



Rolf Hammerschmidt's *Boytropolis* and the Ethno-Ecological Imaginary

IAN FLEISHMAN

University of Pennsylvania, USA

Abstract Rolf Hammerschmidt, one of Europe's most prolific gay porn directors and producers, first came to notoriety with an eco-utopian fantasy that descends into the dystopian. His two-part *Boytropolis* (1993, 1996) imagines a secluded woodland society of horny loincloth-clad young men whose insatiable sexual appetite appears to derive from a juice diet consisting of a mysterious emerald-colored potion that they extract from the local foliage, at least until they are denied indulgence in either this nectar or the sexual activity it inspires and vanish in a puff of smog. Attending to the unexpectedly rich cinematic history on which the film draws, which centrally includes not only Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* but also Frank Capra's *Lost Horizon* (1937), this article puts forth that *Boytropolis* exposes and explores a troublingly normative homotopian vision, one that relies on environmental and racial homogeneity, and on an eco-imperialist politics of conquest, for its erotic charge.

Keywords heterotopia, mountain film, porn studies, postcolonial, queer ecology, sex tourism, utopia

Describing Fritz Lang's Weimar-Era masterpiece *Metropolis* (1926), Nezar AlSayyad contends that "utopias, when pushed to their logical conclusion, become dystopic and, conversely, all dystopias have embedded in them a utopian dream."¹ The same might be said of pornographic fantasy. Fittingly, one of Europe's most prolific gay porn directors and producers, Rolf Hammerschmidt, first came to notoriety with an explicitly eco-utopian project that descends into the dystopian. His two-part *Boytropolis* (1993, 1996), with its obvious allusion to Lang's *Metropolis*, imagines a secluded woodland society of horny loincloth-clad young men whose insatiable sexual appetite appears to derive from a juice diet consisting of a mysterious emerald-colored potion that they extract from the local foliage. As the film's protagonist, Martin (Peter Host), who has discovered this gay getaway through a classified ad, later learns, this brainwashing and amnesia-inducing aphrodisiac also reverses the aging process. Eventually, the boys become too

1. AlSayyad, "Cinematic City," 271.

young, at which point they are denied further indulgence in either this nectar or the sexual activity it inspires and vanish in a puff of smog—a dystopian turn Martin witnesses toward the conclusion of each of the two episodes.

With this extraordinary cancellation of its own erotic premise Hammerschmidt's early pornographic effort obliges us to reconsider the utopian aspirations underlying recent calls for queer ecology. The dystopia of *Boytrópolis* requires that we disentangle same-sex desire from expectations of radical subversion and uncouple queerness from any knee-jerk association with progressive ecological thinking. Building especially on the queer theory of José Esteban Muñoz, queer ecologists like Nicole Seymour have aimed to extend a desire for “queerness as collectivity” to the natural world.² But the homoerotics of *Boytrópolis* tell a different story. Attending to the unexpectedly rich cinematic history on which the film draws, which centrally includes not only Lang's *Metropolis* but also Frank Capra's *Lost Horizon* (1937), in this article I will put forth that *Boytrópolis* exposes and explores what I identify as a troublingly normative *homotopian* vision: a vision reliant on environmental and racial homogeneity, and on an ecoimperialist politics of conquest, for its erotic charge.

Since *Boytrópolis*, the German-born Hammerschmidt—whose studio webpage once alleged that he has more than eight hundred titles to his name—has worked primarily in Prague.³ Produced in the very same year that the Czech Republic emerged as a distinct nation, *Boytrópolis* capitalizes on the sudden opening of iconic Cold War borders between East and West to sell its mid-Eastern European Shangri-La to Germanophone audiences as a destination for Orientalist erotic fantasy. In so doing, I will argue, it builds upon the colonialist tropes that both the Lang and Capra intertexts had themselves repurposed, to ambivalent ends, from the protofascist genre of the mountain film (*Bergfilm*). The titular *Boytrópolis*, I contend, both is and is not the Czech capital, which quickly became a privileged site of gay sex tourism beginning in the early 1990s. While it capitalizes on ethnologically inflected tropes of the readily sexually available but not strictly speaking homosexual Eastern European boy, its dubbing of local actors into German (the only language in which the film was ever released) and the transplantation of these tropes (back) onto a self-consciously “natural” outdoor setting rely upon and reconfigure in a neocolonialist framework the eco-ethnic imaginary of the nation-building Weimar-era *Bergfilm*.

The dystopian, according to Krishan Kumar, “draws its material from utopia and reassembles it in a manner that denies the affirmation of utopia. It is the mirror-image of utopia—but a distorted image, seen in a cracked mirror.”⁴ Changing the perspective in this way, through its dystopian tropes *Boytrópolis* offers a surprising critique of its

2. Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 11; Seymour, *Strange Natures*, 10.

3. Hammer Entertainment, “About Us,” archived at <https://web.archive.org/web/20191023063933/http://hammerentertainment.net/index.php?site=about>.

4. Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia*, 100.

own libidinal investments, excavating and deconstructing the primitivist, masculinist, imperialist, and, indeed, potentially fascist fantasies of nature at its core. This, I argue, has ambivalent consequences for the film's environmentalist aesthetics and, more largely, for the queer-ecological imaginary in which it is situated.

Pornotopia, Heterotopia, Homotopia

Utopian inquiry into the various discourses informing my investigation—queer theory, the environmental humanities, queer ecologies, and porn studies—is well established and too extensive to rehearse at any length here. Suffice it to say that *Boytropolis* depicts what Steven Marcus influentially theorizes as the *pornotopian*—“that vision which regards all of human experiences as a series of sexual events or conveniences”—with profound ramifications for its construction of nature.⁵ For Marcus, working in a heterosexual paradigm, pornotopian nature is essentially feminine and fecund: “The essential imagination of nature in pornotopia . . . is this immense, supine, female form.” At the same time, it “has no separate existence in pornotopia; it is not external to us, or ‘out there.’”⁶ Pornotopian nature, as Marcus sees it, exists either merely as a pretext and setting for sexual encounters or as itself a feminized object to be fucked by an omnipotent phallus.

For similar reasons, Marcus concludes that in “pornotopia conflicts do not exist; and if by chance a conflict does occur it is instantly dispelled by the waving of a magic sexual wand.”⁷ Interrogating this premise in her pioneering study, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the Frenzy of the Visible*, Linda Williams applies Richard Dyer's categories of utopianism in the movie musical to her treatment of pornography, examining how “utopian ‘numbers’” (meaning sex scenes) “represent solutions to narrative problems.”⁸ This model distinguishes between what it calls separated, integrated, and dissolved utopias, depending on how clearly disarticulated the breakout into song or sex is from the rest of the narrative. Given that the setting of Hammerschmidt's *Boytropolis* is itself already so thoroughly a pornographic paradise (think hard-core, all-male *Love Island*) as to constitute a *mise en abyme* of the genre, it seems an uncommonly compelling candidate for the final designation of dissolved utopia:

5. Marcus, *Other Victorians*, 216. Current utopian trends in queer inquiry can be traced back to the original publication in 2009 of José Esteban Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia*, recently republished in honor of its tenth anniversary. It would be difficult to overstate the reach and impact of this work. Here I build most specifically on the reception of this monograph in Jones, *Critical Inquiry*. Elsewhere, Jones has also proposed an examination of queer heterotopias. See Jones, “Queer Heterotopias.” To take just two very recent examples of utopianism in the environmental humanities, see Schneider-Mayerson and Bellamy, *Ecotopian Lexicon*, and Nersessian, “Utopia's Afterlife.” On this facet of queer ecology, see Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson, *Queer Ecologies*, and, as already mentioned, Seymour, *Strange Natures*.

6. Marcus, *Other Victorians*, 272–73.

7. Marcus, *Other Victorians*, 281.

8. Williams, *Hard Core*, 270.

This mode is almost as escapist as Dyer's first category, but where the separated hard-core film offers escape into a pornotopia of sexual numbers whose abundance and energy stand in opposition to the scarcity and exhaustion of the real-world narrative, the dissolved film minimizes the distinctions between sexual fantasy and narrative reality. Here there is no need to escape from realities depicted in the narrative; pornotopia is already achieved. The world of the narrative is nearly as problem-free as the separated form's world of numbers. . . . The two worlds simply dissolve into each other.⁹

The dissolved musical, Williams reminds us, tends to offer a nostalgic vision of a halcyon past, where the "pleasure produced by musical numbers seems to arise naturally from such pleasurable places. The narrative register offers such a rosy picture of reality that song and dance just seem to come with the territory. In feature-length pornography, however, the pleasurable place of the dissolved utopia is more often set in the present or future, offering idealized fantasies of current notions of sexual liberation."¹⁰ The sexual and ecological politics of *Boytropolis*, I would argue, manage somehow to do both: combining a sentimental woodland aesthetic and travelogue tropes (drawn largely from *Lost Horizon*) with futuristic sci-fi elements (ornamental elements of the interiors recall the Bauhaus influences of *Metropolis*), the film is given at once to the "queer utopian memory" theorized by José Esteban Muñoz as well as to the celebrated queer potentiality of the yet-to-come.¹¹ More poignantly, against the background of the AIDS epidemic, which was at its worst in Hammerschmidt's native Germany in 1993, the same year the first VHS tape of *Boytropolis* was released, the film portrays what Muñoz describes as the kind of "queer lifeworld in which the transformative potential of queer sex and public manifestations of such sexuality were both a respite from the abjection of homosexuality and a reformatting of that very abjection."¹² Within this context, pornography like *Boytropolis*, where the actors don't wear condoms, hazards a risky utopian enterprise of queer kinship and community building.¹³

Boytropolis is not only a filmic fantasy but, within the film's diegesis, a geographic one as well. The titular *Boytropolis* is not on any map; Martin drives there but does not as much discover it as it discovers him when he stops to take a roadside cigarette break and is greeted by his first of various sexual partners to come. As such a remote and inaccessible location, *Boytropolis* clearly constitutes what Michel Foucault would call a *heterotopia*. Distinguishing utopias, which are fundamentally unreal, from heterotopias, which are real but exist elsewhere, Foucault divides the latter into two primary categories: the

9. Williams, *Hard Core*, 174.

10. Williams, *Hard Core*, 174–75.

11. Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 35, 48.

12. Hamouda, "HIV/AIDS Surveillance," S49; Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 34. In the Czech Republic, where *Boytropolis* was filmed, the epidemic wouldn't peak until about a decade later. See Hall, "Stories from the Second World," 72n3.

13. See esp. Robinson, "Queer Potentiality."

crisis heterotopia (*hétérotopie de crise*) and the heterotopia of deviation (*hétérotopie de déviation*): “those in which individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed.”¹⁴ As a destination not dissimilar to Fire Island or Mykonos, advertised to gay, and thus non-heteronormative, tourists, Boytropolis would clearly tick this box as a heterotopia of deviation.

But, given its exclusively and emphatically youthful population, Boytropolis, the place, can also be seen as a space of emergence and, by extension, emergency: adolescence being a prime example of the kind of crisis Foucault has in mind, he names boarding schools and military service for young men (the word he uses in the original French is *garçons*, or boys, better matching the title of the film in question) as examples of crisis heterotopias.¹⁵ As the film’s voiceover narration first describes it,

Martin imagined Boytropolis as one of these worlds one always dreams of but which are unattainable in reality. Boytropolis was, as the name implies, inhabited exclusively by boys. No one knew where the boys came from. They just stood before the gates and were allowed in. Strangely enough, old people never strayed to Boytropolis and the boys never seemed to age either. Now and again one of the lads would disappear but in his place a new, even more beautiful face would appear immediately. Boytropolis seemed to have eternal life and everlasting youth contained within its walls.¹⁶

As a site of stunted or reversed maturation, of perpetually stalled coming of age, the titular Boytropolis reflects a heterotopic desire to linger enduringly in this transient period, though it is the failure of such a utopian project of permanence that results in the dystopian event of the boys’ ominous evaporation toward the end of each tape—not, as one might otherwise expect, because they have aged out of desirability but, inversely, it seems fair to surmise, because the pornographic marketing label of “barely legal” has reached its lower limit.¹⁷ At the same time, the universalizing tendency of such temporal suspension—which presses the pause button on a specific moment of maturation—begins to undermine the defining deviance, exigency, alterity, and elsewhere-ness of the Foucauldian heterotopia, hinting instead at a dangerously normative desire to establish such imagined pornographic spaces as a political reality.

Many of Foucault’s illustrations of his concept—vacation villages, gardens, cinemas—resonate either with Boytropolis as a diegetic locale or with *Boytropolis* as a film, with important implications for the political relation between the two. Foucault describes

14. Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 25.

15. Foucault similarly reads retirement communities as occupying a border territory between the two categories (Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 25).

16. All translations from Hammerschmidt’s German are my own.

17. While the actors in *Boytropolis* seem mostly to have been in their early to mid-twenties at the time of filming, that this plot point might nevertheless make some audiences anxious is reflected by the fact that later releases of the film were renamed *Manropolis* and *A Man’s World*.

both utopias and heterotopias as mirrors of society; it is by making the gaze pass through the unreal, virtual image, through the “placeless place” of utopia, that the mirror reconstitutes the very real spatial emplacement of what is reflected: “The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes the place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there.”¹⁸ Following Stanley Cavell’s and Fredric Jameson’s designation of cinema as “intrinsically pornographic,” Tim Dean comes to the somewhat surprising discovery that “the most articulate defense of bareback porn appeals not to fantasy but to its ostensible opposite, documentary realism.”¹⁹ Brandon Andrew Robinson adds an ecological aspect to this purported verism, noting that for barebacking communities “condoms are seen as unnatural, and for that matter, safe sex is viewed as pretend sex or as not ‘real’ or natural.”²⁰ While predating the genre of bareback pornography proper and exhibiting none of its characteristic elements (breeding, cum swapping, etc.), the filmic representation of *Boytropolis* thus nevertheless meditates on the irreality of the pornotopic fantasy it depicts while at the same moment naturalizing this utopia—as the ontological circumstances of pornography, indeed of cinema generally, dictate—as a reflection of the very real space of the profilmic event.

At the end of his short text, Foucault insists again that heterotopias have a function with relation to the rest of space: either they create an illusory space intended to reveal real space as even more of an illusion (this is the function he finds in the *maison close* or brothel), or they create a real, scrupulously managed space (as in the imperial context, he muses) highlighting the shortcomings of our own lived spaces: “to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled. This latter type would be the heterotopia not of illusion, but of compensation, and I wonder if certain colonies have not functioned somewhat in this manner.”²¹ If, as I will examine further down, *Boytropolis* can be interpreted as a filmic reflection of the Czech bordellos for Western European gay sex tourists emerging at the same historical moment,²² Foucault’s evocation of prostitution and colonization in quick succession hints, perhaps, at an imperializing impulse underlying the pornotopia at hand.

Such heterotopias of compensation come closest to the eco-erotic imaginary I am examining in *Boytropolis*. Here, though, this imaginary may prove to be at once compensatory and revelatory of already existing, if otherwise invisible, ideologies. If on the one

18. Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 27.

19. Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy*, 110, 118; Cavell, *World Viewed*, 45; Jameson, *Signatures*, 1.

20. Robinson, “Queer Potentiality,” 103.

21. Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 24.

22. For an overview of this phenomenon see Bunzl, “Prague Experience”; Hall, “Rent-Boys”; Ellison and Weitzer, “Young Men.” See also Stan Persky’s similarly named erotic memoir *Boyopolis*.

hand it is utopianizing and aspirational, on the other it is tacit and regulatory. Which is to say that the inherently utopian instinct of pornography, as discussed above, involves normalizing and de-invisibilizing sexual practices that might otherwise be considered obscene. Instead such sexual practices are brought on/scene, as Williams would have it, by portraying them—quite literally, in the case of *Boytrópolis* and similar outdoor pornography—in the clear light of day.²³ Rich Cante and Angelo Restivo have argued that the utopianism inherent to all-male pornography is its positioning of non-normative sexual practices in relation to a public social gaze.²⁴ The secluded but communal, even disciplinary, setting of *Boytrópolis* exposes the film’s “onscenity” as both a making-visible and a making-real of gay sex. This ontological and normative function reflects the documentary necessities of pornography highlighted by Dean. These are, after all, real bodies performing real sex acts, but every aspect of this sexual activity is prescribed.

The film itself appears to dramatize this procedure, subtly comparing the recruitment of its characters to a kind of military conscription. Martin, the film’s outsider protagonist, originally donning oh-so-nineties tight white jeans and an unbuttoned salmon-colored blouse tied together around his navel, doesn’t definitively trade in his own clothing for the local loincloth uniform until the second tape, when his indoctrination seems all but certain. The psychotropically imposed amnesia from which he and the other dronelike boys suffer is itself a colonial trope: a state of confused arousal in warmer climes known in German as *Tropenkoller* and related to what might be described as jungle fever.²⁵ As the boys gradually forget their pasts and eventually even their own names, the film hints at an absorption of the individual into the community that is both utopian and terrifying—terrifying precisely by dint of its homogenizing utopian vision.

Thus *Boytrópolis* lays bare the fascist echoes of the nationalist, antiliberal, and anti-modernist masculinist tradition in which its own erotics are most manifestly embedded. From Hans Blüher’s account of the *Wandervogel* scouting group as fundamentally predicated upon homoeroticism to the nudist backpacking and camping excursions practiced by Adolf Brand’s *Gemeinschaft der Eigenen*, these all-male German outdoor youth movements had celebrated the beauty of racially “pure” youthful bodies in nature.²⁶ At once mining and undermining this erotic imaginary, *Boytrópolis* is an unusually self-aware, even self-critical, exemplar of what I have theorized elsewhere as homo-eco-erotic utopianism: a peculiarly pornographic mode of homonormativity in which an unspoken but socially obligatory assumption of homoeroticism becomes the

23. Williams, *Hard Core*, 280–315, esp. 297.

24. Cante and Restivo, “Cultural-Aesthetic Specificities,” esp. 152–53.

25. I thank Ina Linge for this observation.

26. Blüher, *deutsche Wandervogelbewegung*. For a succinct summary of these and other contemporary masculinist perspectives in Germany, see Tobin, *Peripheral Desires*, 51–83. For the canonical accounts of fascist masculinities, see Mosse, *Image of Man*, and Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*.

necessary precondition for the establishment of ethnically defined, aspirationally national, and purportedly natural public space.²⁷ Adapting Foucault, it seems apposite to neologize this phenomenon with the (admittedly uninventive) formulation *homotopia*—appending the new prefix *homo* to this template in order to indicate not only same-sex desire but also, and more pointedly, the society-founding ambition of such imagined communities as spaces of idealized homogeneity.²⁸ The homotopian impulse aims to overcome at once the alterity of the Foucauldian heterotopic and the irreality etymologically and generically associated with the utopian or pornotopian. By contrast, the homotopian dream simultaneously staged and unsteadily parodied by *Boytrópolis* and other Hammerschmidt productions invites an oddly interpellative and inclusive voyeurism, enjoining its audiences to project themselves into these imagined milieux and to envision their own lived environments as the realization of these pornographic fantasies: as spaces of ethno-ecological sameness.

Ecological Imperialism: *Boytrópolis* as *Bergfilm*

I would hardly nominate *Boytrópolis* as a masterpiece of world cinema. However, Hammerschmidt's evident cinephilia is, to my mind, undeniably interesting for the film-historical and ideological inheritance brought to light by the playful pastiches in which it results. In the case of *Boytrópolis*, these borrowings produce a mashup of two canonical utopian-dystopian intertexts: Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), as the tropology of Hammerschmidt's title makes immediately apparent, and Frank Capra's *Lost Horizon* (1937), which is evoked through a series of slightly subtler Shangri-La motifs—a topos originating in the source text for Capra's film, James Hilton's 1933 novel of the same title. That Hammerschmidt's Edenic imagination tropes on Capra's own dream of eternal youth is made explicit by the marketing materials surrounding the DVD rerelease of *Boytrópolis*, which bill the film's eponymous setting as a "sexual Shangri-La high up in the mountains where a tribe of loincloth-clad youths drink a magic elixir that keeps them young and beautiful and makes them fuck each other's brains out." (Occupancy of Shangri-La doesn't quite reverse the aging process, as in *Boytrópolis*, but it does bring it to a standstill.) The Venn diagram that *Boytrópolis* sketches between these monumental specimens of filmic utopianism necessitates a comparative close reading of their surprising shared antecedent in the Weimar-era mountain film, the genre known as the *Bergfilm*. In what follows I will first examine the ecological implications of this legacy before turning to the repurposing, in *Boytrópolis*, of its ethnically inflected imperialist tropes for a post-Cold War Europe.

27. See Fleishman, "Naturgeil."

28. I would be remiss not to acknowledge that the gay novelist Jonathan Kemp has championed what he, also with reference to Foucault, calls Homotopia. But whereas my thinking here seeks to historicize and demythologize homotopian desire, Kemp's short book on the subject is a manifesto for "a sameness that democratizes sexuality" (*Homotopia?*, 30).

The immensely popular 1920s alpine melodramas of Arnold Fanck, Luis Trenker, Leni Riefenstahl, and others grouped under the rubric of the *Bergfilm* have historically been read as protofascist nostalgic fantasies given to a conservatively Romantic view of nature.²⁹ The genre is praised, on the one hand, for its visual effects and film-technological innovations, like time-lapse photography, which brought nature to life on screen as never before, but denigrated, on the other, for promoting a politics of heroic and unthinking sacrifice and for the mass appeal of its kitsch aesthetic. In this way the *Bergfilm* embodies many of the key contradictions of Weimar culture. More recent scholarship on the mountain film has begun to problematize how its ecological paradigm reflects and, in turn, inflects a modernist enterprise of colonialism, tourism, infrastructure development, land management, and resource extraction. To summarize the shared conclusion of such studies rather too reductively: for all its reverence toward pristine and ostensibly untouched landscapes, the *Bergfilm* turns out to be very much concerned with the construction, cultivation, and exploitation of nature.

The opening title card of Lang's *Metropolis* dissolves into an introductory image of a hypermodern city skyline that graphically matches a mountain range, revealing an underlying affinity between the *Bergfilm* and the *Straßenfilm*—the kind of street film of which *Metropolis* is an often cited if not entirely typical example. While it is somewhat counterintuitive, I am far from the first to think of these two dominant interwar cinematic genres as film negatives of one another. Eric Rentschler has pointed out how easily Trenker's *Der verlorene Sohn* (*The Prodigal Son*, 1934) “leaps from a mountaintop to an urban setting, segueing via a matched dissolve from the peaks of the Dolomites to the skyscrapers of Manhattan.”³⁰ These are the same skyscrapers that famously, and by his own account, inspired Lang to make *Metropolis*, and his cityscapes can be read in reverse as a mirror image for the breathtaking verticality of the *Bergfilm*.³¹ More recently, Seth Peabody has persuasively excavated the affinities between Fanck's mountain films and the genre of the “city symphony” represented most iconically by Walter Ruttmann's *Symphonie einer Großstadt* (*Symphony of a Metropolis*, 1927).³² What aligns these various instances of so-called New Objectivity is a desire for veracity—the term Fanck uses is *naturgetreu*: true to life or, more literally, true to *nature*—also shared by the documentarian impulse of pornographic fare like Hammerschmidt's.³³ In a dystopian science fiction like Lang's *Metropolis*, which required the construction of elaborate sets and an even more sophisticated apparatus to flood them in the film's climactic moment, this

29. Most famously by Siegfried Kracauer in *From Caligari to Hitler*.

30. Rentschler, *Ministry of Illusion*, 89. Elsewhere, Rentschler writes of this moment: “A single shot, a matched dissolve between the Dolomites and Manhattan skyscrapers, illustrates how Alpine reaches and urban edifices are mirror images. The *Bergfilm*, in short, is the *Straßenfilm*'s double” (“Mountains and Modernity,” 152).

31. See Lang, “Was ich in Amerika sah.”

32. Peabody, “Image.” See also, Peabody, “Infrastructure.”

33. Quoted in Bush, “Moving Mountains,” 14.

results in what Anton Kaes describes as “the ambivalent thrill of seeing the built environment destroyed by means of the latest technology. The modern medium of film seems intent on critiquing and even demolishing the technological modernity it depicts.”³⁴ In *Metropolis*, Kaes insightfully argues, this demolition provides the rejuvenation necessary for the story to come to its rather unconvincingly utopian ending.³⁵ In *Boytropolis*, as I will be arguing in conclusion, the porno-ecological premise is conversely de-idealized by a dystopian dissolve mirroring Lang’s opening superimposition of nature and civilization.

While set in a futuristic megacity, *Metropolis* nevertheless also depicts an internal ecological Eden in an early sequence set in the sky-high luxuriant Eternal Gardens, which, as David Golding points out, are at once an urban oasis and a site of concubinage:

a conservatory in which female sex workers indulge the fantasies of wealthy white men. Depicted through sketches that detail a botanical orientalism, the gardens brim with surreal alien flora based on plants from a miscegenated tropical biome, including baobab-like tree stands, aloe, and oversized dracena. The dense tropical foliage is permeated by pathways of manicured grass adorned with egrets, peacocks, and minimalist deco fountains. The domestication of a savage female wilderness through its penetration by arteries of European male virility resonates with patriarchal modernist narratives of colonial spaces. The ecologically tamed pathways that lace the Eternal Garden provide sites in which male heterosexual desire can be domesticated while still maintaining access to a colonial-coded feminine space of wild tropical vegetation.³⁶

The entirety of *Boytropolis*, of course, takes place in just such a pleasure garden dedicated purely to sexual activity and to the cultivation of the unidentified plant we curiously never see harvested but which is shown being prepared throughout. Without getting into the weeds of landscape theory, it is important to recognize that, as a heterotopic space to which both sex and nature are relegated, these gardens reveal an imperializing and, more specifically, Orientalizing aspect to the libidinal investment in constructed ecologies. Recalling that “in the Orient the garden, an astonishing creation that is now a thousand years old, had very deep and seemingly superimposed meanings,” Foucault himself describes the garden as “a sort of happy, universalizing heterotopia since the beginnings of antiquity.”³⁷ If we follow Foucault on this point, Lang’s Eternal Gardens anticipate the way in which a denizen of Shangri-La in Capra’s film articulates the utopian mission of his terrestrial paradise: “to gather together all things of beauty and of culture . . . and preserve them here against the doom toward which the world is rushing” so that a day might come “when the brotherly love of Shangri-La will spread

34. Kaes, “Phantasm,” 22.

35. Kaes, “Phantasm.”

36. Golding, “Darker Side,” 306.

37. Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 25.

throughout the world.”³⁸ Evangelical in this sense, the heterotopia of the garden is the best example Foucault gives of the homogenizing features of what I am referring to as the homotopian: “The garden is the smallest parcel of the world and then it is the totality of the world.”³⁹ As an encyclopedic microcosm of diverse biomes, the garden inversely (re)produces the entirety of the world in its own image.

These gardens appear only briefly in *Metropolis*, though; on the whole the film is more overtly concerned with its dystopian underbelly: its narrative impetus is the unexpected discovery by an economically privileged protagonist of the exploited labor upon which the urban utopia is grounded. To the degree that *Boytropolis* can be thought of even as a loose adaptation of Lang, it flattens both this vertically represented social hierarchy and its emotional impact, transposing the pivotal and dramatic sequence where Freder (Gustav Fröhlich) visits the underground factory of *Metropolis* into Martin’s discovery in *Boytropolis* of a kind of juice bar. As Martin relates in voiceover toward the beginning of the second tape: “So here they were again at work on the only occupation I had witnessed them doing so far: chopping up the plants from which this strange green juice was made, this green elixir that was the only food served, if this drink could even be called a foodstuff. And as before the boys could not be distracted from their work.”⁴⁰ This aside is accompanied by unusually dynamic cinematography (at least for a narrative interlude) alternating between high angles of the workroom—which visually evokes a sweatshop as much as it does a kitchen—and point-of-view close-ups roughly from Martin’s perspective as he and the camera circle the table where the boys clumsily chop dry leaves and grind them with a mortar and pestle. The effect of this camerawork is to engender an especially participatory viewership: just as the voiceover narration alternates throughout the film between Martin’s first-person monologue and a disembodied but less-than-omniscient third-person account still largely focalized and limited by his perspective, it is difficult to determine here who is doing the seeing. Although the cultivation of this mysterious crop dissolves a nature-culture divide still somewhat upheld in the artificial gardens of *Metropolis*, it also suspends individual subjectivity: in the homotopia that is *Boytropolis* there are no social classes; everyone is the same. And sameness, in a sense, is precisely the problem: the libation produced is at the same time an antiaging love potion permitting pornotopia to come into being and the cultic Kool-Aid ushering in its ultimate undoing. In this manner, *Boytropolis* signals the utopian egalitarianism *Metropolis* had only feebly and implausibly posited at its end.

Like *Metropolis*, the opening credit sequence of *Lost Horizon* begins over a changing backdrop of rolling clouds and painted mountains, representing the Himalayas, before cutting to a large, leather-bound book, which is opened to tease the dream of “every man since Time began. Always the same dream. Sometimes he calls it Utopia—Sometimes the

38. Capra, *Lost Horizon*.

39. Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 26.

40. Hammerschmidt, *Boytropolis*.

Fountain of Youth—Sometimes merely ‘that little chicken farm.’” As the pages continue to turn, we are introduced to our protagonist: “One man had such a dream and saw it come true. He was Robert Conway—England’s ‘Man of the East’—soldier, diplomat, public hero. . . . Our story starts in the war-torn Chinese city of Baskul, where Robert Conway has been sent to evacuate ninety white people before they are butchered in a local revolution.”⁴¹ An extended opening action sequence eventually deposits the audience and our cast of white refugees in Shangri-La: an idyllic lamasery, overlooking, to borrow Capra’s own description, “from its perch on a cliff, the warm, verdant Valley of the Blue Moon, an earthly paradise so secluded, so isolated, so protected from the world and its cold winds by a ring of high peaks that time—unruffled and unmeasured—offered life its richest savor.”⁴² Speculating on Riefenstahl’s possible influence on Capra and their aesthetic-ideological “ideas of national identity, social commentary and romanticism,” Ian Scott has noted “the idealist inferences replicated in the mountain settings for *Lost Horizon* and the *Bergfilme*” made by Riefenstahl.⁴³ And, indeed, certain shots of the moonlit sky, especially, could have been taken directly from Riefenstahl’s *Das blaue Licht* (*The Blue Light*, 1934), which *Lost Horizon* recalls both visually and thematically, beginning already with the storybook framing of both pictures.⁴⁴

But the degree to which *Lost Horizon* echoes the *Bergfilm* does not become fully palpable until the one of the final sequences, where two British brothers and a liberated female love interest attempt to escape Shangri-La through a treacherous mountain pass during an avalanche. Surveying the genre, Rentschler reminds us that the *Bergfilm* is habitually constructed “around romantic melodramas, triangles involving two climbers, usually close companions, and a mutually shared love interest who causes disturbance.”⁴⁵ Further comparing Riefenstahl’s character Junta from *The Blue Light*—an unwilling temptress whose saccharine communion with nature and animals smacks at moments of Disney’s *Snow White*—to the vamplike Maria, the machinic femme fatale of *Metropolis*, Rentschler notes that women and landscapes are frequently aligned as objects of conquest in the *Bergfilm*.⁴⁶ This recalls Marcus’s view of pornotopian nature as essentially feminine. In *Lost Horizon* it is another seductive Maria (played by the actress known as Margo), who, claiming to be held against her will, has persuaded Robert Conway (Ronald Coleman) and his brother (John Howard) to flee, despite warnings that she is in

41. Capra, *Lost Horizon*.

42. Capra, *Name above the Title*, 192.

43. Scott, “Frank Capra,” 285, 293.

44. Hilton’s novel makes the European and specifically Alpine tropes unmistakable: “It was, indeed, a strange and half-incredible sight. A group of colored pavilions clung to the mountainside with none of the grim deliberation of a Rhineland castle, but rather with the chance delicacy of flower-petals impaled upon a crag. It was superb and exquisite. An austere emotion carried the eye upwards from milk-blue roofs to the gray rock bastion above, tremendous as the Wetterhorn above Grindelwald” (*Lost Horizon*, 67–68).

45. Rentschler, *Ministry of Illusion*, 35–36.

46. See Rentschler, *Ministry of Illusion*, 316n7; “Mountains and Modernity,” 159.

fact much older than the rejuvenating atmosphere of Shangri-La allows her to appear. It is not only the stunning cinematography and mountaineering stunts of this sequence that are reminiscent of Fanck or Riefenstahl, but indeed the very choreography of an adapted MMF (male-male-female) love triangle—to rephrase this standard trope of the mountain film in pornological argot. This then dissolves, quite literally, by way of a closeup on Maria’s countenance observing the aftermath of the avalanche fading into a series of mountain views of the continued journey and culminating in the revelation of her true face: wizened and expired. But as in Lang it is nothing other than this spectacular dénouement that reaffirms the possibility of utopia, reconfirming the magical anti-aging properties of Shangri-La and dispelling the doubts cast by Maria’s fallacious tale of captivity. Given her pornotopian alignment with the natural world, the exorcism of the female danger proves necessary throughout the tradition for the definitive establishment of the homosocial imperialist utopia.⁴⁷

Ethnological Imperialism: The Dream of Universal Whiteness

Jettisoning the female element entirely, *Boytopolis* highlights the homoerotic and homo-ethnic imagination that arguably always subtended such narratives. This is the hidden through-line in *Lost Horizon*, which frames its endeavor as one of “brotherly love” and the rescue of “white people”—not to mention the truly homotopian contention that utopia is “always the same dream.” One can locate this same fantasy of sameness in Lang: workers of *Metropolis* are at once subtly racialized as other by their uniform dark overalls and the chiaroscuro of the mise-en-scène while at the same moment “whitefaced” in a transposition of the conditions of colonial exploitation onto white labor. As Golding sees it, this “reliance upon whiteface . . . recode[s] racial concerns into exclusively white spaces” in order to achieve an “invisibilisation of coloniality.”⁴⁸ Such racial homogenization is to be discovered in any number of Hammerschmidt productions, where white actors take the place of ethnic “others.” Films like *Junge Wilde* (*The Wildmen*, 1999) and *Dschungelboys* (*Jungle Boys*, 2000) parallel *Boytopolis* in their costuming and outdoor settings: in the first case, a shipwrecked seafarer finds himself on a tropical jungle island and becomes the willing object of sexual gratification for the indigenous natives (*Eingeborene*), and in the second, a safari of Westerners come across a tribe (*Stamm*) of savages (*Wilden*) hungry for white flesh (flippant allusions to cannibalism abound), played almost exclusively by loin-clothed, white-skinned actors, in many cases markedly paler and blonder than their avowedly Occidental (*abendländische*) counterparts.

And yet, Hammerschmidt’s voiceover narration in such films repeatedly insists on both the racial alterity and the concomitant naturalness of these eroticized figures. To take an example from *Jungle Boys*:

47. Building on Rentschler, Nancy Nenno argues, for instance, that the “masculinized mountainscape is an enduring trope” of the genre and examines Riefenstahl’s reworking of such gender dynamics to recast alpine landscapes as sites of feminine sacrifice (“‘Postcards from the Edge,’” 74).

48. Golding, “Darker Side,” 322.

In their natural nudity the two boys offer a sight that makes the hearts of many a European beat faster. So at ease in their bodies! One has to wonder what so-called civilization really has to offer. And already it's becoming clear what these two jungle boys have in mind. And we'll savor the view of two horny young guys who want only one thing—to have fun and to indulge in their natural horniness.⁴⁹

If such extended meditations constitute an uncommonly forthcoming if campily tongue-in-cheek commentary on the imperialist erotics of conquest upon which such pornographic fantasies depend, the celebration of purportedly uncivilized sexuality is perhaps also a marketing ploy for Hammerschmidt, who, as noted, films in Prague with local actors. In an essay on intra-European gay sex tourism, Timothy McCajor Hall notes the “growing sexual mystique around ‘Eastern,’ Slavic . . . men, seen as wild, passionate, uninhibited—in some ways more primitive and natural than the restrained and civilized Germans.”⁵⁰ This is a cultural mythology, Hall notes, propelled by the outsized dominance of the Czech Republic in the international gay porn industry: “Western tourists perceive the image projected in locally produced (and internationally marketed and financed) gay pornography as a polymorphous and ‘natural’ pansexuality.”⁵¹ The feral pornotopia that is *Boytropolis*, viewers are led to believe, is precisely what one might expect of a boys’ night out in the Golden City. Matti Bunzl shows this paradigm to be in keeping with a “neocolonial invention of a distinct Eastern sexuality”⁵² that at once reasserts facile Cold War intra-European geographies—despite the fact that Prague is well to the west of, say, Vienna—while homoerotically Orientalizing and *naturalizing* these discourses: “If Austrian gay male sex tourists figure the Eastern bodies they encounter in the course of the Prague experience through the tropes of availability and passion, they also fit them with a distinct sexual subjectivity . . . surfacing as a naturalized omnisexuality.”⁵³

On the flipside of this Orientalist fantasy, Hammerschmidt's *Im Dienste des Sultans* (*In the Service of the Sultan*, 1998) is dedicated to the erotic pursuits of the titular leader of an unidentified land (played by the presumably Czech Hynek Cross in clichéd Middle Eastern garb and wearing a ridiculous fake mustache), who assembles a harem of “the magnificent boys of the Occident” and repeatedly confesses his “lust for the golden boy of the West”—evoking Prague's moniker.⁵⁴ Vaguely Eastern European bodies (no

49. Hammerschmidt, *Dschungelboys*.

50. Hall, “Rent-Boys,” 457.

51. Hall, “Rent-Boys,” 459. Czech gay pornography is, in fact, produced exclusively for foreign audiences; the pertinent websites are blocked within Czech borders. As Ilya Marritz writes of one of Hammerschmidt's breakout Slovakian performers (who would go on to become one of the best-known gay porn actors of the nineties): “Lukas Ridgeston could walk into any gay bar in Prague and sooner be noticed for the blue of his eyes than as the star of *Boytropolis*” (“9.5,” 58).

52. Bunzl, “Prague Experience,” 83.

53. Bunzl, “Prague Experience,” 85–86.

54. Hammerschmidt, *Im Dienste*.

distinctions are drawn between Czechs, Slovaks, Hungarians, etc.) have been racialized and Orientalized as other by the same device through which ethnic alterity is invisibilized or effaced.⁵⁵ This persistent fetishization of whiteness in an all-white world has the strange and dissonant effect of denaturalizing it while at once erasing any alternative: the monochromatic homotopia has been achieved.

Hammerschmidt's oeuvre repeatedly hints at an affinity between tourism (particularly sex tourism) and imperialism. If Martin is figured in *Boytrópolis* as a Western vacationer both by his Americanized clothing and the red Chrysler convertible he drives, *Jungle Boys* will develop this association further: the sightseers on safari arrive in a Jeep Grand Cherokee, subliminally connecting the colonization of Africa to cultural mythologies of the conquest of the American West. Recent work on the genre of the *Bergfilm* has analogously emphasized the environmental impact of its complicity with early iterations of what today might be considered ecotourism. I would go so far as to submit that film is the touristic technology par excellence, allowing both the visitation and projection of foreign places from the comfort of one's own home—particularly in the case of pornography like *Boytrópolis*, which was sold on tape (or later on DVD, or pirated on the internet) to be viewed in private. What is notable about the landscapes portrayed in *Boytrópolis*, then, is how utterly unremarkable they are. Rather than the dramatic vistas of the mountain film, *Boytrópolis* is set among small, nondescript green hills that to the average eye could be just about anywhere in Europe. Timothy Morton notes how neoliberal greenwashing pursues *Lebensraum* in an overly literal translation (“living room”) “as if ecology were about rearranging the furniture.”⁵⁶ To whatever extent Hammerschmidt's pornographic colonization of Central Europe dramatizes or reproduces such earlier models of German territorial expansionism, it does so as a domestic and domesticating exercise.

Conclusion: Dissolving Dystopia

If I have focused repeatedly on the filmic grammar of the dissolve throughout this essay it is because I suspect that *Boytrópolis* is essentially a film under erasure: the utopian-pornotopian aspiration of its allegorical representation of Prague and the promise of freely available, naturally concupiscent Eastern boys is undone by a self-critical representation of this erotic Shangri-La, and the dependence on its endemic intoxicant reads as a metaphor for the potentially addictive nature of pornographic fantasy. The generic form is what turns the film dystopian, as desired bodies quite literally dissolve into thin air (fig. 1). As in Capra, this unmasking of the illusion of youth conversely offers ontological reassurance of the fantastical premise of the utopia at hand; as in Lang, it provides the pleasure of its spectacular dismantling. I would go so far as to suggest that as a kind of

55. As Hall notes of Czech gay porn studios, “The names of the actors . . . are a linguistic hodge-podge, which seem designed to convey a generic sense of Europeaness” (“Social Change,” 330).

56. Morton, *Ecology without Nature*, 110, 109.



Figure 1. Denied his juice, a boy glows neon green and dissolves into a cloud of smoke. Image still from *Boyropolis*.



money shot—the climactic distillation of a body into a cloud of cum—this moment has the exact opposite effect of its apparent function: rather than resulting in disillusionment, the visual satisfaction it delivers definitively suspends any distinction between plot and action, between narrative problem and utopian sexual solution. Converting directly from a solid into a gas, from an erotic object into a plot device, from the reality of the profilmic event into the fantastical cinematic imaginary, the pornographic body has been sublimated in the strictest sense.

After all, Hammerschmidt can only take his critique so far; the film wouldn't work as pornography if its eco-imperialist premise failed to arouse. *Boyropolis* ends on a fantastic note: fleeing the sight of this vaporization, Martin awakens in his car, cigarette

still lit, and concludes that it was all a dream. But driving off again after his postcoital smoke he sees along the roadside a lone boy in a loincloth who hauntingly calls out his name. The heterotopia will not be contained. This is perhaps the most important implication of the dissolve: the breakdown of the boundary between fantasy and reality. Homotopias like Boytropolis don't see themselves as subcultures but rather as the institution of the cultural tout court.⁵⁷ For Anahid Neressian, it is the reliance on "lapsarian themes" that situates "Anthropocenic plots on a cultural continuum with utopian ones" and accounts for the "nearly tautological rapport between utopia and dystopia, utopia's lurid other."⁵⁸ But in its eroticization of nature Boytropolis at once unwrites the declensionist narrative of a fall from nature to culture and refuses to allow reactionary imaginaries of ethno-ecological sameness to remain a thing of the past.

IAN FLEISHMAN is associate professor of cinema and media studies and German at the University of Pennsylvania. He has published extensively on topics ranging from the Baroque to contemporary cinema. His first monograph, *An Aesthetics of Injury: The Narrative Wound from Baudelaire to Tarantino*, was the winner of the Northeast Modern Language Association Book Award.

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57. Kemp also sees what he calls Homotopia as "both utopic and heterotopic in the Foucauldian sense: a chimerical place whose function is to disturb, disrupt, dissolve" (*Homotopia?*, 30). But whereas Kemp's is a future-oriented project aimed at radical sexual democratization, I hope to have demonstrated here that the homotopian already has a long history in the cultural imaginary and is neither as radical nor as disruptive as it may initially appear.

58. Neressian, "Utopia's Afterlife," 93–94.

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