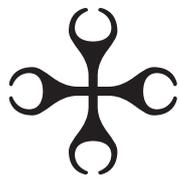
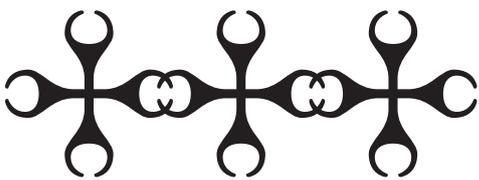
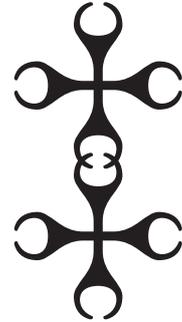
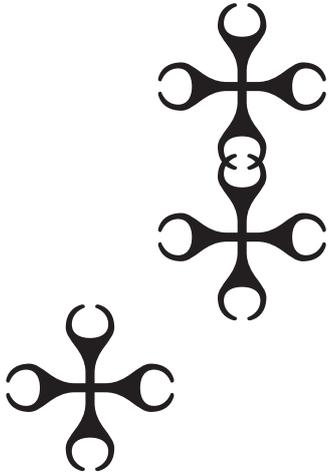
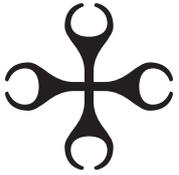
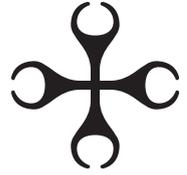
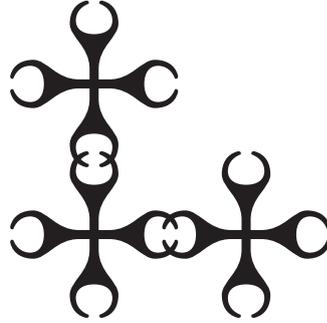
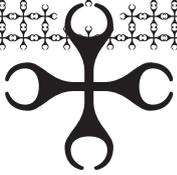
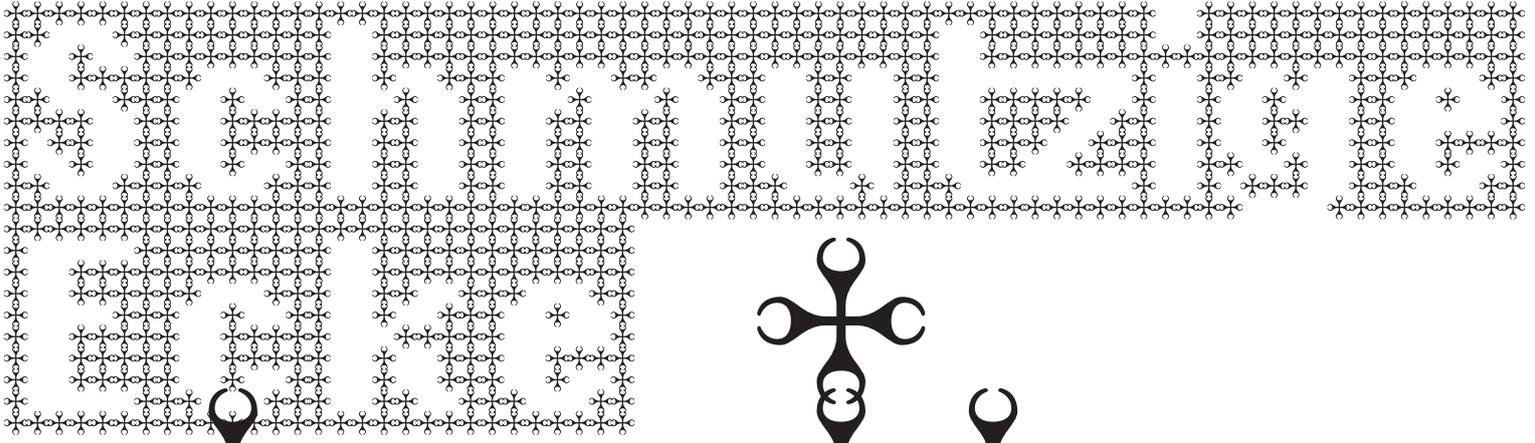
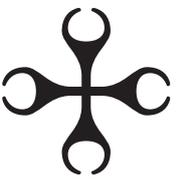


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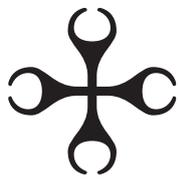
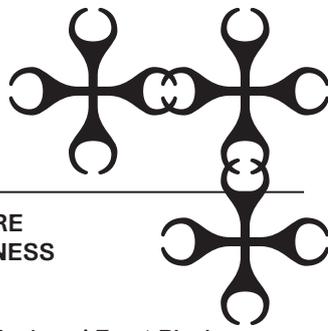


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SCHMUTZIGE ECKE: INTO THE FUTURE
THROUGH HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS
David Cross Kane

Writing in his essay 'The Anxiety of the Engineer' Ernst Bloch describes an urban fear as one of "detachment and distance from the natural landscape."¹ There can be little doubt that as the 20th century progressed towards the 21st century, natural and physical landscapes have morphed and transmuted into hybrid topographies. In the contemporary sense, these spaces are where the natural, physical, and digital collide indicating enlightenment, yet at the same time voids open up competing ideologies and self-interest merge. Confounded by the fact that in today's world we are surrounded by a swarm of ethereal personalized algorithms and self-constructed safe spaces meaning we can live in oblivion of unpleasant, polarizing opinions and dark, historical truths. Yet, due to this ability to form customized-narrative silos, so-called digital utopias, risk detachment and alienation from the physical world by committing to voluntary acts of forgetting and confining the past to history into digital swarms. German Korean philosopher Byung-Chul Han argues that these digital swarms are fleeting in nature and as a result "no political energy wells up... unable to call dominant power relations into question."² Yet, learning to cope and live with the problematics that can emerge from the dark, dirty corners of history and hold dominant powers accountable means we harness the potential to overcome the problematic of historicization. In turn, these lead toward a greater understanding of not just our present but also our future by turning historical memory into historical consciousness. The potential to imagine a future whilst remaining historically conscious is to take utopian ideas and cast a light upon them and bring them into our everyday physical practices once again.

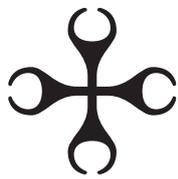
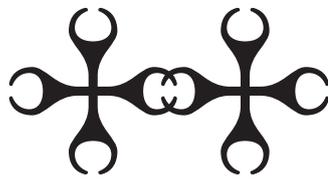
Utopia is often misunderstood as an ideology and often met with caution, justifiably so, since perverted forms of utopianism were present in the dark utopian projects of Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, and the earlier modern European enterprise that underpinned early colonialism. Throughout the late 20th and early 21st centuries spectacle and advertising came to appropriate what utopia was attempting to convey; a desire for a better world with better selves. Capitalism consumed the utopian impulse and made it cynically anti-utopian. In 1964, Theodore W. Adorno and Ernst Bloch discussed the fate and possibility of utopia, along with its paradoxical nature and anachronistic tendencies. They declared that "something's missing" and pointed toward the possibility of the desire for an alternative future.³ One of the architectural modes that seemed to rally to this cry for an alternative future was the "Béton Brut" architectural movement which was commonly known as Brutalism and flourished between the 1950s and 1970s. From its inception this movement was utopian in essence, harnessing architecture as a social tool, creating affordable homes for the many; seen as a positive option for progressive, modern urban housing and city administration. However, brutalist architecture in fiction and film has shaken this image off and has relinquished its role as "the guardian of social balance"⁴; with brutalist architecture often cast into the role as headquarters for oppressive regimes and as cold and sterile environments in areas of decay or trouble.

In June of 1963, the jury of Pforzheim's town hall competition awarded Stuttgart-born architect Rudolph Prenzel first prize for his design *Neues Rathaus*.⁵ Prenzel was then entrusted with the planning and running of the project to realize his proposal,

with construction beginning in mid-1968. The concrete structure dominates its surroundings; the striking concrete brutalist structure defiantly interrupts the surrounding landscape. Apt for a city that crashes against the idyllic backdrop of the Northschwarzwald like a wave of grey gradients. Prenzel's imprint was one of abstract mimetic practices colliding in a constructively conceived design of this city hall, creating a brutalist monument that unleashes both site- and context-bound potential prevalent in the city. The building was a radical departure from the neo-classical town hall that had stood in its place until being destroyed after the city was heavily bombed by the allies during the Second World War in an attack in which around 17,000 lives were lost in just 22 minutes: these agonizing moments are now commemorated just in front of the town hall at *Platz der 23rd Februar, 1945*.

When inaugurated in 1973, *Neues Rathaus* was met with both its plaudits and critics, the bright concrete surfaces, and plaza contrasting with dark underpasses and sharp edges in a confusing fashion where dramatic open spaces are surrounded by shadowy corners. Perhaps Prenzel's vision was too heavy in this way, as rather than instilling a sense of democracy and moving towards the utopian potential of the city, as he intended, it instead, at first glance, seemed completely detached from itself, history, and imposing itself on the surrounding nature of the Nordschwarzwald area. Its form could be perhaps understood as emblematic of the latent urban fears that remain in a post-war city trying to claw its way out of the rubble and destruction of Pforzheim's fateful war day. Yet, in 2005 *Neues Rathaus* achieved heritage landmarked status as the local council declared it a cultural monument, preserving the future of the building and cementing its place at the heart of the city. The building now fulfils the promise of Prenzel's early utopian vision, both in function and in form *Neues Rathaus* is also indicative of Pforzheim's spirit as a city. Once the nation's centre for watchmaking and gold, there is a general consensus that rolling around in the dirt is no way to get clean, but the attitude is that history shouldn't be brushed under the proverbial carpet either. Yet, in the intervening years since the end of the war and Prenzel's design, the city has struggled to find its cultural identity and deal with the aftermath of a war started by the Nazi regime and controversially finished by the allied forces.

Writing in response to the allied bombing of Pforzheim in 1945, German Modernist Alfred Döblin stated, "Utterly vanished from the surface of the earth, razed completely to the ground, smashed to bits and pieces. No soul left here. Pforzheim – you have been wiped from the world's atlas."⁶ While Döblin lamented the destruction of the city and confined it to history, the people of Pforzheim, with the help of French and American forces, set to work on a project to rebuild and revitalize the city. However, Döblin's words reverberated loudly as the removal of bodies, ruins, and debates about reconstruction circulated in the first decade after the war. Christian Groh states, "the reconstruction radically altered the city's appearance. City planners designed an urban space to suit modern individual traffic with all the commodities for shoppers and all the disadvantages this entails for residents."⁷ The residents were feeling unsettled and alienated as a city once lauded as the "Goldstadt" – after its jewellery and watchmaking industry – was now being shaped around the automobile and consumer capitalism. This kind of rebuild permits the disorientation of both the community and individuals within a series of non-places that withhold the ability to fully recognise the surrounding landscape instead creating a fictional city detached from its social reality:



We live in a world ruled by fictions of every kind – mass merchandising, advertising, politics conducted as a branch of advertising, the instant translation of science and technology into popular imagery, the increasing blurring and intermingling of identities within the realm of consumer goods, the pre-empting of any free or original imaginative response to experience.⁸

JG Ballard's statement here taken from his novel *Crash* is a cautionary tale in which buildings and structures are erected not to invite interpretation or meaning; instead, they surround the individual with the signs and symbols of the consumer culture as they navigate the city highways, giving rise to an enforced perverse desire for [self-]destruction. The enforced desire of the first decade of Pforzheim's reconstruction may have been one to move away from the problematic history that led to the destruction of the city, but this was quickly overturned in 1957 when the city's then mayor Johann Peter Brandenburg recognized it could be a policy that would give rise to a perverse rendering of history when he proclaimed:

von dem Geschehenen nichts (zu) vergessen, dass wir die Ursachen, die den Krieg auslösten, erkennen und Ursache und Wirkung nicht verwechseln. Das Vergessen jener Zusammenhänge mag vielen willkommener und bequemer sein, aber gerade an einer solchen Stätte muss daran erinnert werden, welcher Weg die Deutschen und auch unsere Stadt in jenes Unglück der Jahre 1939 bis 1945 geführt hat.⁹

Brandenburg's statement positions the dead as not only victims of the bombings but also victims of the Nazi regime which sent its war machine across Europe. When confronted with the past and guilt it can often be easier to look forwards through personal suffering only mourning those who are lost, leading up to a build-up of dirt in the deeper recesses and corners of one's own mind as well as the collective consciousness and further alienating the individual from the community.

The city's collective task then, according to Brandenburg, was to clean out *the Schmutzige Ecken* (dirty corners) – both in the physical and mental sense – and try to connect back to the future and reconstruction of the city through remembering the darker history and the anxiety and fear that remained. Brandenburg was also vehemently in favour of ensuring Pforzheim retained its cultural significance stating in an earlier speech, "It should be stated clearly and unequivocally that the municipal theatre – in addition to the adult education centre and a number of private and smaller efforts for cultural life – is the most important and serious factor of a cultural nature in our city and our wider surroundings..."¹⁰ While Brandenburg was far from getting everything right, he could be seen as a champion for Pforzheim, who sought to ignite the utopian potential and unite the dark past and bright future to take the city back to its regional focus in a future-oriented manner and to place it on the map as a strong and attractive multicultural economic region in the face of prevailing anxieties.

However, in recent years, this project has been threatened as since the global 2008 economic downturn the city has seen an increase in unemployment and a widening wealth gap between an ageing population and an ever-growing, multicultural youthful one jeopardizes the reputation of the 125,000-inhabitant town made up of an international community at the confluence of the Nagold, Enz, and Würm: the political scale is stretched far beyond comfortable values in recent years. This polarization is seen as a consequence of disgruntled citizens on all points of the political compass, converging in online

swarms to lambast the city's main structural focus shifting from that of national Goldstadt to that of a new multi-national industry; a change that was uncontrolled. Large numbers of local workers, displaced into the windowless mail-order centre of a particular internet retailer – indicative of the alienation effect of cynical anti-utopian consumerism can have on a city. Elsewhere, the city welcomes the high-tech sector is starting to arrive e.g. in the electronic industry, attracted by the gold and precious recycling plants but the main issue is the logistics and the concentration of the product streams, which make the recycling energy-intensive and expensive. This presents another potential dirty corner for city administrators to clean out: "the reduction of primary gold is associated with major environmental and social problems."¹¹ The city municipality is now one of the biggest employers as it adjusts to providing a modified infrastructure that attracts innovation while preserving the integrity of both the residents and physical landscape. However, rapid changes in a city like Pforzheim can revitalize but they can also undermine its preferred status, as an open-minded idyll on the northern perimeter of the Nordschwarzwald, a gateway to the natural world for many local and nearby inhabitants of the region.

In recent years, the majority of the city's inhabitants have since rallied together leading counter-protests against populist bubbles attempting to stir a sentiment of misremembering the city's difficult past, as well as those reclaiming public spaces through collaborative acts of care.¹² Always ready to embrace dark histories and nurture risky thoughts, the spirit of Pforzheimers prompts a question, what if dealing with the restructuring and cleaning-up of a city shadowed by darker truths runs parallel with embracing a historical consciousness? If indeed they share the same relevance and appreciation, when we dust the dark and dirty corners of the city's difficult history, we discover a certain resilience and optimism that can be presented as a diorama of shared cultural moments, showing that on the one hand the seemingly divisive issues, can unite us on the other through a suspension of fear. There is always an alternative, a future to come, which Jacques Derrida declared as *l'avenir*.¹³ A future no longer haunted by history, but rather ignited by it, accelerating through and out the other side to reinvent the future, beyond the present bounds of our imagination and into the future through the dirty corners of history to give rise to historical consciousness.

BIO: David Cross Kane, is an interdisciplinary artist, writer, and researcher with a background in philosophy, critical theory, fiction writing, music composition, and video production. He is a doctoral candidate and lecturer at the University of Stuttgart. His work revolves around the apocalyptic tradition, the utopian impulse, and the possibility to (re)imagine the future through new ways of living.

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