

**Susanne Foellmer**

***Still moving, nevertheless. Questions about utopia in our contemporary moment***

Investigations into utopia usually grasp the concept from the perspectives of temporality or space. In recent performance studies, Jill Dolan (2005), for instance, links the “utopian performative” to moments in performance that point towards “the better life”, placing incentives of hope and of change into the centre of her reflections. The hope for a better future is paramount for instigating feelings that change is possible, so Dolan. From a similar angle, albeit stretching the concept of temporality, José Esteban Muñoz (2009) proposed the queering of time(s), that is, the delving into the past in order to find ways to cope with a present that opens up possible futures. This present is one not to be lingered in, and thus Muñoz took a stance against poststructuralist theories by claiming the potential of a “new futurity”.

While these programs are mainly positing utopia in a time yet to come – that nevertheless inspires actions in the now – experiments particularly in the first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century endeavoured to give utopian ideas of society an actual place. Testing fields such as Hellerau in Germany, or Dartington Hall in the UK, were often related to the idea of the “better life” (Nicholas 2007). Such betterment was usually embedded in a holistic approach that involved both labour and leisure time, promoting an active and healthy body for instance by way of education that involved gymnastics and dance as well as an attempted return to nature. While Dolan and Muñoz indicate(ted) a future yet to come – a utopia that (still) has “no place” –, locations such as Dartington Hall were probing the literal idea of utopia as a “good place”, for instance by introducing new models of decision making in the attempt to flatten social hierarchies.

However, such utopian pilot projects always already come with particular ideas of normativity, and one could ask to whom such betterments actually apply, and how the ‘improvement’ of, for instance, conditions of labour is actually comprised of. Also, the idea of betterment as such, or the “good life”, is coming under scrutiny lately. Lauren Berlant (2011) has explicitly highlighted the problems of this concept, which is

accelerating into the “fantasmatic” realm as the “blueprint has faded”. Berlant opted for investigating the “affective rhythms of survival” instead, by turning the gaze away from the sovereignty of the subject and focusing on “lateral’ agency”.

In my keynote, I am hence asking questions about how utopia acts today. Inspired by Berlant’s idea of dealing with the everyday under increasingly difficult conditions, I am interested in performances that address multiple challenges: Performers who, for instance, fail to cope with hindrances but do go on, nevertheless, partly by simply ignoring obstacles. This stance of the *nevertheless* will guide my reflections on performances such as Schaubplatz International’s piece *Idealisten* (2014), or the projects by a loose collective of Berlin dancers and choreographers who combined their works for a few years under the label *Practicable* (initiated in 2005). In these examples, an important focus is the issue of movement. If movement is a basic means of coping with crisis, so Randy Martin (1998), what happens if movement is hindered, is staggering, or stumbling? What if movement is not serving as a means to propel the self forward anymore, drawing from its flexibility (in a neoliberal sense), but actually comes to nothing? What if dance is “exhaust[ed]” (Lepecki 2006), but movement is still happening, nevertheless? And how does it create resistance – against productivity, against progress, against ideals of how life should be – in the very moments of performance?