

9/15/23: FUTURE PERFECT

Is there some, any, room for optimism?

1. Tzveta SOFRONIEVA (Germany)

The Meriam-Webster Dictionary—I do like dictionaries—describes the word ‘perfect’ as the excellence of every element or quality of a thing, frequently as an unattainable state; and explains that, as a verb tense, it is used to refer to an action or state that is completed at the time of speaking or at a time spoken of. The word ‘future’ is defined in the same dictionary as the time that is to come, but also—in its original use from the fourteenth century—as the time after death. It seems that the future has two important features: 1. It has something to do with the fear of death. 2. It is constantly there, continuously happening—each moment we speak, we have already entered it many times.

Nowadays, many of us fear for life on Earth, not only for our lives as individuals. We have shaped our world into a form irreversibly damaged; and we have a word for this: Anthropocene. Within the limited space of our irreplaceable planet while resources dwindle amidst a growing thirst for their possession and the ruthless struggle to redistribute them, in conjunction with crises in climate and energy sources, in a time of misunderstandings and drifting-apart paradigms and languages, rampant nationalism and wars, loss of democratic elements we believed to be already well established, turning the planet into a garbage dump and establishing money as the only measure of life—as if people eat money, sleep on money, pee money etc., humanity seems to suffer the neurotic anxiety of a hyperactive, unaware, and unrestrained teenager. In our hyper-performative age, image displaces reality, and indifference grows in tandem to a thirst for performance and self-staging, for the medialization of everything that happens to the point of a total neutralization of meaning. Fear seems to have taken over to such an extent that we have begun to ignore it.

What happens to us humans, while we increase our energy needs, continue to pretend we’re the center of the universe, manufacture artificial brains, have (fake-)fun and look to Mars for survival? Flights to Mars—how naïve! A cruel tribute to Mars, the ancient God of war, fogged by adrenalin. Why is it that in fact, no matter how we think about politics, in our everyday life we allow ourselves to be seduced by the invitations of crazy politicians and businessmen to take part in humanity’s suicide? In a hybrid, funny translanguagual chap book in which I look for answers, I propose the word Anthroposcene.

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Because the Earth does not care much for our habits and geological strata definitions. After all, if we destroy ourselves, it's no different than getting killed by a meteorite, super-volcano, a blackout of the sun, A.I. or alien invasion—in each case, nature merely morphs from one form to another. We are nothing but nature in one of its stages, whether self-organizing or created. But we still wish it wasn't that simple.

And here is where poetry comes. The human craving for performance, our need for a stage, all our social conflicts which emerge from the despair that is inherent to the loss of life-sustaining conditions—these cry out for comfort, for narration, for imagination, for artistic skill, and for analytical insight, all combined into constructive criticism. Poetry can reflect the danger that we emanate upon ourselves, the exponential increase of this danger, its anonymity, and the indifference that blurs it. Poetry can outline futures in the plural, and culminate in a multilingual choir, with an honest approach towards technology and cultural representation. We finally get a chance to distinguish between a sharp photo of clouds and a picture that shows something foggy not because of the weather, but because the photo itself is out of focus.

The reading of the past and the present depends on visions of the future. The past is a graphic with different parameters which we must and can analyze and depart from together. It is not the coordinate system of the future. We do write anew old cultural narratives now, bring unheard voices into sound, precisely because we want a future of fairness and respect. We increasingly feel the lifesaving need for multilingual senses and emotion knowledge. There are no perfect times, and we learn to live in the irreversible state of the hatreds and catastrophes we have already created. But if an acceptable future is our leading concept, we might still demythologize the past and shape the present accordingly.

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