Guest Editorial—Reimagining the Future: Utopian Perspectives

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Guest Editorial—Reimagining the Future: Utopian Perspectives

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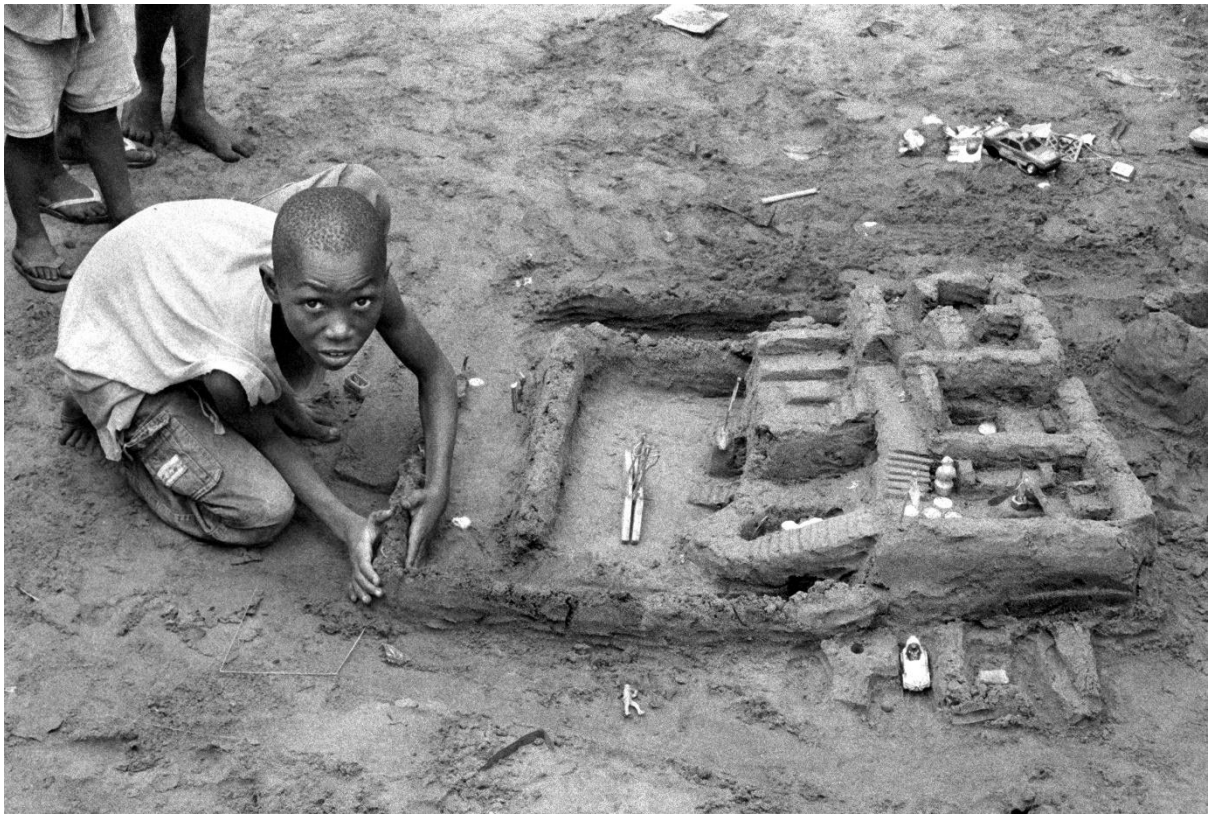

Figure 1. Kinzénguélé, 2003, Moukondo, Brazzaville

Looking down at an African boy building a sand castle, the reader might wonder what the editors wish to convey with this image for this special issue on utopia. And indeed, does such an image not feed into the common stereotypes on which charities and humanitarian organisations play to foster pity for a continent trapped in cyclical poverty? A viewer's assumption might easily be that the picture was taken by a white photographer charmed by the sight of what is then framed as proof of the legendary resourcefulness of poor black children satisfied to play with mud and the leftovers of mass production. But if our aim is not to join the concert of voices singing the beautiful creative simplicity of deprived childhood, along with the construction of a condescending gaze on those who are viewed as needing "our" help, why, then, did we choose this particular cover image?

To answer this question, we could start by displacing the image from the anonymous position it would have in such discourses to situate it within the art world, where images are considered outcomes of personal intentions. In doing so, we would acknowledge the photographer's right to authorship and the photographed subject's right to exist not just as a representative of the

generic "poor African child". Therefore, and somewhat paradoxically, the photo and its story provide us with an opportunity to address the Western imaginary surrounding African societies and the fact that they are all too often overlooked even in the context of utopian traditions, with their canon predominantly based on European and North American authors.[1]

André Désiré Loutsono, aka Kinzénguélé, is a Congolese photographer who has exhibited in his hometown, Brazzaville, in the Bamako Art Biennale and in France (Avignon, Paris).[2] Despite being exhibited, Kinzénguélé's expertise is not recognised by international companies who prefer to hire, ship and accommodate European and American photographers at high prices to shoot images of Congo (a country where most of them have never been before). Kinzénguélé's attempt to change this humiliating situation is a collective one. A few years ago, he co-founded Génération Elili, which promotes professional photographers in Congo.[3] Putting together their earnings, the collective has been able to build a modest art studio on the outskirts of Brazzaville to serve as a platform for local and international collaborations.

The photo was taken in 2003, in the Moukondo district of Brazzaville. The boy's construction is yet unfinished, and might never be completed, like any living utopia. He is entirely at his task, his body bent over his work, his hands carefully moulding the walls of what might be a modern version of a castle, an urban luxurious villa with its large garages and several floors, the palaces that footballers or pop singers build along the roads of Brazzaville or Douala, and which are massive landmarks of success, visible from afar but whose interior remains invisible behind high concrete walls. The boy imagines, then, what constitutes the palace's private space; with sand he creates rooms, beds, tables, doors and staircases. In this way, he subverts the exclusion literally set in stone by the real villas, which may have been his inspiration. And as such, his creation of an architectural model of a big house, open to be seen and entered, and, above all, made by himself, may be read as a utopian practice. His utopia is carefully planned and very realist; for instance, he adds several back doors and various entrances, as well as two distinct driveways, which create the conditions for unofficial encounters, for refuge but also for discreet escapes, aspects which he seems to consider crucial for an ideal place. In the photo, the Promethean boy looks up at his father, the photographer, understanding in this moment that his creation will be fixed in a photograph making possible the improbable use of his "palais", as he called it, as the cover of a utopian journal issue.

With the boy's crouching position and upward gaze, however, the image could also seem like an almost overcharged symbolic embodiment of the idea of a utopia from below constructed

[1] To mention just one counterpoint to this tendency, which mostly also characterises our journal issue, see Felwine Sarr, *Afrotopia* (Paris: Philippe Rey Editions, 2016). A continuing focus on European traditions of utopian thought can, for instance, also be found in the recent collection of essays *Political Uses of Utopia: New Marxist, Anarchist and Radical Democratic Perspectives*, ed. by S.D. Chrotowska and James D. Ingram (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2016). In a footnote to his introduction, Ingram acknowledges: 'The Eurocentrism of this selection is the result of a painful choice rather than inadvertence or a dearth of material. Another book at least as long and as rich as this one could be composed out of recent meditations on utopia and utopianism from the post-colonial world, with special emphasis on Latin America, South Asia, and Africa' (Ingram, 'Introduction: Utopia and Politics', in *Political Uses of Utopia*, pp. ix-xxxiv, p. xxxiii) It is, however, important to discuss why that second book nevertheless remains absent. Just like here, too, existing hierarchies all too often permeate even those realms which are designed to counter them.

[2] Kinzénguélé has also recently been invited by the Valletta 2018 Foundation as artist in residence in Malta.

[3] See <http://www.generationelili.com/portfolio/> [accessed 12 May, 2017].

with limited material means. It is, then, in danger of falling into the trap of current anti-technological and anti-consumerist utopias with their idealisation of situations of poverty and deprivation. Such bourgeois celebrations of "simplicity" and Western environmentalists' calls for a return to less "developed" ways of living often remain blind to the circumstances they operate in and even contribute to. By failing to engage in an analysis of the economic conditions of development and consumption, or to distinguish clearly between economic growth and the actual development of living conditions, these positions tend to be no more than apolitical, generalising calls for a change in individual behaviour. Thereby, the crucial difference between self-chosen "minimalist" lifestyles and forced austerity and dearth gets blurred, and the class structure of global capitalism is disregarded. The distinction between exploitative economies of profit on the one hand and the (utopian) desire for a good life, including material abundance, on the other, is pushed into the background when an undifferentiated "we" is asked to be less "greedy". By reading the elaborate sandcastle built and photographed in Congo as a metaphor of utopia, however, we intend to emphasise precisely the unequal conditions permeating all areas of living—including utopian thought itself. The cover photograph, then, is meant to unsettle the hierarchies of "below" and "above" the image may at first invoke: of Africa and the "Global South" as "below" and Central Europe and North America as "above", together with the idea of "our" Western utopian visions as solutions for "their" problems. The Congolese boy as author of utopia potentially contradicts these hierarchies, which nevertheless remain present in the fact that beyond this image and our interpretation of it, his own voice is absent and his utopia is not discussed. This fact, however, is here highlighted as part of the systemic creation of inequality, pertaining to material conditions, economic, socio-cultural and political structures of exclusion. These are emphasised in opposition to the establishment of racial and class differences discursively normalised as the "natural" circumstances of living "below", a discourse in which the boy's toy cars may already seem out of place clashing with the usual depiction of the poor child in Africa in need of charity. In contrast to the predominant logic of aid and development, which seeks to alleviate suffering but leaves its causes untouched, a utopian perspective is aimed at fundamentally changing the conditions of inequality.

In addition to the important question of "utopia for whom?", which is emphasised by Gregory Norman Bossert in an interview with this journal, the cover image also raises the antecedent question of "utopia *by* whom?". Utopias—and dystopias—are often associated with the figure of a—benign or despotic—white male architect of the futuristic city, such as, for instance, Le Corbusier as the epitome of a utopian creator.[4] Who, we may ask, currently gets to dream up utopian visions which are read and discussed widely? Which utopias have the chance of being recognised as contributions to the canon of utopian thought? The implication of the utopian tradition in hierarchies of class, race and gender has to be addressed critically. Indeed, the very beginning of the term utopia is marked by a fictional act of colonial 'conquest'.[5] What was to become island utopia was not an uninhabited space: its 'rude and uncivilized inhabitants' are brought into 'good government' by Utopus after he 'subdued' them.[6] As China Miéville

[4] Notable exceptions in utopian literature, such as Odo, the female anarchist founder of the utopian state in Ursula K. Le Guin's novel *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia* (New York, NY: Harper Voyager, 1974), engage critically with this dominant tradition.
[5] See Thomas More, *Utopia* (London and New York, NY: Verso, 2016), p. 72.
[6] ibid., p. 73.

observes: 'We know the history of such encounters, too; that every brutalised, genocided and enslaved people in history have […] been "rude and uncivilised" in the tracts of their invaders'.[7] Utopian thought, then, also has to reflect critically on its own history and to continually deconstruct the boundaries of its canon and its discursive practices.[8]

The two questions of "utopia for whom?" and "utopia by whom?" become one when utopia is conceptualised in terms of a radically democratic process of creating better socio-political structures: those who wish to inhabit utopia also create it in a collective, dialogical, agonistic process.[9] Such a utopia based on a radical notion of equality is not only open to everyone but also open to everyone's articulation of desires and demands for the shape of its construction. To create the universal subject of utopia—"everyone" as equal human being collectively shaping a utopian political community—is already at the core of the utopian project and part of its realisation. To envisage such universal equality, it is not enough to make a vague declaration of universal humanity or human rights. Rather, the creation of the utopian subject starts from the sharp recognition of all existing situations of oppression. Otherwise, the declaration of a universal subject of utopia remains trapped in the realities of unequal access to the articulation of such universal humanity—just like the current unequal access to human rights. Utopia, thus, begins with the critique of all relations of exclusion, hierarchy and exploitation, including those arising in the course of debating and shaping utopia. Seen in this way, utopia is a continuous process. Utopia itself, thus, always remains "nowhere" (ou-topos: no-place, nowhere) because it refers to the ever new critique and destruction of all conditions of inequality, not to an idyll of (imposed) harmony and reconciliation.[10] Unlike other forms of protest and criticism, the utopian process does not remain tied to existing social structures, trying to reform them or to bring out the "good" supposedly hidden in them, but recognises the need to engage with the fundamental set-up of the political status quo and has revolutionary implications. Negative symptoms viewed in a utopian perspective are identified as the result of systemic conditions. Therefore, utopia also starts with the analysis of the current political economy, the fundamentally exploitative character of capitalism and its basis in the structural inequality of a class society. These material realities—not some far-removed visions and dreams—are the focus of utopian critical thought. Another point of departure for utopian constructions is the radical rejection of the many ideologies lending legitimacy to the ruling system and hence its ruling class, generating submission and conformity. Such ideologies include a nationalism which masks class difference by creating an imagined "we" and an external "other" and thus achieves a false reconciliation with current political systems idealised as "our" nations—simultaneously allowing for a legitimisation of brutal border politics and other discriminations based on national citizenship and notions of national "identity". It serves to direct criticism towards those construed as "outsiders" rather than towards those in power

[7] China Miéville, 'Introduction', in *Utopia*, pp. 2-27, p. 7.
[8] See for instance Ursula K. Le Guin, 'A Non-Euclidian View of California as a Cold Place to Be', in *Utopia*, pp. 163-194, who, incidentally, uses the metaphor of a 'radiant sandcastle' to describe the tradition of a 'euclidean, [...] European, and [...] masculine' utopia she criticises (p. 177).
[9] See Raylene Abdilla, 'Utopia in Adversity', in this issue.
[10] Some of the points made here have already been published in a different form in Anna Katarrh [Kathrin Schödel], 'Three points for a map of Utopia', *Schlock Magazine: Utopia Issue* (June 2016). <http://www.schlockmagazine.net/2016/05/31/three-points-for-a-map-of-utopia/> [accessed 12 May 2017].

when, for example, immigrants are blamed for a worsening of living standards rather than economic realities and those upholding them. Another such dominant and often implicit ideology which serves to displace more far-reaching, political forms of criticism, as well as more utopian imaginations of alternative futures, is a constant emphasis on individual behaviour, psychology and ethics, whose interconnection with their socio-economic contexts is pushed into the background.[11] Thereby, the individual appears as solely responsible for their well-being and their future prospects whilst the conditions in which these individual prospects can be achieved—and, most often, are impeded—remain absent from this depoliticising perspective and thus remain unchallenged. Utopian thought is a departure from "realism" understood as the ideological limitation of the conception of social worlds to the already existing here and now, as well as its continuation or dystopian ending. In contrast, utopia refers to a radical reimagination of the future and the search for a perspective of a space currently nowhere to be found, but to be created in a collective, democratic experiment.

This special issue of *antae* is guest edited by members of the Institute of Utopian Studies, which was founded in Malta in 2014 in order to provide a platform for the debate of such ideas of social change and alternative concepts of living together.[12] As an independent institution, this Institute itself is a 'utopian "no place"': for the time being, it has no physical place, even if it has used several spaces for meetings, talks and debates, and it has no official affiliation or legitimization; it is a self-declared "institution".[13] On a very small scale and with a pinch of salt, creating this Institute can be seen as a utopian practice that is related to the revolutionary implications of utopia: an Institute that is not recognised within the legal framework of the existing social order, but a potential institution within a new, as of yet non-existent framework, a utopian socio-political order outside of the existing one. As the theorist of utopian thought and sociology Ruth Levitas insists:

> the conditions under which we live, which are not of our own choosing, require us to create radically altered means of livelihood, ways of life and structures of feeling. Only a form of utopian thought and of reading utopia that engages with the actual institutional structure of the present and the potential institutional structure of the future can help us here.[14]

"Institute", therefore, indicates the importance of such an engagement with social institutions, beyond the currently predominant focus on notions of individual change and on the "privatised" hope for a better future.[15] An Institute is—to quote an etymological dictionary—something that is 'put in place'.[16] The reference to place connects u-topia (the "good place" which is also a

[11] See Mark Fisher, 'The Privatisation of Stress', *New Left Project*, 7 September 2011 <http://www.newleftproject.org/index.php/site/article_comments/the_privatisation_of_stress> [accessed 12 May 2017].

[12] See also our previous publication: *Schlock Magazine: Utopia Issue*, ed. by Elise Billiard (June 2016). <http://www.schlockmagazine.net/2016/05/31/utopia-issue-june-2016/> [accessed 9 May 2017].

[13] Institute of Utopian Studies, 'On the Institute of Utopian Studies', 3 January 2017. <https://www.facebook.com/notes/institute-of-utopian-studies/on-the-institute-of-utopian-studies/1819073548333553/> [accessed 12 May 2017].

[14] Ruth Levitas, *Utopia as Method: The Imaginary Reconstitution of Society* (Basingstoke and New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 126.

[15] See Peter Thompson and Slavoj Žižek (eds.), *The Privatization of Hope. Ernst Bloch and the Future of Utopia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013).

[16] Douglas Harper, 'Institute', in *Online Etymological Dictionary.*

"no place") and institute, and this connection is significant: the idea of utopia and of an Institute of Utopian Studies is linked to a notion of change that is not only temporal. Beyond emphasising processes and future-oriented perspectives, a utopian concept of change is also spatial, meaning that it is directed towards establishing something new in a real place, here and now. It wants to 'put in place' new structures: material and political, intellectual, cultural and social structures, new institutions.

At the same time, the Institute of Utopian Studies—just as, some claim, Thomas More's *Utopia* itself—is a joke; it is a fiction and a playful experiment. Between these poles of a fictitious, ludic no-place and the very real, concrete and urgent struggle for a different political reality, the Institute of Utopian Studies may be "placed". Whilst being a hint at the possibility of studying utopia at university, the notion of utopian studies is above all used to accentuate an understanding of a processual utopia, rather than an absolute "state" to be arrived at. Utopian studies in this sense refers to a continuous practice of critique, political imagination and experimentation.[17] This is, however, aimed at establishing new socio-political conditions.[18] Utopian studies, in other words the democratic search for a better world, would not cease to exist in a better world achieved, but would become possible on a new level of equal participation and potential for realisation.

We invite everyone to join us in order to further 'put in place' the non-official Institute of Utopian Studies and above all the creation of utopian social conditions. You are welcome to contact us with your ideas for collaboration, debate, events, and so on so that together we can build spaces for debating and practicing utopia. This issue of *antae* is one result of such collaborations: it combines contributions based on papers given at a 'Utopian Away Day', organised by the Institute of Utopian Studies in Malta in November 2016, others presented at a series of events organised at the University of Malta, 'Utopian Pasts—Utopian Futures? 500 Years after Thomas More's *Utopia*', and articles sent in reaction to *antae*'s call for papers. This guest edition would not have been possible without the truly utopian support by the editorial teams at antae.

Of course, within the current system, even such attempts at creating utopian spaces for debates which transcend existing social divisions and hierarchies remain themselves tied to the very conditions they criticise. For example, we are using Facebook as a virtual space for debate despite strong reservations about this medium.[19] For the moment, this seems the easiest way of reaching and engaging larger numbers of people—with an aim, however, to eventually

<http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=institute> [accessed 12 May 2017].

[17] Even though this also includes the critical analysis of existing utopian constructions, our politicised concept of "utopian studies", therefore, differs from that of the academic Society for Utopian Studies, whose 'purpose [...] is to study utopianism rather than to pursue utopian projects', '[a]lthough many Society members are involved in social activism or communitarianism' (The Society for Utopian Studies, 'About', <http://utopian-studies.org> [accessed, 9 May 2017]).

[18] Cf. the concept of utopia outlined by Ingram, which positions the approaches in the collection of essays in *Political Uses of Utopia* between a rejection of utopia as a 'blueprint' (Ingram, p. xxiii) on the one hand, and the attempt to overcome opposing tendencies in utopian thought towards 'dwindling into empty abstraction or the contentless affirmation of the possibility of something different' (ibid., p. xxiv).

[19] See Institute of Utopian Studies <https://www.facebook.com/utopianstudiesinstitute/> and Utopian Studies Group <https://www.facebook.com/groups/utopianstudiesinstitute/>.

transcend such commercial media. Even if they are used as a platform for the critique of capitalism, their structures, designed for profit, influence the possibilities for deep debate: for example, through the necessity in Facebook to keep posting so as to remain visible in "news feeds", thus enforcing a general emphasis on newness, which makes it difficult to sustain debate as opposed to constant status updating. Above all, any use of such media is implicated in feeding into data collection and leads to grave concerns about digital privacy and surveillance. This in itself is a pertinent example of the urgency of large-scale structural change argued for here: it is currently almost impossible to create small-scale utopian spaces because they will always be entangled in the all-encompassing dystopian realities of capitalism unless this in itself is challenged and changed. Academic contexts, such as this journal, are also only a limited option in view of the creation of utopian equality. Participants in academic discourses have already gone through formal and informal selection processes which tend to reproduce existing class differences as well as other forms of exclusion. Despite these limitations, however, we believe that it is crucial that institutions such as universities, which offer at least some possibilities for critical thought and exchange, are used as forums of debate about desirable futures and livable presents.

This issue, as well as the Institute of Utopian Studies, can be seen in the context of a more general current reconsideration of the traditional leftist rejection of utopian thought, going back to Marx's and Engels's critique of "utopian socialism".[20] In 2016, several events marking the 500th anniversary of the publication of Thomas More's *Utopia* were organised, and a considerable number of articles and book publications appeared.[21] In his critical overview of utopian discourse, the first article in this guest edition of *antae*, Dirk Hoyer nevertheless observes a dominant tendency towards the dystopian in contemporary culture and thought. Taking his cue from utopia as an island, he explores several real and fictional islands, including those of Michel Houellebecq's novel *The Possibility of an Island*, which he analyses as a paradigmatic example of current dystopian imaginings. Based on the reception of Herman Melville's *Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street*, and the protagonist's famous refusal 'I prefer not to', Hoyer describes what he identifies as a predominant political attitude on the left: a 'passive resistance' which is 'anti-utopian' despite its critique of the current status quo, as it does not strive towards, or even imagine, an alternative to the here and now. In opposition to this, Hoyer calls for and identifies traces of a 'new utopianism'. He refers to this as a "retopia", the reconstruction of imaginations of alternative worlds which survived despite the current and almost inescapable capitalist reality. The aim of such a renewed utopianism would be to overcome the wide-spread disconnection between 'agency and utopia' and to create a perspective for social change towards a reimagined future.

Also starting from a critical analysis of leftist positions, Alexander Riccio advocates for the possibility of left unity through the notion of open utopia. In doing so, Riccio attempts to craft

[20] See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, 'The Manifesto of the Communist Party', in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. by Robert Tucker (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), pp. 469-500.

[21] The most extensive example of such a leftist reconsideration of utopia is the book already quoted: *Political Uses of Utopia.* See also, for instance, Ed Simon, 'Five Hundred Years of Utopia', in *Jacobin*, 19 April 2016 <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/04/thomas-more-utopia-socialism-progress-wilde/> [accessed 9 May 2017], along with the quoted Verso edition of More's *Utopia*, together with its introduction by China Miéville and essays by Ursula Le Guin.

a framework which embraces the radical imagination moving everyday toward an open utopia by doing away with what he calls a false dichotomy between the strategic and prefigurative revolutionary perspectives. This radical imagination, for Riccio, is a collective open-ended process which is always in turn posited in uncertainty and without having the comfort that what seems to be just at the present moment guarantees eternal justice. Riccio argues that '[a]dopting a notion of open utopia encourages a prefigurative understanding capable of accepting, but always seeking to push beyond, the inherent messiness of organising practices within capitalist social relations'. For him, such a framework attempts to strike a fine balance between, on the one hand, prefigurative social experiments' tendencies toward 'activist purity' and, on the other, the 'importance of intervening at the level of everyday experience capable of unleashing the radical imagination'.

Michelle Westerlaken offers the possibility of reimagining utopia free from speciesism. Westerlaken argues that in order to start reimagining such a utopia, the critical engagement with current dominant practices of capitalistic exploitation, violence, and oppression on animals needs to be seen at the same level and at the intersection of other forms of human exploitation and oppression. Moreover, she contends that criticising current practices is not enough, but that there is the need to start reimagining and considering futures that are non-speciesist based on care, empathy, and rediscovering ways of relating with animals.

Jason Branford states that humans are per nature utopian. He traces the origins of utopia in the immutable quest for a better future which, he argues, is at the core of the contemporary thrive for human enhancement. Using Emmanuel Levinas and Ernst Bloch's approaches, the author articulates a conception of humanity as a "coming to be" or "longing" and reminds us that it is the awareness of our insufficiency that is at the origin of the positive drive towards the future, therefore the 'unattainability' of utopia should not lead us to a pessimistic and reactionary movement but will necessarily lead us towards hope. The individual is here given a new central place in utopian plans which have tended to overlook the individual to focus on the collective. From this perspective, human enhancement could provide an opportunity to reflect on our individual shortcomings which, if not improved, would de facto prevent any attempt to create a utopian society. Ultimately this essay asks whether we can evolve towards more egalitarian societies without enhancing humans.

In a different way, Francesca Borg Taylor-East also proposes to look at the human body as a utopian topos through the sacred symbols it embodies. Taking on a phenomenological approach, she defends the need to acknowledge the body as an interface between the collective and the individual. Bridging the separation between private and public, she discusses the body as an 'absolute here' with which we inhabit space but with which we also communicate socially through culturally defined signs. If utopia can be understood as a separated space in which to improve social and existential structures, the body could potentially be formed through religious rituals and paraphernalia as the first place for utopia.

Lars Löfquist turns us toward the uncomfortable theme of war and utopia: starting from More, utopia has not necessarily been a pacifistic endeavour, even if peace may be one of the most generally acceptable aims of utopian visions. Löfquist draws a comparison between *Utopia* and Henry Dunant's *A Memory of Solferino*, which established a 'humanitarian' approach to

war leading to the foundation of the Red Cross as well as the Geneva Convention. This attempt to deal with the suffering caused by war is often criticised for its implication in justifying wars; Löfquist, however, argues for reading Dunant's text as a 'realistic utopian' intervention, which led to fundamental changes in international law. In a world characterised by national competition, power politics, and imperialism, this may be seen as an—albeit less than ideal—path towards utopian internationalism. Löfquist's essay can also provide an instigation towards considering questions of utopia and (physical) violence more broadly: what might be a utopian approach to the almost unavoidable violence of revolutionary struggles and self-defense? Is it possible to establish a better world with(out) a violent beginning?

Raylene Abdilla critically engages the current institutional framework of the European Union by exposing the dystopian foundations based on a kind of technocratic cosmopolitanism upon which the Union was established. As an alternative to the current hegemonic institutional structure of the EU, which is increasingly distancing itself from its people and at times even hindering democracy in their nation states, Abdilla argues for an open-ended utopian politics which facilitates contestations between 'adversaries' in a democratic context. This kind of utopian politics, for Abdilla, calls for a politics from below, where the people have the right and responsibility to demand change through civil mobilization and alternative ways of resistance.

This issue commences with an interview conducted by Teodor Reljić with Gregory Norman Bossert, author of science fiction, fantasy, and horror, and winner of the World Fantasy Award 2013 for his story 'The Telling'. It is an interview which offers the highly interesting perspective of the writer approaching utopia as a subject of literature, and subsequently the problems it poses for the creation of appealing narrative structures. This angle on the question of why there is a dominance of dystopian literary texts, films, cartoons, and so on, while utopian fictional worlds—the rich history of which Bossert nevertheless emphasises—are more rare, leads back to central issues of utopian thought: if utopia achieved does not offer a space for the conflicts typical of narrative fiction, this can be a further reason for rethinking the relationship between utopia and harmony, false, idyllic reconciliation and absence of conflict. Can a different, more open and more conflictual notion of utopia, which many of the contributions here are proposing from a political perspective, be developed through storytelling? Bossert, however, also highlights the connection between the ideology of 'libertarian individualism' and traditional narratives of singular "heroes" struggling within hostile worlds, arguably leading to a dominance of dystopia over utopia. This opens up the potential of a divergence from such narrative structures, aiding our imagining of different conceptions of subjectivity and opportunities for alternative social worlds. Indeed, as Bossert asserts, every approach to utopia entails an act of speculative fiction, which the author describes as a dialogue. The dialogic process of creating better worlds, be it in narrative, in the imagination of an audience, in political theory, or social practices may be the only possible way to take us 'straight to utopia', or at least out of the current dystopian state.

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