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Κύριε Θέμελη καλή σας μέρα και καλή εβδομάδα

Σε συνέχεια της συνάντησής μας στο συνέδριο του Historein, σας στέλνω το κείμενο της Ιωάννας Λαλιώτου.

Παίρνω το θάρρος και σας στέλνω και το δικό μου κείμενο. Θα χαρώ να ακούσω τις παρατηρήσεις σας.

Με εκτίμηση,
Δέσποινα Βαλατσού

—

4.40 S. Security → Κτυπά Συναγερμ.
4.40 Επισημαίνει Άμεση Δράση
4 40 Ο φύλακας Αναγκ. ειδοποιείται ω → Γραφ
4 50 φθάνει στο Γραφείο.
5 20 φθάνει Φιλίππου –
Ο δράστης στο Γραφείο – Την είχανε στον είχανε.
5 35 Φθάνει Άμεσος Δράσης

— —

- Κοσμά
- Ασφαλ
- Τύπος
- Επιθ. ΒΗΜΑ

Ioanna Laliotou

Athens, 18 May 2007

Ioanna Laliotou
Hope, expectation, utopia: the history of non-synchronicity

> *If a potentiality to not-be originally belongs to all potentiality, then there is truly potentiality only where the potentiality to not-be does not lag behind actuality but passes fully into it as such. This does not mean that it disappears in actuality; on the contrary, it preserves itself as such in actuality*
>
> Giorgio Agamben

Utopia as a concept and as a field of academic study has recently re-emerged. This re-emergence is partly explained as a response to the various ideological arguments that concerned the end of utopia – indeed the end of history? – and had been voiced in political as well scholarly forums since 1989. Despite those prophecies we are currently experiencing an explosion of historicity on different levels of the social paralleled by a fresh interest in utopia as an intellectual tradition and as a cultural disposition.

Historians of utopian-thinking know very well that there have been plenty of other periods in the past when the "end of utopia"—indeed the end of hope--was pronounced as a fact. The point of course is not to verify or falsify such statements, but rather to understand the historical and political reasons behind them. As a matter of fact, periods of disillusionment, crisis and uncertainty are very fertile for new utopian imaginings, exactly because failure creates the conditions for the tentative dissolution of the certainties that define given and fixed forms of reality in different historical eras. As Fredric Jameson has definitively argued with reference to the recovery of the validity of utopia as a "political slogan and a politically energizing perspective" in the context of the discrediting of communist and socialist parties alike, the scepticism about traditional forms of revolution and the consolidation of the global market means "there is no alternative to utopia".[1] Indeed, during the last decade the social sciences and the humanities as well as the fields of cultural and artistic creativity have witnessed a return to utopian thinking and envisionings.

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[1] Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future. The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*, London & New York: Verso, 2005.

The notion of utopia cannot be strictly defined since utopians traditionally insist on maintaining a certain degree of abstraction in definitions and terminology. Despite this, the intellectual tradition of utopian thinking is well structured and utopian outlines are usually very insistent on referring to the genealogy of authors and books that preceded them. **Utopian thought has been pre-occupied with history already since the 19th century, but most intensively since the dawn of the 20th century, a period that I am mostly interested in since I consider it pivotal for the development of utopia.** This intentional safeguarding of tradition, an indication of the self-reflexive character of utopian thought, presents the historian with a productive point of entry in this field of study. **During the last few decades** cultural and intellectual historians have been preoccupied with the study of memory, thus shedding light onto the ways in which societies, and nations in particular, constitute themselves historically. But, what about the ways in which societies hope, imagine and anticipate their future? The central question that inspires my current study in utopian criticism concerns the various ways in which history is related to utopia and *vice versa.*

In what follows I want to share with you some thoughts that concern the relationship between utopia and history. More specifically my thoughts concern the following:

a. What can we learn about past societies by examining their hopes, their expectations and the ways in which they imagined and desired the future?
b. what is the role of history and the past in utopians imaginings of the future? That is, what is the place of history in hopes and expectations about the things to come?
c. how can utopian thought alter our understanding of experience of temporality in past and present societies alike?

Back to the twentieth century

The first half of the twentieth century was a time when utopian thought developed in new and dynamic ways, and some of the most important works of utopian criticism and reflection on the role of utopias in modern societies were written in that period. Anthologies and histories of utopian thinking often insist on a textual genealogy by

tracing the various ways in which utopian plots are recycled in different texts throughout the centuries.

In his book *The Story of Utopias* Lewis Mumford related utopia to history by defining it not as something that cannot be realised, or something that concerns the future, but as a vision of society that exists in the present in the form of a parallel intellectual reality.[2] For Mumford, the reality of utopia takes place in the sphere of intellectual production and desire. He divided utopias in two categories: personal desires and contemplations, and utopias of reconstruction. The former present no interest for the historian, since they concern matters of individual psychology. The latter have come to reckon with the world in which they seek realization. Mumford defined utopia as a "vision of a reconstituted environment which is better adapted to the nature and aims of the human beings that dwell within it than the actual one", adding that "by a reconstructed environment I do not mean merely a physical thing, but a new set of habits, a fresh scale of values, a different net of relationships and institutions …"[3] Early twentieth-century criticism of utopia engaged in questions that concerned the interaction between different temporalities – past, present and future – in every given historical moment. Thus, Mumford and his contemporaries brought into the foreground an issue that is pivotal in the historical study of utopian thought and which concerns the relationship between historical time and the notions of time in utopia. A very important set of questions can be derived from Mumford's approach to utopia: what does the idea of the co-existence of different temporalities in any given historical moment mean for the ways we understand society and culture? How can research into the history of hopes and future visions – most of which did not materialize – compliment our understanding of the past? To put it more provocatively, can we write a history of that which did not actually happen?

Non-synchronicity

In "Varieties of the Utopian", the first chapter of his book *Archaeologies of the Future*, Jameson announces the methodological presupposition of his study of utopia. In order to do that he makes a methodological statement and he

[2] Lewis Mumford, *The Story of Utopias*, New York: Boni and Liveright, 1922.
[3] Ibid., pp. 21–22.

distinguishes two types of Utopia: utopia as a *program* and utopia as an *impulse*. The former is found in systematic and intertextual utopian literature (indeed literature is the only type of material analyzed in the book), while the latter is more dispersed and found to govern "everything future-oriented in life and culture; and encompassing everything from games to patent medicines, from myths to mass entertainment, from iconography to technology, from architecture to eros, from tourism to jokes and the unconscious"(2). Jameson declares that his analysis is exclusively focused on the first type of utopia. The reference behind this methodological—but also deeply political—statement is of course to philosopher Ernst Bloch's monumental contribution to the study of the utopian impulse.

Enrst Bloch is the most prolific intellectual of utopia in the twentieth century. Complicated, ambivalent, dubious often un-inviting and chaotic, dispersed, but also inspired, holistic, all-encompassing, Bloch's writings on utopia cover his whole life span, that is the largest part of the twentieth century (he died in 1977 at the age of ninety-two).

It is exactly for the reason that Jameson dismisses Bloch's approach to utopia that his work is very productive and indispensable for the historical study of the role that utopia, hope and expectation play in the formation of past societies. The philosophy of Ernst Bloch provides us with a huge repository of thoughts, ideas, elaborations and imaginative applications of utopia as a cultural phenomenon and a political disposition of the twentieth century. Jameson is right in saying that Bloch searches for utopia—hope, expectation and desire for the future—not only in literary texts but almost in every aspect of social, political, economic and creative activity. The range of the themes examined in the three monumental volumes of his *Principle of Hope* prove that utopia is treated as a broad range historical phenomenon that the researcher needs to unearth through systematic analysis of many kinds of social activity.

The range of Bloch's philosophical thought is so broad that it would be unproductive to even attempt to make a concise presentation of his major areas of interest.[4] I will

[4] Jamie Owen Daniel and Tom Moylan, *Not Yet. Reconsidering Ernst Bloch*, London & New York: Verso, 1997.

refer here to some of the keywords of his writings that relate utopia with history. Indeed, his philosophy of utopia is based on a very particular understanding of historical process that not only binds the past, present and future together into an inseparable whole, but also reveals the multiplicity of temporalities involved in each different historical era. Bloch consistently argues that the past contains all the elements that constitute the content of utopia. At the centre of his understanding of historicity lies an evolved Hegelian concept of process that Bloch transformed into a notion of open-ended process that stresses the preconscious dimension of both past and future. Exactly because the past can never be finished and always includes elements that were not realized, it is considered to be a space of utopian creativity.[5] Seen by definition as **not-yet-being**, the past always contains a surplus of utopian thought in the forms of unrealized meaning resting in the works of past people and societies.

Similarly, Bloch suggests a particular understanding of the role of memory (heritage and tradition) in utopian thinking, based on the distinction that he makes between *anamnesis* and *anagnorisis*. The former is defined in Platonic terms of remembering and suggests that we remember something only because we formerly knew it. Following this definition, memory is a recollection of what exists in our knowledge capital. Quite differently anagnorisis is mostly about recognition. Memory traces are reactivated in the present, but there is never simple correspondence between past and present because of all the intervening novelty. The power of the past derives both from its similarity as well as from its dissimilarity from the present.[6] Bloch is ambivalently disposed towards memory. On the one hand, he believes that memory is a safeguard against capitalist oblivion, while on the other he thinks that memory can be a drag on progress and change.

Bloch elaborated the concept of **non-synchronicity** in many of his books. The concept is pivotal in *Heritage of our Times*, where Bloch expands of the relationship between latency and tendency in historical process.[7] Elsewhere in his monumental corpus of works he insists on excavating the traces of not-yet conscious elaborations

[5] Ibid.; Geoghegan,*Er nst Bloch.*
[6] Daniel and Moylan, *Not Yet*, p. 22.
[7] Ernst Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.

of the future in past historical eras, in the works of art and in politics. For Bloch every age contains its own horizon that reveals the dormant potentialities for future developments. In other words, each past contains its future, or rather its potential futures. Bloch's notion of the future is not however tied to the definite materialization of past and present horizons. Rather, the future – similar to the past and the present – is understood as a constellation of differential potentialities in becoming. The Blochean **not-yet** implies, or rather presupposes, the notion of co-existent, non-synchronous and often colliding worlds. If the future exists within the present as an affect, trend, or tendency, then utopia can be embedded in the everyday life of past societies.

Implications for the historical study of utopia

Bloch's principles of the utopian understanding of historical process resonate with current theoretical approaches to the issue of utopia. This understanding of utopia brings the interrelation between the possible and the potential into the foreground of our analysis. The concept of potentiality is addressed by many contemporary theorists. Giorgio Agamben has reflected on the distinction between potentiality and impotentiality and has argued that the potential is defined not only by its ability to happen but equally by its ability not to happen.[8]

What are the implications for historical understanding of this inclusion of acts, deeds, relations, and developments which did not unfold into actuality? If what did not happen does not "lag behind actuality" then the event horizon of history explodes to indefinite number of directions. The questions that I announced at the introduction of this paper remain for the most part unanswered. Still, we could safely argue that one of the most important implications of this conceptual shift is the reintroduction of the notion of crisis into our explorations of the historical process. Research in the history of hopes, expectations and utopias bring into the foreground of historical analysis those moments of crisis when the borders between the possible and the impossible, the potential and the actual were blurred, undecided, negotiated or fought for.

[8] Giorgio Agamben,*Po tentialities. Collected Essays in Philosophy*, Stanford UP, Stanford, 1999, p. 183. (emphasis in the original)

Despoina Valatsou

History, our own stories, emotions online

In the contemporary mediated society, there is an undeniable proliferation of testimonies to violent, exceptionally harsh and generally traumatic events. The desire to testify, whether on an event that directly affects one's own life or on an event that touches the collective life of a community on a large scale, has become a basic component of contemporary culture. It could be argued that we are 'witnessing' the formation of an extended and propagated culture of testimony with novel characteristics and multiple forms.

The need and the desire to produce and consume personalized forms of historical knowledge ("what has already happened") is nowadays evident in various forms of media and communication. Mass media offer a massive space for the expression of the desire or often the *imperative* to tell one's *own* story or *a* story. The Internet, especially, works as an open space that transcends the traditional and re-claims new boundaries of public and private spheres, as well as of personal and collective subjectivities. Personal homepages, blogs, chat rooms, online communities of all sorts (i.e. political, of an activist character, artistic/cultural and so on), and at the same time official commemorative sites, online archive collections organized by institutions etc, are all markers of the blending between the personal and the collective, of the Internet functioning as a common and public space for personal reflection and emotional release.

In this paper I will attempt to discuss how this emerging testimonial culture is interconnected with a more general process of sentimentalization of public memory and historical culture online. I will try to address these issues through the presentation and discussion of the *September 11 Digital Archive* (http://911digitalarchive.org/) of the Center for History and New Media (CHNM) at George Mason University (GMU). The *September 11 Digital Archive* offers a valuable example for the study of the ways into which collective memory can be personalized and familiarized online on the basis of an emotional, a sentimental engagement to the past.

The *September 11 Digital Archive* is a digital repository of histories –I would add, mostly of *personal* stories– and documents relating to the 9/11 attacks in New York, Virginia and Pennsylvania. It is structured in eight sub-sections, in which there can be found many thousands of accounts of different genres. Most of these accounts are personal stories but we also find whole collections of material evidence from official institutions and organizations.

Stories [nearly 20.000 individual stories of people directly affected by the events, that is people who have actually been on site, or have lost dear ones or suffer the consequences afterwards etc, but also stories of people who do not actually have any connection at all to the events –they might even not be American citizens–, except from the fact that they were emotionally moved by the 9/11 events.]

E-mails [nearly 4.000 individual e-mails sent and/or received on or shortly after September 11. Also links to large collections of e-mails from institutions and organizations, such as a collection of 11.000 e-mail from the Department of Justice, or online discussion groups etc.]

Still images [Approximately 3.200 photographs, digitally created or manipulated images, artworks submitted by individuals. Also extensive collections of images from institutions and organizations, for example from the National Guard.]

Moving images [video + digital animations from individuals as well as institutions and organizations, and other groups.]

Audio [Audio material from radio producers, artists, historians, archivists, and the public broadcasting community who came together to collect and preserve audio traces of the World Trade Center, its neighborhood and the events of 9/11.]

Documents [1/ flyers distributed in the streets of NYC after 9/11 {Michael Ragsdale – a video producer in New York City – collected posters, letters, cards, brochures, event programs, press releases, and announcements from the city's streets nearly every day from September 11, 2001 until September 15, 2002}, 2/ reports, studies, and white-papers written by a variety of organizations and institutions in response to the September 11 attacks and the public reaction to them, 3/ oral history interviews, collections of documents from groups and individuals.]

Guide to websites [An indexed and annotated guide to September 11 resources on the web organized by type and content, + a collection of blogs created right after 9/11.]

Navigating through of the *September 11 Digital Archive* raises certain questions concerning the connection between history and personal narratives, between contemporary historical culture and emotional experiences, sentimental expressions and individual meaning-making. Here, I outline some of the main issues that emerge through the study of this type of archival collection.

1.

As this collection of documents shows, testimonial culture is not unified or homogeneous. New spaces of expressing one's own story, such as the Internet, create novel, multiple and complex testimonial forms, presented either on their totality or fragmented. These forms are marked by digital technologies and can be written, spoken, but also visual, artefactual, technological, virtual and so on. Moreover, the fact that the Internet creates and functions as an open, public and perpetual space of expression, magnifies the sense of importance attributed to the personal testimony in the sense that once uploaded, it remains always there, it is always present both as a personal and as a collective piece of historical documentation.

In addition, there are other alterations of testimonial forms that result from their interconnection to one's emotions. The need to tell one's own story, especially when it relates to a hard and traumatic past event, is also felt and experienced as an obligation. This duty to remember (De Baets, 2007), this felt obligation of the individual subject to speak out about the traumatic past is intrinsically connected with complex emotions and as such it reshapes as well as reinforces the sentimental burden of the testimony, thus altering its characteristics. Narrating one's personal story as a documentation of the collective and traumatic past, is eventually experienced as a very important and serious task and as such it has to be emotionally engaging. Especially, in the *September 11 Digital Archive* we can trace a new form of sentimental testimony, the one accounted by a physically detached but sentimentally attached subject. The contributions to the online archive do not just come from actual witnesses of the 9/11 events or from people directly affected by these events but also and mainly from people that were emotionally moved but have actually no other connection to the events. These people feel the need to share their inner thoughts, their life recollections, their reflections about love, human relationships, politics, about almost anything that people usually think and contemplate about after a massive

disaster. Empathy is represented as equal to physical experience and thus it needs to be accounted as part of the historical event itself.

Although these new forms of testimony share many common characteristics with more traditional oral or written testimonies, they are also marked by differences:

a) their production and dissemination is based on the use of digital and mobile technologies that promote a massive public address,
b) they are meant from the start to be presented online,
c) despite the fact that the original nature of the story-testimony is personal and private, it undergoes a constant transformation through its exposure and its presentation on the Internet, and it turns out to be at the same time collective and public.
d) Finally, the individual subjects that narrate their stories are simultaneously producers and consumers of history and the past. This characteristic by itself is not novel. In a sense one could argue the same for the autobiography genre or the memoirs genre. However, these online personal stories could be thought of as snapshots of the individual's autobiographical impulse/urge, mere digital fragments, as Bilalis argues, of one's life (Bilalis, 2007). They satisfy a need to remember as well as make public of an instance of the individual's life, an individual that will probably never find him/herself in a position to put down his/her whole life story in a more organized and structural form, such as an autobiography. It could therefore be argued that these new forms of testimony online promote the construction, not of a "story of the self" as a whole, in its totality, with a narrative beginning-middle-end form, but the construction of a single-fragmented story of "part of the self". In addition, given this short autobiographical narration online, that is within a collective space and through a collective process, the individual shares a feeling of relationality to all the other individuals online, by living a relational digital life. Is seems evident that the 'self' ought not to be thought of as a solitary entity, but instead as a relational one, relational to the other solitary entities online.

2.

The second point has to do with the Internet, again as an open and public space, that plays an important role in supporting a movement to democratize history. Let me just

remark here that the democratization of history is one of the main goals of CHNM concerning its online history projects (http://chnm.gmu.edu/about.php). We should, of course, be aware and cautious when it comes to discuss democracy and the Internet or better democratizing processes, since it is not always necessary that multiplicity and plurality per se promote diversity and differentiation.

To return to the main point, online personal testimonies shed light in areas of personal, social and political activity that would otherwise be lost through official records and institutional archival sources. The personalized expression of a lived, sensed, felt as collective past creates a shared, common, public space of remembering, thus undermining the sharp distinction between the emotional and the rational and the intellectual, and moulding the boundaries between private and public spheres. The *September 11 Digital Archive* gives us the opportunity to think that what had previously seemed emotional, that is personal, individual, idiosyncratic, has been rendered historical, structural and an object of historical study. As oral history has previously done, online/digital history expands our notion of historicity to include practices, activities and interactions that are now all the more recognized as historical.

3.

Moving on to the third point, it seems that both the personalization and the familiarization (οικειοποίηση) of collective memory as well as the publication of personal stories, raise questions about the relations between people's stories and history. It is only recently that scholars have begun to study systematically emotional perception and expression as not merely a "private" inward feeling but as a way of interpreting and understanding the external world and acting in it.

The *September 11 Digital Archive* seems to create a sort of history-in-e-motion. A history created, disseminated, moving at a different pace and rate from the traditional history written by the authorial figure of the professional historian. A history fragmented yet constantly and perpetually present online. Finally, a history experienced and performed on the basis of emotional memories of the past, that undermines quite a few dilemmas and binary notions in our understanding of history, such as individual *vs.* collective, fact *vs.* imagination, reality *vs.* desire, stories *vs.* history etc. As Lauren Berlant puts it "it is about change in the normative structure of

mass subjectivity, a shift in the public sphere standard of ordinary personhood from an Enlightenment model of the reasonable man who is organized by a hierarchy of mind over body in favor of an image of the subject who becomes historical by proximity to trauma" (Berlant, 2001, p.42) and I would add to sentimental emotions in general.

4.

My fourth and concluding point is that contemporary testimonial culture is interconnected with a growing sentimental culture. One is a basic, fundamental, constitutive element of the other. They grow and expand through their interdependence. Testimonies and personal stories about the past, especially the traumatic past, contribute to the sentimentalizing of public and historical culture.

A quick note: The term sentimentalization, as used here, does not necessarily have a negative connotation, nor does it refer exclusively to a description of facile and distorted emotions. Rather it is used in such a way so as to refer to an act of excessively indulging into sentiments without however attributing neither a negative nor a positive set of values to that act. In that sense, this process of sentimentalization of the past seems to be based on the usage of emotions such as fear, grief, shock deriving from the spectacularity of the images and the unanticipated events, vulnerability, nostalgia etc in order to retouch and transform the known and traumatic past into an ideal and heroic past worth remembering and building a future upon it. Within that context, questions of memorialization have so quickly followed the events, and the need to remember and narrate our own stories has emerged so vividly. In the place of absence and loss, there has emerged a massive and intense need to create presence of some kind. And what a better and more alive presence, than that of the past, of history.

These thoughts remain tentative and exploratory and the questions raised fall into a wider project in which we could study the emotional personalization of collective memory within the Internet as a space for reflection about the past and emotional release. I hope that these thoughts in combination with the online example presented here today will provide the basis for a productive discussion.

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