Visions of utopia – some hopeful, others fearful – have become increasingly prevalent in recent times. This groundbreaking, timely book examines expressions of the utopian imagination with a focus on the pressing challenge of how to inhabit a climate-changed world. Forms of social dreaming are tracked across two domains: political theory and speculative fiction. The analysis aims to both uncover the key utopian and dystopian tendencies in contemporary debates around the Anthropocene as well as to develop a political theory of radical transformation that avoids not only debilitating fatalism but also wishful thinking. This book juxtaposes theoretical interventions, from Bruno Latour to the members of the Dark Mountain collective, with fantasy and science fiction texts by N. K. Jemisin, Kim Stanley Robinson and Margaret Atwood, debating viable futures for a world that will look and feel very different from the one we live in right now.

Mathias Thaler teaches political theory at the University of Edinburgh.
NO OTHER PLANET

Utopian Visions for a Climate-Changed World

Mathias Thaler
University of Edinburgh
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Acknowledgements

Apparently, it was not Isaac Newton who first observed that, whenever we strive to make intellectual progress, we cannot but stand on the shoulders of giants; it was Bernard of Chartres or perhaps William of Conches in the twelfth century.\(^1\) No matter its true origins, the dictum always struck me as only partially compelling. For, while all scholarly work, in the humanities and social sciences at least, involves an incessant conversation with the past, the plan to climb on someone’s back just to see a bit better, even if they are long gone and you prove to be a lightweight, does seem rather self-serving.\(^2\)

This is why I prefer another image to account for the debts accrued in the process of writing this book: that of moving forward, together with others, in the comradely pursuit of a shared intellectual passion. Learning with and from a great many colleagues made this endeavour possible. It is a tribute to their stature, and to the solidary bonds between us, that none of them ever made me feel small.

Duncan Bell, Davina Cooper, Liz Cripps, Toby Kelly, Tony Lang, Vassilios Paipais, Paul Raekstad and Steve Yearley have commented on various chapters and offered incisive feedback. A panel at the University of Edinburgh including Elizabeth Bomberg, Andy Hom and Neil Walker steered an early draft in the right direction at a critical juncture. My home political theory crowd – Philip Cook, Liz Cripps, Mihaela Mihai

\(^1\) Merton, *On the Shoulders of Giants*; Jeaneau, “Nani gigantum humeris insidentes.”

\(^2\) Moreover, who is to say that things could not turn awry, with the giants suddenly deciding it was now their time to crush our dwarfish bodies? On this point, see: Eco, *On the Shoulders of Giants*, chap. 1.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

and Kieran Oberman – as well as the PhD and postdoc community (in particular Camilo Ardila Arévalo, Benedikt Büchel, Louis Fletcher, Maša Mrovlje, Lukas Slothuus and Gíslodi Vogler) and other colleagues across the School of Social and Political Science (especially Jamie Allinson, Janet Carsten, Claire Duncanson, Oliver Escobar, Andrew Neal, Nicola Perugini and Jonathan Spencer) have nurtured and stimulated my curiosity during the research phase for this book. A huge thanks to all of them.

While I was working on this project, Elizabeth Bomberg, Luke March and Wilfried Swenden led the Politics and International Relations Department and kindly supported me in the pursuit of my interests. Moreover, for invaluable mentorship over many years, I wish to thank Rainer Bauböck, Christina Boswell, Alessandro Ferrara, Kim Hutchings and Tony Lang.

Several stints away from my usual workplace shaped my thinking about the topic of utopianism. In 2019, on a sabbatical leave granted by the University of Edinburgh, I spent valuable time at Edinburgh’s Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities, the Institute of Philosophy (RIPPLE) at KU Leuven and at the University of Sydney’s Social Sciences and Humanities Advanced Research Centre. I am grateful to my hosts, Steve Yearley, Tim Heyssse, Helder De Schutter and Dany Celermajer, for their hospitality, curiosity and financial support.

I am also thankful to the wider group of scholars leading and orbiting around Sydney’s Environment Institute – Dany Celermajer, David Schlosberg, Lauren Rickards, Makere Stewart-Harawira, Petra Tschakert, Blanche Verlie and Christine Winter – for introducing me to their scholarship around multispecies justice. I have given talks in Cambridge, Leiden, Leuven, Glasgow, Norwich, Oxford, Sydney, Vienna and York and am grateful to the audiences for their helpful comments.

My biggest debt, however, is to Mihaela Mihai, with whom I have mulled over every single idea in this book at least once. It is hard for me to express in words how endlessly rewarding it is to be on the receiving end of her patience, acumen and care.

The final stage of writing this book would not have been possible without funding from the Leverhulme Trust, through a Research Fellowship (RF-2020-445). At Cambridge University Press (CUP), I owe
gratitude first and foremost to Robert Dreesen, who expressed confidence in the project from the start. The manuscript benefitted from the substantial and constructive feedback provided by CUP’s two anonymous referees. During the production phase, I wish to thank Catherine Rae for copy-editing the book, Erika Walsh for helping me with the publicizing materials and Jane Bowbrick, Jessica Norman and Niranjana Harikrishnan for coordinating the whole process.

Last but not least, special thanks are due to Ahmet Öğüt for granting me permission to use an image of his installation *The Castle of Vooruit* as the book’s cover. Öğüt’s project, originally exhibited in 2012, demonstrates with great acuity what I want to explore in this book. The installation consists of a balloon hovering high in the sky above Ghent, with the Vooruit building, a beacon of the Belgian working-class movement, levitating on top of a giant rock formation. Öğüt’s artwork references René Magritte’s surrealist painting *Le Chateau des Pyrénées* (1961), while supplanting the old castle with the replica of a concrete building that stores the social memory of past struggles for freedom and emancipation. Importantly, the dream behind the Vooruit cooperative still remains alive today, more than 100 years after it was inaugurated, in the form of a vibrant cultural centre that caters to the citizens of Ghent.

Öğüt’s decision to transpose this iconic architecture onto a floating mountain reflects the profoundly paradoxical nature of the utopian imagination: On the one hand, the audience experiences the installation as agile and nimble, lighter than air in fact, so that even the most compact structures, such as rocks and castles, appear to be quickly carried away with grace and joy. Call this its future-oriented dimension. On the other hand, upon looking more closely, Öğüt prompts us to redirect our gaze from the bright sky to the rough ground beneath it and interrogate what it actually represents: a building with a tortuous history that tells of both progress and decay; of a time in the interwar period when workers could escape the misery of their impoverished lives; and of a period when the Nazi occupiers transformed the magnificent Festivities Hall into a mundane restaurant. Through this process, the artwork’s focus on the past and the present is revealed. Just as when the utopian imagination is engaged, *The Castle of Vooruit* thus summons us to
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envisage both aspects in parallel – the fantastical weightlessness of a floating mountain and the compact robustness of the built environment – in a sort of double vision that might at first seem rather disconcerting, but turns out to be highly instructive. It is this peculiar way of seeing the world, and our place within it, that my book hopes to examine as well.