

Refectories and Dining Rooms as “Social Structural Joints”:

On Space, Gender and Class in
Ursula K. Le Guin’s *The Dispossessed*

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Introduction

In “Restaurants, fields, markets, and feasts: Food and culture in semi-public spaces” (2016), Clare A. Sammells and Edmund Searles state that: “One can eat alone, but one can never truly eat in a way or in a place that is devoid of public meanings. It has long been clear that what, how, and with whom one eats indicates social status and economic class” (129). As members and collaborators of ALIMENTOPIA / Utopian Foodways Project, we have explored the social, political and economic implications that foodways have in shaping societies. It is therefore in the framework of this project that we, as researchers of different fields of Literature and Architecture, have come together and will jointly discuss primarily gender but also class dynamics, by projecting and analysing specific food-related spaces in Ursula K. Le Guin’s *The Dispossessed*.

From a multidisciplinary perspective, this chapter proposes a reading of particular spaces where meals take place in Ursula K. Le Guin’s text. This analysis will make use of two specific lenses, gender and class, to argue that these spaces can be perceived as “social structural joints”, in the sense that an “architectural structural joint”, as architect Petra Čeferin proposes, is a junction where building elements meet. Using a three-dimensional view (space, gender and class), we will analyse how food spaces can be platforms for social aggregation or segregation and reveal gender and class dynamics.

The Tectonic Structural Joint: Joining Architecture and Utopian Thinking

The intersection between architecture and utopia has a long tradition. The ideal city has been one of the most common tropes of utopian literature ever since philosophers such as Plato, More and Campanella conceived ideal societies. However, this utopian impulse of constructing ideal urban spaces has gone far beyond the theoretical projections on literary texts and drawing maps

of imaginary places. There have been numerous more-or-less successful attempts from both theorists and architects to fulfil visions of ideal communities. The industrialist José Ferreira Pinto Basto's Vista Alegre Factory (Portugal) that very much resembles Robert Owen's New Lanark (Scotland), Le Corbusier's partially built Cité Frugès (France) and Lúcio Costa's planning of Brasília (Brasil) are but a few examples. Although some projects can be perceived as more utopian than others, a transformative capacity is inherent to architecture as a whole, since the simple idealisation of a building presupposes the idea of improvement. We may even claim that architecture is the material realisation of utopian thinking. As Petra Čeferin claims, in "Architecture: Constructing Concrete Utopias" (2017),

architecture – insofar as it is practiced as a creative practice – is always, already, utopia realised. To be more precise: architecture is a utopian practice by virtue of its structural logic; that is, by the way the activity of architecture itself is structured, and by the way this activity appears and functions in the world. And if we really are interested in constructing a better world with architecture, we should insist precisely on its utopian structure, on enacting architecture in the world as a utopian, that is, creative practice (137).

Of course, architecture can also be dystopian. It may at times be a castrating force and a punishing structure of society (e.g. prisons and reformatories). However, this ambivalence only proves the social, economic, political and artistic intervention of architecture, that is at the same time contemporary and transtemporal. In other words, architecture can be a testimony to its time, a symbol of collective memory, as well as a time-transcendent structure.

The Portuguese modernist architect Fernando Távora wrote in 1962 that when we draw a dot on a piece of paper we could say that this dot organises such paper, such surface, such space, in two dimensions, its position being defined by two entities (x, y), in relation to a specific system of coordinates. If, however, we consider such a dot standing up, away from the same piece of paper, we could say that it organises the space in three dimensions (x, y, z), in relation to a specific system of coordinates. There is nevertheless a third hypothesis – that the same dot is not static but moving. So, in this case, another dimension is added t (time) to the three entities or dimensions (x, y, z) that define it; it thus becomes possible to situate the same dot in each position of its trajectory and in relation to a specific system of coordinates (1999: 11). This dot, the inceptional moment (and movement) of the architectonic project, is the perfect metaphor to illustrate and introduce the concept of the *tectonic structural joint*: the dot that joins the structural elements of a building.

Architectural or tectonic joints are the dots that connect different elements of the building in a strong secure whole. As a fundamental part of the construction, these joints have to be resilient and sturdy, otherwise the building will collapse. This pragmatist and basic system of support in building construction was first used to illustrate the poetics of architecture by Kenneth Frampton in the late 1990s and expanded more recently by Petra Čeferin. According to Frampton, architecture is the art of construction or the poetics of construction, and therefore should reject the process of trivialisation or commodification that architecture seemed to have been going

through in recent decades (see Čeferin 2017: 72). Indeed, in *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development* (1976), Manfredo Tafuri had already denounced architecture as a tool for the development of capitalism. Tafuri's text is possibly the strongest critique of modern architecture as an instrument of capital, forgetting its utopian identity as an entity for social transformation. Although we should acknowledge Tafuri's highly pessimistic view, we should also recognise that architecture, apart from some specific author architecture, seems to have been gradually (and in very general terms) reduced to what Frampton calls "a giant commodity" (see Čeferin 2017: 140). To reclaim their transformative power, architecture and architects should return to the creation and production of *architectural things* (Frampton) or *architectural objects* (Čeferin). Since architecture is an activity that is transtemporal, "anachronistic by definition" (Čeferin 2017: 141), its objects (from the simple joint to the entire structure) should be durable and timeless.

Frampton, who defines the structural joint as "the fundamental nexus around which a building comes into being, that is to say, comes to be articulated as a presence in itself" (2017: 142), considers this architectural element as "the presence of architecture" itself. As Čeferin explains, this means that in this "key architectural element around which architecture as a thing is articulated", the "*materiality of architecture as a thing is present*" (*ibidem*). By understanding Frampton's notion of the materiality of the architecture present in the joint, we will make use of the image of the tectonic joint as a symbol for specific social spaces. In this case, food-related spaces.

One of the most interesting features of architecture is the sense that the space should somehow be an extension of the human body. The architect's aim should be to articulate the users' needs with the physical/geographical conditions of the construction. It is a two-way relationship that, to be lasting and successful, should be almost organic in its adjustments. And this purpose should affect, mould and guide every type of construction, whether it is a private building or a public one. We believe that each space is a culmination of purpose, pragmatism, creativity and perception of time. Creativity is the glue that combines purpose and pragmatism in the sense that it allies the design of the building with its environment, fulfilling the intention of taking the best advantage of the space limitations but never forgetting the aesthetics of the plan. The perception of time underpins the architectural design, whether it is faithful to contemporary art, looking towards the future or a tribute to the past. In any case, it will result from the conflict between all these forces: time, space, architect, client/user and art itself. Moreover, it will be a reflection of its society, by accommodating the parameters and paradigms its *status quo* promotes or, on the contrary, by rejecting them. This applies to every space of the construction, but we find that it applies especially to common/public spaces, particularly dining and living rooms in private homes and dining rooms, refectories and canteens in public buildings. Spaces connected to food, as spaces of communion between the many users, are always somehow hybrid by converging the private and the social. Similar to the role played by the tectonic structural joint in architecture, which unites several elements of the building, these spaces assemble the dynamics of the buildings. We shall call these spaces *social structural spaces* because, when closely analysed, they reveal their users' social, cultural, and economic behaviours.

Space and food as tools to expose technologies of gender

Since the main purpose is to unveil gender and class dynamics underlined in a specific corpus, it is fundamental to understand how space and foodways, as conceptual tools, can be combined and aligned in order to expose technologies of gender.

In *Space, Place and Gender* (1994), Doreen Massey explores the way in which gender is intrinsically connected to space by exposing “the intricacy and profundity of the connection of space and place with gender and the construction of gender relations” (2). As Massey explains, these connections can work through the actual construction of real-world geographies and the cultural specificity of definitions of gender. She asserts that “geography matters to the construction of gender, and the fact of geographical variation in gender relations, for instance, is a significant element in the production and reproduction of both imaginative geographies and uneven development” (1994: 2). In fact, the way a space is planned and organised reflects its purpose to unite or separate other spaces and its users. For example, and in general terms, in architecture, the common spaces are usually larger than private ones, since they are expected to accommodate more users, and normally private spaces are smaller since they are aimed at transmitting comfort and privacy. This simplistic view of architecture, restrictive as it is, is nevertheless useful to understand social and economic dynamics. Space is planned, filled and arranged by individuals and society, taking advantage of geographic factors. However, it may also affirm, test or break cultural, social and economic restrictions. Therefore, the analysis of space involves relevant considerations concerning social order, specifically gender, since it is in the space – geographic and social space – that technologies of gender are inscribed.

Starting from Foucault’s theory of “technology of sex”, Teresa de Lauretis elaborates on the concept of gender as a complex entity that embodies several layers of meaning. As Foucault claimed regarding sex, de Lauretis argues that “gender, too, both as representation and as self-representation, is the product of various social technologies, such as cinema, and of institutionalised discourses, epistemologies, and critical practices, as well as practices of daily life” (1987: 2). We should think of gender as a product and a process of a number of social technologies, of techno-social or bio-medical apparatus, a continuous mutating entity.² As de Lauretis explains, the concept of gender is the representation of a relationship, of belonging to a group, category or class (not economic class), and it is also the construction of these relations, “thus gender assigns to one entity, say an individual, a position within a class, and therefore also a position vis-à-vis other pre-constituted classes” (*idem*: 4). This means that gender is not sex, a biological characteristic, but the representation of each individual in terms of a specific social relationship, which pre-exists the individual and is established on the conceptual and rigid structural opposition of two biological sexes: “the sex-gender system”. The sex-gender system is always intimately interconnected with political and economic factors and usually prescribes stereotypical ideas that shape the cultural conceptions of male and female, as complementary yet mutually exclusive categories. How individuals are placed in these categories constitutes within each culture a gender system, a symbolic system, which correlates sex to cultural contents, social

values and hierarchies. From this perspective, de Lauretis points out, “the cultural construction of sex into gender and the asymmetry that characterizes all gender systems cross-culturally (though each in its particular ways) are understood as ‘systematically linked to the organization of social inequality’” (*idem*, 5; Collier and Rosaldo 1981: 275). In order to investigate and identify these social (in)equalities, we should perhaps consider specific questions that combine two factors: space and gender. For instance, do people from all gender identities have access to the same spaces or not? If not, why not? Are they allowed to circulate in these spaces? Or, on the contrary, are they confined to a specific space? If so, why? Are these circumstances different from or identical to a specific society? The answers to these questions may allow for social critique and will certainly lead to other pertinent questions.

However, if we add another factor – food – to the space-gender equation, other components will become involved in the matter, raising another set of relevant questions. Do people from all genders have access to food-related spaces? Or, is there a gender-specific food-related space, for instance, a kitchen? As Sammells and Searles mention in relation to the class implications of food and eating habits, the same could be said in relation to gender. This argument is also shared by Lyman T. Sargent in “Everyday Life in Utopia: Food” (2016), in which Sargent explains how foodways reveal and denounce social, political and economic aspects of a specific society depicted in a utopian/dystopian text (25-27).

“Foodways” is, in fact, the key concept to understanding the significance of food either in literary texts or in everyday life. Julie Parsons explains that foodways usually refer to the production and distribution of food at a macro level and are used in anthropology when exploring food cultures or shared common beliefs, behaviours and practices relating to the production and consumption of food. For Parsons, however, foodways can also be considered at a micro level, by reflecting the multiplicity of ways of “doing” food that incorporate all aspects of everyday food practices, from acquiring food, growing it or shopping for it, preparing, cooking, sharing and eating, to the consumption of food media. This means that the notion of foodways also incorporates an essential aspect of an individual’s identity and cultural habitus, which are cultivated and inculcated over time. Parsons goes on to explain how foodways are “ongoing emotional, socially constructed, embodied, situated performances infused with sedimented social and personal history” (2015: 1-3). Foodways have multiple meanings and, Parsons continues, they work within three interconnecting domains:

1. on an “individual” level, through socialisation, internalisation, identity work and the construction of the self;
2. through interactional “cultural” expectations and “othering” of practices; and
3. via “institutions” that control access to resources, as well as ideologies and discourses (2).

Hence, foodways are validated, constrained and facilitated by reference to wider institutional and cultural contexts that restrain the “individual” choice, and are incorporated into many “layers of identity”, as we call them. Some of these layers of identity are gender, class, race, sexuality, nationality, ethnicity and age. These layers of identity or, if you prefer, these multiple codes, are inscribed in spaces and bodies, which reversely build and shape identities. Bodies are thus the

surface (the skin) and the space (containers of ingested food and ideas) moulded by these layers or codes, regulating the tension that can sometimes arise between them.

As Henri Lefebvre points out in *The Production of Space* (1991),

Space – my space – is not the context of which I constitute “textuality”: instead, it is first of all my body, and then it is my body’s counterpart or “other”, its mirror-image or shadow; it is the shifting intersection between that which touches, penetrates, threatens or benefits my body on the one hand, and all the other bodies on the other. (184)

As the body is the physical and metaphorical space in which the individual layers of identity are inscribed, the same could be said about specific social spaces, these “architectonic bodies” being inscribed with multiple meanings that could be perceived as a cultural practice which promotes a system of hierarchies of gendered bodies.

To understand this continuous process of overlapping these layers of significance – space, gender and food – and how they act, react and interact together, we propose analysing a few food-related spaces in Le Guin’s *The Dispossessed*, which, as hybrid social structural spaces, also function as symbols of macro entities: the Urrasti and the Anarresti societies. They are the “dots”, as perceived by Távora, through which we will examine the social, political and economic dynamics that aggregate or segregate individuals. To fully understand gender dynamics in the text, besides analysing the gender implications inscribed in architectonic bodies, we will also decode the female bodies of the main societies depicted by Le Guin, for they, too, are considered social (structural) spaces.

Food-Related Spaces in Le Guin’s The Dispossessed

There was a wall. It did not look important. [...] Where it crossed the roadway, instead of having a gate it degenerated into mere geometry, a line, an idea of boundary. But the idea was real. For seven generations there had been nothing in the world more important than that wall. Like all walls it was ambiguous, two-faced. What was inside it and what was outside it depended upon which side of it you were on. (Le Guin 2004: 1)

The starting lines of *The Dispossessed* bring forward the crucial importance of spaces, and within spaces, their boundaries. Lines – both geographical and metaphorical – that separate human beings and worlds and, at the same time, invite transgression. This idea of separation and the possibility of transgression unfolds throughout the novel, as does the multi-layered entity of space. Architecture, and space in particular, seem to be important aspects for Ursula K. Le Guin, not only to bring imaginary worlds to life, but because spaces are embedded with multiple meanings. In order to execute this interdisciplinary exercise of ours, and analyse the same spaces from different perspectives, we tried to understand what kind of influences Le Guin had had that could help us draft a few spaces depicted in the novel.

In an interview for *Harvard Design Magazine*, Le Guin elaborates on the fundamental role her family home had on her conceptualisation of space. Her Berkeley family home, designed by Bernard Maybeck (1862-1957), awakened her to the architects’ power in influencing human behaviour through their use of space. Contrary to the usual practice at that time in architecture, Maybeck’s style was functional and organic, adapted to users’ needs, which played with form, proportion and materials. Using Le Guin’s descriptions of the spaces, Maybeck’s style, as well as those of Maybeck’s pupil Julia Morgan (the first female architect to work in California) and William Wurster, we designed two food-related spaces with the same end: an Anarresti refectory and a University Urrasti refectory. These two very dissimilar architectonic bodies illustrate our views of the gender and class dynamics implicit in Le Guin’s descriptions of the spaces, and will be analysed in detail in the next section.

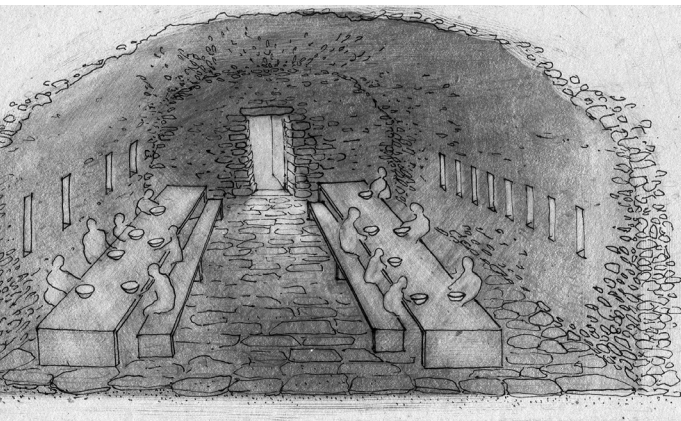
***Refectory in Urras* © Mariana Oliveira³**

As Urras is a planet rich in natural resources, Urrasti architecture is distinguished by its diverse construction materials, large-scale rooms and lavish decorations. The large spaces enhance the users’ experience by allowing them to eat in privacy (in small groups or by themselves) and in great comfort. Due both to the large number of high windows and to the excessively ornate decoration and furnishing, and the detailed construction of the finishes, the spaces are described as “erotic” and “feminine”. Indeed, since the architecture is described with qualifiers credited also to Urrasti women, society assigns them a decorative role. The drawing clearly exposes these social inequalities of the Urrasti societies and illustrates women’s position in the social scale by being completely empty of female silhouettes.



Refectory in Anarres © Mariana Oliveira⁴

In Anarres, however, the pragmatistic use of space demonstrates the main social need that is the survival of a species in an inhospitable environment. Ornaments, decoration and variety of materials are not only rare, but also frowned upon by the anarchist society. As the North American architect Louis Sullivan (1856-1924) used to say, “form follows function”. Therefore, the bare cave-like construction, inspired by a refectory in Chakar, perfectly depicts the Anarresti social organisation: no interest in artificiality, wealth or comfort that may distinguish



individuals. As an anarchist society, people eat together at communal tables regardless of their gender, as the genderless silhouettes in the sketch portray.

Keeping these drawings in mind as indicative of power dynamics inscribed in social structural spaces, the next section will focus first on decoding gender politics by combining an analysis of both architectonic bodies (food-related spaces) and female bodies (as social spaces), and second on class politics.

Gendered Food-Related Spaces

In “Is Gender Necessary? Redux” (1987), Ursula K. Le Guin revises herself on gender issues present in her fiction. Especially clear in her writings about the planet Gethen, Le Guin acknowledges the importance of gender in conceiving societies and solves the inequality problem by imagining biologically androgynous human beings. This, however, is only the first step in this “thought-experiment”, as she calls it. She then puts the question of gender differentiation to rest and focuses on the social and political issues that remain in a genderless society. This exercise allows her to consider questions such as: how would society be organised if human beings were free from gender and sexual constraints? Would they become naturally less violent? Would there be no war? Would there be hunger? Nevertheless, these are cross-cutting questions in all her fiction, even in those of her writings where gender issues seem less evident, such as *The Dispossessed* (1974). Regarded by many literary critics as a great example of critical utopia (Moylan 2014: 87), *The Dispossessed* has been the focus of several researchers interested in the politics of the Anarresti anarchist society. However, gender issues have not yet been studied in relation to their connection to food, an issue that clearly mattered to Le Guin.

“A Rant about ‘Technology’” (2004) is the text in which Le Guin specifically declares her interest in what may be termed “low technology”, highlighting the importance of food, clothing and the production of energy in the creation of imaginary worlds:

[T]echnology is how a society copes with physical reality: how people get and keep and cook food, how they clothe themselves, what their power sources are (animal? human? water? wind? electricity? other?) what they build with and what they build, their medicine - and so on and on. Perhaps very ethereal people aren’t interested in these mundane, bodily matters, but I’m fascinated by them, and I think most of my readers are too. (2004, n.p.)

This fascination with food (how it is cooked and served, with whom it is shared) and its political importance are very clear in several of Le Guin’s texts, in particular *The Dispossessed*, in which one can find more than fifty references to food-related aspects and behaviours. We will see that the analytical value of these food references goes far beyond their quantity, since they reveal power dynamics in the different societies depicted in the novel.

The nearly 200-year-old Anarresti society was founded by a group of exiled Urrasti inspired by the philosophical writings of Laia Odo, one of the revolutionary leaders who in a time of social, political and economic crises stood against the ultra-capitalist Urrasti system (cf. “The Year of the Revolution”): a woman. Although she herself never set foot on Anarres, her philosophy inspired an expedition by a few Urrasti revolutionaries to barren Anarres, who rushed in the utopian experiment of an anarchist society based upon ideals such as egalitarianism and solidarity.

As an anarchist society, there is supposedly no leading government, authoritarian institutions or any form of social hierarchy, and, in terms of gender, it seems egalitarian: women can engage in any kind of work, as Shevek explains to the sceptical Urrasti doctor, since machinery makes physical strength redundant (Le Guin 2004: 22). Genders enjoy the same rights and share the same living conditions and social arrangements. Names and clothes are genderless and sexual orientation is also a non-issue. Marriage, as an institution, does not exist. Instead, companionships are established by the elements of the relationship, which exists for as long as they want it to. It seems that the whole society is an undifferentiated mass of people that find a purpose in following social rules and in blending in. However, as Tom Moylan stresses, “Anarres is a community of individuals, not a collective”, whose ideological apparatus is based primarily on the social conscience (Moylan 2016: 93). Indeed, the worst insult that any Anarresti might endure is to be accused of “egoizing”, of putting their needs above their duties as citizen, because “the social conscience, the opinion of others, was the most powerful moral force” (Le Guin 2004: 90), and the most efficient regulator. Therefore, a system of latent communal surveillance has been inculcated, that any kind of divergence is faced with general disapproval and, at times, open resistance or sabotage, as it is the case of Shevek’s confrontation with the senior physicist, Sabul. Nevertheless, individuals are also allowed to leave the community peacefully, if they so want.

This antagonistic dynamics between the individual and the collective in an anarchist society has been amply explored (cf. Lawrence and Burns)⁵ and is embodied by the main character, Shevek. Shevek is the unsatisfied scientist, the uncomprehended genius, who is forced to desert his world and identity in order to protect his work, which he believes will enable the creation of technology that will eventually benefit the League of the Worlds. He travels to the twin planet, Urras, dominated by two rival power nations, Thu and A-Io, and based upon stratified systems.

As a socialist dictatorship (Thu) and a capitalist state (A-Io), the social systems implemented in Urras are highly hierarchized. Contrary to the egalitarian Anarresti society, Urras has been built on the premise that one class or group has more rights and privileges than the rest. This becomes clear in a conversation between Shevek and Atro, who proudly admits that the basis of Urrasti's societies is "discrimination":

There's a great deal that's admirable, I'm sure, in your society, but it doesn't teach you to discriminate—which is after all the best thing civilization teaches. I don't want those damned aliens getting at you through your notions about brotherhood and mutualism and all that. They'll spout you whole rivers of 'common humanity' and 'leagues of all the worlds' and so on, and I'd hate to see you swallow it. The law of existence is struggle—competition—elimination of the weak—a ruthless war for survival. And I want to see the best survive. (Le Guin 2004: 186)

This ideology permeates the tissue of all Urrasti societies. In terms of gender, what we need to bear in mind is that these societies are "phallogocratic-capitalist systems" (Moylan: 97) that hypersexualize women and commodify sex through marriage and prostitution.

Throughout the novel, it becomes clear that Urrasti women have but one purpose: to be a symbol of ostentation. The large majority of women is relegated to the private sphere and their existence is reduced to pleasuring men, as explained to Shevek during a dinner party (Le Guin 2004: 94-95). Faced with Shevek's bewilderment concerning the absence of women scientists, Oiie and Pae attest that there are a few female specimens that try to contest the idea that women are incapable of mastering abstract thought, who Pae describes as "God-awful brainy women with vaginal atrophy" (*idem*: 105). Yet, not even those women are allowed to study beyond the certificate level. Indeed, A-Io universities and other governmental institutions are exclusively male (*idem*: 105), as illustrated in the first sketch.

In private spaces, women are allowed to circulate, but in a controlled way and following subliminal rules. During Oiie and Vea's dinner party, it is clear how women are used for male entertainment only. What is expected of them is solely to be a decorative piece at the table. The sexual innuendo that their clothes and manners transmit, "the bare breasts, pushed upward" (*idem*: 256-7), the extravagance of their physical appearance, half naked, shaved, ornamented, white-skinned, soft and affected, and barely eating themselves, make them the perfect meal for the men. Like the food on the table, the women present themselves as meat for male degustation. Women are required to perform an ideal of womanhood that relegates them to a standard of objects of desire and places them at an ornamental level, in front of those men who create, determine and compose social spaces. Although they believe that they can use their power of seduction to manipulate men, women have only the illusion of power, because, in reality, women are always confined to the private spheres – to marriage and motherhood, to the bedroom and the house – which are perceived as biologically and socially inferior.

From the standpoint of the outsider, Shevek feels absolutely overwhelmed by the sensual powers of both food and women. As a vegetarian who does not drink alcohol, like most Anarresti, Shevek consumes food and drink which he was not used to and succumbs to this toxic social atmosphere. Although at the beginning he is shocked by the Urrasti egoizing of food and sex, he too surrenders to them, culminating with him sexually assaulting Vea.⁶ This episode is so symbolically charged that in one scene the antagonistic ideologies of the two planets collide in Shevek's actions. This social space that is the private dining room of a wealthy industrialist is thus experienced as corruptive, corrosive and abject by Shevek, who ends up vomiting "all over the platter" (*idem*: 309). In other words, Shevek rejects the opulence, the excesses and the intrinsic corruption of Urrasti societies. On the contrary, in Anarres the relationship between food and gender asserts the egalitarian and the solidarity values of the anarchist community.

Due to the extreme conditions of the planet, the Anarresti diet is scanty and essentially vegetarian (*idem*: 102). In times of hunger, the entire community suffers the consequences and organizes itself in order to provide rations for everyone. In terms of work distribution, although people are allowed to pursue a career, jobs are rotational, preventing the formation of professional groups. These three aspects are fairly illustrative of the kind of cooperation that the Anarresti society promotes, even in terms of gender. The private and the public spheres are organic in the sense that the individual is something less significant in the large scale of things. Social duties and responsibilities always prevail. So, the respect and comradeship for fellow human beings do not depend on preconceptions such as gender. Evidence of that is the fact that both men and women navigate social spaces, including refectories. There is no specific organisation of the space that promotes segregation of the genders. Indeed, the refectories promote communication between users and at the same time allow some privacy (*idem*: 132-3). In terms of food, the Anarresti are served equal portions. However, they may have seconds if there is plenty of food (*idem*: 132-3; 144-5). Contrary to Urras, women's thoughts and opinions are not silenced or voiced through their appearance or by resorting to the sexual manipulation of men. Anarresti women are naturally perceived as equals, if not admired for their "toughness", endurance and intelligence (*idem*: 22), of which Odo is the ultimate example. Therefore, the subjects of conversation during meals are very different from those in Urras. For instance, during the small picnic parties that Shevek joins in, boys and girls talk about "the spatial representation of time as rhythm, and the connection of the ancient theories of the Numerical Harmonies with modern temporal physics", or simply about love and suffering and their childhoods (*idem*: 76-77). These group meals are rituals that can be called "social meals", recalling Sarah Sceats's notion of "social eating". According to Sceats, eating in cases like these is not simply a question of group function, it is linked to the cultural and political relation of individuals or groups to larger groups and eventually society (2000: 165). These rituals gather the individuals of the group together, and in some cases they become the starting point of resistance. In this case, the group meals serve as a space for Shevek and his friends to share memories, debate their ideas on the future and discuss the evolution of Anarresti society.

Even the relationship that Anarresti women have with their bodies is completely opposite to that of Urrasti women. Anarresti people's bodies (both men's and women's bodies) are a space of conformity (in the Anarresti context) and of resistance (when compared to Urrasti societies). They are a surface marked by the scars of the harshness of the environment and rotational jobs, but more important than that is the fact that women are perceived as partners instead of ornamental lascivious objects. Differently from "the body profiteers" (Le Guin 2004: 278), as Takver describes the Urrasti women, Anarresti women do not shave or adorn themselves, a fact that appals Veä (*idem*: 280). Curious is Shevek's reflexion on Takver's physical appearance. After a long separation between the two, Shevek returns home from a faraway post and observes how Takver has aged more than the years they have spent apart, has lost some of her teeth and the freshness of her skin (*idem*: 413). Indeed, people on Anarres – whether men or women – are not beautiful: "they have big hands and feet, like [Shevek] and the [Urrasti] waiter... But not big bellies" (*idem*: 299). However, when observing Takver, none of this seems to matter to Shevek, because "he saw her as she was" (*idem*: 413). As the hero that breaks walls and builds bridges, Shevek functions too as a connecting dot between two opposite versions of womanhood. As he explains in his revolutionary speech, "on Anarres nothing is beautiful, nothing but the faces. The other faces, the men and the women. We have nothing but that, nothing but each other. Here [in Urras] you see the jewels, there you see the eyes. And in the eyes you see the splendor, the splendor of the human spirit. Because our men and women are free" (*idem*: 299). The gender inclusiveness of Shevek's speeches and dialogues should also be noted as a key indicator of Anarresti society's gender egalitarianism.

The single distinctive factor between men and women seems to occur during the state of pregnancy. When Anarresti women become pregnant, they are entitled to extra helpings in the refectories and for anything else they need (clothes and so on). So much so that when Takver is pregnant, she feels very much like a traitor to the community, especially during the hunger crisis. During this period, she was still entitled to extra rations and calcium supplements when her "milk was running short" (*idem*: 332), while other people endured the shortage of food. She even acknowledges that "pregnant women have no ethics. Only the most primitive kind of sacrifice impulse. To hell with the book, and the partnership, and the truth, if they threaten the precious fetus!" (*idem*: 433). As a successful biologist and ecologist, Takver admits that it is a racial preservation drive that can work against the community, and that vexes her deeply. For her, and possibly for all Anarresti women, pregnancy provokes an ambiguous feeling: joy and fulfilment for contributing to the continuity of the community, on the one hand; and, shame for the maternal instincts that may blind them in the face of adversity, on the other.

However, this is indeed individual shame and personal reproach, because pregnancy is accepted unreservedly by the community. This can be proved by social interactions. For instance, when Takver is pregnant and carries on working, her colleagues bring her food from the refectories every time she forgets to eat. Contrary to Urrasti women, who are perceived as inferiors due to their biological reproductive abilities, Anarresti women are valued.

Anarres is thus a society that acknowledges and accepts the biological differences of the sexes, but does not discriminate either sex on the basis of those differences. Instead, society ensures that it is the community's responsibility to promote the welfare of every individual, but it is especially their duty

to protect the next generation, as happens with the education of the Anarresti children. The whole community takes care of its individuals, and each individual works for the community. Foodways and food-related spaces – both architectural bodies and female bodies – clearly demonstrate that. They have proven to be social structural joints, which function as platforms of aggregation in Anarres and segregation (both geographically and metaphorically) in Urras. The inclusion of women in or their exclusion from food-related spaces and the manner in which they display or are meant to display their bodies at the table – hypersexualised in Urras and desexualised in Anarres – expose explicit systems of discrimination in the first case, and egalitarianism in the second. Systems of discrimination extend, however, to issues of class, which need to be explored as a complement to a gender-based approach in order to arrive at a more totalizing understanding of Le Guin's novel.

Class and Dialectical Spaces

Elaine Graham-Leigh ends her *A Diet of Austerity: Class, Food and Climate Change* (2015), a discussion of how the eating habits of the working class are being blamed for climate change, with a chapter titled "What we would eat in utopia" (187-192), in which she begins by briefly mentioning the role of food in William Morris's and Edward Bellamy's utopias, only to turn her attention to the importance of food in Ursula Le Guin's utopias. In contrast with the frugal habits recommended to the poor in late capitalism during the recent years of austerity, Graham-Leigh points to Le Guin's novel *Always Coming Home* as a truly utopian programme regarding food: "Le Guin ends this passage with what is possibly the most optimistic summary of what we might eat in Utopia that I have ever come across: 'The Kesh were not a thin people'" (Graham-Leigh 2015: 190). With this quote, Graham-Leigh's book ends where it started, refusing to blame overweight people and affirming instead the satisfaction implicit in carrying more weight than the slim ideal of our day. However, this ending is introduced as a corrective to Le Guin's depiction of food in a much-better-known novel, *The Dispossessed*, "an ambiguous utopia" in which wasteful consumption is rigidly controlled:

This portrayal of unmaterialistic scarcity might resemble some environmental calls for restrained consumption, but it shouldn't be taken as an attempt to imagine what a post-revolutionary world might look like. The point in *The Dispossessed* is that the people of Anarres are not alone, but live in the shadow of a wealthy neighbouring planet, Urras, from which their ancestors came as settlers. The Anarresti were allowed to leave Urras and set up their socialist colony because exiling them to a planet so barren that it could barely support life was the easiest way of dealing with them, but their fate is related to that of their sister planet. The Anarresti are effectively practising socialism in one country, with all the difficulties that implies, not living in a post-revolutionary Utopia. (*idem*: 189)

Graham-Leigh correctly links this aspect of the world of Anarres to its semi-allegorical correspondent in Le Guin's 1974 world, that is, the doctrine, proclaimed by Joseph Stalin and Nikolai Bukharin in 1924, of pursuing socialism in the Soviet Union in spite of the failure of socialist revolutions in the rest of the world.⁷ This isolationism, contributing as it did to scarcity, famine and the final demise of the Soviet Union, cannot ultimately be advanced as a successful model for moderate consumption, which is why Le Guin's protagonist, Shevek, repeatedly talks of breaking walls, in a thinly veiled reference to real-world walls (both symbolic and literal), such as the Iron Curtain or the Berlin Wall. Graham-Leigh, who is looking for utopian images of post-revolutionary food practices, must then turn to *Always Coming Home*, after noting but leaving relatively unexplored the dialectical potential of the central fact that "the people of Anarres are not alone, but live in the shadow of a wealthy neighbouring planet, Urras". Indeed, in its back-and-forth movement between one world and the other, between one time and several others, *The Dispossessed* provides us with a fascinating picture of dialectics at work in these two interlocked worlds. The dialectics will be explored here in terms of its manifestation in the consumption of food, in particular in the specific sites where food is provided, served and eaten; these sites can thus be seen to function as "social structural joints" in revealing class dynamics throughout Le Guin's novel.

Indeed, food works as a metaphorical joint not only in each world understood separately but also in both worlds as a binary set. Near the beginning of *The Dispossessed*, as Shevek and his friends are still undergoing their political and historical education, they remember "a class on the History of the Odonian Movement" (Le Guin 2004: 37), in which a famine in the Nation of Thu is described by a commenter:

"A famine in Bachifoil Province in the Nation of Thu," the commenter's voice had said. "Bodies of children dead of starvation and disease are burned on the beaches. On the beaches of Tius, seven hundred kilometers away in the Nation of A-Io (and here came the jeweled navels), women kept for the sexual use of male members of the *propertied class* (the Iotic words were used, as there was no equivalent for either word in Pravic) lie on the sand all day until dinner is served to them by people of the *unpropertied class*." A close-up of dinnertime: soft mouths champing and smiling, smooth hands reaching out for delicacies wetly mounded in silver bowls. (*idem*: 38)

Throughout the book, food is often the object of comparison, from the special-beverages ration saved up in Anarres for the purposes of a party to the excess of food at a luxurious lunch in Urras, but the specifics of this contrast are worth pausing over: the contrast between famine and dinner is also one between one nation and another, and thus a contrast of different spaces. We soon learn that the nation of Thu is a socialist dictatorship, whereas the Nation of A-Io is a capitalist state, but also that Thu had undergone a collapse of government in 771, shortly before the establishment of the anarchist society in Anarres; we thus begin to realise that Anarresti descriptions of Urrasti nations are historically dated, preceding the establishment of the Anarresti colony. The description of the famine in Thu might plausibly refer to a pre-

revolutionary convulsion, remembered by the Anarresti but not updated. The contrast in the quotation serves a simple, but effective, political purpose, that of revealing the inequalities between these national formations on the basic level of food distribution, overdetermined, in the case of A-Io, by the reference to prostitutes and to the distinction between propertied and unpropertied class affiliations (here estranged through the need to use a foreign language to name concepts alien to the Anarresti) in who eats the food and who serves it, compounded by a description of the first group as having "soft mouths" and "smooth hands". These last elements serve an obviously crude ideological purpose, not too distant from the stereotype of the capitalist fat cat, holding a large cigar, but their critique is not only of the world of Urras for its inequalities; it is also of its inequalities along national lines, compounded by the historical dimension of the scene and its instrumental use in inculcating a repulsion for Urresti societies. Shevek and his friends immediately question the age of the film they have seen and its applicability to describe the present societies of Urras (*idem*: 38); they soon become aware of the undue simplifications needed to make such indoctrination effective, which is also why Shevek struggles throughout the book to make each world's views of the other more complex. At one point, once more partly in the context of food, he engages in a reverse stereotype, adopting a mocking tone when it comes to what he imagines the Urresti think of the Anarresti:

"You are right," Shevek said. "No fun. Never. All day long on Anarres we dig lead in the bowels of the mines, and when night comes, after our meal of the three holum grains cooked in one spoonful of brackish water, we antiphonally recite the Sayings of Odo, until it is time to go to bed. Which we all do separately, and wearing boots." (*idem*: 179)

Scenes of food include noticeable gender and sexual elements, as we have seen; here, for example, in the alleged negation of sensuality in an austere work culture and, in the previous quotation, in the smooth passage from gender to class exploitation; yet the class coding of food is perhaps the most salient element and thus the easiest to track down. Nevertheless, as we have also seen, it is often steeped in a series of narrative and historical complexities which continuously ask us to refine our interpretations. Depending as it does on a dialectics between an anarchist moon and a planet divided into capitalist, dictatorial and underdeveloped nations, the central oppositions of the novel must almost necessarily hinge on issues of class; the relationship between class and food becomes perhaps even stronger than in other utopias on account of the long descriptions of famine in Anarres, which not only puts the equalitarian society to a severe test, but also helps to explain the attention paid to food by the older Shevek, once he arrives in Urras.

This means that any attention to food in relation to class yields very little if analysed only in the context of Anarres, class dynamics in Anarres being residual at best. Although rules regarding food in Anarres are closely adhered to by practically everyone – if these rules do happen to be broken, as when Shevek takes a double helping at the commons, during a famine, the deviation is met only with a frown (*idem*: 216), a manifestation of peer disapproval – there seem to be institutional allowances. When Shevek starts working at the Central Institute of the

Sciences, he notices the quality of the food and of the refectory and even helps himself twice to the “stewed preserved fruit” (*idem*: 87); later, he notices that dessert is a daily occurrence:

Of course there were local variations: regional specialities, shortages, surpluses, makeshifts in situations such as Project Camps, poor cooks, good cooks, in fact an endless variety within the unchanging framework. But no cook was so talented that he could make a desert without the makings. Most refectories served dessert once or twice a decade. Here it was served nightly. Why? Were the members of the Central Institute of the Sciences better than other people? (*idem*: 94)

On the one hand, the reader may be pleased to notice that, in a more realistic utopia such as this one, local variations do occur, and these may take several forms, so that planning has not yet achieved the drearier uniformity characteristic of more classical utopias. On the other hand, Shevek does call our attention to this one instance of inequality, which, however, is not repeated. Later instances of the use of force to get food during the famine do not appear to have a class basis, revealing only the inevitable strain in a society dealing with scarcity. In these cases, one might in fact call attention to how it manages to overcome a natural difficulty with varying degrees of success. Although Shevek tells of having had a job allotting insufficient food rations to sick people, hence condemning them to starve, and although a truck driver is said to have run over people trying to assault a provisions’ truck (*idem*: 257), so that we know that the famine in Anarres was indeed fatal for many, we do find many more instances of that society being held together by a mixture of solidarity and peer-enforced austerity. One instance of this is Takver’s right to an extra meal as a pregnant woman (*idem*: 197), which, however, she often misses at the commons on account of her work schedule; we are told that this stringent work ethic is compensated by friends who save food which they then bring her.⁸ But, already during the famine, we are told that she continues to be granted supplementary food allowances as a nursing mother (*idem*: 206, 210). The opposite case, however, also occurs, as is later revealed by Shevek to Efor, when he retells how “There was a famine, you know, eight years ago. I knew a woman then who killed her baby, because she had no milk, and there was nothing else, nothing else to give it” (*idem*: 235). Although Shevek does not relate this to class differences, this extreme story reminds one that not all nursing mothers were as well taken care of as Takver. And, granting that this may have had to do with the importance of Takver’s job to alleviate the famine, Shevek does not make this link himself, although, as we have seen, he does connect the nightly desserts to the faint aura of privilege in the Central Institute of the Sciences.

These instances, however, make us realise that class as a category yields little when Anarres alone is taken into account: that is, class as a tracer reveals above all its negation as an active principle in Anarres. This is noticeable in the description of the commons of Chakar, a cavernous room in which equality rather than social gradation is stressed:

They went a block to the commons, the largest building in Chakar. Regular dinner was over, but the cooks were eating, and provided the traveler a bowl of stew and all the bread he wanted. They all sat at the table nearest the kitchen. The other tables had already been cleaned and set for next morning. The big room was cavernous, the ceiling rising into shadow, the far end obscure except where a bowl or cup winked on a dark table, catching the light. The cooks and servers were a quiet crew, tired after the day’s work; they ate fast, not talking much, not paying much attention to Takver and the stranger. One after another they finished and got up to take their dishes to the washers in the kitchen. One old woman said as she got up, “Don’t hurry, *ammari*, they’ve got an hour’s washing yet to do.” She had a grim face and looked dour, not maternal, not benevolent; but she spoke with compassion, with the charity of equals. (*idem*: 264-265)

As a fully functioning category, class can, therefore, only be seen at work in the much more dialectical world of Urras, or in the contrast between Urras and Anarres, as we have already seen. Whereas in Anarres scenes of plenty result from very deliberately saving up daily allowances for a party, to the point that some of the guests even become unwell from overindulgent eating – “The rich plentiful food was intoxicating. Everybody got very merry, and a few got sick” (*idem*: 51) – they are common fare at the Evening Commons of the University in A-Io:

He was used to that grace and comfort now, it had become familiar to him. So had the food, in all its variety and quantity, which at first had staggered him. The men who waited table knew his wants and served him as he would have served himself. [...] He enjoyed dinner very much. He had gained three or four kilos since coming to Urras; he looked very well now, sunburnt from his mountain expedition, rested by the holiday. He was a striking figure as he got up from table in the great dining hall, with its beamed ceiling far overhead in shadow, and its paneled, portrait-hung walls, and its tables bright with candle flames and porcelain and silver. (*idem*: 112)

The luxurious, traditional design of the Urrasti Evening Commons seems to complement the change in the well-fed Shevek’s looks, although this is also the result of his isolation in an affluent setting. However, he eventually gets sick of the opulence of this milieu, to the point of very literally throwing up on it: “He ran up against a table. On it lay a silver platter on which tiny pastries stuffed with meat, cream, and herbs were arranged in concentric circles like a huge pale flower. Shevek gasped for breath, doubled up, and vomited all over the platter” (*idem*: 191). The hungover revelation he has on the following day is once more symbolised by food: “It was not only the alcohol that he had tried to vomit up; it was all the bread he had eaten on Urras” (*idem*: 225). This marks the moment he decides to escape, leading him to explore the underside of A-Io’s class-based society, after a revealing conversation with Efor, in which his servant breaks his polite diction and frankly tells him of the hardships of his life, so that Shevek is led to reflect that

This was the Urras he had learned about in school on Anarres. This was the world from which his ancestors had fled, preferring hunger and the desert and endless exile. This was the world that had formed Odo’s mind and had jailed her eight times for speaking it. This was the human suffering in which the ideals of his society were rooted, the ground from which they sprang. It was not the real Urras. The dignity and beauty of the room he and Efor were in was as real as the squalor to which Efor was native. To him a thinking man’s job was not to deny one reality at the expense of the other, but to include and to connect. It was not an easy job. (*idem*: 235)

It is worth noting that, given Shevek’s isolation in the university grounds, far from the geographical loci of poverty, his only access to this world comes from the inevitable inequality inside the grounds, particularly the fact that he has been given a servant, who finally tells him about the other side of Urras. Shevek quickly comes to a conclusion that is similar to the one he was taught in class near the beginning of the book: instead of only seeing the dignity and beauty of the university room as an illusory appearance screening Urras’ squalor, he understands that Urras is a dialectical reality. His university guardians are thus ultimately betrayed by an unavoidable class structure, which they cannot keep out of the grounds.

Food spaces, then, serve as a social structural joint between the classes in A-Lo, between the nations of Urras, and between Urras and Anarres. Though both A-Lo and Urras make use of refectory spaces in institutional milieus, these are markedly different, one equalitarian and seemingly devoid of decoration, the other attended by waiters and characterised by imposing ornaments. For Shevek at least, it is outside these spaces that a sharper confrontation with the combination between food and class takes place, notably in restaurants, in a private home in A-Lo and in his own room at the university, in the company of a servant. Yet, one passage should make us pause, by calling our attention to the centrality of food, its makers and those who serve it in *The Dispossessed*. Chapter eight begins in the Anarresti city of Abbenay, with the description of

a street festival and feast with cooking over open fires. It was the midsummer holiday, Insurrection Day, commemorating the first great uprising in Nio Esseia in the Urrasti year 740, nearly two hundred years ago. Cooks and refectory workers were honored as the guests of the rest of the community on that day, because a syndicate of cooks and waiters had begun the strike that led to the insurrection. (*idem*: 194)

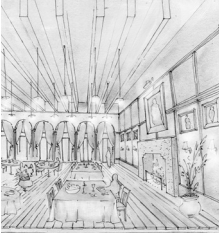
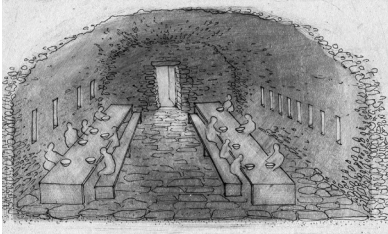
The shift from “waiters” to “refectory workers” is not only one of name: it refers importantly to a change of function, but also to one of space. The holiday registers the decisive importance of a strike of cooks and waiters, leading as it did to an insurrection and the ultimate establishment of an anarchist colony off-planet. It thus places practices related to food at the centre of the politics dialectically linking both worlds.

Conclusion

Ursula K. Le Guin’s *The Dispossessed* is a good example of how social spaces, be they architectonic bodies or physical/human bodies, expose gender and class dynamics. In this interdisciplinary exercise, we have approached the text from different perspectives in an attempt to attain a more complete understanding of the (in)equalities depicted in the divergent societies. As an author admittedly concerned with issues such as gender, class, food and space, Le Guin proves to be a fertile source of multi-layered writing material for the use of complementary lenses of analysis.

As we have seen and the graphic below sums up, in terms of gender, social structural spaces serve as a platform, in the sense that they are moulded by and reflect the intrinsic political order of the two main societies depicted in the novel: a system that segregates individuals in terms of class and gender, in the first instance, and a system that aggregates, in the second. By analysing and illustrating the food-related spaces in detail, it becomes clear how geographic spaces mirror social parameters, how physical bodies (mainly female bodies as marginalised bodies) are displayed and how they are performances of gender standards and inculcated social values. Class would appear to be a simpler tracer in a novel about anarchist and capitalist societies, yet, because it exists only negatively or residually in Anarres, it can only become truly operative if Urras and Anarres are understood in dialectical terms, an operation that then needs to be reproduced for smaller and smaller sets: the nations of Urras and the classes in A-Lo. This approach then needs to be further complicated by an awareness of the potentially misleading narratives learnt and told by each group about each of the other groups. If images of food excess in A-Lo might encourage an unflattering comparison with the austerity of Urras, it must be remembered that A-Lo is a class society, where food excesses are not universally available; whereas some of the food-related hardships experienced in Urras may be made worse due to problems with its concept of work. The result of an inquiry into class and food in *The Dispossessed* will thus reveal the centrality of food and its spaces in the history of class warfare in A-Lo’s past and its continuing importance as an object of scarcity in the communitarian though vulnerable society of Anarres. It should above all allow us to appreciate the complexity of Le Guin’s dialectical conception. This interdisciplinary exercise proves, therefore, to be a useful approach to the text, offering us a multimodal and layered understanding of the (non) stratified social systems of the main societies depicted in Le Guin’s *The Dispossessed*.

Power Dynamics inscribed in
Food-Related Spaces in Le Guin’s *The Dispossessed*

	Urras	Anarres
		
Architectural Bodies (Refectories)	Universities and governmental institutions are exclusively male; Ostentatious decor and massive rooms and buildings; Individuality; Differentiation in terms of the class composition of its clientele; Class differentiation in terms of the class composition of consumers and cooks/waiters;	Organic and gender-free spaces; Basic and merely essential decor; Communitarianism; Almost no differentiation in terms of its users, with few exceptions; No apparent class differentiation between refectory workers and other workers;
Human Bodies (Women)	Confined to private spheres; Controlled circulation; Ostentatious, ornamental role in society; Considered biologically and socially inferior; Hypersexualised and sexual commodities; “Phallocratic-capitalist systems” (Moylan); Discrimination and exclusion; Segregation.	Rotational jobs and pursuit of careers; Unlimited circulation; Free from socially imposed gender performativity; Considered socially equal and pregnancies are considered as individual and socially beneficial; Desexualised and sexually liberated; Gender-free and egalitarian system; Inclusion; Aggregation.

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Notes

1. To illustrate this thesis, de Lauretis states four propositions: 1. gender is (a) representation; 2. the representation of gender is its construction; 3. the construction of gender is continuous, involving institutions, the media, the academy and schools, the arts, the family, among others; 4. the construction of gender is also effected by its deconstruction (1987: 3).
2. References that inspired the design: House in Berkeley – Architect Bernard Maybeck.
3. References that inspired the design: Trulli, Alberobello, Italy; Refectory, Monastero d’Astino, Bergamo, Italy; Man-made caves, Monte Erusheli, Georgia; Refectory, Convento de Cristo, Tomar, Portugal; Medieval Fortress, Marvão, Portugal (detail); Refectory, Mont St Michel, France.
4. See Burns 2010 and Davis & Stillman 2005.
5. It is interesting to note that there has been little reference to Vea’s sexual assault by critics. In fact, during our research, we could find only one: Sean Guynes’ “Sexual Violence in Le Guin’s *The Dispossessed*” (2015), published in his blog. See <https://seanguynes.com/2015/11/03/rethinking-the-dispossessed/>. Last accessed in February 2019.
6. Le Guin acknowledges another limiting aspect of the history of socialism in the twentieth century, namely the fact that Karl Marx expected a socialist revolution to succeed in a fully industrialised nation such as the United Kingdom or Germany, not in the feudal, unmodernised terrain of Russia. This is echoed in the narration of the establishment of the colony in Anarres, when this is contrasted with the plans of its founder, Odo: “Her plans, however, had been based on the generous ground of Urras. On arid Anarres, the communities had to scatter widely in search of resources” (Le Guin 2004: 81). Shevek himself reflects on the limits of his society’s solidarity during the famine, due to the moon’s natural conditions: “he had grim thoughts about the reality of hunger, and about the possible inadequacy of his society to come through a famine without losing the solidarity that was its strength. It was easy to share when there was enough, even barely enough, to go around. But when there was not enough? Then force entered in; might making right; power, and its tool, violence, and its most devoted ally, the averted eye” (*idem*: 212).
7. The willingness to sacrifice oneself for one’s duty to the community is related to the ethical role of work in Anarres. We are told that “The identity of the words ‘work’ and ‘play’ in Pravic had, of course, a strong ethical significance. Odo had seen the danger of a rigid moralism arising from the use of the word ‘work’ in her analogic system” (Le Guin 2004: 223). A social morality based on work risks developing a Puritan work ethic; the identity of “work” and “play” makes work more bearable by presenting it as something that the individual will willingly engage in for the sake of the community, not as an imposition on the individual. However, this leads to imbalances such as that of the pregnant woman who, by foregoing meals in order to work, becomes the object of the solidarity of others, who give her part of their own food rations, at the same time that she does not take advantage of her allotted food rations. That is, while food supplements are planned for her, Takver’s strong work/play ethic ends up overtaxing her friends’ solidarity, otherwise easily remedied.