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Introduction: Impasses of the Freedom to Desire

“The proposition that happiness has become a political factor is incorrect. It has always been a political factor and will bring back the sceptre and the censor that make do with it very well. Rather, it is the freedom to desire that is a new factor, not because it has inspired a revolution – people have always fought and died for a desire – but because this revolution wants its struggle to be for the freedom of desire.”¹

Jacques Lacan

To propose a collective reflection on the topologies of emancipation in order to unearth the emancipatory potential of utopias for instigating new ways of thinking that aim at the possibility of radical change it is necessary to begin with a critical examination of these notions: utopia, emancipation, and radical change, an examination that takes as its compass a radical distinction between the emancipation of desire and the pursuit of happiness, a distinction that cuts across all the notions involved.

The paradigm shift from the pursuit of happiness to the freedom of desire signals not only a revolution in politics, as indicated by Lacan; it equally marks the birth of a new “science”: the invention of psychoanalysis. For what singularises the unheard of novelty of psychoanalysis is not simply the discovery of the unconscious, but also its refusal to satisfy the analysand’s demand to make him/her happy again by getting rid of the symptom, the cause of the analysand’s suffering. In ignoring the analysand’s futile pursuit of happiness, psychoanalysis nevertheless offers something precious in return: it seeks to arouse in the analysand the desire to know and to recognise in his/her symptom, this being

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¹ J. Lacan, “Kant with Sade” in: *Ecrits*, trans. Bruce Fink, W.W. Norton & Company, New York, London 2006, p. 663.

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the indelible trace of a contingent encounter with *jouissance*, the mark of his/her singularity. Refusing to promise the analysand the recovery of his/her happiness by helping reconcile him/her to civilisation, psychoanalysis promises the analysand something entirely different: the uncovering of the revolutionary potential of his/her very symptom. From the point of view of psychoanalysis, the symptom in its revolutionary, unruly capacity opens up for the analysand the possibility of escaping from the formatting imposed upon him/her by the dominant discourse and, in so doing, of enabling him/her to think otherwise, this being the only prospect for innovative action.

From this perspective, one might say that if utopia is conceived primarily as an attempt to solve the problem of the impossible reconciliation with the demands of civilisation and the resulting insoluble problem of how to treat the surplus of enjoyment that is generated by the sacrifice of enjoyment imposed by civilisation, psychoanalysis appears to be a radical anti-utopianism. Evidence of this anti-utopian streak in psychoanalysis can be found in both Freud and Lacan. That psychoanalysis cannot but be opposed to any utopian project that pursues happiness follows from Freud's famous observation according to which it is not simply the pressures of civilisation that stand in the way of the subject's pursuit of happiness, "a piece of unconquerable nature may lie behind [...] a piece of our own psychical constitution," more explicitly, it is "something in the nature of the [sexual] function itself which denies us full satisfaction and urges us along other paths."² Hence, for Freud, if the irruption of *jouissance*, as Lacan will term the satisfaction of Freudian drives, condemns us to an erratic search of happiness while preventing us from attaining it, the lesson to be drawn from psychoanalysis is a double one: to acknowledge that because "[t]he programme to become happy, which the pleasure principle imposes on us, cannot be fulfilled" does not mean that "the programme of becoming happy" must simply be abandoned; on the contrary, "we must not," Freud maintains forcefully, "indeed, we cannot – give up our efforts to bring it nearer by some means or other."³ For Lacan, similarly, a limitation inherent to the idea of utopia is to be found in "the distance that exists between the organization

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² S. Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, in: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey et al., Hogarth Press, London 1953-1974, Vol. 21, pp. 86, 105.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

of desires and the organization of needs,⁴ i.e. at the level of the unattainable harmony – envisioned in Plato’s eutopia – between the individual microcosm and the collective macrocosm. For Lacan, this untenable and unattainable fantasy should be relegated to the idealised non-place that has no place in either the real or the symbolic. On the other hand, however, the utopian drive cannot simply be discarded as it is the very discrepancy or, rather, the insurmountable barrier separating need and desire that generates the utopian or, rather, fantasmatic anticipation of *jouissance*. This kind of microcosm’s inherent utopia is to be located in the impossible, unattainable *jouissance* that manifests itself in the ineliminable disparity between the expected and the obtained *jouissance*.

Does this mean that the encounter with psychoanalysis is so ruinous for the notion of utopia that it remains insoluble? Or, is there something more in the desire for utopia than a set of unrealisable proposals for administering the surplus enjoyment derived from the sacrifice of enjoyment? In a word, can a case be made for utopia today? Rather than proposing a ceaseless oscillation between what is not, yet ought to be and what ought not to be, yet is, between the hoped-for satisfaction and the obtained dissatisfaction, psychoanalysis comes up with a solution that sets the subject on the path of desire by orienting him/her not towards reality, but rather to the always contingent, improbable confrontation with the real. If, for psychoanalysis, there is no “freedom of thought” except in an atopian utopia, there is nevertheless an emancipatory utopian moment that psychoanalysis does recognise: It is with an act that something thoroughly erratic, contingent, and thus immune to control takes place in the world, but it is also with an act that the subject succeeds in separating himself/herself from the Other and thus discovers the margin of his/her freedom. To designate the act as utopian therefore implies that the act itself creates the place for its taking place. In Badiou’s vocabulary, one might say that the act, by being supported by nothing but the u-topia, non-place, literally the void of being, renders the world in which it occurs not-all and in rendering visible the inconsistency of a given world, it reveals its radical openness. If, as is argued in the essays gathered here in two volumes under the title “Utopias and Alternatives”, psychoanalysis opens onto something like a utopia, this is then to be understood in the sense of creating a heterotopic space, a space out of joint in which the speaking

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⁴ J. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Dennis Porter, W.W. Norton & Company, New York, London 1992, p. 225.

being by putting himself/herself at stake in an always singular way succeeds in recovering his/her ability to act. Thus, focusing on the function of utopia rather than on its content, one might state that the efficacy of utopia resides principally in its ability to thwart resignation and mobilise the subject to think and to act – by breaking precisely with those coordinates of his/her world that condition and limit his/her access to reality. Utopia can therefore be considered as emancipatory only to the extent that it summons the subject to step over the threshold of his/her pursuit of happiness in order to activate his/her desire for revolt.

From this point of the venture, to focus on what is termed here the emancipatory potential of utopia requires that we take distance from the idea of utopia understood as a fantasmatic proposal for an entirely novel humanity that, generally speaking, situates utopia on the side of the ideal. In contradistinction to this traditional conception of utopia, the essays gathered here start from a different idea of utopia, a utopia as a way of setting to work, within the world we live in, an inassimilable alterity, an irreducible otherness. It is then a matter of mobilising this alterity in order to actuate the moment of uncoupling what is from what ought to be that characterises utopia. In this sense we can maintain with F. Perrier that a true utopia “aims at the world as another and not at another world.”⁵ To aim at this world “as another” rather than at “another world”, to locate the rebellious dissatisfaction at the heart of the existing reality, to spot the possibilities pointing to another world, clearly allows us to restore something of utopia. Utopia here has the function of putting alterity to work within a given socio-symbolic universe in order to disturb the existing order of things, while aiming at rendering perceptible within the present situation those heterotopic sites, to borrow Foucault’s term, wherefrom the density of the given can be disrupted.

8 Sustained by a subversive imaginary, rooted in history, utopia fissures the very surface of the real, while marking out, despite the obstacles erected by the dominant ideology, heterogeneous sites wherefrom a glimpse of the possibilities for another world can be made. The utopian perspective is open to emancipation precisely to the extent that such a perspective allows us to register the subversive displacements within the here and now in order to connect to the here and now the underlying potential of another world. Taking up this option that strives to uncover a critical potential of the utopian on the surface of the

⁵ F. Perrier, *Topeaographie de l’utopie*, Payot, Paris 2015, p. 23.

existing reality, it is possible to reconnect not only with what has nourished a Marxian critique of capitalism, but also with the power of contestation in the 1960s in order to rediscover the nascent conjunction of thought and action by following the feeble indications of what, on the surface of the existing reality, bears traces of elsewhere and otherwise.

Associating emancipation with utopia is not a matter of demonstrating that one would already contain the other in order to discover a seamless continuity between them. It is rather a question of exploring the intersections and tensions that traverse two different, if not divergent, series of experiments, practices, and ideas. Both break with the logic of peaceful consensus that aims at the elimination of conflicts and the remaining recesses of otherness, and in so doing explore their various trajectories in the universes of meaning, thus contributing to a reconfiguration of the thinkable. Both thus create their proper places and experiences at the margins of the dominant discourse, refusing to submit themselves to hegemonic classification.

It should be noted, however, that utopia and emancipation refer to two different kinds of experimentation with the possible, two distinct “intuitions” as to how to populate a space with otherness, with the unheard of possibilities, by reconfiguring the currently dominant symbolic-social-political order, and even by introducing a healthy dose of the anarchic disorder. For its part, utopia aims to extend and enhance the power of language and imagination. By expanding the realm of the possible over all temporal dimensions, utopia opens up cracks for experimentation at the heart of the here and now, and for the reinvention of new creative practices, together with new spaces in which to situate them. Irreducible to any “model” to imitate or any “ideal” to apply, utopian projects seek to create new spatial settings within the actual capitalist universe, which strives to close down and guard the boundaries of the possible.

The essays assembled in this collection pay close attention to concrete “moments” of utopia, to experiences of the utopian imaginary, to the possibilities and experimentation provided by various creative practices, as well as to the theoretical constructions that justify them. Borrowing from Derrida, it would perhaps be indispensable to think together the imaginary and utopia – two different experiences of an emancipatory promise – since both mobilise our ability to look for junctions in their respective trajectories, and to establish, at the

heart of their very divergences, a complicit solidarity. Associating utopia with the emancipative desire thus allows us to go back to the traditional reading of utopia, to interrogate the utopian potential of new modalities of the imaginary, and to confront various treatments of these two notions and their relations.

Taking distance from theories of the imaginary that reduce it to illusion and deception and from those of utopia understood as the proposal of an ideal society, the ultimate point of a social and political teleology aiming at solving the tensions between the pursuit of happiness and the adversity it encounters in the world of the Other, the present collection not only examines various concepts and various fictional and philosophical figures of the imaginary and utopia, but also attempts to clarify the frontier separating these from one another, the problems that their divergent uses pose, and to explore the possible passages and links between the imaginary and utopia, without, however, obliterating too hastily their differences. Hence, to think of contemporary uses of both concepts in relation to the world we live in – in philosophy, psychoanalysis, theories of literature and art, architecture, and design – is perhaps primarily a question of opening the space for a discussion, to quote Macherey, on “the imaginary to the extent that it does not fulfil only the rather harmless function of escape, but has instead a constitutive role in the establishment of the relationship that we have with the real.”⁶

The first four essays of this collection explore the relevance of psychoanalysis for not only the study of politics, in particular emancipatory politics, but also for a discussion and/or critique of the notion of utopia. In their respective articles, Monique David-Ménard, Marie-Jean Sauret, Antonia Birnbaum, and Jelica Šumič Riha demonstrate – albeit with different emphases – the manner in which Lacan’s and Freud’s anti-utopianism not only renders problematic the eternal pursuit of happiness, but also brings into question the passage from the singular to the universal. In her essay, “*Nier le réel est-ce le transformer?*”, Monique David-Ménard challenges the assumption according to which it is on the basis of a true theory that the real can be changed in two domains of action and thought: that of political transformations and that of the sexual unconscious. Taking Marcuse’s peculiar Freud-Marxism as a particularly telling illustration of such an assumption insofar as it short-circuits the social and the sexual,

⁶ P. Macherey, *De l’utopie*, De l’incidence éditeur, Lille 2011, p. 73.

negating the real in view of its radical change would require a coherent theory that would correctly identify the intersection of the political and the sexual by revealing the parallel between economic-social dissatisfaction and the dissatisfaction of desire. So, to follow, to follow Marcuse, the capitalism in the 1960s, in providing a fallacious satisfaction of desires, lulls the dissatisfaction of desire to sleep, thus preventing the American working class from negating and, therefore, transforming the social real. In questioning the relevance of such an analysis that relates the veracity of an analysis to the conditions of its realisation in order to reveal the illusory character of such a pretention, i.e. to unify – via dialectics – a true thought and the real, Monique David-Ménard traces the logic of contingency in contemporary political struggles that, by being local, escape the opposition between the partial and the total, but whose impact, precisely for that reason, reaches beyond them. As is suggested in this essay, in order to determine the precise status of this “beyond”, it should be taken not in the sense of a utopia, but rather in the sense of an overdetermination that produces unpredictable outcomes due to the intervention of an element that is apparently heterogeneous, indeed, external with respect to the “principle contradiction”. In discussing the notion of overdetermination, David-Ménard insists on the specificity of the Freudian concept of contingency in order to demarcate it from the traditional philosophical conception of contingency that opposes it to necessity. In psychoanalysis, by contrast, it is by borrowing from the necessary that the contingent succeeds in transforming a given setting. The notion of overdetermination, as David-Ménard conceives it, should be searched for in “the creativity of the seemingly indifferent elements,” a creativity which is due to their apparent heterogeneity if not insignificance with respect to that which counts as “essential”. Overdetermination involves contingency insofar as it allows the creation of multiple intermediary links between that which is to be produced and that which should remain in the shadow. In view of this, the three examined examples of overdetermination (the politics of the street, the Bolshevik Revolution, and the transformative dynamics of the sexual unconscious) should be considered as anti-utopias as we are not dealing here with the construction of an “absolute elsewhere” proposed as a measure to evaluate the real that is to be changed. Rather, and topologically speaking, overdetermination should be situated as “a localised atopia” due to the unforeseeable outcome of the intervention of a seemingly exterior, insignificant element that transforms a given situation, yet which is localisable because the contingency that triggers an act is inextricably linked to that which presents itself as the nec-

essary of a given situation. Hence, to prevent utopia from turning into “a normative model,” David-Ménard claims, it should find a way to transform itself, not exactly into “an atopia, but rather [into] a real, although improbable, topia.”

In a similar way, the second essay, “... *nous, artistes de la parole analytique*” by Marie-Jean Sauret, engages in a sustained examination of the implications of collective submission to the suggestion imposed on us by politically correct thought, in order to understand our powerlessness to think the possibility of another world. Having rightly emphasised Lacan’s reluctance to uphold the radically transformative aspect of the concept of revolution – taken in Sauret takes it in the astronomical sense of an orbital iteration that inevitably returns to the starting point rather than in the sense of radical change – in his discussion of the causes of the powerlessness of contemporary thought on alterity that would be a true “thought of rupture” and thus a precondition for radical change, Sauret nevertheless turns to the discourse of psychoanalysis insofar as the latter is expected, in Lacan’s own words, “to repair that which does not work.” It is precisely at this point that Lacan himself draws a striking parallel between Marx and Freud: in questioning that which does not work, both discover the revolutionary potential of the symptom. In order to construct a possible passage between psychoanalysis and politics, Sauret situates the source of the “thought of rupture,” both in psychoanalysis and in politics, in that which drives one to the “passage to the act,” namely, that which constitutes the speaking being’s singularity, i.e. the singularity of one’s symptom. In order to open this path of examination it is necessary to turn to the obstacles that, in the present situation of the globalisation of the capitalist discourse, stand in the way of the freedom of desire. Psychoanalysis is thus summoned because it reintroduces, in the social field, that which science and the capitalist discourse foreclose, namely, the singularity and desire. Thinking differently, considered from this perspective, implies escaping from this formatting and from the generalised mode of suggestion. The question that arises at this point is the following: Is the suicide, the emblematic act that allows the subject to affirm his/her singularity against the pressures of formatting exerted by the neoliberal discourse, the only means at the disposal of contemporary subjectivity? If, to follow Lacan, “the revolutionary effect of the symptom”⁷ is what opens up the possibility of a renewal of the social bond, then it should be considered as a place for “a collectivisation of

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⁷ J. Lacan, “Compte-rendu de L’acte analytique”, in: *Autres écrits*, Seuil, Paris 2001, p. 381.

the symptom.” Thinking differently would therefore imply inventing a new articulation of the singularity of the subject and the social bond, an articulation that would at the same time restore the subject’s capacity to act, precisely that capacity that allows for a renewal of the social bond.

In her essay, “*Nous, femmes: que voulons-nous?*”, Antonia Birnbaum takes up one of the crucial aspects of Rancière’s account of the constitution of the universal in politics, the concept of equality – a specifically political mode of subjectification that passes through disidentification – in order to situate “women” as one of the names to designate the universality of equality. While Rancière focuses on a mobile topology of the “empty” names, such as “proletarian” or “citizen”, generated through the dissolution of the spatial delimitation of such unsituable names, a topology that involves the creation of a space that brings two or more incompatible worlds into one, i.e. the private world of property and the public world of equality, Birnbaum provides an analysis of the specific ways in which the inscription of women in the universality of equality fails. For Birnbaum, situating “women” as one of the names for equality that summons all without distinction is a question of knowing how the specifically feminine *pas-tout*, derived from the supplementary status of feminine *jouissance* with respect to the all encompassing, i.e. universalist phallic *jouissance*, affects the concept of political equality. In her discussion of what Lacanian psychoanalysis has to offer regarding the ways in which the feminine conditions of *jouissance* challenge any attempt at universalisation, Birnbaum notes several important parallels in Rancière’s and Lacan’s accounts of the inevitable failure of identification that, in turn, creates a fissure necessary to all subjectivation, a gap that for Rancière opens up the possibility of an egalitarian politics, while for Lacan it points to the non-relation of sexuation. Setting out from the supplementarity – rather than complementarity – of feminine *jouissance*, Birnbaum raises the question of the *heteros*, of otherness, which, by escaping the signifying order, ruins the universe of the One – an assumption shared by Düttmann as well. Elaborating the implications of the inexistence of the sexual relationship for politics, Birnbaum insists on the necessity of rethinking the notion of equality. Equality, in her reading, brings together the equality of anyone to anyone and equality between men and women, a peculiar equality since it “inscribes a non-relation at the heart of equality itself.” The point of the impossible that informs the contemporary concept of equality is not just the impossible relationship between equality and inequality, it is rather “the impossibility that is

immanent to equality.” Therefore, if “we, women” could be considered as one of the names of the universal, this is because this name raises the question of this inherent impossibility. Hence, the impossibility of spelling out the relationship between men and women in terms of equality reveals the contingency of the signifier of universality. It is from this perspective that Birnbaum poses a question that is crucial for any attempt at rethinking political emancipation, namely: Is it possible to think politics in the not-all universe? This question is taken up, yet developed in a different direction, in the following essay, which is dedicated specifically to an interrogation of the apparent incompatibility between the not-all and the “for all”.

In the concluding essay in this section, “Towards a Materialism of the Real: The One of the Same”, which explores a possible alliance between psychoanalysis and contemporary emancipatory politics, Jelica Šumič Riha examines the modalities of contemporary materialism at the intersection of philosophy and psychoanalysis, whose particularity lies in its immanentism as a consequence of its orientation to the real. In the context of the present hegemony of the nominalist ideology of the not-all, which Badiou calls “democratic materialism” because it considers social space as a space of a limitless proliferation of identities, we have been witness to an unsettling subversion: the primacy of the multiple and the Other – which has been a mark of a disruptive novelty, of a rupturing with the dominant ideology of the times – appears today to be absorbed into the dominant discourse, indeed, as its continuation. In view of this ideological recuperation of the conceptual innovations of materialist thought of the 20th century, the subversive gesture today consists in recovering the cutting edge and the divisive power of the most contested notions: the One and the Same, while demonstrating their compatibility with the not-all universe. By tracing the development of the notion of the One of the Same in Lacan’s and Badiou’s works, while illuminating certain distinctions between their approaches, the essay questions the status to be accorded to the universal from the perspective of the infinite. For Lacan and Badiou, the One of the Same signifies the opening up of a new space within a given situation for the inscription of the consequences of a contingently produced disruption, the working out of the possibilities opened up by the emergence of the impossible within the existing situation. While insisting that psychoanalysis and emancipatory politics share the One of the Same as a common point of departure, the essay nevertheless emphasises their divergence as to their respective goals. Hence, if psychoanalysis seeks to

enable the subject to separate him-/herself from the One of the Same and thus to prevent its repetition, emancipatory politics, by setting in motion an endless verification of the egalitarian prescription which encapsulates for it the One of the Same, seeks to prevent that the One of the Same does not stop being written.

The second group of essays opens with Alexander García Düttmann's analysis of the notion of "radical change". The essay "Can There Be Radical Change without an Outside" takes up the topological aspect of radical change, opposing utopia on the one hand, and heterotopia and/or atopia on the other. Radical change, as Düttmann conceives it, is not to be understood in the sense of "doing something differently as a result of something having been conceived of in a different way." For there to be radical change, Düttmann insists on it being inaugurated and informed by thought, which, in the course of the realisation of radical change, has to be maintained as something that "appears to be nothing." Radical change, Düttmann argues, thus implies a "nothingness of thought," of its otherness, which is to be taken as a kind of sublation that is not in the service of progressive effectivity. Topologically speaking, such a sublation brings to light convergences with heterotopic spaces – since both the sublation and the heterotopia relate to "an otherness that is not unreal" – and with atopian spaces – since both relate to "a drift that is not productive." At the same time, sublation differs from heterotopia and atopia insofar as the change in question involves effects of subjectivations that exceed appropriation either by a single individual or by a collective. For Düttmann, in order to be radical a change has to be considered as "an action traversed by otherness," in such a way that it is at one and the same time "illuminated and obscured by this otherness." Driven by its otherness, which in Düttmann's reading is to be viewed as a new idea that "emerges and presents itself as a powerful yet momentary interruption and re-orientation of thought," radical change takes place whenever "the overwhelming force of a new idea" turns into "an impulse with practical consequences." In order to account for "the encounter of the atopic force of thought with militant resistance to something intolerable and unacceptable," which will result in radical change, Düttmann draws on Derrida's understanding of telepathy. In reading telepathy with and against Derrida, Düttmann elaborates what he calls "the topology of the outside," a topology that is deployed in the process of the generation of a new idea, as the latter, in order to be considered as the atopic force of thought, must be capable of "instituting a heterotopic setup in which an

effective otherness triggers a subjectivation effect and a transformative effect of reality,” an effect that must be considered “as if it originated in an outside.”

The two contributions that follow, by Frank Ruda and Jan Völker, converge on the claim that a proper understanding of “thinking differently” in philosophy requires a radical recasting of some of its basic tenets, such as courage and dialectics. Frank Ruda’s essay “Courage” is concerned more specifically with explicitly philosophical inquiries regarding the conditions of the possibility of a manner of thinking capable of producing radical changes in the world. This allows the author to question the intricate relationship between courage and philosophy, indeed, between courage and thinking *tout court*. Ruda starts by depicting what a contemporary concept of courage would be, that is to say, a courage separated from its Aristotelian origin in which courage relates to virtue and knowledge. This operation of liberating the concept of courage requires, according to Ruda, that courage is seen not as an operation that relates to “what is but [to] what takes place, [to] what happens and might ultimately produce – as its material effect – subjects.” To rethink courage today thus involves a short circuit as it requires a “risky anticipatory reception of something that happens” and which, in turn, constitutes “the very condition of the possibility of it happening at all.” Courage, seen from such a perspective, is a subjectifying operation as it forces one to assume “the responsibility for a decision that one did not consciously make [...] as it is a decision that makes one into who one is.” Drawing a parallel between anxiety and courage, Ruda emphasises the peculiar nature of the object that one encounters in experiencing anxiety and courage: an object that is not an object in the world, but which is only encountered as “something which passes, something that indicates a passing, [that] brings something to pass, something that happens (to me).” Yet there is still a tighter link between courage and anxiety since, to follow Ruda’s anticipatory definition of courage, the latter would consist in “a working on and with anxiety and its peculiar object,” more specifically, it is, in Lacanese, a “*savoir y faire avec*”, a finding of an operational subjective – yet not quantifiable – measure of “how close [anxiety] should get to be liberating and of how far away it should be so as not to be too incapacitating.” It is from the concept of courage thus recast that Ruda questions the relationship between courage and philosophy. Drawing on Kant and Hegel in particular, he emphasises the courage inherent to philosophy as a courage that implies a constitutive passivity of the subject, in assuming the

responsibility of decisions taken in the subject yet without him/her, a position that ultimately links courage to fatalism.

Jan Völker's essay "The Dialectic of Circulation. Marx, Hegel, Plato" opens with an examination of the relation between philosophy and reality in the early Marx, according to whom the philosophy of his time, the philosophy of the young Hegelians, is ideology because it inverts the relation between mind and world. In contrast to the discourse of philosophy that sets out from the assumption that reality is "the reality of consciousness," thus implying that "a change of consciousness is a change of reality," Marx, in Völker's reading, elaborates a discourse of reality conceived as "a reality of relations," i.e. as pure relationality, in order to spell out "the conditionality of any discourse." It is from this vantage point that Völker returns to the thorny question of dialectic considered as "a real figure of thought" insofar as it presents itself as "a process that thinks itself." In proposing three different conceptions of dialectic as a matrix for thinking differently the relationship between mind and reality, i.e. those of Plato, Hegel, and Marx, three paradigms of dialectic that, according to Völker represent three milestones in the history of philosophy, the essay interrogates the ways in which each of them reconfigures the dialectical relation between sameness and otherness differently and, consequently, locates the place of contradiction differently. Taken as a figure of thought capable of bringing out thought's real conditionality, dialectic encounters its "reality [...] in a politics" precisely because it is in politics that we primarily confront "this specific problem of the relation between differences and contradiction." Thus, to claim that "dialectics thinks itself" implies that "it presents the reality of democracy precisely as a real contradiction."

The two remaining essays, "*La politique sans pensée? Considérations sur l'irrationalisme des mouvements populistes contemporains*" by Gernot Kamecke and "*L'idée de contre-institution. Saint-Simon avec Jacques Derrida*" by Petar Bojanić, should be regarded as two divergent if not opposing attempts to discuss the main issue of this collection, "utopias and alternatives", in the domain of politics from the perspective of resistance against institutions. For his part, Gernot Kamecke moves from a socio-political assessment of what is designated as the "irrationalism" of contemporary populist movements in Western democracies – the epitome of this new postmodern populist politics being "Trumpism" or the "Trump phenomenon", to the extent that it "aims at abolishing in a radical

manner the very possibility of reason” in politics – to a critical evaluation of the possibility of a politics of truth in times in which the rhetoric of alternative facts seems to challenge the very idea of truth and rationality. In this veritable “passion for ignorance,” to borrow Lacan’s term, which characterises the emergence of “an apolitical politics or a counter-politics,” Kamecke recognises a vicious attack on the conjunction of two emblematic notions of modern thought since the Enlightenment: “reason” and “politics”, an attack that threatens to undo not only the basis for all “*sensus communis*”, but also the possibility of thinking alternatives in politics. It is against this background of the present democratic materialism without ideas that the essay re-poses the question of truths in politics.

The second of these two essays aims at exploring the utopian potential in politics through an examination of the dialectic of institution and counter-institution. Bojanić sets off from the assumption that the notion of “counter-institution”, such as has been thematised by Saint-Simon and Derrida, can help us understand what it means to think differently about institutions, in particular when the institutionalisation of Europe is at issue. The institutional paradox of Europe is, in this reading, the paradox of the institution itself: while institutions are intended to provide hospitality, they inevitably provoke resistance and call for new, better institutions that would reduce the “indelible trace of violence” inherent to the institution as such. It is this tension between institution and resistance that it generates that comes to the fore in Derrida’s conception of the counter-institution. As a supplement to the existing institutions and not their replacement, the counter-institution is doomed to oscillate between a critique of resistance to the institution and the dream or utopia of an other institution. And it is from the perspective of Derrida’s notion of counter-institution that the heterotopic space of counter-institution can be elucidated, using the example of the institutionalisation of Europe. The institutionalisation of Europe in terms of the counter-institution is not to be confused with radical anti-institutionalism declaring war on institutions. Rather, if “Europe does not occupy a space outside of states, but is rather within states and, above all, on the borders between them,” this is because the state, the institution *par excellence*, assures that there is “no absolute exteriority that would be capable of objecting to or opposing it that ultimately recognises the counter-institutions.”

The contributions to this collection – divided into two volumes – come from various disciplines because it is not only philosophy that is concerned with uto-

pia as a possible emancipatory force. In fact, each of the essays included herein and coming from fields ranging from philosophy, psychoanalysis, linguistics, literary theory, to architecture, urbanism, and design, takes part in probing the proposed theme. This interdisciplinary approach to addressing “utopias and alternatives”, however, seems to be required by the very issue at stake and has to therefore be taken in the Althusserian sense, that is to say, rather than as an “interdisciplinary theme”, it has to be taken as “a theoretical object, a fundamental theoretical problem which, while it may well touch on the domain of several existing disciplines, will not necessarily appear in person in any of them.”⁸ It should be noted, however, that in examining the relationship between utopias and alternatives in various manners, while refusing to eliminate the polysemous character of both terms, the authors of the articles in this double volume were nevertheless guided by a common concern: to uncover and further develop the emancipatory potential of these two notions, indeed, to consider them as an incentive for thinking otherwise, while probing their visibility in, respectively, contemporary post-Marxist philosophy, Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, post-structuralist theory of literature, as well as in contemporary theories of art, architecture, and design.

Most of the articles gathered in the two volumes of this collection, “Topologies of Emancipation” and “Utopia and the Imaginary”, originated in the conference “*Misliti drugače/misliti drugo; Penser autrement/penser autre chose; Anders Denken/Anderes denken*”, organised jointly by the Institute of Philosophy of the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, the *Institut français de Slovénie*, and the *Goethe-Institut Ljubljana* in May 2017 with assistance from *Fonds culturel franco-allemand*, whose generous support we would like to acknowledge here.

⁸ L. Althusser, “Three Notes on the Theory of Discourses”, in: *Humanist Controversy and Other Writings*, Verso, London 2003, p. 33.