

Present Now

Whilst a sometimes unimpaired belief in progress might have proved to be one of the pitfalls of the not-so-nihilistic avant-garde and Modern art movements it would be a mistake to therefore do away with this trajectory altogether. In fact we will take Tomorrow Today as an occasion to turn to the contaminated idea of Utopia, which is clearly associated with the proclaimed progressive stance while it cannot be simply reduced to it. Indeed the unfolding of time in the concept of Utopia proves to be more crafty than simply forward-looking: It is a projection of the future that evolves from a simultaneous reinvention of the present and future to begin with. Most importantly, this doesn't mean to get rid of the past, but to understand it as the structuring code that pervades the present moment. Thus the Utopian projection needs to be orientated in both directions, the past and the future alike, so that we can catch a glimpse of the glitch that is the present moment and envision a reformulation thereof. It is in this way that the concept of Utopia provides not only the generic structure of science fiction but also of what has been called Modernity, e.g. an attitude, a pose, a specific way of thinking, living and doing. In the guise of Modernity it sketches out a praxis, namely an archeology of the present as that which already holds its potential transformation and concerns—ecological, economical, societal and aesthetic issues alike. As such the Utopian gesture can be understood as a leap or a crack, a specific way to structure space and time pointing towards the fictional as towards the real.

Utopian models, as they are also laid out in (post-apocalyptic) science fiction, might not be the worst models to take into account given current conditions. Some narratives though, might leave us with the impression of being stranded in a *Mad Max* desert like situation. This script clings to the idea that you just have to take the biggest, and so allegedly strongest, customized, armored truck, not so surprisingly called the War Rig, and dash off into the Wasteland to outrun the ruthless warlords and their henchmen that control the economy and define the given life-form. Speculating on their escape the group that is at the center of attention accelerates forward in a fury only to realize—after a seemingly endless yet quite entertaining hour and a half—that, after all, blind progress might not be the solution. Suddenly it seems that any move forward might prove deadly and that vital resources can only be found at the point of origin. Whilst in *Mad Max: Fury Road* this seems the only possible solution for a happy ending we all know that this only leads us to another dead end. To escape this reductionist trap— that even the *Furiosa* version of Charlize Theron has to fall for—we will probably have to start with a recap of the already known.

Modernity as an attitude, as an audacity was intrinsically linked to the conception of a self; the idea of inventing oneself and to thus test a new vocabulary and grammar beyond the preexisting, a new life-form. However, the concept of reinventing oneself has been divested of any utopian potential, as it has been subtly converted into a commodity. The spirit of capitalism rather welcomed this Modernist audacity as being complicit with its own eagerness to transform and reinvent itself. Supposedly it has even adopted the model, and so much so that what seemed like a fresh code projecting a (better) future is now only the stale embodiment of living currency. This information hasn't exactly been repressed as some try to suggest. Quite the opposite, it has been declared in so many words. Following this narration, it sure seems that the Utopian model has been exhausted, at least if one wants to reduce it to one aspect of its modernist guise. Yet the question remains, how to imagine the present, how to imagine it other than it is. And while neither a purely forward facing techno-social stance— as a title like Tomorrow Today might suggest—nor a 180 degree return to the start are an option, toxically chrome-spraying your jaw and cunningly operating the techno prosthesis that you are while unwrapping your cyborg self might be. As the solitary male white hero as well as the boy groups – not only in the Wasteland but also in the sciences, in philosophy or Art ... – are not only old and worn out but also obsolete as a model, one can turn to other aspects of the Utopian (and maybe post-apocalyptic) aspiration. Like the daydream of a radical community of tricksters, fakers, cyborgs and 'toons, testo- and estro-junkies, human and non-human things among other what-ever beings in all their plasticity. And while it might only start to form, this daydream sure feels like a fierce and corrosive agent amongst us that carries the potential to re-appropriate the present, the past and the future all at once. To daydream though is not possible if you find yourself in a timely gap, that erases the present by constantly overwriting it with the future, but only if you are Present Now.

Tanja Widmann