The Forms of Utopia: Paradox, Labyrinth, and Infinity since the Renaissance
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Friday, March 1st, 2024
The Humanities Center
602 Cathedral of Learning

11:30am - 1pm: Seminar with pre-circulated paper, “Margaret Cavendish, Infinity, and The Blazing World.” Email benparris@pitt.edu for the paper.

4pm - 6pm: Talk on Thomas More’s Utopia, “The Liar’s Paradox and the Form of Utopia.”

If I lie and I say that I am lying, am I lying or telling the truth? This ancient riddle, the Liar’s Paradox, is at the heart of Thomas More’s Utopia (1516). Because the Liar’s Paradox refers to itself while also negating the truth of its own proposition, it generates an unresolvable logical contradiction.

This essay recovers how scholastic logicians and modern mathematicians have grappled with the Liar riddle, which provides a compact formula for capturing infinity. Drawing on these formalizations, I argue that that Utopia uses the abstract techniques of logic and mathematics to inscribe an autonomous artificial system. This abstract formalization comprises Utopia’s radical political potential: its ability to convert enclosure into a method of infinite expansion.

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