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Utopian confluences: anthropological mappings of generative politics

In this introductory essay, we introduce the possibility of an anthropology of generative politics, focusing in particular on its utopian unfoldings. We depart from the recognition that the current global political landscape is exposing new forms of collective mobilisation that challenge prevailing understandings of ‘the human’, collective agency and chronotopical experiences. Through a critical review of anthropological and other scholarship on, for instance, (post)humanism, as well as a presentation of contemporary socio-political configurations, we make the case for generative politics being integral to what we term ‘utopian confluences’.

Key words utopia, politics, confluence, generativity, temporality

Introduction

Even in anthropology – a discipline predetermined to embrace diversity, alterity, emergence and where some even peddle the idea of hope (e.g. Miyazaki 2006) – it may seem counterintuitive to narrow in on ‘utopia’. For this day and age, filled with ominous ‘Black Mirror’ narratives and with very real pandemic consequences, is saturated with discourses of what is, purportedly, utopia’s opposite in the form of collapse, end-times, disintegration: dystopia. A special edition of *Boston Review* accurately observes: ‘Whether we are talking about cannibal economics or the rising tide of xenophobia or the perennial threat of nuclear annihilation, it seems that the future has already arrived. And that future is dystopian’ (Díaz 2017: 5). Fredric Jameson, one of the doyens of imaginary and utopian thought, also made the following point in a version of his classical essay ‘American utopia’:

We have seen a marked diminution in the production of new utopias over the last decades (along with an overwhelming increase in all manner of conceivable dystopias, most of which look monotonously alike). (2016: 1)

Yet such seeming omnipresence of dystopias goes beyond merely reflecting a particularly gloomy planetary political moment. Instead, Díaz and Jameson demonstrate how that dark sibling of utopia, dystopia, is necessarily intrinsic also to formulations of utopian possibilities. One could therefore approach them as in tandem. Furthermore, while dystopias abound, the often marked absence of utopian visions bears testament to their alleged frailty and fleetingness. However, this is indeed an ‘alleged’ or purely conceptual frailty as this absence masks the intensity of utopia’s generative, playful and meaning-making engagement with reality that we, as anthropologists, encounter

in widely (and wildly) varied global contexts. Such absence occurs within a frame that Sherry Ortner has called ‘dark anthropology’ (2016) and at a time of social abandonment of marginalised human life (Biehl 2013). In our view, this absence eclipses other generative and creative interventions.

While this long-standing utopian/dystopian tension has made it difficult for anthropology to approach utopian formations (see also Maskens and Blanes 2013, 2016, 2018; Blanes et al. 2016), our move in this special issue seeks to advance analysis by critically addressing the mainstream currency of utopia in present day Western thought, which stems from a historical formation as a ‘speculative endeavor’ of alternative contemporary possibilities, expressed through (traditionally future-oriented) projections and expectations.¹ As authors such as Jameson (2005), have pointed out, such ‘speculative endeavours’ have since the 19th century occurred through the unfolding of a ‘utopian aesthetic form’, expressed for instance in the genres of architecture (from garden cities and *phalanstères* to modernism), literature (from Charles Renouvier’s *uchronias* up to 20th-century utopian sci-fi) and cinema. Alongside this aesthetic form – irreducible to a single political doctrine – a more explicitly political one also unfolded. This included the emergence of socialist, Marxist and anarchist projects (diversely framed as ‘utopian’ – see Maskens and Blanes 2018), as well as collective ‘withdrawals’ from society in intentional communities across the globe.² The dual impression of utopia as intrinsic to political doctrine or embedded in aesthetic form has produced a common-sensical understanding of utopia as an illusory ‘nowhere’ (Shukaitis 2004), inevitably distant from both pragmatic politics and everyday life. Against this tradition, we highlight an understanding of utopia as a grounded ‘relational economy’ (Sarr 2019 [2016]) geared not towards society’s outsides or aesthetics but its transformation and re-creation.

In the articles in this special issue, we unveil globally different socio-political and conceptual movements – what we are calling ‘confluences’ – that express such transformations and generative socialities. We invite readers to learn from such cases (which we summarise below) and we argue in the remainder of this introduction that anthropology needs new languages, methodologies and heuristics to grapple with contemporary social mobilisations. This is also so because these commonly express or convey utopian transformative wills to the extent of pushing us to rethink the space of politics, social movements and ideology. This dynamism summarises what we understand by *utopia* here: a generative form that, regardless of political spectrum, emerges from the translation of a transformative will into an instance of mobilisation.³ Thus, papers of this special issue aim at shifting the focus from utopia as an ideal or ‘spirit’ into utopia

¹ For a genealogical approach to utopia in the social sciences, see, for example, Maskens and Blanes (2018).

² Here we are referring equally to religious communes (from Jonestown to Auroville) and social experiments (e.g. Walden communities in the USA).

³ Here we make a necessary distinction between different directionalities in such mobilisations, which can either point towards a re-generation or re-creation, or towards a nostalgic conservation or recuperation. In this sense, for instance, the Make America Great Again (MAGA) mobilisation in the USA can be understood as utopian, but in a reactive, restorative fashion, seeking to reinstate a lost sense of absolutism against a present of relativism in the sense defined by George Steiner (1977 [1974]). From this perspective, the proximity of Evangelical and Pentecostal thinking to MAGA is not coincidental, considering the centrality of anti-relativist nostalgias in their ideologies (e.g. Eriksen et al. 2019). Below we also discuss the distinction between ‘reactive’ and ‘creative’ utopias.

as a praxis generative of mobilisation; an actual political intervention into the world intended for its recreation or regeneration (see also Wright 2010). Let us elaborate. First, our approach implies a heuristic move from the sometimes ethereal anthropologies of potentiality, hope and expectation, and into the concrete manifestations of utopian ethos in society – as in the ‘everyday’ performance of utopia in networks and spaces (Cooper 2014). Second, it resolves anthropology’s traditional discomfort working with utopia as an operative category (Shukaitis 2010; Maskens and Blanes 2018) by overcoming our traditional descriptive approach to the concept (e.g. Ribeiro 1991; Price et al. 2008; Goodale 2009; Basu and De Jong 2016). For, despite notable exceptions (Fox 1990; Razsa 2015), it is interesting to note that many anthropological approaches have too easily conflated utopia with religious worldviews (e.g. Brown 1991; Brumann 2000; van der Veer 2016; Blanes 2018), making it difficult to elaborate an anthropology of political utopias.

Perspectives from this special issue

Reflecting this lacuna, in this special issue we showcase movements towards generative mobilisation that all deviate from approaching utopia as aesthetic form or political doctrine. Rather, in the range of cases presented here, utopian confluences transcend traditional left versus right political configurations and analytical schemes and several articles identify anti-hegemonic, emerging expressions of human mobilisation and anthropological (*lattu sensu*) worldviews. For instance, Maité Maskens’ description of the enactment of the utopia of ‘Fortress Europe’ in concrete spaces, such as city registry offices, while composing a quite dystopian, morbid context of reproduction of the state in its borders (the contact and eventual integration of immigrants in the Belgian national system), in fact describes movements of response against the grain: ‘universalist’ solidarity activists who engage (metaphorically and literally) to overcome the ‘barriers’ and ‘borders’ that place ‘locals’ and ‘foreigners’ against each other. Toby Kelly’s article takes us to a completely different temporal and spatial setting – the Second World War in its Asian front – to describe the emergence of what seemed an impossibility at the time: a pacifist movement that chooses to go to the battle fronts as an ambulance unit destined to relieve suffering. He discusses how, as a utopian orientation, pacifism is at the same time mediated by a logic of personal and collective sacrifice and proponent of an alternative, optimistic and generative existence amid the generalised mayhem and destruction of the 1940s. Meanwhile, other movements, such as the Italian Cinque Stelle (Five Stars Movement), M5S, described by Jan-Jonathan Bock, claim an ‘avant-garde’ form of democratic praxis that is focused precisely on ideas of transcendence of the traditional spectre of political distribution. Crucially, Bock shows that, despite in one sense failing in their techno-oriented direct democratic politics of making obsolete the distinction between the represented and representing, M5S’s impressive political experiment refashioned long-term utopian notions of horizontalisation.

To varying degrees, incarnations or inversions of the figure of the classic socialist concept of the New Man are also present in several articles. Perhaps most visibly and certainly most intensely, we see it in Alpa Shah’s contribution, where she strongly underlines how Maoism, as expressed in the Indian case, involved the shedding of caste identities and signifiers and, crucially revolved around asceticism. Following the

rise and transformation of Naxalite guerrillas, the development of a 'utopian imaginary' among them, and emphasising an anthropological need to elaborate a theory of praxis, Shah holds that within the possibilities of utopia, including among New Men and Women guerrillas, dystopic potential is always embedded within erstwhile utopian practices. What one might call the inversion of New Man is visible in Bjørn Enge Bertelsen's article: Mozambique, being a country that experimented heavily with revolutionary notions of New Man integral to its Socialist era, in this decidedly post-revolutionary contemporary moment, is driven by kleptocratic forms of politics under the aegis of neoliberalism. In this context, novel forms of hierarchising the human are born. Here, the New Man is no longer an emancipatory universal possibility and mandate but sought repurposed under forms of resilience governance integral to urban politics – a form of marginalisation bringing young men and women to embrace life and officially discarded notions of New Man in their protests.

A reflection of utopian confluences that emerges from a connection between a will to transformation and mobilisation is also evident in Sian Lazar's article on Argentine trade unionism. Here, a sense of sacrifice is not merely drawn from the ideological realm of Socialism or labour movement thought and tactics but is instead integral to a specific religio-political trajectory of Peronism and Catholicism informing what it means to be a morally good union activist guided by love and vocation. Lazar argues that such orientations imbued political action with a form of sacredness – keys to understanding both the dedication her trade unionists perform and their location of utopian imaginaries as both in nostalgic past and futures. Lazar's article also underlines a confluence of diverse temporalities of utopia central to their present struggle. Dedication is also key to Ruy Llera Blanes' contribution to this special issue, where we learn how optimism, as an expression of political praxis (instead of a mere disposition of hope), becomes a method rather than an ideology: It comprises a tactic towards the 'opening up' of new political and social possibilities. We read how the activism of the Angolan Revolutionary Movement incorporates a logic of humour and provocation as a discourse that is simultaneously for the past, present and future. Mirroring also other contributions, Alex Flynn's analysis of the MST (the Brazilian Landless Workers' Movement) maps how its members have a 'special relationship' with utopia through their continuous engagement with the 'willed transformation' of both their social, collective situation and their personal life trajectories. In this respect, one could say that the 'land' MST members struggle for is equally found in the horizontal disposition of the territory and the vertical unfolding of the history of individual and collective mobilisation that the MST promoted.

Finally, Roger Sansi's text offers an original take on the notion of 'mobilisation', stemming from contemporary art practices. He explores the artistic methodology of walking and its critical, and at the same time utopian, potential in order to question the anthropological undertaking of politics and utopia. While from an artistic perspective walking can be perceived as an act of freedom, rebellion or resistance against e.g. capitalist alienation, Sansi argues that it also often entails a dystopian political encounter with the harsh realities of everyday life. However, from an anthropological perspective, the use of walking by Tim Ingold, Andrew Irving and others has motivated more subjectifying and less politicised versions of utopia. This allows Sansi to interrogate the epistemological validity of 'utopian politics', at least in the terms we have traditionally understood them, and seek new possibilities in this respect.

Towards conceptualising utopian confluences

While all these texts are unique ethnographic analyses of specific situations, they all exhibit considerable forces and imaginative possibilities that reflect human being and lead us to re-think what we term utopian politics as a prime anthropological concern. Inspired by these articles, in the remainder of this introduction we define and elaborate such utopian politics to comprise a social, cultural and cosmological field. We explore three components – generativity and vitalism; movement and confluence; and spatio-temporality – which unveil contemporary utopian politics as reacting to the classic, hegemonic political topography – both Left and Right. Such new forms challenge the classic anthropological analyses of politics and society – inevitably structured around binary, oppositional logics: the society against the state (e.g. Clastres 1974), the dominant versus the resistant (e.g. Scott 1990), the hegemonic versus the subaltern (e.g. Morris 2010), etc. While we neither discard the political consequence of such binaries nor dismiss their analytical worth, we do suggest that contemporary utopian formations are generating immediate, present confluences operating across different spectra.

Thus, the ‘utopian confluences’ in question here exceed long-standing axes of vertical and horizontal spatialisations of political ideology being irreducible to the ‘anarcho-left’ and also, we hold, transgress conventional left–right boundaries. We should, therefore, not limit ourselves to replicate doctrinaire Right or Left orientations but rather design concepts necessary to grapple with globally diverse contexts. This special issue’s concern with utopian politics comprises, therefore, an attempt to re-invigorate debates within political anthropology. It is also, we hold, a response to a globally dominant modality of politics that constitutes, at some level and in Ghassan Hage’s words, ‘a capitalist–colonialist–domesticating world order’ (2015: 1). As Hage, we also believe that anthropology’s analytical imperatives, born out of the tomes of ethnographic archive and the contemporary world, provide powerful intellectual resources from which non-dominant and emergent forms of utopian politics may be conceptually imagined. And if Fredric Jameson (2004) is correct in approaching utopia as ‘a critical and diagnostic instrument’, then an anthropology of such utopian confluences should provide the diagnostic and critique with the breadth and span of human diversity that the Western-oriented literary and human sciences sometimes lack (see also Bertelsen and Bendixsen 2016).

Generativity in the face of the eclipse of the future

While a key impulse for this anthropological rethinking derives also from current anthropological debates about vitality, assemblage and agency (for a debate see, for example, Helmreich 2015; Ong and Collier 2005), in this issue we invoke the concept of generativity as a central component of utopian politics. By doing so, we aim to, first, shift the conversation in anthropology about politics and, second, create an original space of inquiry into sociality and human relationality. Both aims are inspired by what we could call, following Walter Benjamin (1968), ‘redemptive modalities’: recognitions and reactions against perceived hegemonic historical and political situations (the famous *automaton*). This redemptive mood simultaneously dismantles hegemonic ideologies (often teleologies) of history and addresses the problem of futurity and its ‘presence’ in our contemporary political configurations. From this perspective, one

may argue that multitude, populism, the commons, emancipation, autonomy, communitarianism, etc. appear as against-the-grain semantics for new, alternative political formations centred on human life and the social (e.g. Bey 1985; Hardt and Negri 2004, 2017; Laclau 2005, 2007; Harvey 2000; *The Invisible Committee* 2009). In our view, Ernst Bloch's famous overture to *The spirit of utopia* somehow prefigures such life- and human-centric politics, stating boldly: 'I am. We are. That is enough. Now we have to begin. Life has been put into our hands' (2000 [1918]: 1).

The above-mentioned analyses, underlining generativity and human-centric dimensions, necessitates a focus on the forms of mobilisation (see Sansi's contribution to this volume). Here, we could offer countless examples of 'successful' mobilisation and experimentation, based on progressive and vitalist philosophies of utopian politics – the 'nowtopias' that have been recently suggested (Carlsson and Manning 2010): from EZLN and the globalisation of Zapatismo to Marinaleda or the Zone à Défendre (ZAD) in France, communes and occupy movements. Such cases underline the analytic potential of an *élan vital* philosophy as a (broadly understood) political worldview, one through which sacrifice and optimism, resistance and utopia, combat and revolution, contestation and vindication, produce stances of a 'materialisation of desire' (see Alex Flynn's contribution).⁴

To be clear, the implications of the papers of this special issue are that we are to approach political action as a utopia-driven practice, but one that is conceived as a 'constituent imagination' (Shukaitis et al. 2007) or as prefigurations of utopias to be (Krøijer 2015). Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, it is in this sense that different programmatic utopias – from socialism to Nazism or liberationism – emerged, in response to processes of transformation of the will of emancipation into a political organisation, be it progressive or conservative (Abensour 2000).

Given the above, we thus recognise a distinction between a 'reactive' and a 'creative' utopia (Cossette-Trudel 2010), which appears in the conjunction of contingent and non-contingent dimensions of social life: if, on the one hand, utopia can be perceived as a concrete reaction to (what structures) the given social context (e.g. capitalism), it can simultaneously be perceived as a generative, inscriptive creation, a drive, an *élan* towards something 'different' (2010: 4). In other words, utopia is doubly inscribed in history and is therefore reactive, contingent but *also* creative, non-contingent. In contrast to Deleuze and Guattari's (1994: 110) subsuming of utopia within an encompassing idea of 'becoming' – which concentrates more on the potentiality and less on the actuality of utopia in our sociality – we seek to map utopia's 'inscriptive' political capacities. Emphasising creation and generativity in turn invokes a sense of effervescence and transformation, not only in the temporal sense attributed by Walter Benjamin (1968), but also in the concrete consequences it provokes (see also Bertelsen 2016).

Thus, more than an unattainable ideal, utopia is understood here as the materialisation of desire and will themselves. This materialisation does not necessarily invoke a

⁴ A necessary conceptual clarification: our use of 'vitalism' here is a nod towards the classic discussions on the *élan vital* or the 'spark' that makes us living, growing, evolving human beings, from Mesmer's *magnétisme animal* to Bergson's *Creative evolution* 1911 (1907) thesis on the 'vital impetus' that geared biological evolution. While such discussions took place within the scope of natural philosophy, here we genealogically extract the political consequences: the creative impulse that pushes people into a position of struggling for change (see Lindholm and Zúquete 2010). In this respect, as Ssorin-Tchaikoff (2012) noted, this is inscribed within a longstanding political debate concerning the 'driving force' of human mobilisation. See, for example, Graeber (2011) or Shah and Pettigrew (2018) for similar discussions on the mobilisation of revolution.

total and large-scale order, but rather constitutes an imaginal political domain interrogating the strictures of politically conformist notions of the real, such as political party, state forms or *Realpolitik* approaches to economy. Put differently, it is concerned with the concrete more than the systemic and abstract: the everyday struggle towards ‘promising spaces’ (Cooper 2014), the attempts to move beyond the ‘zones of social abandonment’ (Biehl 2013) and into realms and domains of non-conformity, transformation and perhaps, who knows, celebration. It also includes creatively attacking, weakening or fomenting alternatives to what can be labelled the very ontology of capitalism (The Invisible Committee 2015 [2014]; Stengers 2011). We suggest that in such circumstances, utopian questions of common good, well-being, freedom, happiness and ‘the good life’ may appear – not only as limited imaginations and projections but as factual semantics for gearing political action and thought.

Utopian confluences

In charting new forms of human- and life-centric generative politics, the notion of ‘confluence’ is helpful. Mimicking life itself, the notion has aquatic connotations and is often employed as a term denoting the co-joining of rivers or flows. However, it may also, as Dominic Boyer comments, capture the merging and running together of various forces of the imaginary and, in his example, be used to describe ‘the confluence of western and non-western imaginations of alternative energy’ (2011: 5). Taking our cue from such fluid etymological origins and contemporary usages, by *confluence* we are referring to conjoined forms of social mobilisation that exceed classic understandings stemming from political theory (see Sansi, this volume). Thus, we are not referring to what Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset once called, in his book *The revolt of the masses* (1930), the ‘mass man’, the assemblage of average persons, ‘not especially qualified’ but nevertheless representing a ‘collective will’. This speculation, less akin to a Marxist theory of the (proletarian) class than to a proto-theory of social psychology, perhaps involuntarily gives way to a recognition of the power of mobilisation in the advancement of social life, based on the opposition of mass and minority (Ortega y Gasset 1930). Many decades later, Ernesto Laclau would also contribute to the debate on ‘collective reason’ in his reflections concerning collective identity. In his *On populist reason* (2005), he performed a critical distinction between ‘group’ and ‘demand’. In this framework, ‘the people’ are no longer equated with an unenlightened threat to ‘real governance’ but seen as an inherent and structuring component of present-day political experience.⁵

Instead, in our approach we lean closer to Hardt and Negri’s discussion of ‘multitude’ and ‘assembly’ (2000, 2004, 2017) as open networks of mobilisation that converge in their anti-hegemonic struggle against empire; a present condition of socio-political dominance through the perpetuation of war and conflict that has refashioned old sovereignties with new semantics. As is well known, Hardt and Negri’s analysis culminates in the development of an alternative political and ethical project ‘within and against Empire’ (2009: vii): commonwealth. While ‘commonwealth’ definitely incorporates a

⁵ This, however, must be understood in response to the long-term history of criminalisation of protest and dissent, from the original 1 May to the recent repression of alter-globalisation movements or activism under authoritarian regimes in postcolonial Africa (see Blanes’ contribution to this special issue) and elsewhere.

certain 'old regime' tone, their project entails re-centring 'commons' from a problem of resource management to one of sociality and relationship. This re-centring is also what The Invisible Committee propose when proclaiming an insurrectionist politics that reconfigures 'communalism', against decaying ideas of populism and communism, recuperating the Latin concept of *Omnia Sunt Communia* (2015 [2014]) in order to address alternative mobilisations that exceed the classical 'mass man'. Such theoretical reconfigurations have had the merit of deconstructing an otherwise elite understanding of social mobilisation – one that removed individuality, consciousness and creativity from political acts of anti-hegemonic struggle, dissidence and resistance.

Here, the very figure of the human and her subject therefore looms large: in many contexts the body, comportment, mind, social relations and (re-)productive capacities are attempted slightly reconfigured, radically modified or totally and fully erased and re-inscribed for utopian political purposes. Again, we see here how the notion and possibility of utopia and its (oftentimes) revolutionary emergence is intimately tied to vitalism (in the Bergsonian sense of 'energising' the body for new corporal duties) and sacrifice (e.g. revolutionary sacrifice of self and others), as is explored in the contribution by Ruy Blanes to this issue.

This utopian politics of self-sacrifice, re-direction of productive and generative resources and labour – life, essentially – and, indeed, the need for self-education for the struggle and revolution to be completed and successful, also reverberated from the Soviet Union across the world (see Buck-Morss 2002; Cheng 2009). Not least during the 1960s and 1970s, intensely circulated ideas and notions of radical rupture, liberating violence and new human horizons meandered from the domains of the North or East to the global South (Bertelsen and Rio 2019). Or, indeed, vice versa – as when, for instance, the Irish Republican Army was inspired by the works of Franz Fanon, particularly *The wretched of the earth* (Fanon 2004 [1961]). Further, Fanon of course posited that struggle and self-sacrifice was integral to the rise of a so-called 'New Man' and, indeed, to any liberation from colonial orders (2004 [1961]; see also Skradol 2009).

Time/place for utopia

As should also be evident from the above, there are multiple and ironic impossibilities, and contradictions, that are latched onto the notion of utopia. First, in its classical sense, it is place-less and the *topos* of its emplacement remains floating, fleeting, fix-less. Utopia is thereby seemingly suspended in a temporal as well as a spatial sense – a temporal non-space. Second, the elaborate visions of utopia (i.e. complex ideas of an ideal society) are frequently conveyed as immobile and complete: they are embodiments or materialisations of total social, cosmological and ontological orders in which dynamics, development or trajectories are rendered impossible or obsolete – eclipsed by perfection. Put differently, as the utopian world is, in a sense, always already reconfigured and, indeed, fixed into place, time and being, the opening up for other or diverse trajectories (temporal, generative, political) are foreclosed. Such atemporal statics reveal a highly paradoxical conservative-totalitarian streak to utopia. Arguably, it also potentially undermines the very circumstances of originary radical emergence, longing and articulation – as in instances of experimental prefiguration (Krøijer 2015) or in millenarian movements (Cohn 2004 [1957], 2001 [1993]).

This would be so if the relations of the utopian vision of the future and the present were only linear. But as the current anthropology of time recurrently demonstrates, they are not (Blanes 2019). Even where they are cast ‘as seamless, unified, and forward moving’, effectively ‘repressing or effacing alternative strategies of organizing time’ (Elizabeth Freeman, quoted in Jen and McMahon 2017: 923), they actually appear as a temporal multiplicity (Ssorin-Chaikov 2017). This for us implies an alteration of the linear chrononormativity through a spatial and territorial intervention – as seen also in Alex Flynn’s contribution to this special issue.

Thus, we follow the impetus of such a critical approach to the domain of the temporal as, first, not necessarily linear and, second, holding that the very matter of time and its envisioning is central to *any* utopian politics of generativity. This implies that utopian temporalities may emerge (or be emergent) within erstwhile domains of modern contexts where certain temporalities reign. It also means that generativity as an aspect of utopian politics is *not* in itself linear (or dependent on linearity as a principle) but rather has multiple loci as points of emergence and, further, is irreducible to past, present and future as stable categories. Conversely, the very matter of temporality within utopian configurations is itself unstable, slippery, twisted and changing. We hold that unsettling the dominant narratives of the present – and its antecedents and projected future path – carries significant utopian political potential.

Such temporal multiplications, we argue, reflect utopian revolutionary mind-sets which act on the present in order to redeem the past and open up the future. It is precisely this ‘opening up’ which comprises the utopian matter of time: the introduction of a ‘what if?’ speculation into our present endeavours (see Maskens and Blanes 2018: xxiii and ff.). This is also what can be acknowledged in the wider framework of the linear time of Russian Revolution, which represents an important case of the broader notion of ‘modernity as time’, as discussed by Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov in his book *The two Lenins* (2017), which addresses the multiplication across time and space of conceptions and experiences of revolutionary ontology. Through his identification of different materialisations of Lenin in the history of the Soviet Union, Ssorin-Chaikov’s example unveils what we could call a temporal multiplication of utopian formations. Likewise, and more often than not, the utopian political argument produces the same kind of projections: an alteration of the linear chrononormativity through a spatial and territorial intervention – as seen also in Alex Flynn’s contribution to this special issue.

In sum, by claiming political utopia as immediate and generative, we emphasise that the simultaneity of its temporal and spatial components and the alter-political forms documented and analysed by many authors in this special issue, is as much about alternative futures as about reconfiguring present expressions. This can be translated into different instances: on the one hand, what Deleuze and Guattari once termed, in *A thousand plateaus*, ‘micropolitics’ – as the mobile, ‘molecular’ relations between singular instances that enable potentiality and becoming which ‘thwart and break through the great worldwide organization’ (1987: 216). On the other hand, into what art critic Nicolas Bourriaud later coined as ‘micro-utopias’. Such micro-utopias reflect art and creative (poietic) forms that emerge from proximity, participation and collaboration, and push towards ‘expanding the realm of the possible’ (Bourriaud 1998; Wood 2007; Blanes et al. 2016). However, if Bourriaud was interested in developing a framework for understanding the epistemology of the late 20th-century art scene, here we are referring to the political consequences of proximity, assembly and collaboration.

Think, for instance, of the Occupy movements in terms of their topographical interventions – as in Alberto Corsín-Jiménez and Adolfo Estalella's (2017) analysis of post-15M Madrid, where the 'exhaustion' caused by the work of assembly gave way to experimentation in and for the 'street', shifting the scope of political breadth to the 'micro-' level. Likewise, Jeffrey Juris, in his reflection on '#Occupy Everywhere' (2012; see also Szolucha 2017), refers to the overarching public space that emerged from processes of networking, interlocution and aggregation in Occupy mobilisations in North America. But this public space can (and should) be equally understood in terms of its topographical intervention, as described to us by Paul-François Tremlett in reference to Occupy London (2012) or by Charles Hirschkind in his reflections on Tahrir politics (2012). Such mobilisations, in the midst of their heterogeneity, are in any case framed as constituent, at least after the fact, through the assessment of their impact in local and transnational political faring. What links them is the 'hope in common' that David Graeber has presented to us and analysed (2011). And regardless of the effective or eventual 'newness' of their praxis, what they reveal is a very utopian transformative will, as we argued in the beginning of this introduction.

One may indeed question, paraphrasing Sarah van Gelder's book on the Occupy Movement and the 99% (2011), if 'this changes everything'. Finding the answer may be simpler than initially expected. The mere fact that we are able to speculate on this change and transformation is indicative that it is already in progress. And this is precisely the kind of endeavour that we propose to ourselves as anthropologists: to engage in a political anthropology of utopian confluences, where the political appears *not* as institutionalised praxis but as an emergent and generative formation that affects the 'being-ness' of the selves that take part in it. In doing so, we must allow for the experimental, creative and promising to operate – we must allow for utopian politics, explore its generativity and map its many confluences.

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Confluences utopiques : cartographie anthropologique d'une politique générative

Dans cet essai introductif, nous suggérons qu'une anthropologie de la politique générative est possible, en nous concentrant en particulier sur ses déploiements utopiques. Nous partons du constat que l'actuel paysage politique mondial révèle de nouvelles formes de mobilisation collective qui remettent en question les conceptions dominantes de « l'humain », de la capacité d'action collective et des expériences chronotopiques. À travers l'examen critique des recherches en anthropologie ou relatives à d'autres domaines – le (post)humanisme par exemple – et la présentation des configurations socio-politiques contemporaines, nous démontrons que la politique générative fait partie intégrante de ce que nous appelons les « confluences utopiques ».

Mots-clés utopie, politique, confluence, générativité, temporalité