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Karine Basset, Michèle Baussant

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Utopia, Nostalgia: Intersections

Karine Basset and Michèle Baussant

Translated by **Andrew Brown**

[Utopie, nostalgie : approches croisées](#)

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1The experience of the past, which is, after all, a present experience, itself contributes to the creation of the future; our effort to bring about ‘again’ the appearance of an old experience actually leads to a new experience. And as St. Augustine said, everything is present, even the past and the future; likewise, we could say: everything is future, even the past, which is a past-future and (...) a past yet to come or a future that has already come to pass. All the more, the past of *passéisme* (looking backward) is itself an ideal yet to come; the object of *passéiste* nostalgia belongs, in fact, to the normative world of future things just as much as the object of futuristic hope; the paradise lost and the paradise regained of messianism, the golden age of tradition and the ideal city of the utopians, the extreme suprahistorical past and the ultimate metahistorical future come together in the same eschatology. (JANKELEVITCH, 1977, 34)

- 1 The notions of memory and heritage have been widely studied in the social sciences for the last thi [\(...\)](#)

2For many years now, research on the relation to time, memory and the uses of the past in contemporary societies and, more marginally, research on ancient societies, has continued to develop, overlapping with a trend in the public sphere sustained by those people who are active, for example, in politics, community life, the media and culture. Some of this research has analyzed the links with different pasts and different spaces, whether these links are projected, maintained or broken; and it has taken two directions that are not mutually exclusive. On the one hand, such research has focused on practices which testify to an abstract feeling of belonging to a human community, through heritage and commemorations¹; on the other hand, it has investigated symbols, imaginaries and even political projects, particularly in terms of utopia and nostalgia (RIOT-SARCEY, 1998; LACHENAL and MOBDJ-POUYE, 2014).

3It is to the connection between these two last notions, often perceived as opposites on the basis of a priori well-established splits (between progress and reaction, modernism and *passéisme*, etc.), that this issue is devoted. Here, we will not try to circumscribe these notions, but will leave their potential definitions open as they involve spaces and temporalities of infinite diversity, and this is precisely what enables connections to be forged between them. Outside literary studies, little work has explicitly addressed these connections from a theoretical point of view, in terms of their practical expressions – which are themselves conditioned by the social and historical context in which they unfold.

4How are we to conceptualize the link between these two notions and the social phenomena on which they rely? The former, nostalgia, is often defined in a relatively narrow way, usually in the context of individual experience – nostalgia as a moral malady whose somatic repercussions can lead to death (BOLZINGER, 2007), and then as a concept designating a cultural practice whose forms, content, meanings and effects change with the present context (STEWART, 1988). The second, utopia, is polysemic (RIOT-SARCEY, 2001, 5), forming part of the collective and social spheres and characterized by a non-linear history – sometimes as a formal ‘totality’ (a closed system), sometimes as an ‘*élan*’ or impulse contained in heterogeneous and scattered fragments or hidden within the folds of daily life, or as a ‘nightmare’, a dystopia whose definitive realization must be prevented (Huxley, 1932). Yet they both come together through their central reference to an elsewhere that does not exist or has ceased to exist, anchored in a dimension of either protest against, or escape from, current society. As Marina Chauliac points out in her contribution, ‘the present place and moment are, in a way, the negative of what has or is yet to come to pass...’

5 What is the meaning of the individual and collective experiences that connect these notions? What tools should we use to apprehend them? Utopia as well as nostalgia have one thing in common: their pejorative meaning often prevails, in the usual interpretation as (often) in scientific language, over their use as analytical categories and/or as historical objects. No doubt this pejorative meaning is due to the fact that both are linked to the sense of loss lying behind the gesture of revolt against the present which gives its momentum to the projected ideal. It is also the point of connection where they meet and create histories and stories: sometimes critiques of the present, sometimes projections of an elsewhere (temporal and spatial) which are rooted in an idealization of the past. And it is perhaps the particular tone that the sense of loss confers on the utopian experience that baffles the analyst. Moreover, if nostalgia could well be constitutive of utopia in its different forms (RICŒUR, 1984), including as a ‘pathology of Utopia’ (RICŒUR, 1986), does all nostalgia contain a utopian ferment?

6The works on nostalgia that have pondered its links with utopia are few and far between. This notion, André Bolzinger reminds us, appeared for the first time in 1688 in a medical thesis, where the word was used to translate the effects related to the ‘pain’ felt by an individual whose country is far away. In the eighteenth century, it was described as a disease arising when the subject’s desire to see his country was transformed into a permanent psychological pain whose somatic impact could lead to death (BOLZINGER, 2007). The medical debate swung between linking this mortifying sadness to an effect of nature and associating it with culture, and gradually shifted the boundaries of the controversy over its treatment, which sometimes advocated a return home, and sometimes recommended a dialogue between the patient and the practitioner. But this approach was stymied by the reforms in anatomy, which drew a clear distinction between the consideration of psychological causes in morbid phenomena and the reduction of the clinical field to the organic. The patient became a body, expressing itself only through an organic symptom. The doctor alone could decipher it thanks to his science of anatomy, which rendered the diagnosis of nostalgia obsolete by the end of the 19th century.

7Having been used to describe individual pathology, the concept was then applied to designate, in common as well as scientific language, a cultural practice. At the time of the Romantics, especially in Germany, it referred to the quest for a unified German homeland that merged with the memory of the Holy Roman Empire. The lost homeland became the metaphor for a past that was irrevocably over. Nostalgia was a psychological pathology with

bodily effects: from the point of view of the individual it linked a life trajectory to disorders of self-esteem, connected in particular to the dissolution of familiar social bonds engendered by departure. On the one hand, it was associated with the notion of time, conceived as irreversible. It thus became a form of reconstruction of the past engendered by a feeling of loss in the face of the irreversibility of time. 'The nostalgic is well aware of this: he does not really want to return. What he really wants is to maintain, and at the same time to abolish, a distance, a gap, whose main virtue lies in providing him with a source of inspiration' (JANKELEVITCH, 1977, 103-104). On the other hand, nostalgia was intrinsically linked to the notion of place, something reversible – a place lost or left, or the place of exile where the nostalgic now finds himself, an imagined place, or the object of his nostalgia – and susceptible to all the manipulations, combinations and superimpositions imaginable. This is what the neologism of nostalgia refers to: it is not the absence of the place as materiality that is painful, a place to which it is possible to return; what is painful would be reunion with it, in another time than the irreparably lost time of the past.

8Thus, some writers see nostalgia as the converse of memory when this is understood as a moving and dynamic social phenomenon including memories in a temporal continuity endowed with meaning and charged with plans (ATTIAS-DONFUT, 1988, 181-182). In this nostalgia, which is nothing but a trace of losses and ruptures, no present or future can be revitalized. It is an impossible return: in this respect it is distinguished from history as a form of reconstruction of the past, expressing a desire for what is lacking, a desire to create or rebuild what one can never possess. For others, nostalgia is, on the contrary, a social construction of regret, which is neither a retreat nor the signal of a rejection of the present, 'but which is a gaze down the road travelled, a way of saying that this path was not solitary, that we travelled down it together' (RAUTENBERG, 2003, 19). Embodied in collective memory or heritage, it is a positive nostalgia, 'constructing an imaginary and with the potential for projection, especially for implementing collective projects', drawing on the past considered as a raw material. It projects itself through 'exemplary' places more than through symbolic places ("hauts lieux") or even sites of memory; it is the 'theatre of a social action for the resolution of a problem' (MICOUD, 1991, 53), created to express in situ a problematization of the social bond and to open onto other interconnected spaces. A certain number of recent studies, finally, have conceived of nostalgia as a sign of modernity (BONNET, 2016), characterized either by a tension between a devalued present and an idealized past (HUYSSSEN 2003; RETHMANN, 2008), or by a relation to the past established outside any lived reality or any personal connection (APPADURAI, 2005), or finally by its retroactive or prospective nature, not necessarily or only focused on the past but turned towards the future, in an uncertain present. Others have stated that these expressions of memory need to be grasped within specific temporalities, the representations and practices that they underlie, generate and/or nourish, between alteration and persistence, continuity and change, disappearance and creation (ANGE and BERLINER, 2015).

9Projection, opening, the construction of an imaginary: the idea of a link with utopia is not entirely absent even if it is not explicitly formulated. For their part, Pickering and Keightley (2006) have highlighted the complex and sometimes contradictory phenomena that nostalgia covers, and the critiques to which, like memory, it has been subjected, particularly as regards its ideological potential. They have also underlined the multiple meanings it bears depending on social and historical contexts and, as a form of idealization of the past, its potential links with utopian elements, as both a desire for re-enchantment and a response to disenchantment. 'Nostalgia arises because of the divergence of experience and expectation generated by modernity, but as we have argued throughout, it is not a singular or fixed condition

(KOSELLECK, 1985; PICKERING, 2004). It is not to be conceived as necessarily “the opposite of utopia, but as a form of memory, always implicated, even productive in it.” (...) Nostalgia as retreat from the present and nostalgia as retrieval for the future are not mutually exclusive, any more than either impulse is the preserve of dominant or subordinate groups’ (PICKERING and KEIGHTLEY, 2006, 937-938).

10 Studies of utopia have tended more to incorporate the question of the past as one of the founding values of utopia, as is evidenced by the work of Ernst Bloch for whom the future was to be discovered in the aspirations of the past, as an unfulfilled promise (1959). According to him, utopia is, in essence, nostalgic. He conceived it not as a system, as an imaginary totality, but as fragments and desires at work in an infinity of objects and experiences. His work was rooted in the trauma of the First World War which in his view revealed the intolerable nature of capitalist society. He believed less in a revolutionary type of struggle than in the necessity of launching a battle against the spirit of the age and for the creation of another spirit, the spirit of utopia. The latter could be detected in all periods of the past. As J.-M. Vincent notes in the *Dictionnaire des utopies*, after the experience of Nazism, Bloch was convinced of the theoretical necessity ‘to establish new, critical, non-linear, more complex relationships between the past, the present and the future. From the past, we must remember whatever has not found a voice, which has remained in the state of trace and has been rejected’ (RIOT-SARCEY et al., 2006, 30). Bloch’s work, in particular *The Principle of Hope*, itself constructs a *non-prospective* utopia, entirely based on an archaeology of traces of utopian activity in the past. His approach thus seems to be nostalgic in its very essence: it is less a question of finding what took place than what could have taken place and which manifested itself in the form of aspirations and promises. It thus encourages us to embark on a history or an anthropology of that which did not come to pass.

11 For his part, Karl Mannheim brought to light differentiated forms of ‘utopian mentality’ (1929), and reflected in particular on our relation to time in history. For him, the utopian mentality has the specificity of being in ‘disagreement with the state of reality’. This disagreement ‘is always apparent in the fact that such a state of mind in experience, thought, and practice is oriented toward objects that do not exist in the real situation.’ However, these orientations, which go beyond reality, are designated as utopian only ‘when they are acted upon and tend to shake, partially or totally, the order of things dominant at that moment’ (MANNHEIM, 1956, 72). The utopian point of view is thus ‘in opposition to the conservative opinion which speaks in favour of the established order, [and] prevents the existing order from becoming absolute’ (ibid.). However, there is a form of *conservative utopia*, a counter-utopia that arises from opposition to the *rational utopian mentality*, based on notions of progress and perfectibility and represented by the liberal order. These two utopian forms, then, are quite different in the meaning they ascribe to time. For conservative thought, which favours the concreteness of the present, time is discovered as the ‘creator of value’. Since the conservative mentality is essentially devoid of utopian impulses, its utopian character arises solely from the struggle with the rational utopia that denies that value. The connection between utopia and nostalgia is thus observable a priori solely through this singular form that Mannheim calls ‘conservative utopia’. Does this mean that progressive or properly revolutionary utopias are devoid of all references to the past and of any nostalgic potentiality?

12 By identifying the emergence of a new utopian form based on the positive value ascribed to the past in reaction to industrial and capitalist liberal society, Mannheim’s work leads us to question the specific contextual dimension of the relation to time established by the different forms of utopian narrative, in other words, the historical conditions of the production or non-

production of utopias, so as to overcome the 'trap' of individual biography, as highlighted by Fredric Jameson (2007). If Jameson was especially interested in specifically 'utopian' programmes which propose a conscious realization of utopia, the sociology of romanticism developed by Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre has opened up other perspectives by associating this concept (often used in a literary way) with an overall social situation. These authors define romanticism, as it unfolds in very different spheres of cultural life (literary, artistic, economic, political), as a 'view of the world' characterized by a tension between revolt, the inaugural gesture of utopia, and melancholy, which the authors equate with nostalgia (LÖWY and SAYRE, 1992). This broadening of the concept allows them to identify, as against Mannheim, the traces of nostalgia for the past perceptible in the successive forms of radical and non-conservative protest against capitalist civilization, starting with the pioneer works of Marxist and/or libertarian revolutionary socialism and the cultural movements of the avant-garde, such as surrealism, and continuing in the philosophical and sociological criticism of writers such as Herbert Marcuse and Henri Lefebvre.

13In relation to the existing definitions of utopia, Jean Seguy (1999), finally, places an unprecedented emphasis on the utopian function of memory, i.e. the central reference to a past, a tradition, or the memory of a beginning. Focusing on the utopian socialization of values in sects and religious formations, he defines utopia as an overall ideological system which, either 'by appeal to the imaginary alone (*dreamt utopia*), by concomitant or complementary recourse to writing (*written utopia*) or by the subsequent or parallel shift to practice (*practised utopia*)' (1980, 12) makes it possible to question the present in the name of an archetypal past. Referring to a normatively apprehended past so as to criticize the present and to shape another future, utopia aims to radically transform existing overall social systems, in two ways that either go 'in the same direction as, or run against, the social change perceived to be inevitably emerging' (1980, 13). It can be retrograde, characterized by the refusal to tolerate current changes and favouring 'a past that one wishes to save more than the acceleration of potentialities that the present keeps confined' (id.), or it can be progressive, leading to a social change perceived as being too slow to impose itself in the present while still being inevitable. In one case, recall of the past and action to shape the future are conceived as an attempt either to limit social changes or, on the contrary, to create new conditions. In 'concrete terms, a shift is possible from "pro" to "retro". The interpretation and critique of the present, as well as the meaning ascribed to social change, and the kind of relationship that needs to be fostered between the desired future and the reference to the past, seem likely to change with the circumstances. However, each balance of these relationships with time refers to values praised, promoted, or else denounced' (1980, 13).

14Based on these theoretical perspectives, three convergent lines thus form the premises of our thinking. The first is inductive, starting from an investigation, based on empirical data collected from our respective fieldwork, of the 'resistance to the present'. The forms of this resistance often come down to two extreme, non-exclusive poles: on the one hand the projection of an elsewhere, a radical otherness to be constructed, a utopia in the positive sense of a social imaginary 'legitimately opposed to the existing state of affairs'; on the other hand, an idealization of the past on which the critique of the present would be based.

15The second line follows the many studies that, in the human and social sciences, have since the 1980s questioned the many different forms of the experience of time and place. Some writers ponder the 'utopias of the present', such as anti-globalization, which does not focus on detailing 'the architecture of the ideal world and which does not place it either in another

place or in another time' (BERTHO, 2006, 191). In a full, connected, global world, there is no longer any elsewhere (ZARKA, 2010).

16Some people, diagnosing the disappearance of the 'grand narratives' that shaped the Western world, have thus underlined the failure of the great political and social utopias (socialism, communism) and the questioning of the belief in the 'single march' towards progress. This questioning of the contemporary modalities of the experience of time in the Western world has led some authors to speak of a 'crisis in time', a jamming of the connections between the past, present and future (ROUSSO, 1987; AUGÉ, 1992; HARTOG, 1995 and 2003). There is no *horizon of expectation* (KOSSELLECK, 1990) in this contemporary experience of time: the future is no longer perceived as a promise or a principle of hope, but as a threat, a 'shadow line' imperilling our present. As for the past, it is paradoxically some of its most negative experiences, such as the Holocaust, which now constitute, in many countries, a new basis for averting further crises and for forging shared elements of representation on which there can be built a sense of common belonging, an essential foundation for the practices of solidarity and cohesion imposed by the challenges of globalization and its increasing degree of integration.

17Correlatively, these works have highlighted a hyper-presence of the past, in contemporary times paradoxically characterized by 'presentism', the form of experience of a 'perpetual, ungraspable and almost immobile present, seeking in spite of everything to produce for itself its own historical time' (HARTOG, 2003, 28). This is particularly reflected in an inflation of memory and heritage that has been commented on many times, one of the signs of an 'excess of time' characteristic of the situation of supermodernity (AUGÉ, 1992). Through this 'injunction to preserve the heritage', it seems to be less a question of renewing ties with a historical past and 'a tradition' than of building a custom-made past constantly updated according to its own needs (FABRE, 2013). This 'excess' characterized by an 'obsession' with the past, the omnipresence of an uncertain present and a relative weakening of utopian and/or futuristic perspectives, can be observed pretty much everywhere; since the 1970s it has been fostered by various participants, discourses, actions and norms in circulation (ROUSSO, 2016). The digital realm, at once the creator, product and symbol of this phenomenon, contributes to this amplification and the feeling of excess which it generates, sometimes crudely exposing the dynamic, subjective and emotional dimension of the links to the past in fragile presents (ASSMAN, 2010). When confronted with the heterogeneity of sources and the diversity of the spaces of memory that they fashion, in an almost limitless and 'à la carte' manner, sometimes ascribing new value to pasts that are painful, denigrated, or contradictory, in a mode of nostalgic consumption (the descendants of Nazis, of the expelled, of *pieds-noirs*, *retornados* ...), the researcher, like the web surfer, is often left feeling perplexed. Thus, for Bertho (2006, 194), 'The consecration of the present in a replete world, a world which is ours, presents us with the inventory of abolished dreams: now there is no longer any beyond, nor any elsewhere, nor golden age, nor bright future. And humanity, face to face with itself, has no escape. Concrete utopia then concerns the very category of humanity, its inclusive and cosmopolitan character of solidarity and communication, in exact contrast to the *bare life* which modernity has turned into the cornerstone of power. The other possible world is us ourselves, today.'

18Finally, the third line investigates, in tandem with the phenomenon of uncertainty and tensions over identity revealed by the new forms of relation to time, a return of utopia or the manifestation of a desire for utopia since the 2000s, both in the social and media sphere and in academic work. The latter also involves both literary utopias, of which it produces new

interpretations, and the multifaceted utopian manifestations which it observes and analyzes in the social field (PAQUOT, 2007, 15-16).

19 This renewed interest in utopia seems a priori to contrast with the emergence of a certain nostalgia for toxic pasts and the desire for strong political leaders, even for a soft-core, 'gelatinous' totalitarianism, resting 'on soft ideologies promoted by the power of the means of communication' (MAGRIS, 2001, 13), aiming, unlike the utopian approach, to create or organize the human as a raw material malleable at will. After the break-up of the bipolar framework in the 1990s and the loss of illusions, Europe was paradoxically, at the end of communism, the scene of expression of all hopes and the theatre of an eruption of painful, denigrated and contradictory memories, sometimes very localized, that the narrow and standardized frameworks of narratives of the past imposed by the Cold War had repressed. In this political and symbolic register, the re-opening of the future by the social imaginary is sometimes said to be the only modality of resistance possible to the systemic evils of our ultra-liberal present – such as the 'environmental crisis', the widespread commodification of goods and services, or even the whole of life subjected to the undivided reign of biotechnology –, evils that lead to forms of social disaffiliation. Utopia, after a long period in which the term had an essentially negative connotation, being associated first with the totalitarian excesses of the major political systems and then with the technicist or technico-scientific utopia that became the normative utilitarian ideology, here has a 'positive' value, under the auspices of a promise to return to 'the human' – a new humanism, a kind of social ideal legitimately opposed to the existing state of affairs, according to the very perspective that Henri Desroche pursued all his life long, through the quest for 'utopias able to form institutions' (DESROCHE, 1991).

20 But this humanism can no longer be seen as a universal category. The theme of the 'desire for utopia' no doubt now echoes the very nostalgia for utopia as a totalizing form, while the observation of fragmented 'utopian micro-narratives' – 'micro-narratives' related to individuals or groups, and in which a Utopian momentum is reinvested – seems to be bringing Ernst Bloch's analytical project up to date. The ideas behind urban planning or, more broadly, the projection of the built and inhabited space, which provided some of the greatest utopian narratives of the 19th and 20th centuries (CHOAY, 1965), is a particularly favourable breeding ground for the analysis of this fragmentation but also of this newly positive evaluation of the utopian theme. As Olivier Mongin notes in *La condition urbaine* (2005), the contemporary utopian space, contrary to the universality and a-territoriality of Thomas More's 'model', is necessarily singular and anchored in a space whose multiple potentialities need to be rediscovered. According to Alberto Magnaghi, the urban project also needs to be rehabilitated as a necessarily concrete utopia arising less from an imaginary than from a 'strategic vision' capable of sketching a possible future based on a thorough knowledge of particular places in their historical, environmental and human thickness (MAGNAGHI, 2000). And it is this – always plural – notion of 'possibilities' to be found in the past (DELUERMOZ and SINGAREVELOU, 2016), the present and the future, also close to the idea of 'what has not yet come to pass' (KRACAUER and BENJAMIN, 1930), which is now tending to replace, more modestly perhaps, the notion of utopia, thus emphasizing the necessary 'new momentum' to be imparted to an ossified present.

21 At the crossroads of these three convergent lines, it is one single investigation that is emerging: it bears on the 'lived experience of time', on the temporality instituted by these 'constellations of meaning' known as utopia and nostalgia, and on the movement of

connection between these two constellations, forming part of the more general framework of a reflection on the differentiated modalities of the social experience of time.

22The texts presented here explore the historical conditions and processes by which utopia and nostalgia meet and connect in specific contexts. The texts by Caroline Saal and Stéphane Baquey study various literary works in order to question the singular dimension of the utopian temporal experience, the presence of the past not as a model (since utopian becoming cannot be a simple restoration), but as an anchor point for an ideal becoming. The memory of happiness and traces of utopian gratification survive into the present and provide it with a 'reserve' of personal and political energy (MARCUSE, *Eros and Civilization*, 1956, mentioned by JAMESON, 32). Utopia thus becomes its own matrix, capable of creating, in one and the same movement, its future and its own past, its nostalgia, which will give remembrance its hues and its tonality (GUILHAUMOU, 2010). So we need to pay attention to the logic of its trajectory, observable especially when utopia, once it has been expressed, itself becomes an ideal anchor point for the subject, a dreamed-of elsewhere towards which the gaze is now turned, in a complete reversal of the horizon of expectations.

23Stephane Baquey endeavours to grasp the relation to history that the intersection between utopia and nostalgia establishes, at the level of the individual, by looking at Louis Aragon's use of the imaginary in connection with a utopian Andalusia and Grenada. In the context of a crisis of historical and political beliefs, Andalusia is a sort of screen enabling him to indirectly mention the historical events of which he was a contemporary, notably the Algerian war. It is the nostalgic recourse to the past that allows him to project from that past a utopian impulse, at once a way of reconnecting time in all its linearity and a factor of tragic disorientation. The depiction of a Granada in which religions and cultures coexist and mix becomes the figurative, nostalgic expression of an Algeria that did not come to pass and of futures that were lost as a result, a sort of retrospective utopia dreamed of, 'with more or less good faith and procrastination', by the communists. But beyond that, he also shows that this Andalusian dream is not a nostalgia that celebrates an idealized past in a harmful, melancholy way. It is, at a time of personal and collective crisis within communism, one of the conditions for the reconstruction of a utopian front, giving rise to other struggles, which, as Baquey emphasizes, also led to their own vicissitudes: those of Third Worldism.

24Starting from the French literary utopias of the 17th and 18th centuries written in the wake of Thomas More, Caroline Saal questions the presence of the past in cultural production, describing a fictitious ideal society that is, however, paradoxically characterized by an 'absent or barely referential spatiotemporal location' in an elsewhere where time is suspended. 'What is missing in utopia is history,' she reminds us, echoing the words of Alexandre Cioranescu. However, not all reference to history is absent, nor is it reduced to a foundational moment. If it is difficult, in the world we are condemned to live in, to live without utopia (FURET, 1995), can we likewise live without any reference to the past? The author here emphasizes a major characteristic of these productions, one that might provide an answer to such a question: these texts are for the most part political protests, testifying to a belief in and a search for another possible system, even if it be conservative. Giving depth to the narrative, the past constitutes in these narratives an important reservoir of arguments and a vector of opinion that makes it possible to criticize the present and rewrite history. As a result, the historical narratives embedded in the utopian narratives represent forms of counter-history in which a certain form of nostalgia for the past is also expressed.

25 Peter Murvai's analysis, devoted to a part of the same literary corpus but from a different perspective, complements this point. While also emphasizing the 'insularity of utopian temporality', apparently impervious to European political history, he emphasizes the 'convergence of the utopian imaginary with that of the New World and that of Antiquity'. He thus points to the meeting, in the classical utopian *place*, of a referential world of the past and of spatialities that were hitherto unknown to Europeans but which seemed to open, within their present, a window on an unfinished past that had not been consummated in the cultural space of Christianity and was paradoxically remembered as a golden age: 'The New World is, like Utopia, not only the result of a divergent historical evolution, but also the depository of another version of humanity which had not experienced the Fall.' It is therefore in this new world, perceived as a-historical, that the images of a possible resolution of the evils denounced by utopians can be drawn – i.e. the state of permanent civil war within European societies –, going beyond the ancient model which was imperfect since it did not prove to be sustainable.

26 In contrast to these different analyses, Amélie Bussy, in her text on the work of filmmaker Harun Farocki, highlights the impossibility, in certain cases, of any meeting between utopia and nostalgia. Questioning the place of the cinematographic or photographic archive, as the trace of a past, in the creation of a way in which destructive events can come into the present, she shows how the past cannot here serve as a frame for the future (except as a negative), nor as a movement towards the future.

27 Returning precisely to the historical conditions of the production of utopias and questioning the nature of 'utopian impulses' associated with a nostalgic feeling, impulses that are sometimes but not necessarily conservative, the contributions of Thomas Dodman, Marina Chauliac and Madeleine Sallustio highlight some of the empirical modalities of the intersections between utopia and nostalgia. They show, in context, the ambiguities of both utopia and nostalgia. First, these notions can cover an emancipatory conception, based on a critique of the present by 'imaginaries teeming with new solutions and communities' and on 'practices both dissensual and innovative' (FJELD, 2016, 157). But at the same time, this conception is perceived as needing to be protected from 'historical attempts to give this word a concrete realization' which always, in the case of utopia, turns into domination. And second, utopia and nostalgia can take the form of a harmful and melancholy retreat into a past that constitutes a model for both thinking about the future and tolerating the present.

28 Thus, Thomas Dodman focuses here on the case of the colonization of Algeria in the 19th century, when it was a place for utopian experimentation and social reorganization, for a projection into a future based on a past conceptualized by Saint-Simonians and Fourierists. But this Algeria was also the place where, literally and figuratively, soldiers 'ended up', homesick and thus affected by a nostalgia that was then perceived as the specific evil of this Algeria, a country militarized and without any 'social body'. Making Algeria a part, an imagined copy of France, with its villages structured around the church, the town hall, the war memorial and the bandstand, was probably perceived as a remedy. The rise of a stream of liberal thought, understood in the broad sense, here lay behind the malady that affected the soldiers and settlers and, a few years later, also led to the creation of 'authentic' French villages by public limited companies, combining nostalgia and utopia as two sides of the same coin.

29 Focusing on the phenomenon of *Ostalgie* for the GDR in Germany after reunification, Marina Chauliac shows how communist utopia became a 'retrogressive utopia', based on the

utopian ferment of GDR's past as a positive value for an ideal society in the future and an alternative to the existing social order. Ten years after the reunification of Germany, the change in depictions of the GDR in the public space led to the latter, formerly associated with a dictatorship and a system of repression, becoming an object of 'nostalgia', including for those who had no direct memories of it. But it actually drew on a diverse range of attitudes and feelings. As Chauliac rightly points out, what predominates here is more a contrast between East and West than any comparison between a devalued present and an overvalued past. This contrast is based on a sense of inequality, both economic and historical, which has multiple effects on the relationship with the past, in the face of a present where the dream of the West has not found fulfilment and where an idealized vision of the past, peculiar to nostalgia, has replaced the utopia of a better world. Fostered by a marginal fraction of society, this utopia is not realized as a mobilizing force, and finds little resonance with a generation that has only a superficial knowledge of this history. The *Ostalgie* of the younger generations then takes on a completely different form which, while keeping its critical potential vis-à-vis the present, is moving away from the utopian vision of a new German communist society.

30On the other hand, by looking at the aspirations of collectives of young peasants recently settled in the countryside of the South of France, Madeleine Sallustio shows that the reference to the past, in its idealized and nostalgic form, can be a source of genuine creativity. The past becomes a 'resource' and is here placed at the service of a utopian project of personal emancipation, one that seeks to be consistent with an ethical, cultural and political change that seems necessary in order to preserve an increasingly threatened and threatening future. Sallustio then describes, in these empirical modalities, the complex temporal system of the neo-peasant life project, a system she describes in terms of 'sustainable nostalgia', a term borrowed from Jeremy Davies (2010), who 'situates the place that nostalgia occupies in a utopian, environmental and social project'. Nostalgia for the peasant past and 'nostalgia for the future' are here the inseparable drivers of the utopian impulse contained in the old conservative image, but with a political significance updated by the ecological imperative of 'back to the earth'. This rural nostalgia, whose intellectual genealogy is described by Sallustio, can thus be read today not only as a form of contemporary 'exonostalgia' (BERLINER, 2014), but as the concrete utopia of those who, from an idealized past of which they can have no memory, create the heaven for a better world which they seek, by their daily practices and the quest for a new rationality, to bring about here and now.

- 2 In Mumford's vocabulary, the terms 'utopia', 'social myth' and 'collective myth' are equivalent.

31This last case study seems to echo the words of Lewis Mumford who, observing at the dawn of the 20th century the vicissitudes of a humanity that had entered its industrial era (he was eighteen years old in 1914), called for the construction of 'rational myths' to replace the old 'disastrous social myths'.² This was a new imaginary, to be built not on a 'clean slate' but by drawing inspiration from some constant principles which the utopian (literary) tradition contrasts with certain recurring problems in the history of humanity. In his essay on the history of utopias, Mumford thus contrasts what he calls the 'utopias of escape', of pure intellectual speculation, with the 'utopias of reconstruction' whose superiority is in his view based both on a real consideration of the human environment as it is and on the intention to profoundly transform this world, in its physical and ideal aspects.

32Ultimately, for Mumford, there is no other way for the individual caught in the present world than to live in utopia: 'The genuine alternative for most of us, is that between an

aimless utopia of escape and a purposive utopia of reconstruction. One way or the other, it seems, in a world so full of frustrations as the “real” one, we must spend a good part of our mental lives in utopia’ (MUMFORD, 1922, 16). At the dawn of the next century, which is ours, faced with a past perceived both as ‘the place of the essential and the place of the outdated’ (DE CERTEAU, 1987), this ‘need both for utopia and for disenchantment’ is still there, in the view of Claudio Magris. For ‘the fate of every man, and of History itself, resembles that of Moses, who never reached the Promised Land, but never ceased to walk towards it. Utopia means not submitting to things as they are and fighting for what they should be; it means knowing that the world, as a line in a poem by Brecht puts it, needs to be changed and saved’ (MAGRIS, 2001,18).

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Notes

1 The notions of memory and heritage have been widely studied in the social sciences for the last thirty years or so. We refer the reader to the overall bibliography at the end of this issue. The references quoted in this introduction relate to utopia and nostalgia.

2 In Mumford’s vocabulary, the terms ‘utopia’, ‘social myth’ and ‘collective myth’ are equivalent.

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Authors

[Karine Basset](#)

Laboratoire de recherche historique Rhône-Alpes (LARHRA – UMR 5190), Institut d’urbanisme et géographie alpine

[Michèle Baussant](#)

Centre de recherche français à Jérusalem, CNRS.

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