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Postindustrial Funfair Operators

On Heike Mutter and Ulrich Genth's Tiger & Turtle – Magic Mountain

“To be pleased means to say Yes.” With this formula Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno distilled their reflections on the phenomenon of organized entertainment. In their famous chapter on the “Culture Industry” in *Dialectic of the Enlightenment* (1944) the two social theorists condemned every commercial leisure enterprise as a bare-faced bid for escape. To take up with the leisure industry seemed dangerous to them, not just because it meant closing one's eyes to “wretched reality” but more importantly because it meant abandoning “the last remaining thought of resistance.”¹ Today we might be somewhat put off by the rigor with which Horkheimer and Adorno condemned all of popular culture—from film to jazz music—as mass manipulation, but the roots of this radical rejection lie in the by no means outdated conviction that industrialization was accompanied not only by a heretofore unknown separation of work and leisure but also by a history of alienation.

In this regard, Horkheimer and Adorno saw the leisure industry simply as an extension of late-capitalist work or, if you will, the other side of one and the same questionable coin.² Admittedly, at least since the advent of the New Economy, these interrelations have been radically displaced. The problem is no longer one of the dialectic and the mutual conditions of work and leisure but rather their entanglement—the lack of separation between the two.

With these considerations in mind, the roller-coaster-like structure Tiger & Turtle—designed by the artist duo Heike Mutter and Ulrich Genth for the sealed landfill of a former Duisburg zinc works—appears in a shimmering light. The sight of a work of this sort, surrounded by the steel works and container port of this steel-worker's city, lights up an entire arsenal of symbolic connections.

One might speculate that this landscape sculpture has something to do with paying homage to the amusement park—or rather, ask whether it critically recalls the aforementioned relationship between work and the leisure industry. But another perspective might be possible as well.

This extremely appealing aesthetic object with its elegantly alluring curves and accessible viewing platform might also be seen as a sort of monumental marketing logo for the otherwise all-too-gray remnants of an industrial city. For in the evening, as one drives through the nearby streets of the Duisburg-Wanheim Container Port, the elegant and labyrinthine steel construction comes across as a crowning jewel, thanks to its appealing nocturnal illumination.

But perhaps it is at least misguided to embark on a symbolic reading of Tiger & Turtle. After all, here is a construction that is by its very nature accessible and usable, one that invites residents to observe their city from an unusual new terrain. Is it, then, a tangible leisure facility rather than a mere symbol? Here at the latest it becomes clear that the piece elicits a range of different interpretations. What follows is a closer look at three possible readings.

I. Logo and Monument

Much can be said of the idea that the Tiger & Turtle project serves as a kind of sign or monumental logo. This at least is its intended long-range effect. Nor presumably do the Duisburg city authorities, who commissioned the work and called an invited competition in 2009, object to this interpretation. After all, the project was conceived as a so-called “landmark” within the framework of the “Ruhr.2010 – European Capital of Culture” campaign. The German word “Landmarke” had already been introduced in the Ruhr area a few years before to denote similar art projects. (Initially the word referred to buildings and topographical features, readily visible from water or air, which helped orient pilots and seafarers from afar.) In the Ruhr area these art projects are among the core features of the region's overall urban and regional landscape plan. Perhaps the best-known example here is Richard Serra's *Bramme für das Ruhrgebiet* (Slab for the Ruhr), built in 1998 on the Schurenbachhalde, a spoil heap in the Altenessen district of Essen.³ It is no coincidence that a great many urban wastelands and territories left behind by heavy industry have been granted new functions and meaning with the help of artistic interventions. Slogans such as Ruhr.2010's motto “Change

through Culture—Culture through Change” help supply the appropriate framework. In the context of this oft-declared structural change, Tiger & Turtle, too, is primarily concerned with the goal of expressing the region’s “mutability and power to transform” (Wandlungsfähigkeit und Transformationskraft)—that, at least, is how the competition description phrased it in the Duisburg initiative that resulted in Mutter and Genth’s winning entry. Moreover, the competition stipulated that the landmark would be lighted at night. To this extent, it was among the stated goals to create here a monument that would generate an identity.

Now, some doubts may be raised about whether or not this sort of approach is still topical. It is not without reason that the monument’s appropriateness as a form of expression for pluralistic society is increasingly being called into question. ⁴ One reason for this may be seen in the fact that, as the Marxist urban and spatial theorist Henri Lefèbvre claimed, every monument “is essentially repressive.”

And yet Tiger & Turtle presents us with a monument that seems astonishingly appropriate for this particular place. ⁵ Moving through the surrounding streets, one could hardly wish this neighborhood anything more than such moments of identification—*islands of identity*—that transform this sprawling urban space into a “place to be.” Lefèbvre for all his skepticism at the same time also considered the monument to be “the only conceivable or imaginable site of collective (social) life.

It controls people, yes, but does so to bring them together. Beauty and monumentality go hand in hand.” ⁶ Monuments, he continued, “project onto the land a conception of the world, whereas the city projected (and continues to project) social life.... At the very heart of a space in which the characteristics of a society are most recognizable and commonplace, monuments embody a sense of transcendence, a sense of being elsewhere. They have always been utopic.” ⁷

To set Tiger & Turtle against this background, however, is to pose all the more vigorously the question of what this monument—if it is indeed a monument—is being identified with. The leisure industry? The critique of it? Is it a self-reflexive celebration of steel construction? A number of very different levels seem to overlap here, and most likely it involves a sort of second-degree postmodern symbolism.

II Happiness Machines and a Vague Sense of Dizziness

The image of a roller coaster certainly brings to mind associations with industrialized entertainments: amusement parks, carnivals, funfairs—those spectacular, fantastic places that promise temporary happiness and are peopled by an entourage of showmen, jugglers, and acrobats. The roller coaster in particular has deservedly come to stand for the emotional world associated with these places. Its sensational loop turns everything topsy-turvy, making it a device for emotional fluctuations of its very own kind. Not only does it create an intoxication of speed but it also generates the sort of basic thrill that psychologists say plays on our fear of losing control. ⁸

Of course roller coasters are hardly recent inventions. Celebrated as sensations at the great fairs around the turn of the last century, they soon became part of the standard repertoire of the numerous Luna Parks springing up everywhere at the time—among others in Duisburg and Dortmund in 1912. ⁹ In the Dortmund Fredenbaum Lunapark, for example, the then world-famous carousel builder Hugo Haase installed rides known as the “Gebirgsbahn” (mountain railway) and the “Wasserrutsch- bahn” (waterslide). ¹⁰ Only a few years earlier, Haase had constructed and toured Germany with his first transportable roller coaster, which he had christened “Deep to Deep” with an eye toward the American market. Photos of the day show a sprucely dressed public in elegant hats and frock coats, making clear that visitors were by no means limited to the working class. This picture hardly seems compatible with today’s fairgrounds, and such old images lend an unexpected dignity in retrospect to the concept of the amusement park. Against this background one might almost consider Mutter and Genth’s sculpture to be a nostalgic recollection of a bygone era’s classic art of engineering—an art of engineering that also celebrates itself with new “happiness machines.”

Seen from up close, however, the Duisburg structure’s formal language is quite distinct from that of a classic roller

coaster. It is both leaner and more complex—leaner because it is not loaded down by the typical side structures, lettering, and related décor and therefore looks lighter, more filigree. But Mutter and Genth's construction is also more complex because of the way the coils overlay each other, tracing an impressively lovely and harmonic movement in space—a movement that consistently appears to be speeding up or slowing itself down. In this way the eye can perceive different degrees of speed. And at the same time, the perpetually looping form lends something self-reflexive to the whole.

III. Land in Sight

There is something innately appealing about loading down this highly aesthetic object with an arsenal of sentimental and symbolic implications. Very different realms of meaning seem to overlap each other. Here a classic impression of form encounters the imagination of a childlike sense of happiness. Different levels of speed, perceptions of time, and bodily experiences are intertwined, as with the “Tiger” and the “Turtle.” The minute you climb inside the structure, your expectation of experiencing that specific thrill of danger associated with a careening roller coaster jars up against a completely different kind of perception—one that is factual, corporeal. You begin moving through it, slowly, step by step, and realize that nothing could be less like a ride on a roller coaster than the painstaking scaling of this sweeping structure.

Indeed, it seems decisive that Tiger & Turtle is not an object only to be looked at but rather also one to be appropriated through a site visit. You must climb the structure in order to see the city from the top of it. To do so, you move along narrow footbridges, possibly with butterflies in your stomach and a vague sense of unease when looking down. If you had perhaps asked yourself from a distance how the loop could be surmounted, you find on arrival a simple barrier that obliges you to turn around. Unlike the playground-style slides and other accessible amusement devices familiar to us through Carsten Höller's work, all conventional expectations of amusement are immediately frustrated.

A vast view of the Ruhr area's industrial landscape opens out from atop Tiger & Turtle's steel bridges—far wider than from the spoil heap alone. In clear weather one can see as far as Mülheim an der Ruhr and Oberhausen. One looks out over the renaturalized meadow onto a purification plant, tennis courts, and well-to-do villas backed by wooded areas; a bit further to the north are single-family homes of more recent vintage, alongside workers' estates that embrace yet another social model. To the north and west are enormous company sites and the Rhine river behind its logistics center. Scrubby and marshy fallow lands lie in between. All in all, here is a seemingly endless urban conglomerate, developed and green. And yet the view has something lofty to it. Greatness and freedom overlap here with smallness and vulnerability. The steel structure is not equipped with places to linger, however. The narrow grated stairs seem instead to challenge you to trace your perspective on the world while you walk. For there is no beginning and no end.

It is a characteristic of lookout points that they offer a very distinct experience of time and space, and we have practically come to expect them to transform “an area” into “landscape”—that is, we recognize new sensory dimensions from up here. In his book *Landscape and Memory*, the British historian Simon Schama writes that it is myths and stories that first turn mere geology and vegetation into landscape—into a territory that means something to us and to which we attach a value. ¹¹ Considering that the Magic Mountain is a closed landfill, the very idea of taking an appreciative view would not at first seem an obvious place to start. Nor could the surrounding urban landscape be described as anything approaching classic notions of hominess or beauty. It is perhaps more appropriate to speak of this sealed-off waste dump, set between a container port and purifying plant, as an anti-landscape, a zone that in the best of worlds would not even exist.

Indeed, to transform this sort of place into a landscape in the emphatic sense of the word calls for a radical recoding. The great challenge facing all involved was to avoid the traps of mere prettification, compensation, or simply producing a fake. To have chosen this elegantly curving, accessible steel construction with its roller coaster associations—

symbolizing both the leisure industry and our changing states of emotion—can be seen as a successful trick. The work simultaneously uses, transforms, and disarms the mere implications of a parallel world, and of entertainment. It invites us to look at what is there. Nothing is embellished in the process. Instead, Tiger & Turtle puts a landscape on display in a way that is both realistic and at the same time confidently sentimental— a view of a landscape marked by civilization’s wounds and shortcomings. Despite this—or indeed because of it—we are subversively dared to regard this landscape and all the memories and realities that are inscribed in it with a newfound affection and sympathy. A stance like this toward the area’s postindustrial topography could even, finally, stimulate our imaginations into ceasing to conceive better worlds and instead picturing ways of bettering the one world that we actually have. It would therefore not be inappropriate to have a hot-dog stand right next to Mutter and Genth’s landscape sculpture. For this would hardly imply that we are “saying Yes” to everything.

1 “It is flight; not, as is asserted, flight from a wretched reality, but from the last remaining thought of resistance.” Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), trans. John Cumming (New York, 1993), p. 144.

2 Ibid.

3 The Duisburg counterpart to this would be Lutz Fritsch’s sculpture *Rheinorange*, completed in 1992 at the mouth of the Ruhr river. See the essays by Martin Warnke and Andreas Rossmann in this volume.

4 Here the debate surrounding Berlin’s Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe is cited as only one example. See my article “Der öffentliche Raum gehört den anderen: Postheroische Orte, Kaugummis und künstlerische Praxis als Wunschproduktion,” in *Die Zukunft des Öffentlichen: Multi- disziplinäre Perspektiven für eine Öffnung der Diskussion über das Öffentliche*, ed. Stephan A. Jansen et al. (Wiesbaden, 2007), pp. 211–42. See also Monika Wagner, “Die Parzellierung des öffentlichen Raums—oder Kunst als sozialer Kitt?,” in *Paradoxien des Öffentlichen: Über die Selbstorganisa- tion des Öffentlichen*, ed. Söke Dinkla and Karl Janssen (Nuremberg, 2008), pp. 24–33.

5 To judge the project as the product of neoliberal collaboration between art and city marketing—as happened, for example, with Olafur Eliasson’s *Water- falls* in New York—is to miss the point, the more so since Tiger & Turtle is a monument to be used and not simply looked at.

6 Henri Lefèbvre, *The Urban Revolu- tion* (1970), trans. Robert Bononno (Minneapolis, 2003), p. 21.

7 Ibid., p. 22.

8 Michael Balint, *Angstlust und Regression* (Stuttgart, 1999).

9 Sacha-Roger Szabo, *Rausch und Rummel: Attraktionen auf Jahr- märkten und in Vergnügungsparks: Eine soziolo- gische Kulturgeschichte* (Bielefeld, 2006).

10 See Ralf Ebert, “Der Lunapark im Fredenbaum,” in *8 Stunden sind kein Tag: Freizeit und Vergnügen in Dortmund 1870–1939*, ed. Gisela Franke (Heidelberg, 1993), pp. 126–30; Jürgen Weisser, *Zwischen Lustgarten und Lu- napark: Der Volksgarten in Nymphen- burg (1890–1916) und die Entwicklung der kommerziellen Belustigungsgärten* (Munich, 1998), p. 283, p. 287.

11 Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London, 1995).