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EARLY STAGE

UTOPIAN IMAGINARY OF URBAN PERIPHERIES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ANTHROPOCENE´S CULTURAL CONCEPT

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

IMAGERY, PERIPHERY, ANTHROPOCENE

DDR STATEMENT

How can the potential of cooperatively produced speculative images be adapted through the lens of the Anthropocene´s cultural concept and used as a strategy for reflections on new forms of human environments outside dense urban agglomerations?

In the field of urban design is a need for new design strategies concerning the adaptation and mitigation of "hyperobjects" such as climate change and urbanization, how Timothy Morton calls it. This claim entails the opportunity to speculate about alternative urbanisms that convey between the existing dichotomy of dense city centers and low-dense single-family housing areas that both fail to encounter those challenges.

As the state of research, the Anthropocene´s cultural concept [Trischler, Horn, Morton], assemblage theory [Deleuze, McFarlane], urban geography and landscape theories like the concept of "Zwischenstadt" or "landscape urbanism" are considered relevant for this design driven research. While there are design strategies and experimental urbanization models found in Italian [Branzi, Vigano], Dutch [Geuze, Sijmons, etc.] and Anglo-saxon context (Waldheim, Corner), there is a knowledge gap of German design projects that tackle the intrinsic connectedness of settlements and landscape on equal footing beyond urban agglomerations.

The spatial aspects of the Anthropocene's cultural concept - such as the entanglements between nature and culture - are used as methodological approach. The speculative design imagery investigates "ambiguous edges, incomplete forms and unresolved narratives" as potential spaces that comprise the future human and nonhuman demands. This might lead towards a reassessment and better understanding of existing urbanisms and a speculation about potential ecological effectiveness of urban peripheries.

ABSTRACT

Using spatial aspects of the Anthropocene's social concept as methodology - such as the manifold entanglements between human and nonhuman environments - promises to develop architecture and urban design projects beyond common sustainability arguments of re-densification and land-use reduction.

The design driven research is located beyond dense urban agglomerations in Germany, representing the spatial boundaries between man-made landscapes and built environments, the frontline of the modernistic dichotomy between nature and culture.

Large-scale utopian imagery is chosen as a method to encounter the scale problem and viewpoints that are inherent in the anthropogenic arguments and to process, manage and narrate the inherent entanglements in this research. Moreover, imaginary serves as an interdisciplinary, multi-cultural device and thus may contribute to related fields and future urban-development processes.

The imaginary is developed within a collaborative work process. The co-authorship is used as a method to inform and develop a multi-perspective outcome.

The Anthropocene's Cultural Concept

Geographers identified the last century as the starting point of a new geological time - the Anthropocene. But besides understanding it as a man-made epoch only, according to Helmuth Trischler[1], it is much more than that. It is a narrative social concept which links deep time perspectives with human responsibilities. Therefore Eva Horn argues that there is a need for new aesthetics of the social concept as method by identifying three challenges: "(1) latency, the fact that the transformation of the world is happening not in the form of cataclysmic events but in imperceptible and unpredictable processes; (2) entanglement, the fact that the modern separation between the human and "the world" has dissolved into uncanny dependencies, unintended consequences and unpredictable side-effects; (3) a clash of scales, the fact that the environmental crisis of the Anthropocene unfolds on very different spatial, temporal and quantitative scales." [2]

These parameters challenge existing social concepts like dichotomies between nature and culture, object and subject and the immanence of matter vs. exteriority of mind. They blur boundaries of common antagonisms and ask for a new connectedness and circularities.

Peripheries and Assemblage Theory

The design driven research focuses on human settlements beyond dense urban agglomerations. Therefore it aims at peripheries, "Zwischenstadt" areas and the German countryside because they represent the maximized boundary between (man-made) landscapes and built environments. These "urbanisms" are often described as inefficient, a waste of land, expensive infrastructure and unecological. Yet, the existing amalgamation - housing typologies in the immediate neighborhood of local recreation areas, zones of nature and landscape protection, food and energy production, commercial space and infrastructure - suits the research question particularly well due to its immanent spatial complexities.
The Deleuzian concept of assemblage thinking provides a philosophical and methodological framework for this by using networks, systems and processes to describe and determine those urban conditions[3]. In architectural theory, peripheral and suburban areas have been theorized and examined as well[4]. Nevertheless, there are only a few spatial (German) designs that focus on those issues, particularly on the ecological potentials of low-density urbanisms.

„Demzufolge darf das ‚Bauen' nicht als Eingriff in die Natur und Landschaft verstanden werden, sondern muss als Keim einer Veränderung verstanden werden, die langfristig wiederum zu neuen schutzwürdigen Räumen und Flächen führt." [English translation: "As a result, 'building' must not be understood as an intervention in nature and the landscape, but

Roth M. & Kopper M. (2013), „green - the desired city"

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[1] Trischler, H. (2016). The Anthropocene: A Challenge for the History of Science, Technology, and the Environment. NTM International Journal of History and Ethics of Natural Sciences, Technology and Medicine, 24(3), 309–335.

[2] Horn, Eva, In: Dürbeck, G. (2020). The Anthropocenic Turn. In The Anthropocenic Turn. p. 160.

[3] Deleuze, G. / Guattari, F. (2013). a thousand plateaus capitalism and schizophrenia. In Deleuze & Guattari.

[4] u.a. Sieverts, Th. (1997/2001) Zwischenstadt. Zwischen Ort und Welt, Raum und Zeit, Stadt und Land. Basel – Boston – Berlin: Birkhäuser.

as the seed of a change that in the long term leads to new spaces and areas that are worthy of protection"][5]

Therefore we believe that multi-scale spatial design experimentations can contribute to the discourse and to the state of knowledge in Germany. The design driven research investigates a new kind of living by looking at nature and culture on an equal basis and to generate synergies in the regeneration of the rural and the suburban landscape. Furthermore, in the context of sustainability and ecology arguments it offers new perspectives beyond re-densification of existing neighborhoods, land-use reduction and expenditures of protective areas.

This research shows different aspects of several speculative design projects beyond dense urban agglomerations that challenge conventional settlement structures by testing the anthropogenic and assemblage knowledge.

Large-scale Utopian Imagery as Design and Research Based Method

In her book "Utopia as a Method" Ruth Levitas[6] argues to reconsider utopia as a distinctive, yet suppressed method that can be used as a heuristic device for exploring possible futures in a dialogical and reflexive way. Furthermore, according to her arguments, utopian imagery has the potential to be a critical instrument for knowledge transfer and therefore becomes a "scientific" tool. It eventually overcomes the limitation of being a finished original (or goal) and can be expanded towards a participatory process with creation-evaluation cycles.

Another aspect is the method of representation and questions concerning different points of views. Martin Heidegger described in 1935 this as "Sichversetzenkönnen"[7]. Heidegger's arguments are influenced from the environmental theory by Jakob von Uexküll who described the relationships, interactions and effects between inner and outer worlds of animals that lead towards a perception of complex and fluid interconnectedness of species and objects. Today, Francois Roche from the architecture office New-Territories/R&Sie(n) argues therefore for positioning oneself into a "weak position".

"Are you able to take a position from inside, when you are in a position of servitude to the system you are trying to transform? That is, to lose the visibility of what you are doing and to accept a degree of uncertainty."[8]

Large-scale imagery is chosen as a method to encounter the scale problem, levels of details and the different point of views that are inherent in the anthropogenic arguments. Furthermore, it serves as an interdisciplinary, multi-cultural device that includes the "viewer" rather than consolidating a classical relation between artwork and observer towards a spatial experience.

KOPPERROTH (2020), „micro-agriculture housing - BB2070"

[5] Neumann K. / Sieverts Th.: Das Meßdorfer Feld, konzeptionelle Ansätze für eine langfris-tige und ökologisch orientierte Sicherung und Weiterentwicklung, Planungsgutachten für die Stadt Bonn, Mai 1995

[6] Levitas, R. (2013). Utopia as Method. In Utopia as Method.

[7] Heidegger, M. (1983). Gesamtausgabe, Band 29/30: Grundbegriffe der Methaphysik. Welt - Endlichkeit - Einsamkeit.

[8] Roche F. in conversation with Turpin E. in: Turpin E. (2013). Architecture in the Anthropocene, Open Humanities Press

„Wir sehnen uns nach dem Blick von oben, der uns das Gefühl gibt, über den Dingen zu stehen. Doch um uns ökologisch zu verhalten, brauchen wir nicht noch mehr über Ökologie zu lernen. Wir sind ökologisch, indem wir atmen, Felder bestellen, Tiere und Pflanzen essen und in Seen baden. Erst wenn unser Denken die Vogelperspektive aufgibt, in der wir selbst der blinde Fleck sind, werden wir auch verstehen können, dass wir unauflöslich mit unserer nichtmenschlichen Umwelt verquickt sind. [English translation: We long for the view from above that gives us the feeling of standing above things. But to behave ecologically, we don't need to learn more about ecology. We are ecological by breathing, cultivating fields, eating animals and plants and bathing in lakes. Only when our thinking gives up the bird's eye view, in which we ourselves are the blind spot, will we also be able to understand that we are inextricably intertwined with our non-human environment."][9]

Collaboration, Co-Production, Co-Authorship /
the Art to Contradict and Complement

The two authors have worked together since 2008 as teachers, researchers and as partners of their own architecture and urban design office in Berlin. Collaborative image production is one essential design method of their collaborative design practice and also stands in the foreground of this design driven research. The well-rehearsed production process of these images passes several phases, amongst them: discussing, writing, sketching, drawing 2D, modelling 3D, testing view-points, light and materials, further image editing, scaling, framing and cropping. Some work sequences are carried out individually, others mutually. They are examined before they reach the next design stage. Each phase of the image production involves its own design implications. The two office partners work equally, sometimes staggered and sometimes at the same time but mostly in direct succession in individual storylines contradicting and complementing each other. This process is documented in a permanent chat history.

"The author - or what I have called the 'author-function' - is undoubtedly only one of the possible specifications of the subject and, considering past historical transformations, it appears that the form, the complexity, and even the existence of this function are far from immutable. We can easily imagine a culture where discourse would circulate without any need for an author."[10]

If the question of authorship arises in the context of a scientific work, then, in this case of image production, authorship cannot be clearly assigned to one person. Alternative categories of authorship have to be considered. On the one hand, the work needs to comply with examination regulations and assigned to "two individual authors" and on the other hand one could speak of a shared "artistic identity".
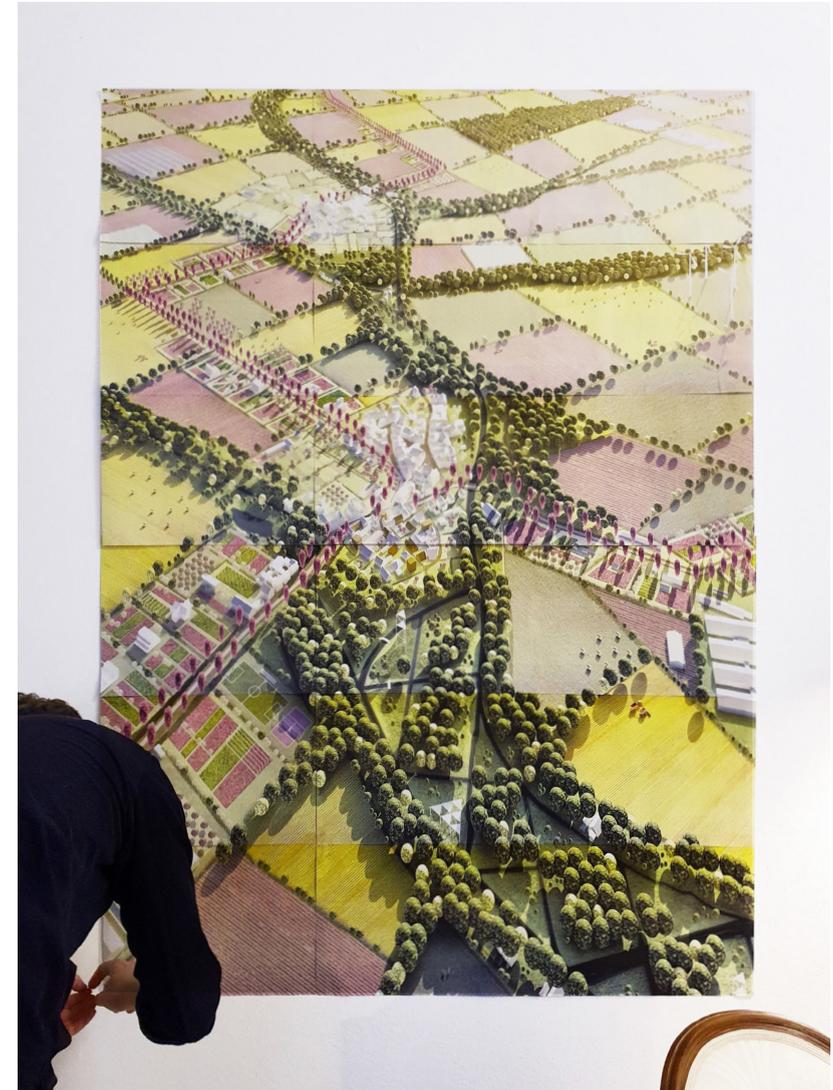
KOPPERROTH (2020), „Landgut 2050" (mounted A3 printouts)

[9] Morton, T. (2019). Ökologisch sein. Matthes & Seitz Berlin. Original title: Morton, T. (2018). Being Ecological (Pelican Books)

[10] Foucault, M. / Faubion, J. D. (1998). Aesthetics, method, and epistemology. New York: The New Press.