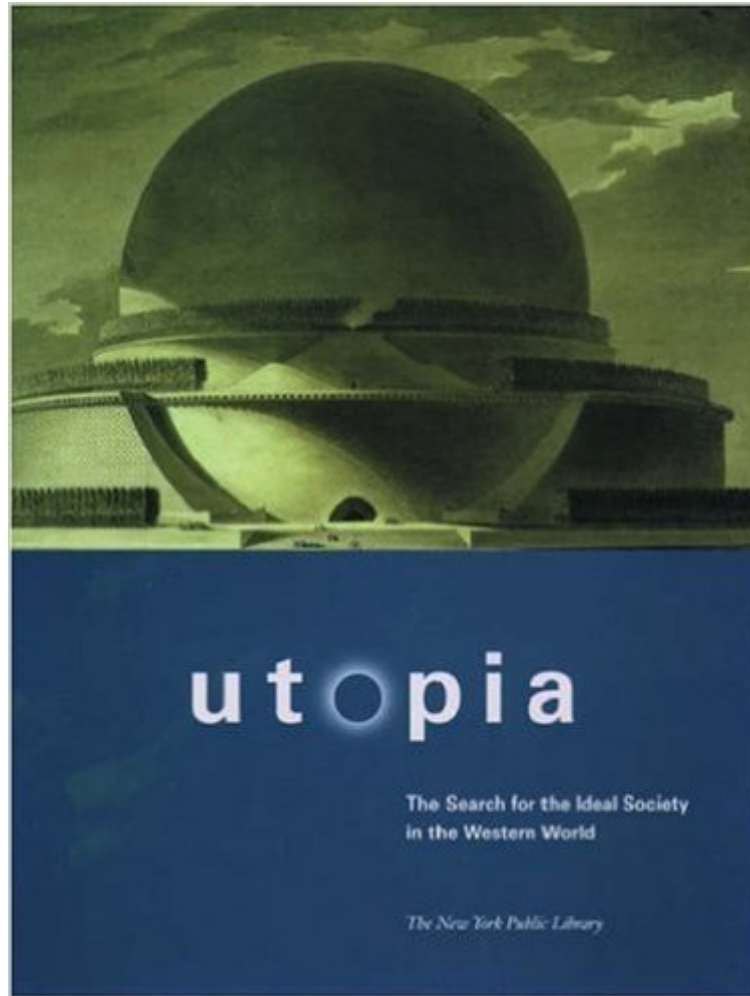


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Utopia: The Search For The Ideal Society In The Western World



Synopsis

The idea of utopia, the perfect place, has tantalized humanity for thousands of years, from the myth of the Garden of Eden to the high-tech folly of Biosphere 2. Now the Bibliotheque Nationale de France and The New York Public Library are jointly sponsoring a major exhibition that explores the utopian imagination and the myriad attempts to achieve utopia, showcasing a spectacular collection of art and literature. *Utopia: The Search for the Ideal Society in the Western World* is the catalog for the American exhibition, which will be on view in New York from October 14, 2000 through January 2001. Featuring essays by curator Roland Schaer and by Alain Touraine, Lyman Tower Sargent, and other leading European and American scholars of utopia, this elegantly designed volume will explore the long tradition of thought and art envisioning the "perfect place," extending from classical antiquity to the present. Lavishly illustrated with more than 200 pictures, most of them in color, *Utopia* presents such fascinating images as Theodore de Bry's 16th-century idealized drawings of the native inhabitants of the New World, Renaissance renderings of ideal architecture, posters from the Soviet Union and the 1939 World's Fair in New York, and photographs of experimental communities. Included as well are such resonant documents as a copy of the Declaration of Independence in Thomas Jefferson's hand, stunning illuminated manuscripts, and rare items relating to the French Revolution and to the social utopias of the Romantic Age from the collections of the Bibliothèque Nationale. Both beautiful and intellectually provocative, *Utopia* is the perfect vehicle to explore an idea that has arisen, in many forms and many places, throughout human history.

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Customer Reviews

This large (perfect size for reading on your lap) book contains a series of intelligent essays and sumptuous illustrations and photos mapping the history of utopia from Plato on. I believe that the thing that makes it such a spectacular work is the wide range of disciplines, works and forces that the writers identify as utopic. When people think of utopia, they often think of science fiction, fanciful and ideal worlds that make life better than our wildest dreams. In truth, most science fiction these days explores utopia as a critical paradigm, realising that we can not live in a perfect world, they explore the possibilities, the way they work and the way they fail. I'm all for this, but the thing that I loved so much about the New York Public Libraries book on Utopia, was the way it is very solidly linked to the real world. It is, indeed, a book that explores the search for an ideal society in the western world. From the communes of the 1960's and '70's to the environmental housing collectives of the '80's and '90's. From the South Seas in the British imagination to Urban Geography, from Communism to Architecture, Romanticism and Formalism and Futurism, this book identifies attempts at and dreams of utopia from our own history. Rather than the speculation and fabulation of science fiction, the book provides us with our own speculation and fabulation, our own hope and idealism. I've always been fascinated by Utopia, growing up reading Ursula Le Guin, Yevgeny Zamyatin and others, Dostoevsky's happiness versus freedom dilemma grounded itself deep inside me, living in New Zealand often feels like paradise, and hopes for a better world got me imagining.

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