

Future Perfect

Annika Eriksson's work is often concerned with reflecting on past social visions from the present in relation to the future. Temporally ambiguous, the works create loops of time between these points, interweaving and collapsing different time zones.

Adventure Ahead is new project which is derived from footage from the Media Archive of Central England (based in Lincoln, UK) which holds a huge array of films from amateur and broadcast sources. The work takes footage from a number of origins, including from a film called *Children Rule 2080*¹ – a science fiction musical featuring children - a future world of clones and musical conditioning into which children from 1980 are suddenly thrown to fight for their freedom from dystopian state control. Creating a timewarp of propositional projection from and reflection on this key era in British social history, the project includes a film, illuminated signs and an event in a building in Lincoln which has functioned as a nightclub for over 30 years.

Eriksson's work often suggests a sense of non-linear time, which loops back on itself as well as projecting forward – this is reflected in the titles of the works - 'It did happen soon', 'Wir sind wieder da (We're Back)'. This conflation of time and tense aligns with a corresponding sense of utopian visions seen from their unrealised futures or a retrospective view of something that has not yet happened. The oscillation between projected futures and imagined pasts creates a productive wormhole in these works, a time-warp which eschews nostalgia, whilst creating a concatenation of moments of past utopian promise and the imagining of possible futures.

This approach seems to have resonances with the work of fourth dimensionists such as P. D. Ouspensky and Charles Howard Hinton who believed in an extra dimension - of duration - where past and present blur together and become a matter of perception.² These ideas seem to have had a profound influence on culture and literature at the turn of the 20th century, including cubism as well as writers such as Henry James and HG Wells. Wells's *The Time Machine* deals explicitly with four-dimensional geometry and in Henry James' story 'The Great Good Place', the narrator steps out of quotidian

¹ Featuring children from Sharman's Cross Comprehensive School in Shirley, West Midlands. Following a nuclear war in 2021 the future world is repopulated using 14-year-old clones. World leader Albert Hall controls these clones using his musical powers but he runs out of tunes and is forced to abduct four children from 1980 using a time machine to produce new music. The musical is shot inside the school and features young cast drawn from pupils at the school. Some elements of the story (nuclear war, first world war battle scenes and dance crazes) are illustrated with stock footage. Produced by ATV - Cameraman: Noel Smart, Sound Recordists: Bill Dodkin; Chris Munro, Production Assistants: Sheila Ford; Patsy Wood, Film Editor: Bob Cook, Executive Producer: Brian Lewis, Director: Graham Moore <http://www.macearchive.org/Archive/Title/children-rule-2080/MediaEntry/50238.html>

² As is referenced by Brian Kuan Wood at <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/is-it-heavy-or-is-it-light/>

responsibilities to a place where 'there was nothing now to time' ³(p. 578). It is coincidental but appropriate that one of Eriksson's previous projects was also called 'The Great Good Place'. The work, however, does not seek an esoteric or escapist approach to time, but one which allows for the loops and reflections possible in generational intervals. A looking back on 'future perfect' aspirations, on the "hallucinations of unrealised futures"⁴ to perhaps induce us to undertake such propositional thinking for a generation hence. As Fredric Jameson points out in 'Archeology of the Future', the political impulse of science fiction is to point out to us the paucity of our utopian imagination – the difficulty of thinking about alternatives to the prevailing order⁵. Perhaps the approach is like that of Hinton to go 'beyond the horizon of actual experience', to question 'whatever seems arbitrary and irrationally limited in the domain of knowledge'⁶ – as a means to offer new and differing perspectives on the world.⁷

This may also have been what the teenagers who participated in the film *Children Rule 2080* were aiming to do in producing a sci-fi musical in 1980. However contrary to producing an extra dimension in which time is fluid, they seem to be forever situated in a particular moment in time when the indexical trace on the film emulsion captured their images. This is perhaps what is so remarkable about film archives; that as well as cumulatively allowing for the experience of a continuum of social practice and history, from the personal to the professional, they are in essence a series of cut-off instants in time, arresting their protagonists in their particular moment (be it *May Day celebrations 1967*, *Workers at the A Booth and Sons nylon stockings factory, 1954* or *Water shortages Lincolnshire, 1976*⁸). Eriksson notes the lack of such archives in Sweden or Germany and they are perhaps the direct offspring of the focus on everyday documentary engendered by the Mass Observation Unit in the UK with their aim of creating an 'anthropology of ourselves' with multivalent snapshots of particular moments such as *May the Twelfth, 1937*⁹ and the related films by Humphrey Jennings and the GPO film unit. Many of the works in this archive,

³ , 'The Great Good Place' in *Henry James: Stories of the Supernatural*, Ed Leon Edel (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1971)pp 567-597, p 578

⁴ a phrase from William Gibson,'s short story 'The Gernsback Continuum' quoted in 'Semiotic Ghosts: Science Fiction and Historicism', Peio Aguirre, *Afterall* Vol 28, Autumn/Winter 2011

⁵ F Jameson, *Archeologies of the Future: The Desire called Utopia and other Science Fictions* (London & New York, Verso 2005), referenced in the above essay by Peio Aguirre

⁶ from Hinton's *Scientific Romance 1*, p. 4, referenced in *The Scientific Romances of Charles Howard Hinton: The Fourth Dimension as Hyperspace, Hyperrealism and Protomodernism* Elizabeth Lea Throesch unpublished doctoral thesis, accessed 13/7/15 at <http://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/371/>

⁷ This seems also to be the approach in William Morris's *News from Nowhere*, 1890 in which his protagonist wakes up in a future socialist utopia (set first in 1910, then amended, less optimistically, when republished to 1952).

⁸ See www.macearchive.org for full catalogue

⁹ *May the Twelfth : Mass-Observation Day-Surveys 1937*

though, (like Jennings docu-fiction *Fires were Started*) exceed their documentary impulse and engender a fictive imaginative response.

The work seems to bring with it a sense of eternal return – Nietzsche’s idea that given the infinite nature of time and the finite nature of matter and space, all possible events must recur at some point: ‘All possible developments must have taken place already. Consequently the present development is a repetition, and thus also that which have rise to it and that which arises from it, and so backward and forward again!’

¹⁰Although seeming unpalatably deterministic, this approach ‘does not pre-empt or close down the future. Rather it welcomes the future as the culmination and reiteration of the present, as a synthetic overcoming of the present.’ ¹¹ The loop of Eriksson’s film, the reflection back on a historic piece of science fiction which is set in the (still) future, the bringing together of teenagers with a generation’s gap between them¹², the highlighting of the recurrence of certain political climates a generation on, taking material from the archive and donating new material back, all bring this sense of recurrence and looping to the work, but one which posits a sense of the future perfect, the ameliorative promise of ‘Adventure Ahead’ in a future inflected by the past.

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¹⁰ Nietzsche from *Werke*, quoted in Arthur Danto’s *Analytical Philosophy of Knowledge*, (New York: Macmillan, 1968), p.205

¹¹ Elizabeth Grosz, *The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution and the Untimely* (London: Duke University Press, 2004), p146

¹² Eriksson staged an event at which teenagers from Lincoln (the same age as those who participated in the original film, but a generation on) responded to the film work in a performance which was filmed and donated back to the archive. The event was hosted in a building in Lincoln which has functioned continuously as a nightclub for over 30 years.

