feeds over a hundred families in the area.[34]

In today's popular discourse, the representation of gardening as a utopian activity has taken on a new insistence as domestic gardening is linked to larger issues of ecology. The Slow Food and Locavore movements indicate a lively desire to engage with the production of plants, whether as home gardener or as farmer's market customer, along with a conviction that the world would be a better place if it included more or different kinds of gardens. Influential chefs like Alice Waters as well as authors such as Michael Pollan, Barbara Kingsolver, and Eric Schlosser have written eloquently of the damage that the industrial production of food inflicts upon the environment and on our bodies.[35] The Obama White House has its organic garden, and Peter Lamborn Wilson (aka Hakim Bey of the *Temporary Autonomous Zone*) has advocated "avant gardening" as an act of resistance that is simultaneously a work of art, a positive praxis conjuring up an autonomous zone outside the mediations and commodification of capitalism.[36] Tim Hodgkinson, author of *How to Be Idle*, has written that "digging is anarchy in action" and has called upon revolutionaries to "put down their weapons and take up their spades".[37] A "Guerrilla Gardening" website offers the slogan, "Fight the Filth with Forks and Flowers."[38] And Douglas Tallamy exhorts suburban gardeners to favor native plants in order to better support the web of life.[39]

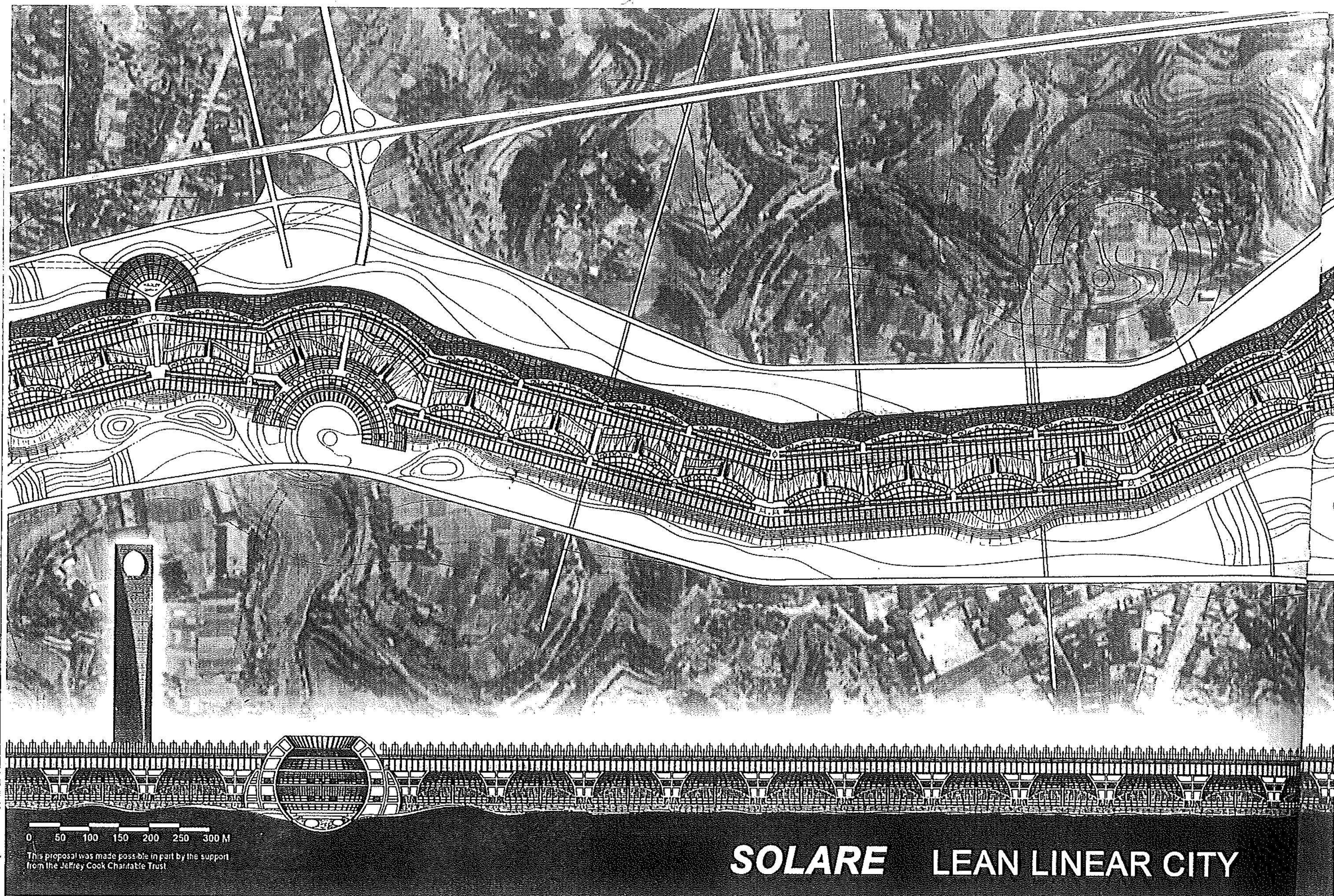
A good deal of sociological evidence does confirm that gardening can serve utopian ends. Garden projects at prisons, schools, nursing homes, and hospitals have all been shown to have a beneficial effect on participants. The establishment of community vegetable gardens on abandoned city lots and at housing projects has led to decreased crime, drug use, vandalism, and littering, created friendlier relations between neighbors, and even increased self-esteem among the urban poor. Studies in the UK have shown community gardens to "promote social inclusion, and give rise to health benefits".[40] A Denver study found that community gardens foster "high levels of collective efficacy", which "at the neighborhood level are associated with decreased risky sexual behaviors, asthma prevalence, obesity, and premature mortality, as well as improved self-appraisal of health".[41]

With health benefits, social benefits, psychological benefits, physical benefits, economic benefits and the ecological benefits that come with reducing our reliance on industrial agriculture, it might seem there can be no dark side to the enterprise of gardening, and it is tempting to think of the garden as a space of innocence and simplicity. It can be precisely that. But, as has been shown above, like all works of human artfulness, gardens are complicated places. They can be used to express the power of a monarch or a regime, to impress one's neighbors, or to glorify the human control of nature. They can be toxic places as well as sacred spaces, regions of conflict as well as realms of harmony. The gardener's very love for the plant world's amazing diversity can lead to unwelcome side effects, as when the nursery industry introduces to home gardens a beautiful plant that promptly invades the woodlands nearby. Some gardens, whether in art or reality, catalyze our anxieties about the power of nature and the unruliness of our own natural impulses. Some gardens are enclosed by walls topped with broken glass, intended to keep out the hungry and the angry.

THE GARDEN, UTOPIA, AND NATURE

As the number of people living on our garden planet approaches seven billion—perhaps to reach nine billion by the middle of the century—the possibility of sustaining a harmonious life in nature seems ever more remote. Cities spread across the landscape like a cancer, claiming forests and meadows, draining water tables, destroying wildlife habitat, and generating new miles of asphalt and power lines. Activities necessary to human nourishment, shelter, and movement foul the water and air. Industrial agriculture damages the web of insect and bird life, as well as the microorganisms that inhabit healthy soils. As the climate warms, some fertile areas are expected to become too dry to support plant life—or human life. Many fear the Earth will become little more than a gigantic garbage dump, covered with mountains of discarded consumer goods, plastic bags, rusting vehicles, and old computers, unless humanity profoundly changes inured forms, patterns, and modes of habitation.

These concerns are far from new. Over the millennia there have been repeated passionate calls for the absolute necessity of reducing humanity's footprint on the planet: if we aspire to garden and recklessly reap a harvest from the entire Earth, no uncompromised nature will remain. One such call issued some two thousand years ago from



the Roman poet and ardent utopian Lucretius (c. 99–55 BCE). A follower of the philosopher Epicurus and of the school he called "The Garden", Lucretius stated that the Earth is in decline, a process hastened by humanity's relentless use and abuse of nature's resources. While the Earth's depletion and ultimate passing cannot be reversed, the process can be slowed if we embrace the fact of the essential, atomic unity of all life on the planet. Harmony with the very nature that people had come to consider 'other' and remote from the human endeavor, Lucretius wrote, is the key to a good life and happiness.[42]

Today, architect and utopian theorist Paolo Soleri delivers a similar message, arguing that it is not merely reform—of urban and suburban patterns in particular—but thoroughgoing reformulation that is required. A lifelong proponent of sustainable urban efforts that reduce impact on the natural environment while promoting improved quality of life, Soleri has proposed "Solare: the Lean Linear City". Consisting of two urban ribbons on either side of a continuous urban park, the linear city would concentrate residential commercial, industrial, institutional, cultural, recreational, and health maintenance spaces, leaving the surrounding environment intact [Figures 5, 6].[43] Notably, the garden is key in Soleri's utopian scheme, as it was in Lucretius'.

For many of us, the creation of a garden is a small candle lit in the darkness of impending ecological collapse. But how can the humble garden possibly make a difference in the face of such apocalyptic scenarios, the results of misguided gardening efforts on a global scale? With every passing day, this question becomes more timely and the anticipation of a response more pressing. Since the garden and gardening practices define humanity's relation to the natural environment, it is of utmost importance to retrace and re-examine the garden's symbolism, history, and life-sustaining potency. The contributors to this volume do so

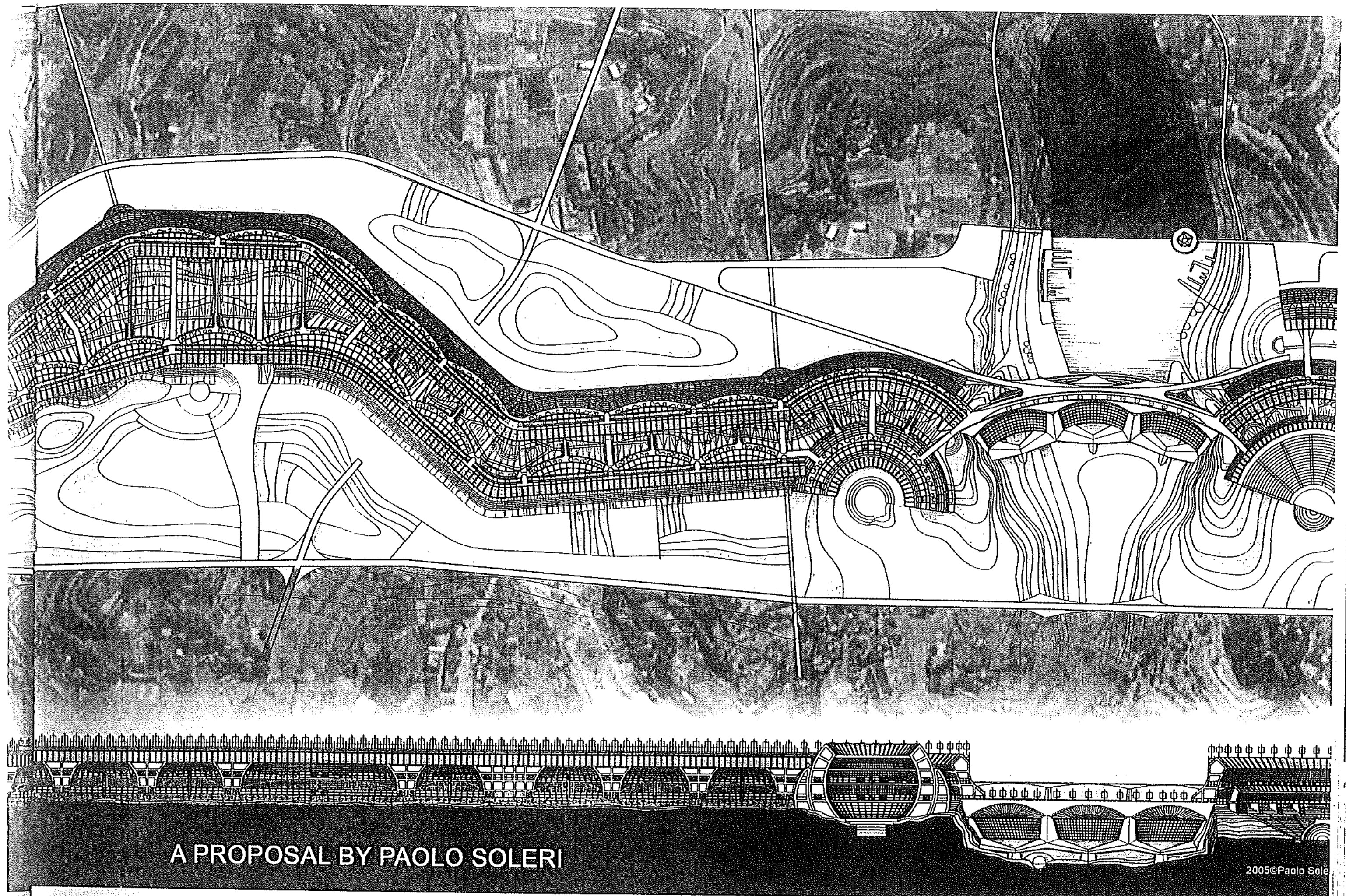


Figure 5/ SOLARE: the Lean Linear City, Paolo Soleri, 2005. At the base of the city on the southerly side are greenhouse aprons, and orchard aprons are on the northerly side. Image courtesy of the Cosanti Foundation.

by exploring both sides of the utopian dynamic—utopian desires and dystopian fears, utopian hope and dystopian despair—in relation to the garden. They consider the garden as an escape from harsh reality, a site for the practice of virtues, an emblem of the ideal human relationship to nature, and an intimate setting that helps us to find hope even in the 'garbage dump' of the present. But they also recognize that the garden can express fear of nature or a desire to control its unruly powers. They demonstrate that the garden is a reflection at once of our unavoidable separation from wild nature and of the gardener's intimate relation of care with the natural world.

Necessarily possessing many points of contact, the essays in this collection are grouped in accordance with their particular emphases: the garden's spiritual dimension, touching on questions of the sacred, of healing, and of creative agency; the garden as subject of human creativity that explores its representational limits; the garden as a critical natural space of peace and beauty that enfolds the home; the social and political forces at work in the creation of gardens as repositories of hope; the essential economic value of gardens to a humanity that survives by virtue of the exploitation of nature; and the garden as a place to learn how to live with the nature that sustains us. The gardens featured here range from the domestic gardens of ancient Rome to zoological and botanic gardens of the present day, from Versailles to the English Picturesque, from Hieronymus Bosch's Eden to a small Connecticut organic farm, and from a war-scarred Bohemia to pharaonic Egypt. Each represents the innate human drive to perfect the Earth, and each in its own way signals how delicate is this venture. In the words of Jean-