Imagined Utopias in the Built Environment

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From London's Vauxhall Garden to the Black Rock Desert

By

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For Christina

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INTRODUCTION

FROM A WALK IN THE PARK TO A TREK THROUGH THE RUINS

The seven essays in *Imagined Utopias* appraise the enduring dream of a better future. Bracketed between two diverse public gatherings—Vauxhall Pleasure Garden in London and the Burning Man Festival in San Francisco and later the Nevada desert—the anthology displays the circular nature of Utopian intentions and Dystopian consequences. This study attempts to shed light on a few of the many Utopian intentions of the modern past in order to offer viable insights into the present moment. Spanning hundreds of years, from the early proprietors of Vauxhall to the founders of Burning Man, individuals hoped to create a space for free expression and communal life that would serve as a prototype for a greater society. Their provisional Utopias utilized spaces that were, at the time, distant from established cities—independent island communities. Through physical isolation and disassociation they hoped that psychological renewal and inquiry could take place. Their experiments, like all Utopian intentions, moved through phases of hope and success to unavoidable anxiety, expansion and demise.

In this collection, Utopia is defined, not so much as a specific physical place, but an ongoing state-of-mind. Utopia is an emotional experience encompassing the desire for a better world (in the future); an anxious need to understand the current moment (in the present) and the disappointing inability to complete the original intention (in the past). As individuals, Utopians are restless and in search of an oasis, an island paradise, a haven from the ills of society. They are sometimes affiliated with a likeminded group of free-thinkers who simply embrace a Utopian state of mind.

In this volume, Utopia is considered as an intentional desire. My use of the word *intentions* as opposed to desires or hopes is deliberate and encompasses the cause and effect dichotomy that is at the core of all futuristic fantasies. It is also an unstable term which takes into account the perpetual slippage of Utopia into Dystopia—the culmination of a circular state of mind in which the original intention is consumed by the anxiety of

the present resulting in the disappointment of an incomplete and unconsummated dream.

Architecture, as an artistic medium, is particularly suited for a study of imagined Utopias. As a practice, it is triggered by the hope for a better future, through new and innovative design. The initial concept sets off a series of emotional realities—a revolving triad of hope, anxiety and disappointment. The anxiety lodged between Utopia and Dystopia is caused by the collision between the space and desires of the individual (the architect, artist or designer) and the needs of the collective (the patron, collector or visitor). As a sequence it can be viewed as a series of recurring and unavoidable events through history and across cultures and artistic styles.

The life cycle for Utopian ideas is a natural process through which individuals find their place in the world. It is their resilience and ability to continue their search for a better future that make their stories poignant and uniquely human. The artists in our societies often try to conceptualize what the future might look like. Architects, in particular, offer us a new world, which we can walk into, explore and inhabit.

Inhabiting a Utopian space, whether a public park, a house, an apartment complex or a plan for a new city is a bold experiment. The shift in physical space from the past to the future gives us hope for spaces of Arcadia—a world in which we can be free from the rules of society. Architecture, as an artistic medium, is also particularly prone to calcification and decline. The moment it is completed and inhabited, its flaws begin to emerge—its shortcomings come to the surface.

As the most ambitious, social and costly artistic genre, architecture and its cousin urban planning are particularly prone to patterns of compromise. The initial vision—intentions—of the artists is soon in conflict with material costs, construction codes, city bylaws and the needs of the client. The ambition of the project is in a direct and tense relationship with the level of compromise needed for its completion. This cycle is repeated in every project—however modest or grand. Architecture, itself, more so than any other art form is the embodiment of Utopian intentions—the hope for a better future. As a social art form, it relies on a series of collaborations for its existence—between the artist and client, the client and the city, the city and the larger social order. This pattern of interdependence rotates through each project as an initial idea is formulated and ultimately actualized in the physical, built environment.

The seven essays in this collection illuminate this cyclical process by following the development plan and ultimate implementation of a diverse group of projects. Each project shares a desire for a Utopian world within

the confines of social mores whose disruption always comes at a cost. Gender relations emerge as a constant social construct that is engaged and challenged through the greater Utopian intensions. Secondarily, the needs of the individual in opposition to the collective are foregrounded as the dynamic core of architectural innovation—a medium that inhabits a continuous sequence of ambition and compromise.

Each chapter begins with an introduction of a particular Utopian concept or intent. The body of the chapter focuses on the practical implementation of the concept. The conclusion follows the decline and Dystopian aftermath of the project. The structure of the chapters mimics the basic characteristics of Utopian ideals—a movement from the past to the future—with an understanding that the present is a dead zone. Utopian intentions are understood as this act of continuous transformation.

1. Arcadian Drift: London's *Vauxhall* Garden and Denbies' *Il Penseroso—a memento mori*

Vauxhall Gardens, 1750-1859, situated along the Thames in Kennington, was a Utopian pleasure park that offered the illusion of luxury and privilege to a broad spectrum of London society. **Chapter One** describes the eye-catching virtual showpieces made possible by the innovative gas lighting of walks creating a nocturnal fantasy world. Its phantasmagoria alluded to a virtual, proto-cinematic experience that transported ordinary citizens to a world of aristocratic privilege. The visual signifiers of pleasure were foregrounded through classical references as well as nods to modern technology. In tandem with Vauxhall, Jonathan Tyers (1702-1767), the parks proprietor commissioned a private Dystopian park that he called *Il Penseroso—a memento mori* situated on his estate near Dorking, Denbies—about 30 miles from Kennington. This companion park was inspired by the poems of John Milton (1608-1674) and emphasized the tension between public Utopian pleasures and private Dystopian melancholy. Looking nostalgically to past literary models, Milton's writings became a central inspiration to the companion gardens. In 1645 Milton published a folio of verses, in which *Il Penseroso and L'Allegro* were presented as companion poems that are

> unavoidably locked in a condition of textual self-consciousness where, no matter how hard each tries to extricate itself from the embrace of the other, neither can stop thinking and dreaming about its companion.[1]

2. Glass Haven: The Social Life of Greenhouses

Victorian-era greenhouses, such as Kew Garden's Palm House and the San Francisco Conservatory of Flowers, were spaces of sensory diversions and the healing properties of sunshine. Encased in a glass skin, elaborate buildings, such as those designed by Joseph Paxton (1803-1865), protected tender plants from the elements while also offering themselves up as therapeutic spaces for the visitors who saw in their expansive windows a kind of public sanatoria that relieved city dwellers from the stresses of urban life. **Chapter Two** examines the translucent effects of large sheets of glass which made it possible to open up dark, musty interior rooms into more liberated and healthy architectural expanses. The use of public spaces for private needs is noted by Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) who wrote that

> for the private citizen, for the first time the living space became distinguished from the place of work … From this sprang the phantasmagorias of the interior … The collector dreamed that he was in a world which was not only far off in distance but also in time. From this epoch sprang the arcades and the interiors, the exhibition halls and the dioramas … residues of a dream world.[2]

3. Primeval Forest: Mid-century Modernist Architecture in Brazil

In the 1920s, modernist architects were consumed with notions of transparency and the demise of private space. The ability to live in a glass house, exposed to the world, was both an envisaged fascination and an unobtainable futuristic fantasy. **Chapter Three** discusses how this visual clarity offered a physical manifestation of the personal liberation that many were striving for in the interwar years. German architect Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969) most prominently explored the multiple dimensions of architectural clarity in the 1929 *Barcelona Pavilion* and his 1950 *Farnsworth House*. By mid-century, Miesian transparency had begun to slip away from its former interest in optical clarity and personal liberation. For Italian-born architect Lina Bo Bardi (1914-1992), a second-generation modernist, transparency was mixed with traditional mortar and concrete privacy in order to achieve a more discrete and perhaps poetic form. In 2003 Contemporary Italian artist Luisa Lambri (b. 1969) captured Bo Bardi's *Casa de Vitro* (Glass House) outside Sao Paolo, Brazil in a series of large-scale laserchrome photographs. In these images of the *Glass House*, Lambri reconciles and unites Bo Bardi's interior and exterior, traditional and innovative, and private and public aspects. When seen as a

whole, Lambri's interpretation of the home suggests a layered, mnemonic alternative to the visual minimalism of earlier modernist designs.

4. Floating Elysium: Counter-culture Islands

The possibility of an unencumbered life on a deserted island has been a stronghold of our collective imagination for hundreds of years. The ability to create a sovereign nation on a patch of land is integral to our sense of the possibilities of a better world. From the early literary references found in the writings of Jules Verne, Hugh Lofting and C. S. Lewis to the architectural melding of technology and nature posited by Buckminster Fuller and Shoji Sadao, there has been a sense that through design individuals could imagine a separate, self-sustaining island for themselves and other members of their tribe. Since the counterculture movements of the 1960s, artists, engineers, architects and other futurists have attempted to realize island countries and city-states that were sovereign nations—physically and legally exempt from the broader social structure. Swept along by the emerging counterculture movement, these experiments in island living ranged from Giorgio Rosa's *Republic of Rose Island* to futuristic designs by Fuller and Sadao for the *Tetrahedron* and later *Triton City*—grand plans for lives of sovereignty, mobility and self-determination discussed in **Chapter Four**. Trained architects and designers challenging the assumptions of their discipline, and people from outside the field who were interested in creating alternative lifestyles initiated the projects. "It is this Utopic impulse that gives the counterculture [and its design projects] its radical edge and avant-garde position."[3]

5. Staging Dreamland: Case Study Homes and Suburban Subdivisions

Between 1945 and 1966, *Arts and Architecture* magazine commissioned dozens of modern architects to design technologically efficient homes for postwar Americans. The project addressed the need for affordable housing while also showcasing the latest in American technological ingenuity. Most of the realized projects, which were actually quite expensive, were in southern California and embraced the mild climate with transparent glass walls, lush gardens and views of the Pacific Ocean. The completed homes, such as *Case Study #8 (The Eames House, 1950)* in Pacific Palisades and *Case Study #22 (The Stahl House, 1960)* in Los Angeles, were staged, photographed and filmed as models for a new Utopian lifestyle. The home of Charles (1907-1978) and Ray Eames (1912-1988) constructed from industrial materials, is an actualized Utopian paradise that embraces the

latest technology inside the house as well as the spectacular coastal view from Pacific Palisades. The Eames' own film about their Case Study #8 house, *Home: After Five Years of Living (1955)*, was created using fast cutting—a rapid-fire technique that relies on the viewer's optical ability to process images of nature and urban spaces—a proto-digital film experience. Architect Pierre Koenig's (1925-2004) Case Study House #22, situated at 1635 Woods Drive in Los Angeles, was a family home for C. H. Buck Stahl a former football player, his wife Carlotta and their three children. CSH 22 was the Utopian backdrop for the 1962 film *Smog* by Italian director Franco Rossi (1919-2000). Both *Home: After Five Years of Living* and *Smog*, discussed in **Chapter Five**, focus on the private home as an emerging Utopian dreamscape held together with plate glass, steel and spectacular views of Los Angeles and the Pacific Ocean.

6. Gimme Shelter: The 1920s *machine-à-habiter* and 21st Century Shelter Art

In 1923, Le Corbusier published *Vers un Architecture*, a book that extolled the symbiotic relationship between modern man and machine. The book, translated into English in 1927 as *Towards a New Architecture*, has remained an influential cornerstone of architectural theory. From the 1920s until today, architects and visual artists have attempted to capture the essence of the *machine-à-habiter* in their own designs. One of the quintessential machine homes has been the modern trailer, discussed in **Chapter Six**, which has gone from a checkered history in the 1930s and 1940s to a re-emergence in the 1990s as creative fodder for Krzysztof Wodiczko (b. 1943), Andrea Zittel (b. 1965), Winfried Baumann (b. 1956) and other contemporary artists. These artists designed small-scale modular housing that formed the basis for the current tiny house movement. The machine home of the 20th century has created the foundation for 21st century tiny house living communities and hacker houses that attempt to streamline day-to-day chores thus making time for creative work and collaborative entrepreneurship.

7. Tracing Shangri-La: From New Babylon to Black Rock City

Le Corbusier's grand plan for the *Ville Radieuse* (the Radiating City) began in 1924 as a social as well as architectural plan. Working within the confines of Syndicalism (a form of socialism) he designed several iterations of the ideal city, a Utopian urban plan that was intended to create cooperative government structure as well as technologically progressive

and affordable housing for city dwellers. The plans for the Radiating City were based loosely on the human body while his earlier *Ville Contemporaine* had a radiating design that emerged from a central core. Constant Nieuwenhuys' (1920-2005) plans for New Babylon spanned from 1956 to 1974 and included a series of transformable structures as well as constantly changing urban plans allowing for an environment for ultimate freedom of movement. The melding of Le Corbusier and Constant's contrasting ideas can be seen in Black Rock City—a temporary city formed annually at the Burning Man festival in the desert of Nevada. The *ad hoc* metropolis, discussed in **Chapter Seven**, includes a city plan, laws, sanitation, public safety and emergency system. As an intentional Utopian community, it functions to create a social order and provide a structure for its inhabitants. Unlike earlier precedents, this Utopian experiment is short-lived and only materializes for one week annually before being dismantled. Black Rock City's ability to appear and disappear provides a unique response to the waning possibilities of Utopian structures.

Ultimately Utopian architecture, in all its expanding forms, mediates between public and private space in a daily ritual of hide and seek. While offering individuals a greater amount of autonomy and personal agency, modern design can also leave them vulnerable. The ability to successfully inhabit the space between isolation and exposure, and the private individual and the collective group, is a distinctly modern skill and one that ultimately bridges and redefines the interdependent states of Utopia and Dystopia—order and chaos.

Notes

[1] Finch, Casey and Peter Bowen. "The Solitary Companionship of *L'Allegro and Il Penseroso," Milton Studies* 26 (1990), 5.
[2] Walter Benjamin. *Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century* (Berne, Switzerland, 1835) quoted in John Hix, *The Glasshouse* (New York: Phaidon, 1996), 74.
[3] Andrew Blauvelt. *Hippie Modernism: The Struggle for Utopia* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2015), 12.

CHAPTER ONE

ARCADIAN DRIFT: LONDON'S *VAUXHALL* GARDEN AND DENBIES' *IL PENSEROSO*—A *MEMENTO MORI*

> They cultivate their gardens with great care, so that they have both 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.
> —Thomas More, *Utopia*[1]

Public parks and private gardens have long held an indispensable position within the collective imagination. Public parks promise a democratic paradise—a space for ordinary citizens to commune with nature. As esthetic spaces they display good taste, civilized behavior and the triumph of order over nature. Private gardens offer solitude while putting status and good taste on display for the eyes of watchful neighbors. Both parks and gardens operated as staging areas for Utopian intentions—malleable spaces that sustain the changing desires of the individual and the collective.

Vauxhall Gardens, situated along the Thames in Kennington, was a twelve-acre riverside replica of a luxurious island paradise. For over 100 years, 1750-1859, eye-catching virtual showpieces were made possible by the extensive gas lighting of walks. Its nocturnal spectacles alluded to a virtual, proto-cinematic experience that transported ordinary citizens to a world of fantasy and aristocratic privilege. The visual signifiers of pleasure were foregrounded through classical references as well as nods to modern technology. References to the art of the past were deliberate and a way of easing into technological advances while retaining an air of nostalgia. Through artificial illumination pleasure gardens allowed visitors to experience a virtual Utopia that, while acknowledging archaic markers, was also completely modern in its approach to individual agency. As a public space illuminated by thousands of gas lamps, Vauxhall was able to create light after dark—a space of liberation within the confines of a

restricted social structure. A series of promenades offered a type of *tableau vivant* spectacle that was once possible only within aristocratic social circles. As a modern park built upon progressive, technological advances, it provided an arena for the shifting social status of the emerging middle class.

In tandem with Vauxhall, Jonathan Tyers (1702-1767), the park's proprietor commissioned a private Dystopian park that he called *Il Penseroso*—a *memento mori* situated on his estate near Dorking, Denbies—about 30 miles from Kennington. The park was inspired by the poems of John Milton (1608-1674) and emphasized the tension between public pleasure and private melancholy. Looking nostalgically to past literary models, Milton's writings became a central inspiration to many 18th century Londoners. In 1645 Milton published a folio of verses, *The Poems of Mr. John Milton, both English and Latin*, in which *Il Penseroso* and *L'Allegro* were presented as companion poems that are

> unavoidably locked in a condition of textual self-consciousness where, no matter how hard each tries to extricate itself from the embrace of the other, neither can stop thinking and dreaming about its companion.[2]

Written some one hundred years earlier in couplets of iambic tetrameter, the pieces introduce in lines 11-16 the Goddess of Melancholy who is dressed in black:

But hair thou Goddess, sage and holy
Hail divinest Melancholy
Whose Saintly visage is too bright
To hit the Sense of human sight:
And therefore to our weaker view,
O'er laid with black, staid Wisdom's hue.

Milton also clarifies, in lines 168-176, the inevitability of aging and the desirability of the solitary life of the hermit.

And many at last my weary age
Find out the peaceful hermitage
The Hairy Gown and Mossy Cell,
Where I may sit and rightly spell
Of every Star that Heav'n doth shew,
And every Herb that sips the dew;
Till old experience do attain
To something like prophetic strain,
These pleasures Melancholy give
And I with thee will choose to live.

This balance of dark and light, joy and melancholy, life and death, evidenced in Tyers' private garden appears as a major theme within Vauxhall itself. Seen as companion pieces, the two gardens balance Utopian intentions with Dystopian ruins.

While the Denbies park was private and landlocked, Vauxhall was public and accessible by boat from London to Kennington on the south bank of the Thames. Even though the distance between London and Kennington was not great, visiting Vauxhall was designed to simulate a voyage to a faraway Utopian island paradise. Taking cues from Thomas More (1478-1535), Margaret Cavendish's 1666 *The Description of a New World, Called The Blazing World* and later 18th century novels by Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) and Daniel Defoe (1660-1731), the park's experience was considered an immersive and transformative experience—a movement from the world of the everyday to the land of the enchanted—from water to land. The sequence of events invoked the magical voyages of the past where ship-wrecked voyagers hit dry land finding

> the island of *Utopia* is in the middle two hundred miles broad and holds almost at the same breadth over a great part of it; but it grows narrower towards both ends … its coast fortified by nature and art.[3]

Cavendish (1623-1673) constructed the *Blazing World* as

> several islands of unequal distance from each other, which in most parts were pleasant, healthful, rich and fruitful, as nature could make them . . . secure from all foreign invasions, by reason there was but one way to enter.[4]

Upon disembarking the boat and entering Vauxhall from the Thames, the Georgian-era visitors suspended belief in order to enter Utopia—participating as actors within their own pseudo aristocratic fantasy world. The watery access was a seminal prelude to the night's experiences. It was also a reference, in miniature, to the great sea adventures of antiquity—a kind of modern *Odyssey*. "The necessity of a short trip by boat increased the feeling of having put aside the cares of work, and given the seeker of amusement a strong impression of being away on holiday."[5]

> The river [as a transitional space from the physical to the virtual] … was … in itself a pleasure haunt, and people took boats on it as much for the mere enjoyment of floating on its surface, as from necessity caused by the scarcity of bridges.[6]

The physical separation of the pleasure gardens from the rest of the urban space was significant and created the aura of social and economic exclusivity—a facsimile of an elite lifestyle.

Unlike the public streets of London, these nocturnal gardens were primarily orchestrated, artificially illuminated environments that allowed both sexes to dress up, eat, drink and partake in a provisional *fête galante* while retaining their personal sense of agency as modern, urban citizens. The stratified visitors, men and women of various social classes, enjoyed newly acquired free time through industrial advancements, allowing for social experiences that were previously only in the domain of the wealthy. Even "servants and apprentices, who would have had room and board included in their wages, might have been able to spend time and money at Vauxhall with [some] frequency."[7] Leisure time became a predictable part of modern life allowing for the orchestrating of pleasurable activities.

Vauxhall was bisected and defined by a grand promenade that divided the center of the garden and

> ran to the eastern boundary from the entrance and was the main east-west avenue, measuring over seven hundred feet in length … The Centre Cross Walk, the principal north-south avenue was over five hundred; this gave an area of nearly eleven acres, with the central Grove, the main gathering place, extending to over an acre.[8]

The pleasure garden *allées* were replicas of the grand walkways in public parks such as the Tuileries in Paris.

> We may count daily walks in a public place, new demeanors, new gender relationships, conspicuous consumption of clothes and fashion development, new forms of sociability and the development of newsmongers and public opinions among the numerous cultural transformations of city life … Emergent practices were gleefully pursued without any other purpose than enjoying the pleasure of unfettered social encounters. The gardens had not been designed to encourage free exploration or innovations in public life, they simply made it possible and it gave rise to unheard of collective behaviors.[9]

As reproductions, it was hoped that the pleasure garden *allées* would impart some of the freedom and sophistication of the Parisian parks onto their London grounds. This transference was closely aligned with the Georgian Era—a time period during which considerable social change was occurring on a regular basis. It is also one of the markers of the continuous melding of French and British cultural references.

Vauxhall's walks were meticulously designed wayfinding paths. According to an account from 1757,

> the principal gravel walk is planned on each side with very lofty trees, which form a fine vista; it leads from the great gate, and is terminated by a landscape of the country, a beautiful lawn of meadow ground, and a grand Gothic obelisk. On the right hand of this walk, a little after entering the gardens, is a square, which, from the number of trees planted in it, is called *The Grove* ... At some distance do several noble vistas of tall trees, where the spaces between each are filled up with neat hedges; and within are planted a variety of flowers and sweet smelling shrubs. Some of these walks terminate in views of ruins; others of them are adorned with painted representations of triumphal arches … When it grows dark, the garden near the orchestra is illuminated, almost in an instant, with about 1500 glass lamps, which glitter among the trees and render it exceedingly light and brilliant.[10]

In contrast to the grand promenade, Vauxhall's dark walks were unlit and unregulated paths—discrete, narrower spaces that allowed for a level of liberation from the social mores of the time. These mysterious promenades were unregulated and located at the far ends of the gardens and remained crowd favorites for decades as they redefined what was possible within public spaces. The tension and excitement bisecting the illuminated and dark areas are a recurring theme within the pleasure gardens. It is that space between acceptable, proper behavior and illicit desire that contributes to the general appeal of the parks. The theme of frivolous impermanence, night, summer and artificial gas lights can be seen in the

> shady groves and most delightful walks, illuminated by above one thousand lamps, so disposed that they all take fire together, almost as quick as lightning, and dart such a sudden blaze as is perfectly surprising.[11]

As public spaces they provided opportunities for young lovers to meet, for extramarital affairs, for liaisons with prostitutes and for casual exchanges among strangers who were interested in exploring taboo sexual exchanges. These imposing arteries mapped out the topography of the park for the strolling crowds that enjoyed the aura of scopophilic play.

> With play there is always the possibility of wildness. A living city will provide places to play and wildness that even encourage their spontaneous eruption.[12]

> From the official point of view, there are acceptable ways of letting off steam such as parades on certain calendar days, and unacceptable ones such as drinking, whoring and ultimately, thieving, murdering and rioting.[13]

The Vauxhall experience was rooted in the tradition of walking, being a pedestrian, traveling afoot and engaging in an early form of *flânerie*. As proto-*flâneurs* they utilized the park as a spectatorial space trained on enhancing the visual experiences of its visitors. Being viewers, as well as participants, the 18th century visitors could expect to develop observational skills that would be suited to modern life in the centuries to come. The act of walking was also linked to personal agency. The walkers could control their direction and speed—taking it upon themselves to make conscious choices and control their observational abilities.

The long walks and alleys traversed the park forming highly charged physical and psychological promenades that transported Londoners from the congested real-world metropolis to the imaginary sanctuary of the urban park. London streets during the mid 18th century were turbulent and overcrowded—

> a pageant of colors and smells and squalor. All life was lived there. The fashionable people, the *bon ton* and the expensive courtesans paraded in the royal parks and in the Mall; in the teeming, claustrophobic courts and stinking alleys, the capital's poor and huddled masses bickered and sweated and loved and drank to excess, living out their lives without hope or dignity in the common glare in their tinderbox ghettos.[14]

By slowing down and walking through the park, rather than riding in a carriage, visitors could adjust their urban experience and take in the various spectatorial delights at a self-guided pace. The relaxed gait became the barometer for the evening's entertainment and a vehicle for personal volition. It also marked the existence of leisure time—a by-product of the industrial revolution. As walkers, Vauxhall visitors were able to sharpen their ocular skills by focusing on the act of seeing and being seen. The park, taken in at the pace of a strolling visitor enlivened Vauxhall and gave it an almost cinematic quality. Each walking path was a filmic scene within a shifting *tableau vivant*—a social exchange between men and women, friends and strangers.

Perambulation in Vauxhall evolved from wayfinding to a form of virtual travel. Visitors could psychologically transport themselves to an imaginary island, a different country and social class. Interest in travel evidenced in early literature was enhanced by new inventions that opened

up imaginary lands. The walks went by architectural follies that represented China, Turkey and the Grand Tour lifestyle of the aristocracy. The resemblance to an early theme park is evident in the desire to entertain and feed the imagination of the middle class. Like Disneyland, Coney Island and many other 20th-century theme parks, there is a quality of transference that is at the root of the collective experience. The individual is transported into a different time and place by engaging in the communal act of suspended belief.

Works of art by Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665) including *Bacchanal before the Statue of Pan* from 1631-1633 and *The Feast of Pan* captured by Claude Gillot (1673-1722) influenced the overall design of modern parks resulting in a technological pleasure garden inspired by the classical past. This duality is a recurring theme that allows guests to occupy various spaces simultaneously.

> The bacchanals of antiquity took place in a certain spot in Attica, where the temple of Bacchus stood … The High Priest of Bacchus was widely respected and was given the primary place in the ceremonies … When they performed their celebration, they ran about at night dressed in tiger or leopard skins, some wildly clutching candles or burning torches; others, who were crowned with grapevines and ivy, holding a thyrsus, or wand decorated with grape leaves and ivy. They all produced horrible cries and were accompanied by musicians who played cymbals, horns and drums. The men walked along quietly, dressed as satyrs … some mounted on asses, and others who led goats to sacrifice.[15]

The virtual *bacchanal* as a Vauxhall experience offered the possibility of unbridled sexual and social exchanges—something that was highly restricted during daily London routines.

The pleasure garden, functioning as a public stage, allowed for the revolutionary enactment and projection of private desire in a democratized and virtual version of love gardens by Antoine Watteau (1684-1721).

> Aristocrats enjoying the gentle lure of love relax in the same setting as the actors: trees and lawns, soft contoured, subdued in color, undisturbed by winds and indiscreet sunshine have drawn them away from their salon to a music party, a garden party, a Venetian fete.[16]

Watteau's utilization of the *fête galante* (or courtship party) as a genre, suggested a life free of worries, work and religious moralizing. His *Embarkation for the Island of Cythera*, as a seminal work within the genre, captures a moment in the aristocratic imagination. It also creates a distinct link between the classical *bacchanals* and the *fête galante* through

the panther hide and its association to the god Bacchus. The composition captures a group of lovers on their way to the island of Venus—a sacred, pagan space of freedom and love.

> Identifying Cythera as a timeless symbol of transcendental beauty, explains the death of Adonis, the mortal lover of Venus, as a reflection on the tragic fragility of art in a world of human insensitivity.[17]

This pagan reference clarifies that

> the myth of Cythera stands not for a one-time journey but for a continual process. If the ship represents the embarkation of a new society under the sign of Venus, Cythera the destination, and love the means, the voyage occurs whenever an audience—or by extension a society—is transported across the sea of desire to a Utopia of love, pleasure, peace and freedom.[18]

"The very theme of the *fête galante* is paradoxical … décor, gestures and characters belong simultaneously to an imaginary and an existing world." [19] Like Cythera, Vauxhall, accessible only by water, was a theatrical space delineated by pleasure and a perimeter within which new forms of social activities could be explored. "Getting to and from the establishment was the first essential step in the pleasure garden experience."[20] Vauxhall, tapping into the deep reservoir of classical and aristocratic references, created a new type of public space—based on free thought and a rebellion against societal norms and church restrictions.

The Georgian pleasure garden took cues from painterly representations of the *bacchanal* and *fête galante* and brought them into the setting of a modern, public park. By doing so, they made it possible to move from the virtual to the physical world. "Class distinctions were forgotten when there was no need for them to be remembered, and flirtations were an accepted part of the evening's entertainment."[21] Within the contained environment of the pleasure gardens it was possible for the middle class to enjoy new and liberating forms of entertainment. Likewise, the middle class was able to access some of the pagan festivals that had long been embraced by the wealthy but invisible to the lower ranks.

> During the mid 1700s, a change began to take place between the social classes, stripping the aristocracy of their role as Britain's foremost … trendsetters. The economy was changing … and an industrial environment, which often included factories and workers, was the new-found key to the financial success of the self-made [middle-class].[22]

Emerging from the shadow of Paris, London came into its own as a global capital and a site for indigenous cultural contributions.

> As with the boulevards in seventeenth and eighteenth century Paris, the graveled walks of the suburban pleasure garden created a new kind of movement, which could not be indulged in either the city or the countryside.[23]

Upward mobility was possible during the mid-eighteenth century and with it came a growing appetite for all things aristocratic and fantastic. Replicating the experiences in paintings such as *Lovers in a Park*, 1758 by François Boucher (1703-1770) became a milestone for the mercantile class whose income was growing as a result of technological advancements.

Part of the appeal of Vauxhall was certainly its touch of provocative flirtation. As in the garden of Arcadia, Pan contributed to the mischievous, electrified spaces with an element of bawdy sexuality and mirth. This quality of spontaneous gaiety contributed to the complex psychosocial spaces of the park. They could indulge in an artificial past that included allusion to the Greeks and to the mythology of the classical world. The gods and goddesses of the ancients allowed a level of freedom that fed the imagination of the visitors in an unparalleled fashion.

> The lofty trees of the Lover's Walk formed a [living] canopy in which the nightingales … the blackbirds, and the thrushes were wont to build. The [mysterious] dark walks provided inspiration to writers who were intrigued by their provocative nature.[24]

British poets were stirred by Vauxhall's walks and used the nightly strolls as fodder for their work. John Keats (1795-1821) wrote a sonnet that captured the park's illusive amorous moments: *To A Lady Seen For A Few Moments At Vauxhall.*

Time's sea hath been five years at its slow ebb,
Long hours have to and fro let creep the sand,
Since I was tangled in thy beauty's web,
And snared by the ungloving of thine hand.
And yet I never look on midnight sky,
But I behold thine eyes' well memory'd light;
I cannot look upon the rose's dye,
But to thy cheek my soul doth take its flight.
I cannot look on any budding flower,
But my fond ear, in fancy at thy lips

And hearkening for a love-sound, doth devour
Its sweets in the wrong sense:
Thou dost eclipse
Every delight with sweet remembering,
And grief unto my darling joys dost bring.

William Wordsworth (1770-1850), animated by the park, wrote:

Vauxhall! I then had heard
Of your green groves, and wilderness of lamps
Dimming the stars and fireworks magical,
The gorgeous ladies, under splendid domes,
Floating in dance, or warbling high in the air
The songs of the spirits![25]

The parks enjoyed a dual identity as places of innocent fun as well as bawdy sexual exploits throughout their existence. This tension between what is moral and what is shadowy was one of the draws for the large crowds and it was also a selling point for the proprietors who saw economic advantages to offering this form of social interaction. It had a broad appeal, which was financially appealing and also allowed for a semi-controlled environment within which to explore new forms of personal exchange. As the proprietor, Tyers spent considerable effort and capital in curating the illuminated walks and alleys of Vauxhall garden so as to optimize its Utopian qualities. In so doing, he was able to reinforce the identity of the park as a space offering ever-increasing social and physical mobility. The spaces of modernity were becoming unhinged from the class restrictions of the aristocratic past and were in turn opening the door to a greater variety of city dwellers with their own, unique urban experiences. The physical space of the park was akin to the literary adventures found in the writings of Swift. Occupying the spaces of Vauxhall offered a fantasy world grounded in imaginary spaces and vast possibilities of a new world.

Tyers' private garden named, aptly, *Il Penseroso*—a *memento mori* was only to be visited on Sundays (while Vauxhall was closed). In many ways, this private, masterfully curated garden was intended as the companion space for Vauxhall. It was the Dystopian response to Vauxhall's Utopian call. In 1734, Tyers purchased a plot of land in Denbies near Dorking in the Surrey Hills with the proceeds from Vauxhall. The land became a haven for Tyers who at the age of 33 began planning the space. This companion garden was designed with