

Nataša Sienčnik
No-Time for Utopia

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This project would not be possible without
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Figure 1 — Series of No-Clocks (2017)



Figure 2 — Thomas More, *Utopia* (1516)

Utopias are *nothing*, says Thomas More, who inscribed the word utopia into our body of thought. Writing about the condition of a fictional island in 1516 he designed the prototype of a social utopia. The term derives from the Greek “ou” (not) and “topos” (space) and hence means *no-place*, a geographical metaphor for an imaginary or unknown place. And yes, it was always accompanied by a desire of finding this *no-place*, which went perfectly along side with the discovery of unknown territories — until there was no *terra incognita* left to be conquered. The world was finally finite, which led writers like Jules Verne to relocate their stories to the inside of the Earth, into the depth of the Sea or to the distant Moon. However, by doing so he implanted these images into the minds of the readers and consequently enabling the landing of the first man on the Moon in 1969. So let’s call Verne a pioneer of design fiction, a speculative design practice testing what-if-conditions by creating fictitious artifacts.

I was experimenting with these what-if-conditions in one of my previous works, the *Future Generator* (Figure 3–4), trying to visualize the complex interdependencies of conditions. Together with Brigitte Höfler I developed a mixing tool implementing certain parameters to predict the future. The adjustments that users



Figures 3-4 — Future Generator (2014)

could make on-site were changing the visual outcome on a screen in front of them. While the color of the visual was based on whether the future might be utopian or dystopian, the position of the typography corresponded with the political system, the choice of font reflected the technological aspect and the complexity of the graphics in the background responded to the choice of network. Moreover the slider between individual and community based society changed the size of the names and portraits. The visual outcome presented on the screen was ultimately printed as possible future scenarios in form of a series of posters. The modeling of both utopias and dystopias is telling us a lot about the present, or even the past. It is the difference to the status quo that makes these imaginations valid.

One of the last political utopian ideas was certainly Marxism, an idea of a society disposed of social classes and capitalism based on social ownership of the means of production. One may argue that with the collapse of the USSR in the 1990s the utopian age died all-together, the so-called revolution becoming one more before-after-before-again-moment in history. I tried to capture this very moment in the installation work “Time for Revolution. A political world clock” (2012-14) inspired by the

Arab spring and so-called Twitter-Revolution. The installation of parallel clocks (Figure 5–6) was monitoring political activity according to Twitter in a selection of countries. Instead of progressing in time simultaneously, the incoming tweets about political change were the engine for driving the clock hand. While some clocks seemed to be in a static mode, time was running faster in other countries, indicating it is time for change in an infinitive loop leaning on the idea that the status before a revolution is usually not so much different than after a revolution.

This leads me to one more definition by one of More’s companions: In a letter Guillaume Budé is writing about utopia as “udetopia”, meaning *neverland*, from the Greek for “never”. This is, how Julius Gavroche puts it, captured in the 19th century term “uchronia”, meaning *no-time* (Gavroche, 2016). This transition from *no-place* to *no-time* is particularly interesting. The negation of time puts the notion of Utopia into a continuous loop, a long NOW detached from history (or histories) and denying the possibility of any future evolvement. This constant NOW is embodied by an object I built a couple of years ago (Figure 7), which was based on a converted clockwork from the 1970s. Rather than displaying the time, the object shows the word NOW which continuously regenerates itself, slowly accelerating and slowing down.



Figures 5–6 — Time for Revolution (2014)

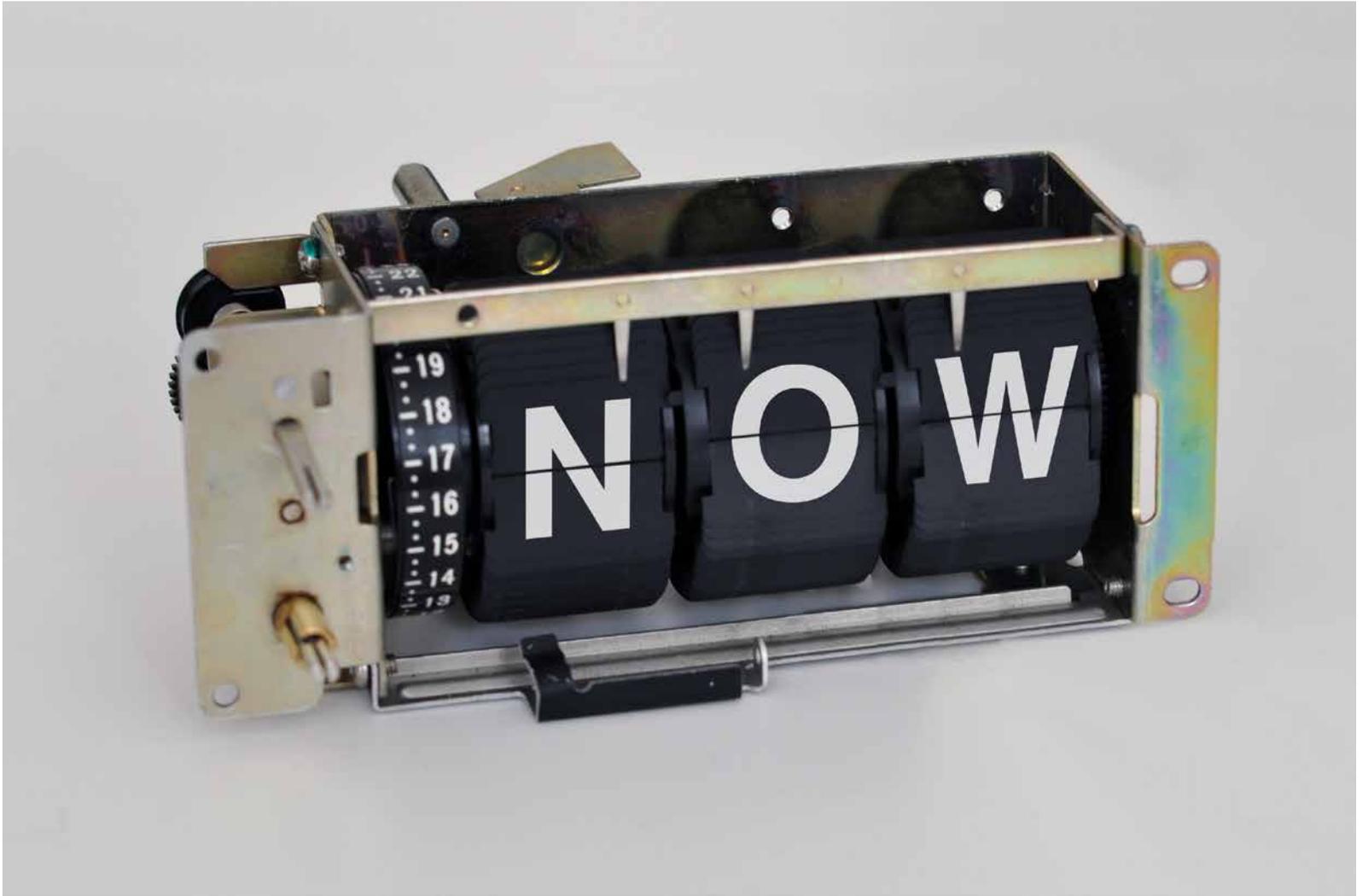


Figure 7 — Object NOW (2012–13)



Figure 8 — SIEMENS NOW (2014)

The division between work and free time was made visible in the clock project SIEMENS-NOW, which was made as a result of the Austrian company SIEMENS sending half of their employees into short-time working, thereby changing their lives completely. The split-flap-display of a converted SIEMENS clock radio shows a constant NOW, an additional button operates between two modes — work and sleep.

The notion of time was further reviewed and translated for the Research Pavilion in Venice into a series of *No-clocks* (Figure 7–14). Each of the objects is representing the idea of *no-time* or a continuous *now-time*.

Today is tomorrow is yesterday is a modified calendar, giving the user the possibility to change the date, however, the display is blank, with no history and no future.

Around-the-clock is featuring a globe ticking in a familiar and nostalgic way, yet the object is deprived of its original function.

The infinite endless of time is presenting a loop endlessly multiplying in a mirror.

Turn back the clock is fulfilling the wish of getting back lost time, going back in history instead of transientness in the future.

Play time is playing the sound of a clock, but with no clock hands all-together. Only the sound of a traditional clock is structuring time in intervals.

Dead time is keeping the traditional clock as a leftover of “old” times, being overgrown in time by moss.

And finally **Time flies** using an ordinary balloon to display the fleeting moment.



Figure 9 — Time flies (2017)





Figure 10-16 — Series of No-Clocks (2017)

Thinking of time, two more artist come into my mind: Bruno Munari with his idea of *Tempo libero* (freeing the time), who deconstructed the notion of time in his clock design projects, and Tibor Kalman, who playfully translated the inevitable and strict concept of time into clocks and watches (Figure 17). What does the time tell us about our lives? I would argue it does explain a lot, if not everything.

The way we work, we live, we sleep, we eat, we pray, we meet — especially the strong division in work and free time.*

The idea of the hands-on-workshop at the Research Pavilion in Venice is to fathom the idea of time thereby reflecting and reviewing the world we live in and identifying the parameters that would define our Utopias. How can we structure time and what conclusions can we draw of it? What are the conditions in our lives that define the way we live? What should they look like in Utopia? How can we overthrow the possible, overcome the probable and choose the preferable future we wanna live in (Figure 18)? By deconstructing, altering and rebuilding representations of time into a series of *No-clocks*, time is being translated into a seemingly eternal present or a different world after all.



Figure 17 — Tibor Kalman, Clocks

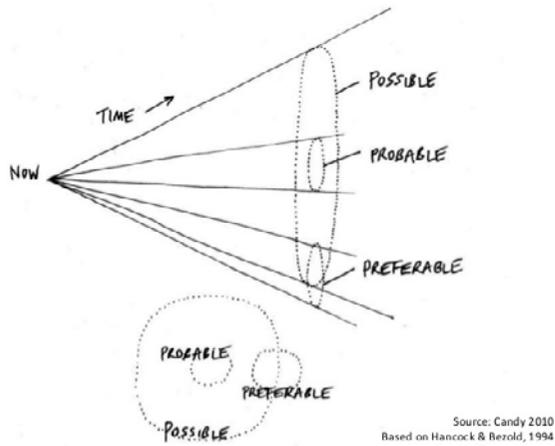


Figure — Possible, probable, and preferable futures, based on Hancock & Bezold (1994)

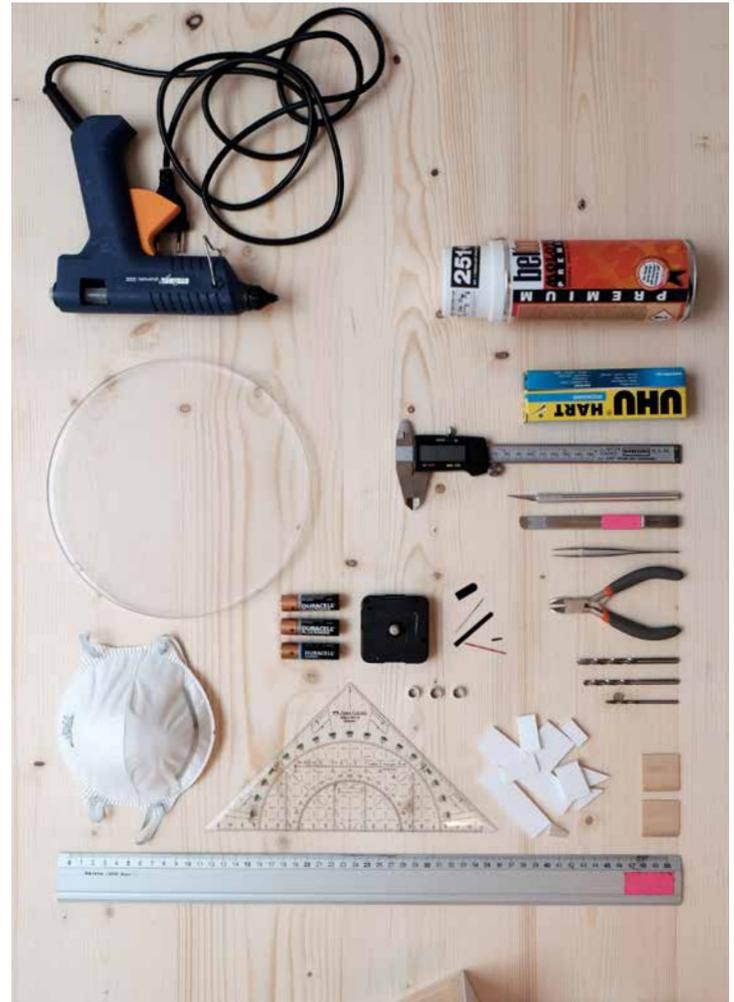


Figure — Workshop material

Further Reading

Benjamin, Walter (1938): *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1996.

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Bruno Munari the Archaeologist. Corraini, 2007.

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Verne, Jules: *Journey to the Center of the Earth*. Originally published in 1864.

Verne, Jules: *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*. Originally published in 1870.

Figures

Figure 1 — Series of No-Clocks

Photo: Nataša Sienčnik (2017)

Figure 2 — Thomas More, Utopia

Source: Wikipedia (Originally from 1516)

Figures 3-4 — Future Generator

Photo: Florian Voggeneder (2014)

Figure 5-6 — Time for Revolution

Photo: Nataša Sienčnik (2014)

Figure 7 — Object NOW

Photo: Nataša Sienčnik (2013)

Figure 8 — SIEMENS NOW

Photo: Nataša Sienčnik (2014)

Figure 9-16 — Series of No-Clocks

Photo: Nataša Sienčnik (2017)

Figure 17 — Clocks by Tibor Kalman

Source: Princeton Archtiectural Press, 1998

Figure 18 — Possible, probable, and preferable futures

as subsets of possibility space

Source: Candy (2010), based on Hancock & Bezold (1994)

Figure 19 — Workshop Material

Photo: Nataša Sienčnik (2017)

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