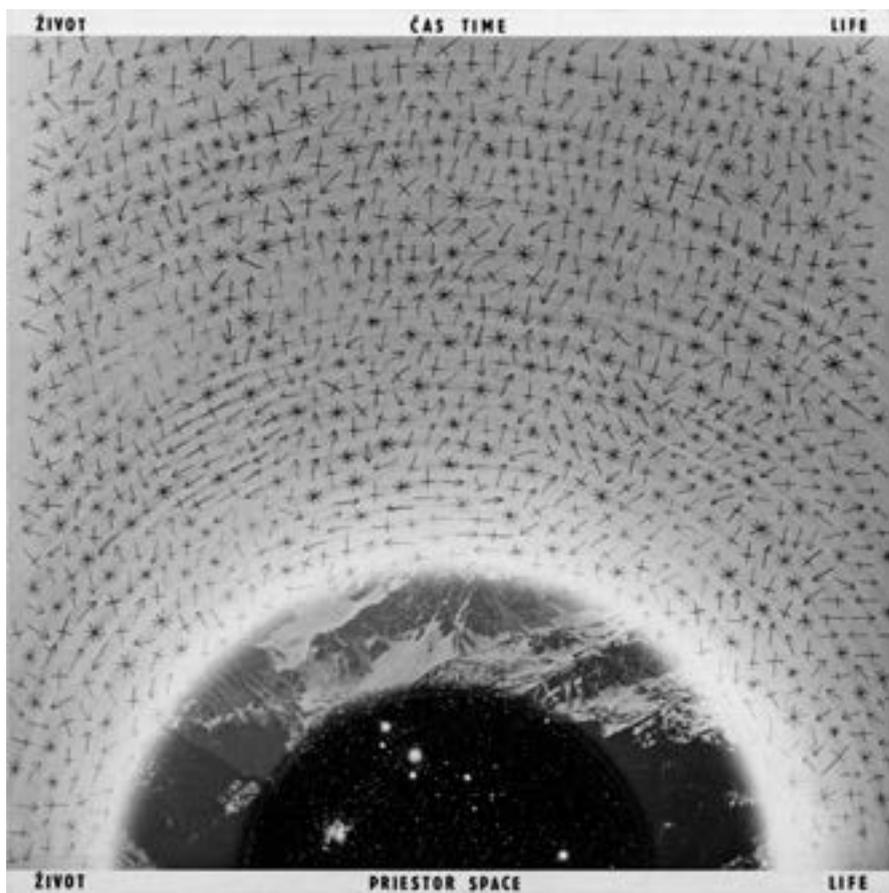


# kritische berichte

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1 Rudolf Sikora, *Space*, 1979, photograph, collage, paper on cardboard, 29.5 x 29.5 cm, from the series of 24 illustration *About the World* (1973/1979), Slovak National Gallery, Bratislava  
Having worked with the theme since 1970, the Slovak artist Rudolf Sikora was one of the first artists to systematically reflect on the problems of ecology in the «Anthropocene», and its impact on human life, as well as the relationships between man, space and nature in a global perspective.

Thanks to a growing acknowledgment of the environmental catastrophes that threaten human existence, the subject of «nature» in art and architecture resounds louder now than it has done since the 19th century. This is evident through the ever-increasing density of art exhibitions, publications and critical texts, as well as built and landscape architectural projects, dedicated to nature and the environment. The significance of these themes in art and architecture is also the subject of this issue of *kritische berichte* «(Post)Nature / Natur(T)Räume». Our title refers to the revisions of «Romantic nature» brought about by contemporary analysis of the interactions between man and the world. It also considers the ways art and architectural practices envision and translate these new concepts.

At the heart of this nature/culture revision is the topic of the Anthropocene. The Anthropocene, or «age of the human», denotes how—industrial—civilisation has changed the Earth in ways comparable only to geological processes. For instance, the planet's balance of natural elements such as carbon and nitrogen, the biodiversity of our lands and seas, the Earth's water cycles and its temperature regulation – all systems that evolved slowly over millennia—have been quickly and forever altered by human activity. The start of the Anthropocene era is often associated with the development of agriculture 10.000 years ago, and/or the Industrial Revolution at the beginning of the 19th century. However, as noted by David Farrier, philosopher and researcher in Environmental Humanities, there is a consensus that the «great acceleration», which started in the 1950s and which was characterised by a dramatic jump in consumption, rising global populations, an explosion in the use of plastics and the collapse of agricultural diversity, was the definitive turning point from the Holocene to the Anthropocene era.<sup>1</sup>

After a period of uncertainty since the British chemist James Lovelock first fo-retold the Anthropocene in his 1970 *Gaia Hypothesis* (which was initially derided), the concept is now officially recognised. In 2001, more than 100 scientists signed a declaration that concurred with Lovelock's findings: «no aspect of nature can be understood away from the system in which it plays a part. Similarly, nature itself can no longer be understood as a point away from human activity.»<sup>2</sup> In June 2015, Pope Francis dedicated his second encyclical to the topic. In *Laudato Si. De communi domo colenda: On Care For Our Common Home*, the Pope criticises consumerism and reckless development and laments environmental degradation. Later that year, on 8 December, the Vatican projected photographs of endangered animals, including the giant panda and the leopard, onto the iconic St. Peter's Basilica. The screening included images from the *Photo Arc* series by the renowned American photographer Joel Sartore. In this biodiversity archive – that aims to bring attention to the plight of animals at the hands of human beings – Sartore intends to document all 12.000

captive species, of which he has already photographed 5.000 in over 40 countries. Also in 2015, the former President of the United States Barack Obama televised an interview with the veteran British broadcaster and naturalist Sir David Attenborough, in which they discussed humankind's impact on the earth. Obama subsequently launched the *Clean Power Plan*, which sought to limit greenhouse gas emissions from coal-fired power plants, a significant step on the road to environmental harmony from the world's biggest consumer of fossil fuels.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the 2015 United Nations Conference on Climate Change in Paris (COP21) was a tipping point for global awareness of humanity's role in climate change. Indeed, as noted by the British curator and researcher Barnaby Drabble, COP21 was also a tipping point for art, as an unprecedented number of environmentally engaged artists involved themselves in the summit.<sup>4</sup> These artists used a vast range of creative strategies and conceptual approaches to consider the diversity of connections between the human and the non-human. Many moved beyond Romantic visualisations of nature as a pure realm – a Garden of Eden – upon earth, while others, despite having ascribed themselves to a post-Natural-approach, played on our Romantic predilections so as to heighten engagement.

Naturalists such as Jonathan Bate, Karl Kroeber and Onno Oerlemans,<sup>5</sup> as well as geographers such as Neil Evernden, Max Oelschlaeger and I. G. Simmons,<sup>6</sup> have illuminated connections between Romanticism and ecology. These writers contend that the origins of today's green thinking are present in the ideas of European Romanticism, sometimes more specifically in British and American Romanticism. However, for many contemporary eco-political theorists, the relationship between Romanticism and ecology is problematic. The American art historian and eco-critic T. J. Demos highlights the «unnaturalness» of places imagined with the Romantic eye, cognisant as it was with a Judaeo-Christian conception of the wilderness and Kantian ideas of the sublime: «nature as a distinct realm that was pure—spiritual even—and which needed protection from mankind, pollution and economic exploitation is not only «unnatural» but goes as far as to reify nature.»<sup>7</sup> The reification of nature is central to the thinking of the British eco-philosopher Timothy Morton. In *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*, 2007, Morton argues that Romantic visions of nature are not only socially constructed but hinder environmental thinking, as Demos paraphrases: «the very idea of nature has become too ideologically compromised to warrant continued conceptual and aesthetic usage of the term. This doesn't mean that there isn't an environment filled with life forms; rather, it insists that «nature» can't be objectified as separate and external because living and non-living objects are embedded within a mesh of social, political and phenomenal relations.»<sup>8</sup> Thus, for Morton, in order to overcome Cartesian conceptualisations of nature as «other», we should celebrate living in a post-natural age. Morton uses the term «hyperobjects» to describe things that are «massively distributed in time and space as to transcend spatiotemporal specificity», such as climate change.<sup>9</sup> It is interesting that, even as Morton moves away from romantic perceptions through concepts such as hyperobjects, their inherently transcendent character continues to orbit romantic ideas of the sublime.

While some contemporary views of Romanticism might be reductive, the idea of going beyond Romantic concepts of nature is at the heart of imagining the Anthropocene. Indeed, it is becoming increasingly impossible to separate «nature» from human activity, as ecology gets further intertwined with economics and law. Thus,

in contrast to Romanticism's Cartesian dialectics, today's visualisations of nature address the increasingly complex intersections between nature and culture. Such junctions, due to their abstraction and scale, can be difficult to comprehend and to relate to in a way that is more than merely intellectual. However, artists and architects can give shape to often invisible aspects of nature and ecology, bringing abstract concepts such as climate change closer to human experience. Recently, these artistic practices and their ecological impact have been addressed by a growing number of publications. Particularly notable among recent books are Frank Fehrenbach and Matthias Krüger's *Der achte Tag: Naturbilder in der Kunst des 21. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin 2016; T. J. Demos' *Decolonizing Nature: Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology*, Berlin 2016; Charles Waldheim's *Landscape as Urbanism: A General Theory*, Princeton 2016; and *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters Among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies* edited by Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin, London 2015.<sup>10</sup> These titles cover the broad spectrum of topics associated with art, nature, and ecology, issues that also form the basis of this volume of *kritische berichte* «(Post)Nature / Natur(T)räume». The included articles, which discuss how art and architecture imagine intersections between nature, humans and the environment, seek to add to this complex and engaging conversation.

Some of these articles, such as Verena Kuni's *Gehäuse im Grün*, Barbara Costa's *Eugenic Garden City* and Fiona Curran's *Losing Ground in a «no knowledge zone»*, reflect on the idea of nature as an imagined paradise and sanctuary in which to escape from reality. The ways in which perceptions of nature are manipulated through contemporary photography are addressed by Bruno Lessard's *After Nature: Aerial Photography in the Anthropocene* and Anna Volkmar's *Dreams of Post(nuclear) nature in Photography of the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone*, articles that also critique how art aestheticises Anthropocene degradation. Seraina Renz and Demian Berger's *Im Blick des Tieres*, Larissa Kikol's *Religion, Umweltschutz und Kunst* and Ursula Ströbele's *Skulpturale Rhetoriken der Natur* encourage us to reflect on the moral, political and ethical implications of our relationship to the world around us. The last three articles of this issue, Ana Bilbao and Pavel Reichl's *Between Earth and the World*, Svava Riesto and Ellen Braae's *Designing Urban Natures* and Pathmini Ukwattage's *Pflanzenvorhang und Felswand*, illuminate the ways that nature itself is both a subject and material for artistic and architectural practice. Overall, the articles encourage us to reflect on what constitutes environmental art and architecture, and on how these practices can shape environmental consciousness and action to create positive relations between us human beings and the world in which we live.

## Anmerkungen

- 1 David Farrier, «Deep time's uncanny future is full of ghostly human traces» in: *Aeon*, 31 October 2016, <https://aeon.co/ideas/deep-time-s-uncanny-future-is-full-of-ghostly-human-traces>, accessed March 2017.
- 2 Cormac Cullinan, *Wild Law: A Manifesto for Earth Justice*, Devon 2003, p. 4.
- 3 Unfortunately, on 28 March 2017 current President of the United States of America, Donald Trump signed an executive order to overturn the Clean Power Plan.
- 4 Barnaby Drabble, «Contemporary Art at the Tipping Point—Environmentally Engaged Art at (and after) the COP21 Conference on Climate Change» in: *Seismopolite*, June 2016, <http://www.seismopolite.com/contemporary-art-at-the-tipping-point-environmentally-engaged-art-at-and-after-cop21-conference-on-climate-change>, accessed June 2016.
- 5 See Jonathan Bate, *Romantic Ecology. Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition*, London/New York 1991; ders., *The Song of the Earth*, Cambridge/MA 2000; Karl Kroeber, *Ecological Literary Criticism*, New York 1994; and Onno Oerlemans, *Romanticism and the Materiality of Nature*, Toronto 2002.
- 6 See Neil Evernden, *The Social Creation of Nature*, Baltimore 1992; Max Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness*, New Haven 1991; and Peter J. Atkins, Brian Roberts and Ian G. Simmons, *People, Land and Time: An Historical Introduction to the Relations Between Landscape, Culture and Environment*, London/New York 1998.
- 7 T. J. Demos, «Art After Nature: The Post-Natural Condition» in: *Artforum*, April 2012, pp. 191–197, p. 194.
- 8 Ibid, p. 195.
- 9 Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, Cambridge/MA 2010, p. 130
- 10 Among other publications to be mentioned are: Hans Dickel, *Kunst als zweite Natur, Studien zum Naturverständnis in der modernen Kunst*, Berlin 2006 and the forthcoming *Sustainability and Peaceful Coexistence for the Anthropocene* edited by Pasi Heikkurinen, Abingdon/New York 2017. See also (Re) *Designing Nature. Aktuelle Positionen der Naturgestaltung in Kunst und Landschaftsarchitektur*, edited by Florian Matzner, Iris Meder und Susanne Witzgall, Ostfildern 2010.