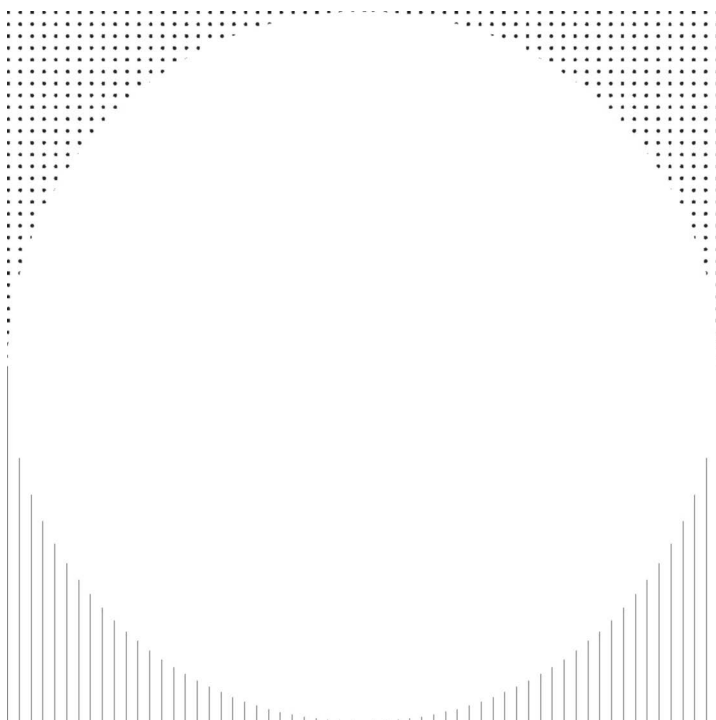# 1 Introduction

"It is more about how utopia would feel rather than how it would be organized." (Ganjavie 2015, p. 96)

1.1   Why (Utopianism of) Care?

Research Diary Entry, 4ᵗʰ March 2022

Throughout my childhood and teenage years, I was given the impression that I was living in a world of unity and peace in which everything evil had been resolved and left in the past. Like most people growing up in Europe, I truly believed that the world had changed for the better and that I had the freedom and opportunity to achieve anything, if only I worked hard enough. Reinforced by my multinational background, unity, internationality, freedom, and peace were all I had ever known. It was only in my mid-twenties when I had realised that I had accepted much of it as given and started to critically reflect upon it. In fact, we[1] still lived in a hugely discriminatory world in which working hard alone was not a guarantee for a 'successful' life – whatever that meant. Nevertheless, or because of that, I felt myself determined to write a book about utopianism and hope. I still believed to the core, that human beings were intrinsically good and that a fulfilling and meaningful life meant a life shared. When the Coronavirus had hit at the beginning of 2020, I had only felt more encouraged in believing that we urgently needed more hope-filled visions, imagination, and creative ways of thinking. Even after almost two years of Covid-19 still being continuously and obtrusively present, with leading people getting notably exhausted, I had still not given up in believing so.

Then, on 24ᵗʰ February 2022, when Russia had started its military actions against Ukraine and the world of many people literally came tumbling down, so did an internal world inside me. I had now spent around

---

1   'We' in this book is an expression of a hopeful signifier that expectantly will one day be representative of an actual 'we': "If we become feminists because of the inequality and injustice in the world, because of what the world is not, then what kind of world are we building? […] we need to ask what it is we are against, what it is we are for, knowing full well that this we is not a foundation but *what we are working toward*. By working out what we are for, we are working out that we, that hopeful signifier" (Ahmed 2017, p. 2, own emphasis).

one and a half years thinking and reading about topics related to utopianism, hope, and ideas to change the world for the better, but in that very moment all of it seemed instantly lost and shattered. While I had managed to stay hopeful in a world ruled by capitalism, patriarchy, and neocolonialism, I could not in a world where yearning for power now also meant killing for power. I had no means to comprehend it. Suddenly, it was as if the sum of all the world's injustices had simultaneously accumulated into one painful lump inside my body. While I had questioned the fulfilment of Western ideals of freedom, equality, and peace, even though they had been preached since the Enlightenment, a brutality of this kind seemed beyond reach. The pain inside my chest was then joined by a sense of guilt for having once believed that there had ever been a moment in time where the world had been one of unity, freedom, and harmony. Suddenly, I had to painfully come to terms with the fact, that in the 21st century, people were still killing each other for power and revenge.

What sense would hope make in such a brutal world? What good were dreams if they could be shattered instantaneously? What utopianism would be relevant if it was not shared by those in power? Within the one week that had passed since Russia first invaded, it had seemed as if any legitimisation for this book had been devastatingly crushed. In that week I struggled to see any value in it, since it and everything else, now seemed so utterly meaningless. Even if there was hope, what good was it in architecture anyway? At the end of the day, what can architecture do—really? I started to doubt any positive response to this million-dollar question I had optimistically been devoting myself to.

However, the moment someone told me it would be understandable and acceptable if I were to change the topic of my book, was the moment I realised that changing it would have meant giving in. Changing the topic would have meant that there is really nothing that can be done. That there was really no place for hope. Yes, I do have an architectural background rather than one in political sciences or law, but should not all areas in society equally do their best to contribute to a better world? Did not exactly this supposedly 'weak' attribute of architecture legitimise its withdrawal from wider socio-political responsibilities? While archi-

tecture cannot stop people from bombing the world, it might help in rebuilding it. Now, more than ever, thinking about new ways of communal life seemed necessary; ways that go beyond consensus, freedom, and equality. Now, more than ever, I had come to realise that pursuing utopia(nism) was not simply about spreading hope as a self-comforting coping mechanism but that it was as a way of life. Believing in its possibility would be the first necessary step for achieving its actuality. Yes, it had become much more difficult—but it had also become far more necessary.

"On the borderline between inside and outside, utopia is as much possessed of *Zeitgeist* as of *Weltschmerz*." (Santos 1995, p. 480, original emphasis)

1.2   Methodology and Book Structure

This book is a theoretical exploration of the meaning of contemporary architecture in and for the pursuit of a good life, especially with regards to society's inherent crisis-ridden structure. For this reason, the term utopianism is introduced to express humanity's unrelenting pursuit of human flourishing. Informed by "philosophy [which] is dedicated to a critical analysis of the basic assumptions of being and the self-evident aspects of everyday life" (Loh 2019, p. 1, own insertion), this book explores how the concepts of utopianism and crisis interrelate with architecture from a metaphysical perspective. While largely theoretical, this book reveals the extent to which philosophy plays a crucial role not only in rethinking architecture but in affecting the very ways people inhabit it.

Following this endeavour, the author has chosen the method of conceptual analysis, a common method in philosophical methodology to deconstruct complex entities or phenomena. While *philosophical methodology* can be understood as "the use of thought experiments to test conceptual analyses, or understanding us and our environments in a way conducive to human flourishing" (Dever 2016, p. 3, emphasis removed), *conceptual analysis* is defined as "a method of inquiry in which one seeks to assess complex systems of thought by 'analysing' them into simpler

elements whose relationships are thereby brought into focus" (Baldwin 1998). As a method grounded in philosophical methodology, conceptual analysis studies concepts in their relation (e.g. how they are linked to knowledge, power, identity, time, space, and so on) and thereby bears the possibility of deconstructing the narratives they are embedded in. Critical judgement therefore is a necessary precondition since concepts, human-made theoretical terms, are by no means fixed but tied to ideologies (Cappelen et al. 2016).

Conceptual analysis can be used as a tool to question *ontological assumptions* (the study of reality, e.g. what is crisis?), *epistemological assumptions* (refers to the nature of that knowledge, e.g. what are crisis claims being made upon?) and *axiological assumptions* (the study of values, e.g. what are the underlying values in the architectural field?). While *descriptive* conceptual analysis is of an explanatory nature, *normative* conceptual analysis offers propositions about how things *ought* to be. Normative approaches are therefore often linked to *conceptual engineering*, a method which aims at redefining concepts in fruitful ways. As such, this body of work applies both descriptive and normative methods of conceptual analysis.

Furthermore, "Philosophical Methodology is the study of philosophical method: how to do philosophy well. But at the end of the day there isn't much to say about how to do philosophy well." (Dever 2016, p. 20) Therefore, the format and structure of this book have been devised by the author in a way that would logically guide the reader through a coherent thread of argumentation.

As for the structure of this book, all chapters have been written in an essay format, assembled into seven chapters consisting of three subchapters each. The book starts by introducing several concepts from the social sciences into architecture in 2 *Imagined Worlds*, whereby the imaginary and the human imaginative capability are rendered as the opening theme. The subject matter is then contextualised within the socio-political framework and debates which substantially influence developments within contemporary architecture in 3 *Constructed Narratives*. In 4 *Linking Utopianism, Crisis, and Architecture* the author consequently triangulates utopianism, crisis, and architecture by scrutinising the conceptual

commonalities between each. This chapter offers insight into their historical developments, their significant interrelation with time and space, and the many underlying assumptions affecting utopianism, crisis, and architecture. In chapter *5 Space-Times of Control: Problem-Solving Utopianisms*, the previously elaborated dialectic of utopianism and crisis is analysed within specific contemporary forms of architecture. What will be explored in particular detail are the ways in which these concepts manifest in power-induced time-spaces. In *6 Space-Times of Care: Question-Raising Utopianisms*, the author offers possible normative concepts for rethinking architecture's definition, its education as well as its (re)production. The author closes with hopeful conceptual speculation and goes beyond theory alone by developing a method for radical spatial practices ambitious to change lived experiences. The final chapter, *7 Interpretation*, contains the summary and analysis of the book as well as its conclusion. Furthermore, two research diary entries, the introductory subchapter *1.1 Why (Utopianism of) Care?* and the final text *7.3 Revisited: Why Utopianism (of Care)?* conceptually open and close the book respectively by each connecting the philosophical subject to current socio-political realities, illustrating the book topic's relevance, as well as some personal reflections.

In addition, the author would like to stress that she is aware of the contested nature of some of these propositions. For some, the outspoken critique might seem too radical, the ideas too abstract, or the propositions too unpractical in a discipline which has become obsessed with 'realistic' and market-oriented tasks. However, precisely for these reasons, introducing philosophy into architecture has a lot to offer.[2] Therefore, situated in an "architecture academy [which] suffers from the 'poverty

---

2   Slavoj Žižek (2012b), for example, has contended that the need for philosophy today is more urgent than ever, especially for it to inform science and the basic assumptions on which it relies. While Marx famously observed that 'the philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways. The point, however, is to change it' (ibid.). According to Žižek the world in the 20th century has been changed too fast and therefore the time has come to reinterpret it again. Žižek (2012a) therefore stresses first and foremost 'to start thinking'.

of philosophy'" (Lahiji 2021, p. 3, own insertion), this book serves as an invitation for creative, imaginative, and new ways of thinking which go beyond object-oriented accounts and an "obsessive matter-of-factness" (Coleman 2005, p. 6). In doing so, it positions architecture in a multi-disciplinary field, challenges its autonomous position, questions existing knowledge-claims, assumptions, and methods. It should serve as a source of inspiration and encouragement for (re)thinking the tasks of architecture, (re)evaluating the basis for a good life, (re)visiting togetherness and (re)considering alternative ways of being, living, thinking, and designing. Most importantly, however, it should serve as an invitation to rethink ourselves as spatial practitioners.

1.3 Research Questions

1) What is the meaning of architecture in and for the pursuit(s) of the good life in a society inherently marked by crisis?

   a) How are utopianism, crisis, and architecture conceptually connected? What assumptions, values and (outdated) myths underpin these?
   b) What forms of utopianism and ways of dealing with crisis exist in architecture today? How do these influence human interpretation of space and time in the production and experience of architecture?
   c) What normative concepts and ways of thinking could create the basis for relational understandings of utopianism, crisis, and architecture?