

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.

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Even if it may be reminiscent of certain hippie experimentations or current neo-hipster attitudes, we take the risk of wondering, what does the idea of (artistic) community mean today? And if it makes sense to explore this notion again, in what way might a community self-consciousness be shown?

First, we have to be aware that social media determines a new rhetoric and so characterizes social relationships. This, in return, has a significant impact on the way we represent ourselves and our relationships in a specific context. This new rhetoric has definitively colonized the terminology used to describe communities. The term “community” itself has been exhausted of its previous political meaning, and has become another surplus value of art, most often an equivalent to the word “scene”, or a neutral term for gathering as “digital communities”. It is not about stepping back from the digital sphere as a protective move, but it is about considering the changes to representations and meanings of social relations which arise from this new rhetoric of social media. Another consequence; the traditional distinctions between scenes and communities delineated by certain spaces, discourses, and attitudes seem now to be more confused, more blurred. In general, groups, communities and networks appear to be functioning within visible and invisible boundaries whose visibility depends upon the position of the viewer, whether he/she is an insider or an outsider. Then the question is to know what really makes really an insider, in an environment of indistinct informations, where it is easier to look like one.

Scenes and communities are always evolving into new configurations driven by personal factors— such as rivalries, conflicts, friendships— and power struggles, and all the rituals of exclusions and inclusions that come along with it. The way communities function seems largely based on subjective decisions and affinities, driven by a certain awareness of common principles, tastes and attitudes. On the contrary, social networks shape scenes through information exchanges of all sorts, gossip, texts, debates and images within a new digital logic of grouping. The success of Instagram among artists, for example, is due to the fact that it gives an instant image of the state of the relationships and social relations without distinctions between the private, the intimate, the professional, the exhibition and the artwork. It has proven to be the most popular visual representation of scenes today, while the communities forming behind the screen are almost clandestine.

So the question becomes how to analyse the current art system by working on different communities, outside the art world. For example, the community-based projects of Stephen Willats,

in which the community is seen as a locally shared experience, clearly propose other models of artistic practices. Willats urges the artist to think of a social model of his own art practice and to examine the institutional framework. Consequently, community-based projects always have to deal with a critique of the institutions.

Anne Imhof in one of her recent collective choreographies “The School Of The Seven Bells”, first presented in the art school where she was studying, refers to the clandestine ballet of the pickpockets in the eponymous film by Bresson—only visible to insiders. In the same way, she creates and choreographs two different forms of language, for the viewers and the dancers, which is often antagonistic. The internal language acts as a counter-consciousness to the visible social system.

The show is structured around three parts:

- the exhibition Berlin Local, a community based project of Stephen Willats which took place at the gallery MD72 in Berlin, in October 2014 within the neighbourhood of the gallery,
- a selection of books and documents dealing graphically, stylistically and conceptionally with the idea of community,
- some editions reflecting the question of community through collaborative production.

But also the question of scenes emerging around some gallerist’s figure, through collaborative production.

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