



Re-Imagined Aftermath

Social Imageries of the post-apocalypse



Wenzel Mehnert

- ▶ Background:
 - ▶ Cultural & Media Studies, STS, SF-Studies
 - ▶ Future Studies
- ▶ Dual affiliation:
 - ▶ Austrian Institute of Technology (AIT)
 - ▶ Technical University in Berlin (TU Berlin)
 - ▶ Alumni University of the Arts, Berlin (UdK Berlin)
- ▶ Imaginary Research
 - ▶ Particularly imaginaries of future technologies (e.g. Neurotech)

The Imaginary

- ▶ „Not only the subject but also society are ‚made‘ into what they are, first and foremost by the **imaginary**.“
- ▶ „What we call ‚reality‘ and ‚rationality‘ are its works.“ (Castoriadis, 1975, p. 3)
- ▶ „By **social imaginary**, I mean ... the ways **people imagine their social existence**, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations.“ (Taylor, 2003, p. 23)
- ▶ „**Sociotechnical imaginaries** [are] collectively held, institutionally stabilized, and publicly performed visions of desirable futures, animated by shared understandings **of forms of social life and social order attainable through**, and supportive of, advances in **science and technology**.“ (Jasanoff & Kim, 2015, p. 4)

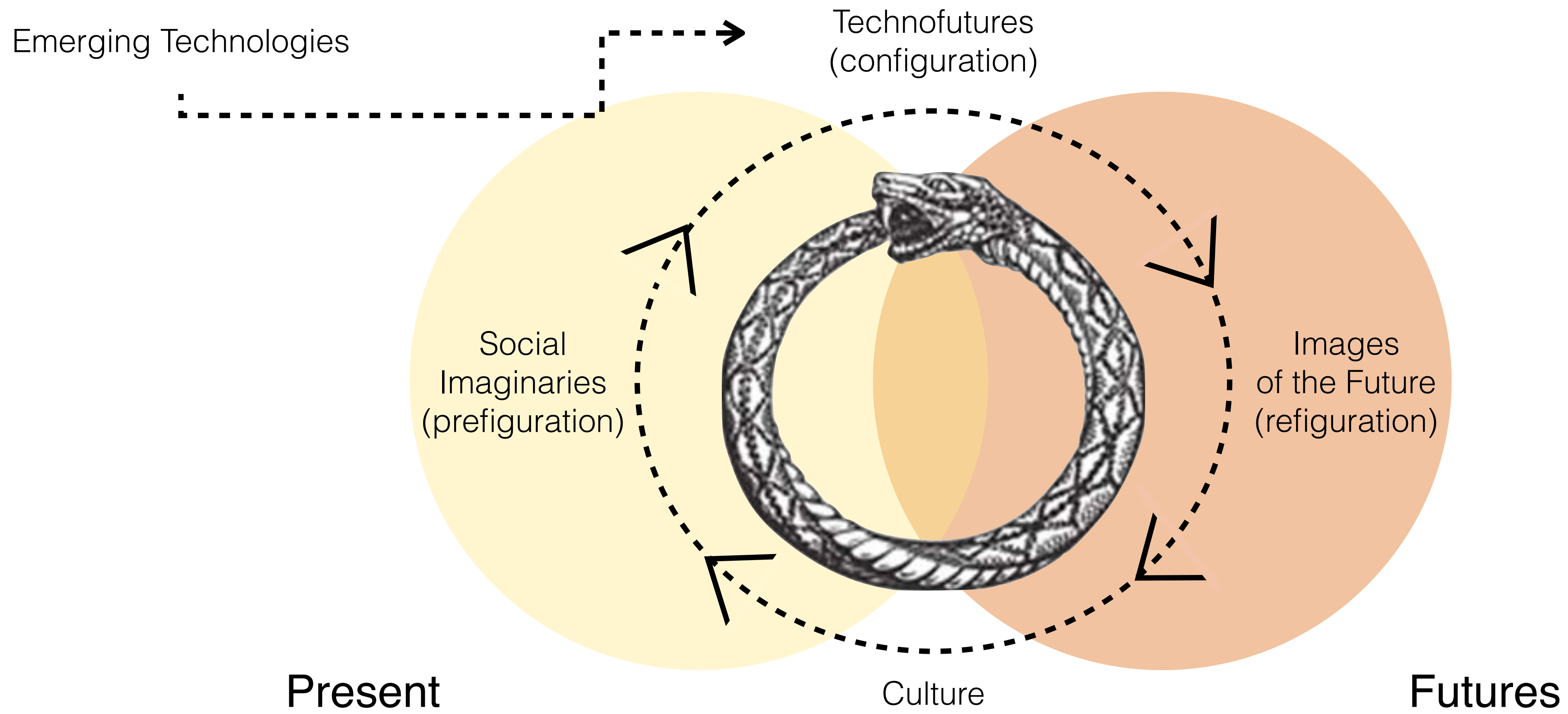
Science-Fiction

- ▶ „Science fiction (...) is a repository of sociotechnical imaginaries, visions that integrate futures of growing knowledge and technological mastery with normative assessments of what such futures could and should mean for present-day societies. Utopic or dystopic, these fictions underscore the self-evident truth that **technologically enabled futures are also value-laden futures.**“ (Jasanoff & Kim, 2015, p. 337)
- ▶ Science-Fiction *stories* are biased – they take a normative stance to the described world.

Mimetic Circle (Ricoeur, 1984 - 1986)

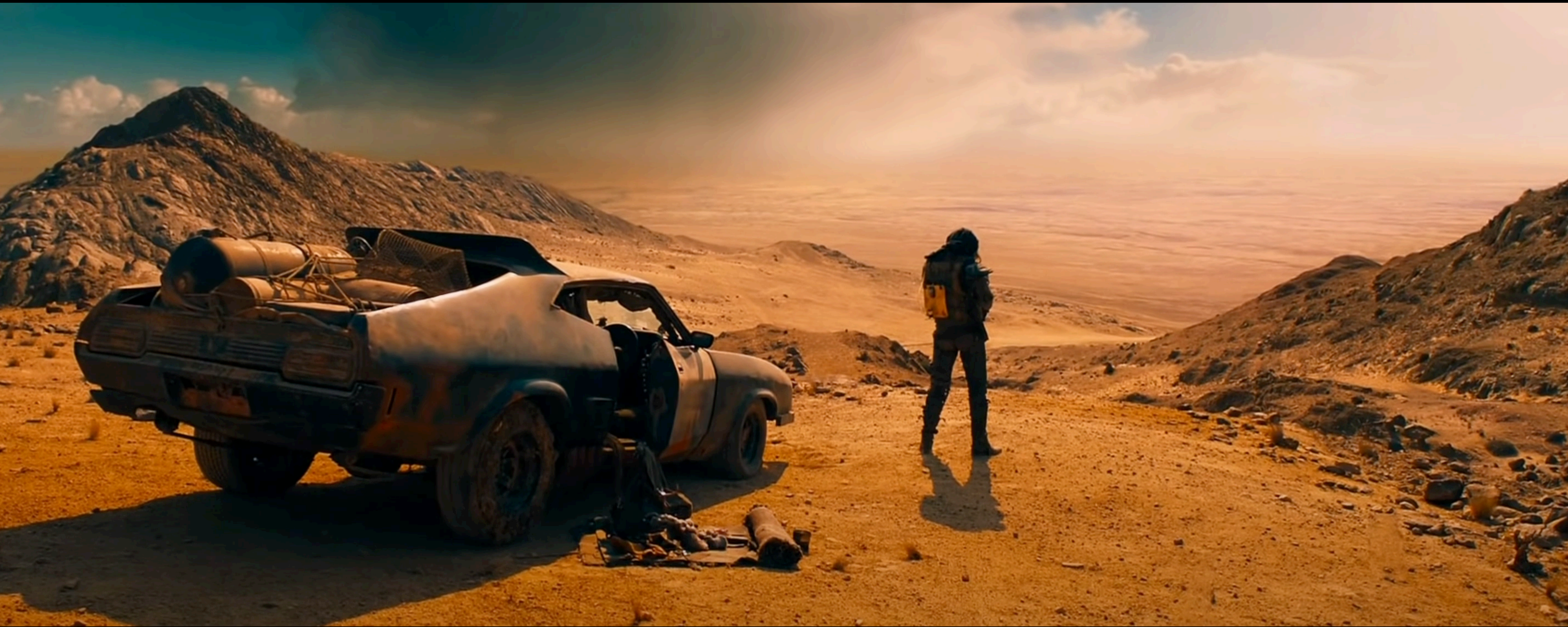
- ▶ „A narrative text is (1) **prefigured** by its cultural context with its specific symbolic order. It (2) **configures** extra-literary elements (the ‘real’ and the ‘imaginary’) into an exemplary temporal and causal order. In the act of reading, finally, the narrative composition is actualised. It becomes part of the symbolic order of a cultural formation, which is thereby (3) **refigured** and – here the circle closes functions in turn as the source of narrative preunderstanding on the level of mimesis I.“ (Erll, 2010, p. 93)

Science-Fiction as a repository of imaginaries



Social imaginaries
of the post-apocalypse

(... and how to read it)



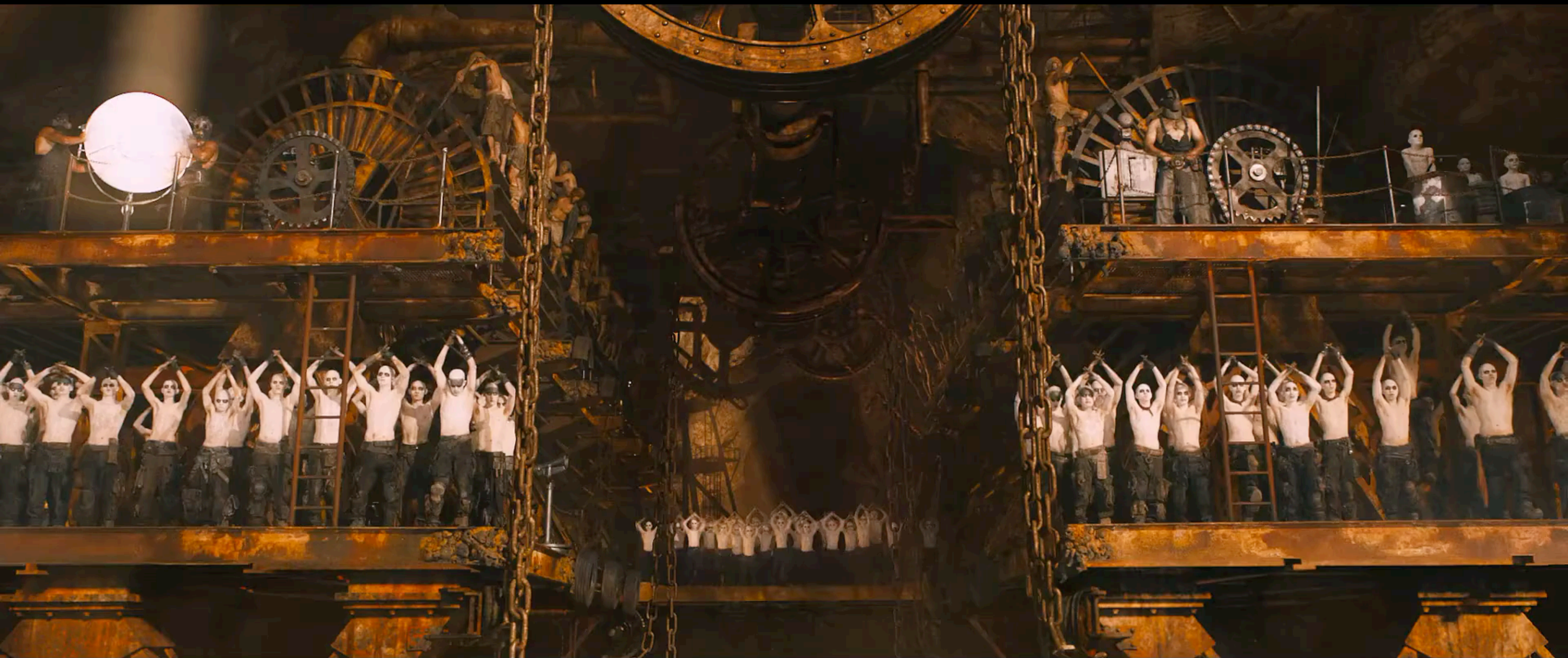


Mad Max: Fury Road (Miller, 2015)

- ▶ „Might makes right“ / Kratocracy / Caste System
- ▶ Leader: **Immortan Joe** – Former Military general who came to power through violence and fear.
- ▶ Imaginary: After collapse, society will be ruled by the law of the strongest who brings order into chaos and regulates scarce resources based on loyalty to the system.
- ▶ ***„I am your redeemer. It is by my hands that you will rise from the ashes of this world.“***







Power and Dominance through Technology





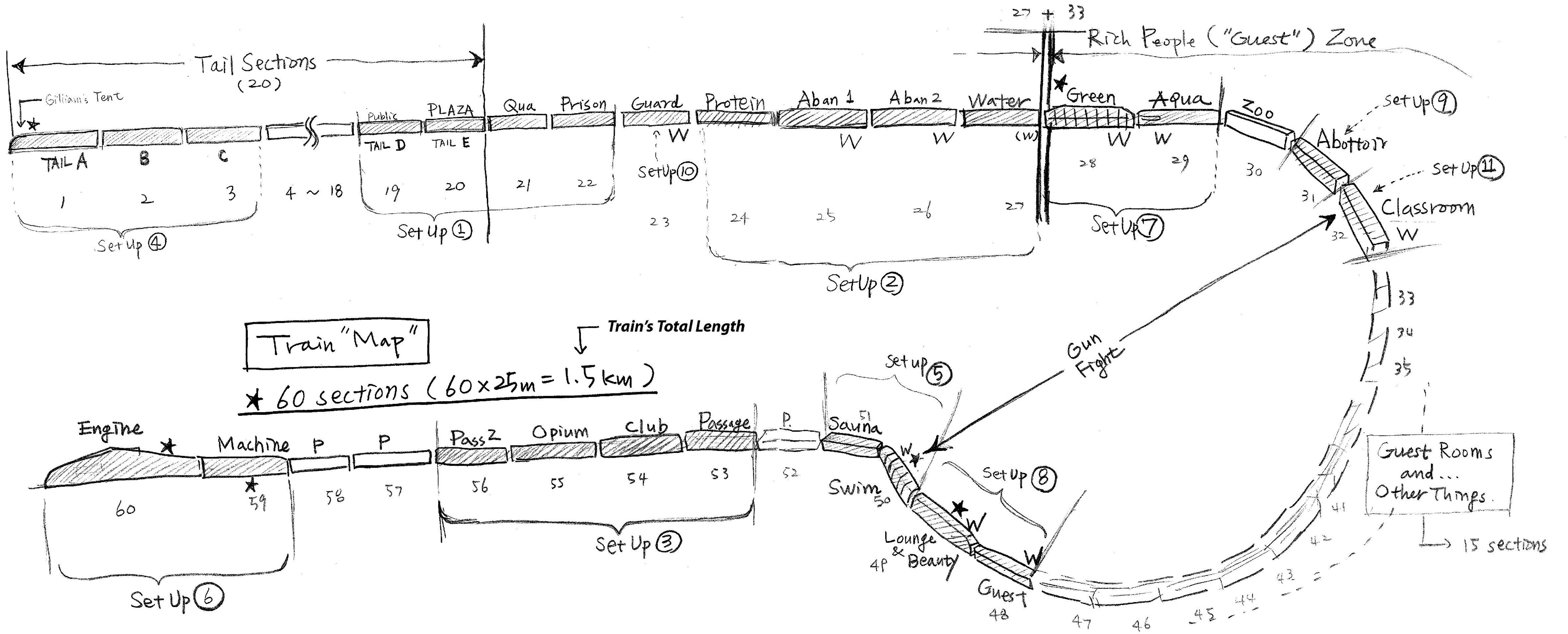


Snowpiercer (Bong, 2013)

- ▶ Technocratic
- ▶ Leader: **Mr. Wilford** – Businessman and Engineer who constructed the train and sold the tickets.
- ▶ Imaginary: Society as a machine, organized by technology and the logic of efficiency.
- ▶ ***„The perfectly correct number of human beings all in their place.“***



* Setup 4 & setup 10 are to be set together on a single 4-gimbals set.



* All sections share the identical structure. Only the sizes and the placements of the windows differ for each section.

* Stars indicate sections with different structure and dimension:

#60. Engine, #59. Machinery, #50. Swimming Pool, #49 Lounge, #32. Greenhouse, #1. Tail End

* The Distance between Classroom & Swimming Pool

The Distance between Franco & Curtis estimates to be about 286m

- 1) There are 17 sections in between Classroom & Swimming Pool
- 2) 17 sections x 25m = 425m
- 3) 450m x 2 = 900m
- 4) 900m / 3.14 = 286.6m





The Lathe of Heaven (Barzyk & Loxton, 1980)

- ▶ Utilitarianism
- ▶ Leader: **Dr. William Haber** – Psychoanalyst and Engineer who uses a machine (the Augmentor) to harvest George's ability of „effective“ dreaming.
- ▶ Imaginary: Society without difference to effectively fight all social problems (e.g. overpopulation, racism, war). Still a totalitarian leader on top who forces his ethics on society.
- ▶ ***„The greatest good for the greatest number.“***





Conclusion

Conclusion

- ▶ A totalitarian leader controlling the aftermath of the collapse.
- ▶ It is a white man who establishes his vision of how to restructure society.
- ▶ This white totalitarian leader uses technology to establish dominance.

Perverted variation of the White Saviour Trope



Moral of the story



Re-Imagine... ?



Thank you!

Wenzel Mehnert

wenzel.mehnert@ait.ac.at

