PART 1

Narrating and Navigating Futures



CHAPTER 1

Utopian Loyalties: Understanding Western Transformation Dynamics with the Sentimental Scenario Framework

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> The designers were populists, you see; they were trying to give the public what it wanted. What the public wanted was the future. (William Gibson, *The Gernsback Continuum*)

1 Introduction

The future used to be better, as we have heard time and again in recent months with an anxious undertone. For former German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine signified a "watershed moment" ([Zeitenwende], Scholz 2022), an end of the post-World War II order. The Hamas attack on Israel and the retaliatory measures taken by the Netanyahu government as well as Trump's first year in office, advertising Tesla cars, threatening sovereign allied countries such as Denmark and attacking others (Venezuela, Iran), confirm this impression of an epochal rupture.

And then, in addition to all these highly threatening scenarios, there are also the immanent risks to the Western (globalized) way of life, whose extractivist consumer economy is reaching its planetary limits – the main problem of 'our' world, if you believe the repoliticized youth who are taking to the streets calling for climate justice. In the eyes of many observers, it is about nothing less than the conversion of the entire collective semantics from growth to post-growth, a radical *change of direction* in society's understanding of consumption, prosperity and freedom. The concept of such an eco-social transformation aims at a deliberate shift in Western ways of life and production toward greater inclusion of factors of production, and thus toward greater sustainability and justice. Such a concept of change, and this is important, therefore goes beyond merely addressing changes that are occurring anyway or that, for example, are the result of a geostrategic power agenda, as in the cases of Putin's aggression against Ukraine or Trump's regime change attempts. Such violent changes outside the framework of interna-

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tional law would likely also fall under the latter category in a dual schema of "change by design" or "change by disaster" (Brocchi 2022). My article focuses primarily on the potentials and challenges of desired change, and one must admit that even advocates see this as more as a wishful fantasy: "The 'degrowth' project is […] a utopia, that is, a source of hope and dreams" (Latouche 2015, 56–57).

But why does the goal of growing less or not at all seem so "utopian" (i.e., unrealistic, unfeasible) when the consequences of carbon capitalism and alternatives (steady state economy, circular economy, common good economy, donut economy) have been discussed with increasing intensity for over 50 years – the Club of Rome report, *The Limits to Growth* was published in 1972? When demands for the aforementioned socio-ecological transformation are part of the standard vocabulary of politicians of almost all stripes, driven by UN Secretary-General Gutierrez, who – in unison with Greta Thunberg – repeatedly calls for policies suitable for grandchildren? Why does a green lifestyle magazine like *Futur II* have to headline "Climate targets unattainable – what now?" in December 2023 and replace the self-prescribed activism with an interview with the climate catastrophe realist Jonathan Franzen, who argues for an ethic of *kindness* beyond appeals for reduction and change (Franzen 2024, 18)?

Does the answer lie in the persistence of neoliberal government technology, which "shatters traditional social bonds" and produces subjects "who are reluctant to act collectively" (Zelik and Altvater 2016, 198–199), as has often been argued in the cultural and social sciences following Foucault and Butler (most recently Wilder 2022)? Or is the destructive hostility to life, which is particularly evident in the dramatic extinction of species, primarily rooted in capitalist "material domination," which has created a "world relationship of sovereignty of disposal and license to violate" and thus produced masses of "phantom owners" (*Phantombesitz*) who believe they have a vested and legitimate claim to everything (von Redecker 2020, 13–14)? Or is the crisis even deeper in anthropological dimensions, as Graeber and Wengrow note with regard to the loss of a social dynamic along three elementary freedoms (freedom to move, freedom to disobey, freedom to shape social relations) – that the main question is why mankind got stuck in normalized relationships of dominance and violence (2022, 553)?

My (partial) contribution to answering this (big) question is a shift in emphasis. In order to understand why, in the Western world's heated self-talk about its foundations and its dwindling future, so little is changing and far too slowly, I look at *loyalties to ideas*, more precisely: to utopian emotional scenarios that represent an affective orientation space for a society or groups

of societies (such as the West). My thesis is that the global North/the Western way of life is primarily affectively tied to the idea of a *future without scarcity*, which can be read as a primal utopia (see Morus 1990; Heller 2016) – and which has been *realized as a liberal utopia* in the "commercial society" (Smith 1976, 37) with markets and trade. The deeply felt gratitude of satisfied consumers weighs heavily and creates a strong loyalty to this scenario, even against all market failures, all financial scandals, rampant injustice, etc.; the shopping malls are full, that counts for a lot.

I therefore share with many authors a contemporary, post-holistic approach to understanding utopia, which reconstructs it as a local or niche phenomenon of the "blueprint" era (Bregman 2019, 19) of the great socialist-totalitarian systems (Welzer 2019; Wilder 2022). Utopian thinking therefore no longer follows a collective top-down logic, but instead begins again with concrete people in concrete situations – returning, as it were, "to the island," only today no longer in the sense of a justifying "heuristic fiction" (Vogl 2010, 189), but as a lived alternative practice. This re-subjectivization and re-opening of historical practice had actually already been the significant achievement of Ernst Bloch in the twentieth century (Neupert-Doppler 2015, 75), but with the Marxist Bloch one could still sense the proximity of the dialectical historical materialism, which had retreated in a weakened form into concepts such as the "tendency" of developments or the "latency" of possibilities. In today's multipolar world of plural crises, no one has any idea "where it is going," as Bloch always asked so beautifully. Everything is there, everywhere, all at once, in varying degrees of severity, from a new start to extinction. And in this time of perplexity and reconfiguration, in which one does not want to give up hope, authors all around the world activate the energies of desire that have been on the map since Thomas More: utopias are part of an affect cartography of modernity that needs to be written, sometimes in concrete terms (from urban gardening to the 4-day week), sometimes in abstract terms (along the lines of the possible-impossible, e.g., basic income).

In my contribution, I will attempt to plausibilize this approach in three steps. A brief theoretical modeling (part 2) is followed by an attempt to illustrate the utopian loyalties of the West along the WEIRD scheme (Western, educated, industrialized, rich, democratic) (part 3). Derived from this, I define the suggestive power of the concept of 'Imagineering' as the affectively highly self-image-effective combination of three loyalties (part 4). I conclude with a reflection on the future of the West after its end (part 5).

2 Loyalties, Utopia, and the Social Modeling of Time: Theoretical Frameworks

2.1 Loyalty

Loyalties are an elementary part of social coexistence, but not without potential problems (see below: Simmermacher 2022). Like a "problem child" (Simmermacher 2022, 45), people love them very much, as they are relationships that have grown over time and are often also socially single-digit – e.g., family, hometown, nation of birth. These contexts convey values and views to which one feels personally committed and to which one is also committed from the outside. This can lead to problems if the self-image or identity formed through loyalty comes into conflict with counter arguments and criticism: recall the difficult discussions among family and friends about the COVID-19 measures, in which the central tension was between the (often uncertain) level of knowledge and the demanded affiliation ("Do you believe that?"). Two important features can be recognized here:

a) Loyalties have emotional and rational parts and the legitimacy of claims can be clarified or at least addressed via the rational-argumentative part,
b) the distinction between person and feeling is possible because the object of loyalty is important to me, not the loyalty itself. For example, I have both my friend *and his well-being* at heart when I advise him against a trip that he wants very much to make. (A current political case would be the German position in the Middle East conflict: due to historical-cultural contexts, loyalty to the state of Israel and its local integrity is very high, but one can and must criticize how uncompromisingly hostage rescue and retaliatory measures against Hamas are carried out with regard to the long-term well-being of the *state*).

After discussing various proposals for a definition of loyalty, especially from the perspective of philosophy (Royce 2005; Ewin 1992; Rorty 2001; Rorty 2018; Kleinig 2014; but also Hirschman 1970), Simmermacher arrives at the following compromise definition:

> Loyalty is an action-guiding motive that protects and promotes the interests of the object to which it is directed, subordinates the self-interest of those acting to the good of the object in cases of doubt and is an expression of the acceptance of shared values from which obligations are derived depending on the context. With regard to collectives, loyalty is highly unifying and protects collective interests against community-destroying self-interests. (Simmermacher 2022, 56, my translation)

Conflicts of loyalty inevitably arise in a pluralistic society because people have inevitably experienced various loyal embeddings due to their different origins and thus value systems and carry them as identity markers. However, the conscious discussion of these conflicting loyalties also offers the opportunity for moral progress, as Rorty points out when he emphasizes, in terms of solidarity, that we can move from a particular to a universal 'We' if the inherited loyalties are abandoned in favor of a common background of experience of "pain and humiliation" (2018, 310) to which all people are exposed. In view of populism, xenophobia, racism, and wars worldwide, this perspective is more relevant than ever, but it also seems to be increasingly fragile in the growing struggle for the division of the world and distribution of its goods?

The dimension of loyalty to an idea, which Shklar (1993; see Bajohr 2019, 7) has already pointed out, is crucial for my argument. In Stilz (2009), the example is a young Canadian citizen who feels committed to the idea or ideal of a liberal state and, in liberal loyalty, adheres to the rules of coexistence that she considers just. The example shows well how a strong emotional-ethical bond ("I'm in the morally right place here, it's a good thing") and rational-argumentative (repeated) examination are not mutually exclusive, but two sides of the same identity. Transferred to the German context, such a liberal attachment could be seen in "constitutional patriotism" à la Jürgen Habermas; in my argumentation, I propose to consider this political loyalty to a *republican utopia* as specifically "Western" (as part of the interpretation of WEIRD) (see part 3 below).

It is important to note here that other relevant political concepts such as 'faith,' 'trust,' and 'solidarity,' all of which also have the dimension of proximity to an idea or a shared concept ("trust in the post-war order"), for example, also have the aforementioned connection between emotion and (action) rationality. However, as Osterkamp and Schulze Wessel explain, what makes the concept of 'loyalty' so specific is that it "is able to operate the multi-layered and processual relationality of social bonds, identities and identifications" (Osterkamp and Wessel 2016, 558, my translation).

2.2 Loyalty as an Emotional Scenario

Loyalties are very interesting from a cultural studies perspective as a hybrid of emotional and rational elements, but have not yet been comprehensively and systematically interpreted. I understand this essential link between connectedness and commitment, argument structure and imaginative context (almost all contributions emphasize the situational-particular basic structure of loyalties, which also makes them problematic) as a "sentimental scenario"

[*Gefühlsszenario*]. By this I mean cognitive-emotional-ethical patterns that discursively create interpretations of the world as cultural spaces in which affective relationality, informal scripts, social norms, and narratives are articulated (see Metelmann 2016 and 2019).

The concept of the emotional scenario arose in the context of the debate on narrative emotions and is based on the fact that secondary emotions, such as pity, hatred, resentment, and boredom, or complex emotions, such as shame due to resentment or pride in pity, cannot be thought of in a stimulus-response scheme. Rather, they are culturally shaped and mediated by the media. Voss (2004, 218) assumes that four mini-narratives intersect at the core of each such emotion, forming an imaginary world associated with the specific feeling:

a) a loss or a gain,
b) the fulfillment or disappointment of our wishes and goals,
c) the confirmation or thwarting of our expectations,
d) the recognition or rejection of our needs and efforts.

Beyond the emphasis on the complex structure of mini-narratives that Voss refers to, the very choice of the term "scenario" also points to the performative-bodily dimension (*skené*/*skiní* is Greek for 'stage,' 'scene,' 'tent'), associated social scripts (learned performance logics, often informal and implicit) and the design and power aspects that are (or can be) inherent in every staging. Understood in this integrative and comprehensive way, the sentimental scenario is the *cultural manifestation of affect*, i.e., the way in which bodies feel, understand, and articulate themselves in a "space of possibility" (Slaby 2011, 133) of affectivity in concrete social situations and their (pre-)tracing [*Vorspurung*] (Mühlhoff 2018, 20).

Understood in this way, the emotional scenario also has two sides: one is the phenomenological level of subjective inner experience; the other is the cultural-sociological level of the modes of behavior and speech to be observed (in Foucauldian terminology, this difference could be taken up in the duality of subjectivation as norming and subjectivation as norm appropriation (see Bührmann and Schneider 2008). Methodologically, the procedure of analyzing sentimental scenarios is then ideally directed both (empirically) at personal experience and at the experiential *dispositives* that place bodies in the social frameworks of being affected (which can be found, for example, in novels).

Within the broader discourse of cultural studies, this line of inquiry resembles the "cultural hypothesis" from Raymond Williams' *Structures of Feeling*. With this concept, Williams sought in the mid-1970s to soften Marxist structural determinism and to grant the "here and now", the concrete present, its

own space for actualization and development. Even though Williams provided an important impetus – and Illouz (2023), for example, refers to him affirmatively (without, however, resolving the problems of the approach) – one must critically note that this concept is theoretically outdated. Above all, praxeology and the *performative turn* have operationalized the action-structure debate more satisfactorily (see Giddens 1979, Schatzki 1996, Reckwitz 2002). Williams himself explains that instead of "feeling," one could also speak of "experience," "worldview," or even "ideology" (sic!) (Williams 2015 [1977], 23), which is no longer compatible with the differentiated debates on feelings and emotions (see, for a summary, Frevert et al. 2011, Plamper 2012) and the theoretical framing outlined here. Finally, Williams's work lacks a genuine reflection on and theoretical-strategic integration of the *mediality* of feelings, which is indispensable in a global media-driven society – the scenario approach advocated here places this aspect at the center of the entire analytical scope (image, scene, script, narration).

The sentimental scenario in my approach is thus more than a showroom for the history of ideas; it is also something other than a cabinet of passions. In this respect, the investigation of utopian loyalties represents an excellent object of observation, because they contribute significantly to a setting of action that is a sentimental scenario, interpreted in everyday practice, without having received any special attention to date. People are bound to certain ideas not only conceptually and instrumentally, but above all emotionally. Hope is first and foremost a dream that has something other than the existing in mind. And these attachments can be strong and motivating, as ideas of the afterlife have shown sufficiently throughout history.

One such sentimental scenario is, for example, the liberal conviction that a free market in combination with the division of labor, specialization and the exchange economy leads to growth and prosperity, which is also true in purely numerical terms, as around 1800, 85% of people worldwide were still living in extreme poverty; in 2017, it was only 9% (Rosling 2018, 69–70). So even if, strictly speaking, it is a theory or a bundle of concepts (neoclassical economics), i.e., *conceptual knowledge*, this sober idea – mathematically whitewashed with formulas – stands for much more, as it includes imaginary elements of wishing and dreaming, stories of advancement ("from dishwasher to millionaire") and, above all, *emotions* (fearlessness, being respected and recognized, happiness or at least its pursuit). This strong attachment to a sentimental scenario means that, despite all the criticism of the system and the devastating balance of the damage caused by an externalization economy, the "liberal utopia" (Hayek 1960, 384) – that the allocation mechanisms based on supply and demand are the most efficient means to produce the social – still stands.

This adherence, even against argumentative objection, shows the specific dynamics of loyalty, which is precisely why I speak here of "utopian loyalty."

2.3 Utopia

A very brief history of utopia, as could be compiled with the help of the overview works by Claeys (2011), Neupert-Doppler (2015), and Schölderle (2017), would above all have to recount two major changes in the understanding of the term: the 'temporal turn' and the 'practical turn' (as one might say in Cultural Studies), with the two being interlinked. The "temporalization of utopia" (Koselleck 1982) in the late eighteenth century shifts the spatial non-being of the "oὐ-topos" into the future becoming of the U-Chronia. Using the example of the French novel *L'An Deux Mille Quatre Cent Quarante. Rêve s'il en fut jamais* by Louis-Sébastian Mercier from 1770, Reinhart Koselleck demonstrates the "intrusion of the future into utopia," which represents a paradigmatic change in the literary genre in two respects:

a) The author of a fiction is transformed from an observer into the producer of the utopian world. In contrast to More, whose convoluted narrative construction *systematically* marked Hythlodaeus' account as the register of an uncertain narrator, after the "Sattelzeit" around 1800, the writer can only rely on his own imagination if he wants to depict the future that is absolutely irrefutable (Koselleck 1982, 3).
b) This autonomization of utopian fiction also raises the question of credibility anew. While the island novel could still claim wild things about life on the island 'out there,' which no one else had (or could have) seen, the utopian novel, as a novel about the future, must be able to construct a temporal continuity, at least more or less plausibly, in order to be able to take the reader with it (Koselleck 1982, 34).

This latter legitimation requirement, framed by the two democratic revolutions of the modern era in 1776 and 1789, then paved the way for the second major paradigm shift in the form of the *practical turn* from the contemporary critique of the founding discourse (Morus 1990; Campanella 1981) to the implementation claim of the early socialists in the early nineteenth century (Neupert-Doppler 2015, 29–41). According to Bloch, the modern difference between freedom and security is repeated here: "Liberal-federal socialism (from Robert Owen onwards) has Morus as its ancestor, centralist socialism (from Saint-Simon onwards) touches on Campanella" (Bloch 1982, DPH2, 614).

With this double theoretical re-coding of the fulfillment of wishes in the here and now, utopian discourse turns to the near future. Sooner or later the earthly paradise will be achieved or, this is also linked to the changeover, hell

on earth will arise, called dystopia. Both scenarios are now, and this is the systematically decisive point for the linking of utopia with loyalty, connected with emotions: utopia is connected with hope, dystopia with fear, both of which are embedded in the workings of a dream-analogous a priori imaginary that articulates itself historically. This explicitly affective-theoretical twist, which Heller describes in her book *From Utopia to Dystopia: What can we wish for?* of the memorial year 2016, synthesizes utopian knowledge on a new level:

> Imagination is a unique power of the mind, a combination of rational and emotional faculties. There is neither thinking nor doing without some kind of feeling. Even the sense of spatial orientation is a kind of feeling. [...] There is also no cognitive memory without feelings being involved from the beginning. Personal experiences associated with intense feelings are always transferred from short-term memory to long-term memory. Innate drives (for food and water or for sexuality) are also feelings. Put better: one is a need, the other a feeling of satisfaction or expectation of satisfaction. Innate affects (fear, anger, curiosity, joy, sadness, shame) directed towards or triggered by certain objects, objects that must be known in order to recognize them. (Heller 2016, 7, my translation)

Heller thus defines the interpretative space of utopia or dystopia as (in my words) a *sentimental scenario* in the sense described above, in which imagination, feeling, knowledge and practice are structurally intertwined. Such a scenario is always historically and culturally determined, because the imagination can only "play cards with the views" that are available at a given time (Heller 2016, 9), i.e. imagination draws on the respective archive as "the sum of views, stories, texts, the cultural memory of every human world" (Heller 2016, 14). In her working definition, utopias are accordingly "creations of the imagination associated with certain views of a time and the passion of hope," whereas dystopias are associated with the "passion of fear" (Heller 2016, 17).

With reference to the theoretical tradition, it is clear how strongly Heller changes and concretizes the concept of hope from a "principle" in Bloch, which includes functional and volitive elements (Bloch 1982, DPH 1, 178), to a very concrete sense of well-being. For example, Heller laconically remarks that two central pillars of the utopian tradition (the abolition of private property and the regulation of sexual intercourse) are no longer attractive to "modern men and women" (Heller 2016, 43).

With regard to my conceptual fusion of utopia and loyalty, this could be reformulated as follows: it is true that "modern men and women" still stand in

the culturally evolved loyalty with the social utopian idea of a uniform regulation of property, which also includes legitimate sexual relationships – they still understand what is meant by this. However, *other utopian loyalties* have developed in the course of modernity, such as those to the "material self" (Trentmann 2017, 311–315, following William James) or to the experimental-creative lifestyle of an "aesthetics of existence" (Foucault, following Nietzsche), which have reconfigured the collective imaginary of the West. Or, in Heller's words: the orchestra of views has played differently under the direction of the imagination. Put yet another way: what interests me most about Heller's affect-political interpretation of utopia is the possibility of understanding social conflicts ("no longer attractive") as loyalty-political disputes. In these renegotiations, desires for a successful, good life come together, which are fed by different utopian traditions that can be mapped onto five central areas: **W**estern, **E**ducated, **I**ndustrialized, **R**ich, **D**emocratic. This will be explained in part 3, following some remarks on the modern semantics of the future.

2.4 The Social Modeling of Time: The Modern Semantics of the Future

Western identity is decisively characterized by a temporal order that describes a plural opening window onto the future, in the well-known words of Reinhart Koselleck (1992): there is a shift in semantics from "space of experience" (*Erfahrungsraum*) to "horizon of expectation" (*Erwartungshorizont*), since in an uncertain future what is to come cannot be a repetition of the same (of what has been experienced), but rather a new thing to be configured speculatively and statistically (a horizon of expectations), which ideally always brings something better than what one already had (more freedom, more happiness, more money, etc.). The collective singulars 'history,' 'enlightenment,' and 'progress' model a reflexively accelerating field of action (Koselleck 2003, Rosa 2005), which, as a space of the new and modern, has human perfectibility as its telos. In this sense, what is new about modernity is "the idea of the future as a period in which all these things occur or in which they are imagined as such" (Hölscher 1999, 19).

With the double step of the modern era (from 1500) and modernity (from 1750), there is a completely *different social modeling of time*:

> In traditional societies (at least this is how the moderns tell it), temporal change mainly occurs as a deviation from the past held present in cultural memory. In contrast, modernization means a shift to a collective *reference to*

> *the future*. In Europe, it is generally accepted that this shift began in the eighteenth century – in the same epoch that first recognized the factor of time as a productive force of epistemic orders, instead of neglecting it as an accidental variable in relation to the unchanging substance of things. (Koschorke 2012, 204, my translation)

This homogenization (uniform time-space) and productivization (time as a value factor) contributes decisively to the rise of capitalism. Capitalism, above all, means understanding the "temporal dispositions" of action structuring: "probabilistic weighing of opportunities and risks as well as the utopian ideas of future states" are the key tools, according to Jens Beckert in "Imagined Futures. Fictional Expectations and Capitalist Dynamics" (2018, 61), to make uncertainty operable by means of simulations. An open future urgently needs operationalizing, because it offers both opportunities and risks, high profits and bitter losses. What is interesting about Beckert's theory, which builds on Koselleck, is that he integrates "utopian ideas" quite naturally into the canon of appropriate, reasonable and promising tools that can deal with the modern basic stock of an open semantics of the future (a similar pragmatic take, which has little to do with Thomas More, can also be found in the current trend towards concrete utopias, which will be discussed later).

What is crucial for the (capitalist) logic of investing in the future, however, is that it is *truly open.* And it is precisely here that more and more doubts have been raised in recent years in the course of the mainstreaming of climate debates (see, for example, the discussions surrounding Jonathan Franzen's essay "Why don't we stop pretending," 2019). The ubiquitous talk in the mass media of peak curves, tipping points and remaining CO_2 quotas (with the associated footprints at an individual level) indicate that a certain way of doing business and living cannot continue indefinitely; ergo: the future must be regulated. To address this emergency, a "climate dispositive" (Thiele 2015, 95) has been established in recent decades, which primarily attempts to contribute to normalization by forming a "hybrid science-policy body" (Edwards 2010, 399) consisting of politics, science, business, education and civil society, which goes by the name of the "two-degree target." The urgency of the agenda (one hears overtones of the Foucauldian "urgence" every time, as a dispositive responds to an *urgence*; see his famous definition: 1980), emphasized over and over again, clearly indicates that it is about the rapid negotiation of a new normality which can no longer be solely in the service of an expansive extractivism, by means of which industrial modernity has ensured incredible prosperity. What is interesting here is that it is not about resources as such (there is

still plenty of coal), but about the consequences of emissions for the temporal order of a (no longer) open future.

3 Interpretation of WEIRD – Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic

On the basis of this theoretical framework, which is only a sketch for reasons of space, I would now like to describe in more detail the individual utopian loyalties that belong to something like a Western identity. I use the acronym WEIRD for this, which has developed a cultural significance beyond the narrower boundaries of the psychological debate on sampling characteristics (see Henrich et al. 2010), and in which the unreflected universalism of Western ways of living and thinking can be critically articulated and negotiated in a pointed way. However, this diagnosed misconception of universal transferability is all the more suitable for my purposes, as I want to reconstruct a *Western* identity along a certain order of *utopian loyalties* in industrial modernity. In answering the question of the transformation potential of the West, I would like to introduce three sub-aspects of this specifically affect-theoretical or, more precisely, emotional-ethical concept, before dealing with the individual elements.

a) In archeology, "industry" refers to a "uniform, matching range of finds" that is "usually characterized by a single product that occurs in all areas of this 'industry' and often also gives it its name (example: hand axe industry)" (wikipedia.org). The psychogram of the West could be thought of as a "discovery plate," in which different strands of the "eponymous product" – in my case: utopia or utopian loyalties associated with the positive image of the future – can be found in a historically specific constellation. My main focus is on the 2010s and 2020s, one can also describe the field of utopia in the much broader affect cartography of modernity (see Metelmann and Quellmalz forthcoming).

b) A second concurrent figure of thought on the functioning of utopian loyalties is Lauren Berlant's "cruel optimism," with which she explores the similar question of the extent to which the imprinting power of deeply affectively anchored wish scenarios contributes to doing the wrong thing under changed historical circumstances, namely that which does more harm than good ("A relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing," 2011, 1). Utopian loyalties in the sense I am proposing here aim, with Berlant's "cruel optimism," at the strong emotional attachment to desir-

able scenarios (see Anderson 2022, 144) and also follow her in the central theoretical concern (following Pontalis/Laplanche) of understanding the socially framing function of ideas of norms as the stage of the social (Callard 2023, 121). However, since gender identity is not in the foreground, I am less concerned with the urge of the unconscious and the psychoanalytical instruments of individual desire. Rather, I am aiming for a media-technologically and narratively informed and performatively oriented mid-range analysis of fantasies and myths, "which is collective but not anthropologically-universal," as the psychoanalyst and philosopher Daniel Strassberg (2022, 20) poignantly stated in his "Affect History of Technology." As such, my endeavor leaves the conceptual interpretative framework of psychoanalysis (individual psychology/anthropology) and enters the field of general media-affect-culture theory.

c) The third point of reference for the question of emotional attachment to certain emotional scenarios is Judith Butler, who in "The Psychic Life of Power" uses the term "*passionate attachments*" to explain how the psyche of the subjugated is formed in the act of subjugation using the example of the child-adult relationship (Butler 2001, 12). She sees this as a gap in Foucault's analysis of power, as he was, in her opinion, only interested in the mechanisms of subjugation, but not in the affective consequences for the subjects (Butler 2001, 8). In doing so, she operates conceptually strongly with the early Foucault and the disciplinary apparatus, which "attempts to produce and totalize identity" and "has become a permanent object of passionate attachment" (Butler 2001, 97–100). Resistance against these devices is thus only possible through the shattering of passionate attachments.

In contrast to Butler's approach, the connection with visions of happiness and prosperity, as expressed in utopian loyalties (as I would like to call them), fits better with Foucault's later concept of governmentality, with which he attempts to describe the control of modern subjects since the sixteenth century under the siglum of the "art of governing" (Foucault 2000, 41–42). This art remains at a standstill as long as it remains bound to the pure raison d'état, and only picks up speed at the moment in which economics detaches itself from the narrower oikos/house concept and, as the "main science" (63) of governmentality (beginning with the physiocracies), describes its own "level of reality, a field of intervention" (64) in the governance of populations (50).

Joseph Vogl (2010) describes precisely this transition using a comparison of Thomas More's *Utopia* and Johann Gottfried Schnabel's *Insel Felsenburg* as the semantic shift from the best to continuous improvement. In Schnabel's four-

part novel (1731–1743), More's title-giving optimum ("de optimo reipublicae") turns into a "limit value [that] becomes the criterion of a continuous and never completed realization" (Vogl 2010, 204). Schnabel's island is a "eutopos" of continuous transformation to the extent that "the political economy of the eighteenth century structurally provides eutopian knowledge" (Vogl 2010, 204). This knowledge flourishes against the background of the double conversion to the future and to realization described above, which define a "horizon of expectation" of social progress (Koselleck 1992, 362). In this sense, utopian loyalties could also be understood as eu-affective imaginations.

3.1 Western

There is of course a *petitio principii* inherent in the naming of the West as a defining element of the West, which is probably due to the rather provocative setting of the term's genesis (the term and article on WEIRD were created for an opinion piece in *Nature*). What can be meant by "West" could be defined in many different ways – as an Enlightenment tradition, as progressive thinking, as capitalism, as a power structure, etc. – and would be worth an article (or even a research project) of its own. For my framing as sentimental scenario, I can refer to the aforementioned remarks by Anna Stilz on "Liberal Loyalty." In this political-theoretical study, she uses Kant and Rousseau to attempt to find a position between universalism and national liberalism, which gives "the citizen perfectly good reasons for allegiance to the particular democracy she lives in" (Stilz 2009, 211). Her central concern is to assert a more or less emotional attachment to the concrete institutions of a local community, without having to refer to the culture of an established structure (e.g., long-standing affiliations one has from birth). She explains this using the example of participating in an orchestra:

> We can easily explain why we identify with our orchestra – because in it, we act together with our fellow players, and we endorse that shared activity, since it produces a valuable good for all members. *We don't need to invoke any cultural communalities to explain that sense of membership*. One can say, then, that *we feel a rational sense of membership* in the orchestra: we value our membership because it allows us to pursue goals we care about. But it is no more mysterious why we might feel a sense of membership as a citizen of a particular democratic state. (Stilz 2009, 205, italics mine)

The phrase "feel a rational sense" fits very closely with the definition of loyalty discussed above on the basis of Simmermacher. What is striking about this

concept synthesis is that Stilz does not seem to be specifically concerned with a concept or even *the* concept of loyalty (and its conceptual potential); she barely mentions it in her argument, which is surprising given the prominence of the title. And it is even more surprising given that Judith Shklar's reflections on "Obligation, Loyalty, Exile" (1993) offer a prominent counter-position based on the strict separation of "obligation" and "loyalty":

> The emotional character of loyalty also sets it apart from obligation. If obligation is rule driven, loyalty is motivated by the entire personality of an agent. Political loyalty is evoked by nations, ethnic groups, churches, parties, and by doctrines, causes, ideologies, or faiths that form and identify associations. When it is a result of choice loyalty is a commitment that is affective in character and generated by a great deal more of our personality than calculation or moral reasoning. lt is all of one that tends to be loyal. (Shklar 1993, 184)

Shklar's concept to define the motivation to integrate into a community is also not particularly sharp. On the one hand, she states at the beginning of the quote that loyalties (and also obligations) are often not voluntary, but at the end she also emphasizes the elective character of these (which is then supposed to produce a special affectivity). On the other hand, the relationship between emotion and rationality is only slightly clearer than in Simmermacher's or Stilz' work, when she gives priority to affect. However, the juxtaposition of the two positions can help to illustrate an aspect that is essential for defining the West as *liberal* or, as I would call it with regard to Dolf Sternberger's and Jürgen Habermas' "constitutional patriotism," *republican* loyalty: *without affect it is not possible*. Whether this bond is based on duty to the law or to citizenship (Stilz 2009, 204), or on socialization or choice (Shklar), loyalty to a community and responsibility for its prosperity go beyond a cost-benefit calculation or moral requirements.

But what exactly is republican loyalty supposed to be? Or more precisely: loyalty to the republican utopia? Agnes Heller rolls out the field of thinking about utopia in this respect once again precisely as a question about the institutions that must be so established that even Kant's famous nation of devils could live decently in them:

> Kant occupies a special place in this story because he presents the idea of progress as a prerequisite for the utopian moment of republicanism. He was also the one who drafted the utopia of eternal peace on the basis of the republican utopian moment. The very title of his work "Idea For a Universal History With a Cosmopolitan Purpose" mobilizes two utopian moments: universalism

> and cosmopolitanism. Needless to say, they are still utopian ideas today, when they are rejected and ridiculed by many precisely because of their utopianism. (Heller 2016, 37, my translation)

In the fourth year of the invasion by the aggressor, Russia against the Western, republican-oriented Ukraine, and in the wake of the storming of the Capitol as a monument to the republic, and in times of populist exclusion and negative inclusion via nationality, racism and hatred – who would seriously disagree with Heller's assessment of utopianism? Although these values are written in the constitutions, they must be lived faithfully and loyally every day, otherwise they will not exist. The no longer silent majority of demonstrators against the right seem to have realized this.

3.2 Educated

The question of education as a utopian loyalty is very similar to that of republicanism. Of course, despite various PISA shocks and the fact that educational success is still highly dependent on social class, it must be stated that the members of the OECD have, by and large, a generally good and broad institutional educational landscape, in which about 80% of adults aged 25–64 within the OECD have completed upper secondary education (OECD Better Life Index).[1] However, it is not primarily about the top scorer Estonia and the problems in Turkey when asking about the role of education in the Western self-image. Then it is less about training modules and more about the philosophy of becoming, the place of man in the world – after all, education contains the image of God (*imago dei*), in which man is reflected and (re-)produced in his symbols. This has never fundamentally changed, according to education economist Oliver Fohrmann, only the gods have changed: "In times of economism, education is therefore reflection in the *imago pecuniae*" (Fohrmann 2016, 13). It is precisely at this intersection of philosophy, education and socioeconomic development that what can be described as a utopian loyalty to the (power of) education emerges at the end of the eighteenth century: Friedrich Schiller's "On the Aesthetic Education of Man" (2005 [1795]).

> Schiller's aesthetic utopia marks a turning point in the history of utopian thought. The question: "How could the world be completed?" (Bloch) is no

1 https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/2023/09/education-at-a-glance-2023_581c9602/full-report/to-what-level-have-adults-studied_7d8f2f94.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com [accessed: 15 September 2025].

> longer answered by him with a social utopia in the style of the fictional state novel, but reflected in the experience of art. This is Schiller's peculiar answer to the crisis of the Enlightenment. The function of the play instinct is to mediate between nature and reason and restore the disturbed balance between the material and formal instincts: "there is no other way to make the sensual human being rational than by first making him aesthetic" (Letter 23). Through the beautiful appearance of art, the individual experiences a possible totality. The desired aesthetic state then points as a common sense to a new, higher culture. (Berghahn 2005, 272)

Schiller writes his "aesthetic utopia" in the midst of the shift from U-topia to U-chronia, with which the genre of the island novel around 1800 reacts to the semantic shift from providence to contingency and the temporalization of the concept of history as a philosophy of progress, as argued above (see Koselleck 1982). In this respect, Schiller's change of discourse from society/politics to aesthetics makes just as much sense as the transformation of the concept of the aesthetic state from an intermediate step on the way to the ethical state to the actual, utopian goal (Hamburger 1993, 194). In this ideal polity, the divided worlds of needs (society/economy) and morality (politics/laws) are casually united in the third of a playful togetherness, a resurrected common sense, which is conceived analogously to art as the "genuine embodiment of a communicative reason" (Habermas 1993, 62).

This idea has been a point of orientation throughout the entire Hegelian-Marxist tradition up to Herbert Marcuse and was taken up again in a modified form by Jacques Rancière after 2000. For Rancière, Schiller established the primal scene of the aesthetic in 1794 by declaring art to be an autonomous part of life and from this the sometimes difficult (sometimes traumatic, hence the allusion to Freud's primal scene) relationships between life and art arise, which can be divided into three constellations: a) art becomes life (Schiller, oldest system fragment: reconciliation), b) life becomes art (Adorno: life maintains itself in the autonomy of art), c) art and life permeate each other (Romanticism: permeability of boundaries) (Rancière 2002, 134, see Früchtl 2007, 211).

Rancière is important for the discourse on utopia today and the utopian loyalties of the present insofar as, by strictly reserving the concept of the political for the (changed) perception of the world – the new "division of the sensual" (Rancière 2008; see also Muhle 2011) – he opens the question of education to the imagination of a different world. This emphasis on the role of consciousness and sensory redesign can be found in many contributions to the transformation debate (Schneidewind 2018; Göpel 2020; Metelmann and

Welzer 2020). And yet the EU farmers' struggles for subsidies, for example, which demonstrate the gap between the goal of sustainable agriculture and the iron constraints of a distribution logic throughout Europe, make it very clear how conflictual the encounter of profit maxims (needs), system logic (supply routine) and new thinking is.

In this respect, education as utopian loyalty, as I would like to suggest here, actually has little to do with curricula, although the conversion of curricula naturally contributes to increasing sensitivity. The power of this passionate attachment to Schiller's "education," to aesthetics and art, lies rather in the moment of openness that is, or at least could be, possible at any time. It is the idea that with a turn of the gaze, with a change of perspective, with new "orders of sensory faculties" (Rancière 2009, 73), a social situation could be described differently than according to interest politics, which in its bureaucratic reliability administers a consensus once it has been found. It is a matter of "establishing a new relationship between appearance and reality, between the visible and its meaning, the individual and the common" (Rancière 2008, 89).

3.3 Industrialized

The utopian loyalty to technology in the modern age is self-evident, one need only look at the newspaper every day. Indeed, despite the presence of the growth/profit complex of the economy, one could almost say that the most accurate description of this historical formation is faith in technology. Understanding 'faith in technology' with Hans Jonas, writing about the "Baconian program," "to direct knowledge towards dominion over nature and to make the dominion over nature usable for the betterment of human destiny" (Jonas 1979, 251). It is therefore significant that, although eco-utopias critical of technology began to develop in the 1970s, they have not yet become a significant strand of Western self-understanding – the approaches to the thinking of other cultures perceived as less domineering under the heading "Pluriverse" (see Reiter 2018) are only just emerging (see Luisetti 2023). In Western dynamics, however, man as *homo faber*, as the philosopher Bacon envisioned the researching-experimenting animal (artificial fertilizers, weather manipulation, etc.), has lost control. It is the logic of what is technically possible that drives people and not the other way around. So there is no problem that can be solved through "research & development," but there are various feasibilities (from basic research) and it is primarily a question of how they are done, not whether (AI as the last example). As early as the late 1970s, Jonas wrote that people today live "in the shadow of unintentional, built-in, automatic utopi-

anism," i.e., they must constantly behave in accordance with a drifting tendency (*Treibtendenz*) of social development, which he calls the "utopian *drift*" (Jonas 1979, 54) of human action.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the process of capitalist industrial production, in which profit maximization and technical innovation combine to form an "artificial phenomenon" that pushes social circumstances ahead of itself, as Karl Polanyi writes in his reconstructions of the "development of the market system":

> It was not realized that the gearing of markets into a self-regulating system of tremendous power was not the result of any inherent tendency of markets toward excrescence, but rather the effect of highly artificial stimulants administered to the body social in order to meet a situation which was created by *the no less artificial phenomenon of the machine*. [...] The extension of the market mechanism to the elements of industry – labor, land, and money – was *the inevitable consequence of the introduction of the factory system in a commercial society*. The elements of industry had to be on sale. (Polanyi 2001 [1944], 60/78, italics mine)

Ultimately, it is the *culturality of man* himself that makes this possible. For the "fictitious commodities" that labor power, land and money must become in social treatment, even though they are not actually such (as Polanyi repeatedly emphasizes), demonstrate the openness and creativity of the human being as *symbolic animal*, who can and, it seems, also must constantly renegotiate the specific meaning of things, actions and signs. Polanyi does not focus on this aspect at all in his history of the decline of social life, but it is remarkable from the structure of the argument that the decisive switch for the change towards marketization is the ability of people to *take something for something else* – e.g., work as a commodity, although it was (previously) a care service embedded in social systems.

Whether this happened and happens in freedom or under duress (i.e., how forms of alienation are to be described) is a political-moral question that rests on the structural-semiotic one: in the beginning there is cultural technology. Seen in this light, it is also not automatic to surrender to the emerging idea of market fundamentalism. Why, otherwise, could and should we do this if, as Polanyi says, the nature of things does not allow it? Rather, in addition to technology ("machine"), it is power discourses and systems of conviction that are behind the enforcement and implementation of the idea that the world can be treated as a storehouse of resources and all goods can be made commodities. In the discourse, this view is declared to be plausible and correct

by an "epistemic privilege" that makes it immune to criticism (Block and Somers 2014, 156). Only this way the model of market fundamentalism could reach its widespread acceptance.

The history of the triumphant advance of a way of thinking that uses knowledge not only to exercise power over nature, but also over people, therefore depends in many (all?) respects on the *cultural decisions* that a community makes. And this also means, for example, whether it considers a utopia to be utopian in the sense of 'unrealistic' or utopian in the sense of 'target image.' Ultimately, it is (almost) always *not* the automatisms that set a development in motion, but possible interpretations that can be used depending on power or powerlessness, in combination with forgetting the alternative.

3.4 Rich

A particularly conspicuous example – to repeat Polanyi's strong adjective: market capitalism as a "stark Utopia" (Polanyi 2001, 3) – of such a hegemonic interpretation is precisely the reinterpretation of the liberal *utopia* of a market society as a *set of tools* similar to the laws of nature with immediate applicability in day-to-day politics. In the same decade in which Polanyi formulated his fundamental critique of the market society, Friedrich August von Hayek propagated his plea for the same – as a "liberal Utopia." It was about opinion leadership in the battle for people's hearts, and that meant learning from the socialists:

> What we lack is a liberal Utopia, […] The main lesson which the true liberal must learn from the success of the socialists is that it was their courage to be Utopian which gained them the support of the intellectuals and therefore an influence on public opinion which is daily making possible what only recently seemed utterly remote. (Hayek 1960, 384)

Theoretically, the endeavor is quite simple to describe: by focusing on the "market," a term is loaded that has neither ever been fully realized (no empirical evidence/refutation) nor is clearly defined (can be used very generally or very specifically); the same oscillation between utopia and normativity applies to the central price mechanism and the social implications of general consumer domination to global peace (Ötsch 2016, 116).

After a good forty years of neoliberalism following the Thatcher/Reagan years, it must be said that the program of the Mont Pelèrin society has worked to the extent that one can say and expect to be understood in saying that, for example, "the market will sort it out" and that this statement is not regarded as

nonsense far removed from reality. In the debate between the utopian loyalties of "rich" (growth economy, prosperity) and "democratic" (equality, justice), neoclassicism has won the day insofar as it may still be on the road to utopia, but it is not doing so by utopian means (see Merkel 2014; Streeck 2016, 2017). After the "long century" (1870–2010) of abolishing extreme poverty, we are currently only "slouching" towards utopia, but at least we are on the way (and not a utopia ourselves) (DeLong 2022, 7).

Against the backdrop of the great material hardship experienced by many people throughout virtually all of history, it is hard to gauge – which should be emphasized here once again – how much the advanced consumer culture of late capitalism must feel like a realized utopia and how strong the loyalty to the seemingly objectively proven 'theory' of enabling such prosperity is – all the facts to the contrary, and market failures notwithstanding. Claeys sums up the ambivalence that is condensed in this mixture of emotions very well when he defines the shopping mall as our "temple" in which we praise "the names of Gates and Buffett" (Claeys 2011, 202). In his follow-up study "Utopianism for a Dying Planet" (2022) he underlines the difficulties of thinking out of the box of the realized liberal utopia:

> Consumerism is triumphant. It blinds us to the possibility of any alternative. We are all Sybarites today, and we know full well that Sybarites cannot become Spartans. Many of us, indeed, would probably rather not live than endure Spartan restraint and the curbing of pride and ostentation prescribed by some earlier utopians. Pride, indeed, practically defines the later moderns. So there is no return to the lost "home". This is the Golden Age, and we will not have our desires frustrated. We want what we want, and to hell with the consequences. (Claeys 2022, 445–446)

3.5 Democratic

If one assigns the idea of self-determination and sovereignty to republicanism (see "Western") and the question of happiness as material prosperity to economics (see "rich"), then aspects of equality and justice among people – i.e., what Bloch called the "ancestral home of utopias": social utopias – can be negotiated in our matrix under the keyword "democratic." This extended reading, which goes beyond political-theoretical paradigms such as representation and participation to look at emotional-ethical problems such as the distribution of opportunities, initially leads directly back to the founding text by Thomas More. His novel is cited above all as a vision of overcoming poverty and hardship by abolishing private property, but logically preceded by the

suspension of feudal birthright – a rather ludicrous idea in the time of Henry VIII:

> There are no castes in modern Utopia. The community consists of men and women with equal rights and duties. There are still serfs, but they are not part of the community and are treated more humanely. Birth does not secure a social position. Each leader is elected to his position for one year. (Heller 2016, 30, my translation)

In More's early modern dream version of post-feudal society, participation rights and social rights coincide directly, which would only be realized historically over the course of three centuries (eighteenth to twentieth, see Hirschman 1992, 15). Due to the lack of historical semantics of "individuality" and also the homogeneous-corporate concept of community, it is not yet possible to speak appropriately of freedom rights. This coincidence is possible because the collective ideal of the island imaginary is one of statics (and not dynamics) and ascetics (and not affluence), to use two of Schölderle's three utopia markers (2017, 48, for further units of analysis). The typically modern logic of growth that arises with temporalization, autonomization and individualization (see 2.3 above) is not found in the locally isolated unit. Nor is the vision of society about the land of milk and honey, but about a very functionalist version of dealing with the *human condition* and the most egalitarian possible distribution and participation in the fruits of labor (and *nota bene*: there is an *obligation* to work).

On the island of Utopia, Schölderle's third descriptive pair of opposites ("egalitarian-hierarchical") does not diverge to the same extent as it does with the modern democratic revolutions at the end of the eighteenth century. There is theoretical equality at all levels (freedom, participation, welfare), but clear boundaries of the social are still defined (priority of the elderly, cooking and parenting only by women), which define a hierarchical framework for development. Life there is a little like a perpetual festival of the volunteer fire department: everyone goes to work during the day and in the evening they have a barbecue together, informal but structured; they sing together and parade, *allegro, ma non troppo*; any kind of pleasure "that brings no harm" (Morus 1990, 79) is not spurned by these fundamentally joyful, rationalist minds. And at the end, everyone clears the benches together.

It is a vision of democracy without excess – a decisive difference to the modern version, of which Max Scheler (1955) very aptly noted that the difference between formal equality (*citoyen*) and real separation (*bourgeois*) fuels a structural resentment that can explode the political form. It is precisely this

contrast that illustrates the crucial importance of a materially understood utopian loyalty to democracy. While freedom rights were still lacking in 1500, welfare rights that allow all members of societies to participate fairly in the wealth produced are still lacking in the early twenty-first century. "Rich" as the production of this wealth is not "democratic," as not only the "We are 99%" movement complains.

4 The Power of Imagineering

Against the background of this theory of eu-affective loyalties, how can it be explained that a concept such as *Imagineering*, presented in a compact form and trademarked by Walt Disney (but by no means a private marketing tool, see Metelmann and Welzer 2020), is so intuitively successful? Everyone seems to immediately understand what the slogans "Where dreams come true" (motto of the Walt Disney Theme Parks) and "If you can dream it you can do it" (attributed to Disney) are supposed to mean. Let us take another look at the components using a kind of working definition from Prosperi:

> Walt Disney defined Imagineering as *the blending of creative imagination and technical know-how*. I like this definition for two reasons. First, it adds the word 'creative' to highlight the importance of creativity in Imagineering. Second, 'technical know-how' is a broader term than engineering and encompasses technical and scientific expertise as well as creative and artistic expertise, and is a better reflection of the varied range of disciplines practiced by Disney Imagineers. (Prosperi 2016, 4)

It is therefore about the combination of "creative imagination" and "technical know-how" in a deliberately very broad sense in order to turn dreamed content into reality, i.e., ultimately to turn a more or less private part of the collective imaginary into a more or less publicly accessible part of this very imaginary. The fascination for technology and know-how, i.e., the skills and abilities of practical action, are an obvious source of loyalty. It is interesting that a social dimension is also priced in via the know-how, i.e., it is really about technology and not engineering, if Imagineering in Disney's sense is to be more than "engineering" – in other words: the laws of nature, the numbers, the calculations.

The definition and function of the creative is now crucial, because the link to the imagination makes it possible to connect with the (children's) world of dreams (in the very broad sense of a cultural imaginary), as well as the more

practical definition as a toolset of design practices (work processes at a certain historical point in time, use of computers, methods, etc.). If the quote emphasizes "creativity" in the sense of something creative and new (see Metelmann 2024), for me the point of Walt Disney's approach seems to lie in the urbanization of the wild land of dreams. As an inexhaustible source of fresh inspiration, it is waiting to be translated into easily usable units of experience by the "colonial masters" with "technical and scientific expertise." The motto 'they know how to do it' could therefore roughly mean: there are specialists in how to bring the desired images to earth in a satisfactory way, there are tried and tested routines of "blending" (see Prosperi quote)!

And of course, after technology ("industrialized") and creativity ("educated"), the third loyalty comes into play, that of the market. And here it is actually also in the variant of the fairground (see Szakolczai 2021): the hustle and bustle of the many figures and worlds into which one can immerse oneself anew and which distract us from the fact that ultimately it is always about one and the same mechanism when it comes to the "blending of creative imagination and technical know-how" (Prosperi, see above): commodification, i.e., the transformation of a thing or a good into a commodity, complete with barcode, that can be traded on the market. Just because the offerings are free for all age groups does not mean that they are freely accessible to everyone: the method transforms elements of the collective imaginary (dreams as public goods) into club goods protected by private law (theme parks, films, stickers), which do not exclude anyone from consumption, but for which there is competition ('can I afford to go to Paris?', for example).

Unlike centuries ago, when characters from an author's novels, for example, became part of the collective imaginary again in the moment their stories were *retold*, today such recirculation comes up against the copyright payment barrier. Just think of a film director who plans to present a critical documentary movie on popular culture: anyone who wants to have Disney's Bambi, i.e., the illusion of a non-violent relationship with nature, run through a burning forest to show the result of an extractive economy, among other things, can only do so in moving image form (if at all) with a massive financial investment to obtain the copyrights. Despite all the criticism, this should not sound too pejorative, because products are always forms of social appearance with aesthetic and social potential (see Baßler and Drügh 2021) and they enrich the history of the "material self" (Trentmann 2017). And, of course, with regards to Disney's inventions and the creative energies of many other artists, it needs to be clear that their work and rights must also be protected and paid for – but as a part of a potential public exchange and debate that is not restricted or even made impossible due to private economic interests.

Seen in this light, the power of Imagineering lies in the combination of three very strong utopian loyalties of modernity: creativity & aesthetics (education), know-how & engineering (industry) and goods & markets (economy), with the significant exclusion of other public loyalties that tend to hinder private consumption, such as autonomy (power of disposal, including participation) or distribution (ownership of the dreams). In an economically dominated world that can be reduced to the denominator of value creation with the core question: "Where is the next 'Cheap Nature'?" (Moore 2014), this is eminently plausible.

5 The Future of the West After its End

However, there are now increasing signs that precisely such a selective view of the world as an open context of exploitation for private enrichment also has its dark sides in the form of planetary destruction and social disruption (income inequality, migration movements, political extremism) and offers no opportunities of a future. Such a model, which as a *conditio sine qua non* must assume an open, potentially profitable future in order to incentivize entrepreneurial action, reaches its limits precisely when this future is no longer open because resources for production or for transport are no longer available and potential customers no longer have the money needed for the infinite scales of satisfying relative needs (comparing oneself with one's neighbor).

This "ecological crisis," which is essentially linked to the "emancipation of the economic from its ties to the norms of other social systems" (Hösle 1991, 96), cannot be solved in the paradigm of economics. For with infinite needs and finite resources, there is no solution to the problem of scarcity that would consist in satisfying consumption. In contrast to absolute needs, as with More, there are always new incentives to buy: marginal utility can never become zero (Kremser 2020, 203). The contribution of the loyal utopia of the market can be to keep material consumption as low as possible with high efficiency, and manage everything as well as possible. However, this "small and beautiful" imperative has never been understood and used in this sense, because it has always been about averting need and poverty. In this respect, a central conceptual concern today is not only to correctly understand the relationship between *chremastiké* and *oikonomia* (see Vogl 2010/11), but also to correct the public image of economics. It is neither an applied social theory whose model assumptions describe empirical conditions and their complexities (see Felber's "This is not Economy," 2019), nor can it continue to represent the abundance of material growth and consumer saturation, as there can theoret-

ically be infinite growth on earth, but not infinite resource consumption, which is why the metabolic systems must change (Levermann 2024, 59; see Levermann 2023).

A world with planetary and social boundaries that are taken seriously is therefore a world of new boundaries and thus, after "apertist liberalism" (Reckwitz 2019, chapter 5), once again a more regulated social structure (at whatever level, however precise). The decisive change for our context is the closure of the expansive development space, as the Earth has been defined, first physically and then temporally, since the Conquista. Utopias and dystopias have decisively shaped these developments, as they define the deficits in the existing system *ex negativo* in the wishful thinking, and create an emotional connection to a better world in which a community would like to live. The Western transformation process, as it has been underway since 1970 or at the latest with the Brundtland Report on sustainability in 1987 and the Hansen Report to the US Congress in 1988, can be described *from a Western perspective* primarily as a critical reappraisal. It would involve honest work on utopian loyalty to the prosperity achieved ("rich"), a new perspective on democratic deficits (following the thesis that the ecological question is the new social question, see Latour and Schultz 2022) and aesthetic potentials. However, the real challenge will initially be to overcome the "utopian tendency" of technology, which aims for full implementation of for profit interests. Instead, the focus should be on its selective use (e.g., carbon storage) within the framework of a larger *ethical* utopia: a kind of meta-utopian loyalty. At its core, this would have one goal: the (re)invention of a concept of knowledge that is not aimed at domination, but at co-existence. Its name: planetary revolt (see Metelmann 2023).

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