

Are “Cities – made – from- Dreams” the better Cities? □ Thoughts on the Bethang-Project of Karsten Neumann

from Max Ackermann

Post-war Germany: Pop - singers were dedicating their songs to cities like Naples, Rimini or Roma, but – and this has been forgotten by now – they also sang about fictional places like „Adano“ or „Maratonga“. As long as it sounded like Italy and evoked feelings of longing and desire.

The artist Karsten Neumann also creates a city that is made from dreams. But he is doing so by applying a certain sensitivity for the bankruptcy of reality to which he reacts with dark humor, playfulness or deepest earnestness. Thereby, he is defending himself from the undue standards and requirements of normality, very similar to Pirandello in his drama “Six persons in search for an author“ „Life is full of senselessness,“ so, he says, “which - uncanny enough – do not even need to look like they are real because they are real.“

But we look around and what do we see? Three cities, - or one, depending on whether we want to perceive what is already reality for some and which others still see as fiction. But where exactly is the boundary? If we believe in what Karsten Neumann’s art is telling us, we constantly meet in everyday life the phenomenon that Robert Musil called “Form of Possibility“ . Indeed, we are already living in it. Are these different street names? ... different colours? ... are there other rules in existence? ... does all of this take a different, a new direction?

BETHANG? ... a somewhat awkward word, a strange name. – After some Google search you discover a Bethanga in Victoria, Australia and an identically named city in the south of Central Asia. There is a Bethang not far from Srinagar, between the borders of Pakistan and China. Thereby it is relatively near to Mount Saraswati in Himalya west, where we can find on it’s summit the Chandra Telescope ,where nowadays you can observe per webcam at any time in day and night how the weather around the globe is being observed and recorded.

But aside from associations, as adequate as they may be,(like high-tech/ webcam and nature/weather or globalization/google and developing countries/India) this a path that does not lead us anywhere or becomes relevant only at a later stage when we address the subject of partner cities.

The Bethang we will we talking about from now is has a different location or as a genius loci in Neumann’s fantasy. For Neumann it is already present tense, for others still a conjunction, or at best, futurum. It is a project of art and situated in Germany which means it is very close to us. It is a concept, which attempts to change the way we perceive cities and thereby changes these cities themselves.

In Munich, the street to Nürnberg is now the street to Bethang

Neumann starts right there where he is and initiates change from there. This means everybody around him lives already in Bethang ... or still in Nürnberg - for his B und E -, in Fürth - for his T und H - or in Erlangen – for his A, N und G. As far as Neumann is concerned the old cities have already been merged and where thereby transformed into something different. “Bethang is a Billion-Euro-project – think only about the amount of street signs that need to be changed, he smiles.

What drives an artist to propose a different city simply by his sheer will? Isn’t this a somewhat over - ambitious approach? And, is there not an attitude of a pattern long - time - passed which reminds us of solipsistic model cities, and totalitarian utopia driven by an overestimation of high –ego maniacs? Neumann does not shy away from an answer: “Bethang is not a project that has a demand on you but one of enthusiasm. Somewhere Bethang is already existing, you just have to find it..“

The ones who know it will be reminded of Italo Calvino’s book “The invisible cities“ („Le città invisibili“), in which Marco Polo tells the Kublai Kahn about places, which are actually unreal but tell us something about life as it is, comments, criticizes or- at least – show norms und normalities in a more critical light, less certain and less enduring. - And then there is also the master of fantasy from Argentina, Jorge Luis

Borges, who in 1941 published his novel "Tlön, Uqbar und Orbis Tertius" and, thereby, developed the idea that the sheer knowledge about another world already changes the existing one. Finally, the earth itself becomes what was a world of fantasy before.

Karsten Neumann views himself as a „process - oriented conceptual artist“ but is also creating objects and montages and paintings. He makes performances, writes letters and letters-to-the-editor and renames streets. But all his works of art and actions with a connection to Bethang derive from this parallel world where conditions and objectives are indeed a little bit different and are constantly moving ahead in all sorts of direction.

New York, New York – or: How art makes a difference

The dimensions of mankind are related to its surroundings and the effect of how we change our perception is often opening new dimensions.

So, out of all the possible ways to photograph a city like New York, Neumann choses a perspective from a knee – high focus (!), thereby avoiding the cliché of the "N.Y. Vertical": bigger/higher/broader – Is this the stair down to the subway? Are these pant's legs? Definitely, all this has nothing to do with skyscrapers.

Back in Bethang, an aluminium camping cup inspired him to do a drink - water - performance („panta rhei – everything is in flow“). And we realize: where do we still find drinking fountains in the old cities – free at our disposal? How many public toilets are there still around?

Or: Where are you still allowed to take a swim in public waters when you feel like it? Consequently, Neumann took was swimming – during another performance – in one of Bethang's rivers (strictly forbidden!) and - as a local newspaper commented the event -played the role of the "creative free – style swimmer" in the Pegnitz, .

Much of this relates to processing and retouching – e.g. when existing brochures or posters are changed "according to Bethang", when mail correspondence is commented or provided with a different address or stamp.

There are plenty of "finalized aspects of Bethang", which change when Neumann puts his hand on them – could be a montage or collage, a paint - over or digital refining. When a plastic moon from a throwaway piece rises above a postcard, when tourist attractions from 3 cities turn into a lepperello of one city. Because undoubtedly, Bethang could be a resort as well as a university town, could be medieval, baroque, romantic or Gruenderzeit; protestant, Huguenot and Jewish. Irritating, however, are the strange characters of letters (texts from a pack of smoke sticks as we will learn later on).

There is, for instance the figurehead of Bethang; a LED display with a logo like of arms of ancient times (a sketch of 3 cities that looks somewhat like the UK and broken dots which symbolize the separated cities of the past, and there is – on the back – side- a footprint of Neumann's son, like a commentary or an accentuation.

And it also makes sense to imagine a joint telephone directory of Bethang, pre - conceived by simple means, namely gluing together the existing ones of Nürnberg, Fürth and Erlangen in a 3-piece edition, however with a new digitally processed cover.

Neumann's favourite material are found objects, waste, civilisation's left - over, throwaways, negligible and lost pieces. With each one of these pieces he changes Nürnberg, Fürth and Erlangen into his vision of Bethang.

And quite often he approaches small things. So, he uses a cassette box – thrown away because they are not „State of the Art“ anymore in our society and fills it intuitively with pieces of colourful plastic: "Musickbox". There is a "painting" made out a found hubcap. One object is titled "moustache" and consists entirely of industrial and packaging ribbons. There is an old gorgonzola carton with collected plastic pieces. Plastic bottlenecks turn into shot – glasses, trays are create from wall – paint lids.

Neumann's concern is our relationship to nature: ecology, so to say. There is an object which consists of a poisonous canister found in one of Nürnberg's lakes in the middle of a natural resort - „Xmas_for_the_Fish“. Furthermore, he has decorated the canister with inward – turning electric Christmas candles.

The same importance as nature and resources is given to intercultural relations: There is a praying drum made from a dust - brush. There lies a wooden chain, similar to a rosary, decorated with colourful apparel. Neumann's unisex chain, for example his "Thaisticks" are colourful ornaments again from plastic. And after some souvenir sculptures were not meeting the requirements well enough they were transformed in the sense of a found – object manner. Thereby add – ons and insignia like a halo made from a round grinding ring were created.

The way to Bethang – an attempt of a chronology

In the mid - nineties Neumann went to a regular home – and garden appliance store (in German Baumarkt) and out of basic wooden broom – sticks, two apple peelers and shredded aluminum pieces he created the lamp "Baumarkt goes Tibet". Today, he does not like the spontaneously selected title anymore because he "does not want to make advertisement any more". The principle, however, showed him the way: "Change involves handyman's work !" And: "Besides the economic globalisation there should be a cultural one, not in the style of Hollywood, however.

In 2002, Bethang was presented for the first time as Bethang and this was during the election campaign for the city council of Nürnberg. Neumann was running at that time for a communal activist group: DIE GUTEN (the Good), a mixture of merry hipsters and radical opposition. If you would have asked him then: Why did you invent Bethang? He might have answered: "Because I cannot stand Nürnberg anymore."

In the summer of 2004 he undertook an art – cycle - tour and drove – dressed with a Vietnamese rice farmer hat, with a miscanthus – plant on his bike through the area. . The impressively high china reed has a background of migration, it is – in a certain sense – a migrant in our regions, "a winter - durable ornamental grass, which prefers a deep and solid ground" and which is associated with many useful features. On his round – trip Neumann visited intentionally such places, which deal with the production and research of this plant, construction companies which use them for isolation, the Botanischen Garten (botanic garden) in Erlangen, a farming school and a farmer who grows them. At the journeys end, the traveling reed found its place in the Nürnberg Hotel am Jakobsmarkt.

Shortly afterwards – during the 60 year festivities on the invasion of the allies in the Normandy - Neumann introduced a new time period for Bethang in retrospective: Thus 1945 represents actually the starting point , and this may indicate for the unified cities an act of liberation, even when the guilt still remains. In the meantime, the night from May 8 to the 9th is comparable in Bethang with December 31st because that night the New Year begins.

The Fusion as a state of "Climatic Crisis"

Why a fusion of 3 cities to one? Is centralization not really a problem? Why then a larger structure, when presumably smaller units are considered more human? Short paths, simple communication, direct contact ...

Sure, there is a wilful element in this but changes do need change" and "Certain elements need to become bigger so that they can make their statement. Just think of the UNO."

On the other hand, Karsten Neumann reminds us that in homeopathic circles there is a term called the "climatic crisis". It describes a state of momentary worsening conditions, but basically a cure through crisis, and: "it indicates that the body recognizes the remedy and activates its self – healing forces to fight the disease".

Furthermore, such fusions are a basic structure and have as such a long tradition. So – according to US archaeologists – the first real mega – cities of mankind developed in Mesopotamia through the fusion of many smaller settlements. Which contradicts the long – held belief that the cities at that time started to develop from one central point and where reigned by a central government.

History, Preservation and Anti - fascism

History plays an important part in Neumann's thinking. However, not in the sense of its conservation. An example: Architecture. - In a book chapter headlined "The milieu und its influence on the development of culture", the author and fantasist Paul Scheerbart writes: „Culture is in a sense a product of our architecture. If we want to bring our culture to a higher level we are more or less forced to change our architecture. And this will only then be possible when you take away the closed atmosphere of the rooms we live in". Scheerbart proposed for this an architecture of glass, Neumann however pleads for a discontinuation of institutionalized preservation.

When running for local election for DIE GUTEN, Neumann not only provoked the „Altstadtfreunde Nürnberg e.V.“ (according to their own definition a necessary trouble – shooting agency which reminds us of the treasures of the past), when he mentioned that blowing up the ring – wall around Nürnberg could definitely be a liberating act for all contemporaries. Because: "We live here in a total Disneyland ... medieval times, however, were organic." As for Bethang-architecture, Neumann thinks instead of houses ... "like the clay buildings in Yemen, only with contemporary material." Outreaching buildings, swallows nests and towers instead of norm edges and a standardized drip heights, windows in those places where you need light and blue – tiled roofs which use the solar energy.

Another example: National Socialism. – According to Neumann Bethang is "radically anti - fascist", especially since a part of it was the city of the "Reichsparteitage" and thereby should not only serve as a symbol for remembering.

Because Erlangen is a part of Bethang there is no need for a Erlanger Straße in Nürnberg. Neumann gave it the new name "Beate Klarsfeld Straße", - named after the woman who hit ex - chancellor Kurt Georg Kiesinger (past member PG 2633930 in the NSDAP) and thereby reminded a republic with great " talent to forget" about their ties with National Socialism.

Because Nürnberg is apart of Bethang,there is also no need for Fürth's Nürnberger Straße. For Neumann it is therefore the "Fritz Kurz Straße", named after an unskilled worker who was executed in 1944, who had founded an activist group "Freikorps Plärrer" a year before his dead, who sympathized with Zwangsarbeitern (forced labor), had fist – fights with members of the Hitlerjugend (young Nazis), and who was denounced as a feeble – minded ambush man in a propaganda tone by the "Fränkische Kurier" (newspaper).

There is - so far - only one holiday Bethang the 19th of November, the start of the Red Army's "Operation Uranus" which according to Neumann "was the real psychological turning point in the Second World War." The day is honored with a ritual: "bread is baked and given to friends".

About City Utopia and Ideal Cities

"Inhospitable" was the term used by the psychoanalyst Alexander Mitscherlich for the rebuild German cities after the Second World War. They were characterized more from concepts like order and restriction than of freedom. How, so Mitscherlich, should their inhabitants develop a close tie to their home town when they grow up as children "on asphalt streets and courtyards" when they actually needed "animals, all the elementary components, water, dirt, bushes, room to play". But the basic tenor of this book published in 1965 was not a new one: Cities are created by people and reflect on their inhabitants.

This relationship was stressed before and after Mitscherlich the city utopia and the idea of ideal cities. This thought stretches from medieval times, where the order of a heavenly Jerusalem was an ideal to representative buildings and technophile mega - centres up to social reformist garden cities.

As a reaction to the questions regarding large cities Geometry became the main focus, sometimes with an “organic” and sometimes with an authoritarian “city planning”, sometimes under the maxim of “ownership” and “consumption”, sometimes with euphoric belief in technology with a total automation of our life, sometimes “Re-naturalization”.

And also today there are hardly disguised ideals: there are faked historicisms – in extreme à la USA (like Disneyland and Las Vegas), like China (for example the victorian Thames Town in the Yangtse-Delta) or Russia (such as an eclectic villa township before the doors of St. Petersburg). But there are also shrill futuristic fantasies such as “Walking□” or “Plug-In-Cities“, “ Bay -and Ocean-Cities“ or “Clusters in the Air“.

But is Bethang actually a city utopia?

Yes indeed, one could answer – and immediately add the question, what kind of an utopia it really is. Because not only the utopia - researcher Wilhelm Voßkamp pointed out utopia are not directed per se towards “humanistic” goals.

Utopia can take on the characteristics of totalitarian ideals and they can be structured in a future – oriented and pluralistic way. Utopia and the process of its implementation can be determined by hierarchies as well as by groups.

There is, for instance, the Italian Renaissance town of Sabbioneta, settled in the Po delta between Parma and Mantua, founded by the Duke Vespasiano Gonzaga. Or there is the alternative „Freetown Christiania“ in Copenhagen which was developed by its inhabitants.

In any case, however, utopia, whether they were implemented or not, act mostly critical to what was there before.

The oldest known concepts from Ideal cities where mostly aligned with the organization of politics and derived from Platon und Aristoteles. First drafts came from Vitruv. In Renaissance times such ideas were used, for example by Alberti in his work „De re aedificatoria“ . Highly influential was of course the name – giving book „Utopia“ by Thomas Morus or „The Sun State“ by Tommaso Campanella.

Principles of ideal cities were tentatively realized around the residences of Barock - such as in Mannheim or Karlsruhe. Inspired by these ideals, Thomas Jefferson had Washington erected in 1792 as planning capital. Another example would be Freudenstadt, which is designed like a board of morris and makes reference to Albrecht Dürer’s vision of an ideal city.

New concepts were developed in the 20th century, amongst others 1913 by Walter Burley Griffin with the Australian Canberra, 1914 by Antonio Sant’Elia mit der Città nuova, 1922 by Le Corbusier with Ville Contemporaine, and also 1956 by Lucio Costa with Brasilia, the capital of Brazil. Special cases are the communal experiments Arcosanti in Arizona, USA, und Auroville in South India.

Between the late 18th and the 20th century city utopia reacted to specific turn – around movements in society: Urbanization and industrialization, social revolts and liberalization, the fall of aristocracy and the rise of the bourgeoisie, but also to demands on consumption and traffic problems. We think of the concepts of the “revolutionary architect“ Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, of the “social utopists“ Charles Fourier und Robert Owen, of Ebenezer Howard, who drove towards a concept of fusing rural and urban regions, of the „Ciudad lineal“ of Arturo Soria y Mata, and the planning of an industrial town by Tony Garnier.

Studying a “historical atlas“ of “European city utopia“, a compendium of the architect Virgilio Vercelloni, it becomes apparent that nearly every city utopia wanted to transport a pure picture. Untainted by all resistance stemming from the material world, by demands of facts and reality , by human strive and – life something si created which simply suffices by its mere image.

Nevertheless, it was the journalist Karl Stankiewicz who pointed out a few years ago how much ideas (and utopia) are hidden in the existing city of Munich alone: Plans of ruling emperors, attempts towards a world

- capital and the metropolis of would – like – to – be, retrospective dreams of idyllic suburbia , the “capital of the movement” the city of “hearts”, park- and garden desires and the leisure demands of a fun – society.

This was seen similar by the history and culture theoretic Michel de Certeau. He was the one to distinguish between the city as “reality” and the city as “concept”. Space and architecture, places and cities do not develop from concrete building material which is needed to erect them. They also live as pictures, quotes and imagined worlds in the imagination of the perception.

The American urbanite Kevin Lynch pointed out that real cities are not a problem of design alone. The “mental” image of the cities also has to be created by a form of esthetical education. The inhabitants should be taught to look at their city and to intensively strive for the “energy and common context of communal life”.

In the seventies of the 20th century the – once so rich – utopia production decreased. As Magnus Enzensberger mentioned, it made room for a melancholic lack – of - ideas – especially since 1989 when together with the wall also a veil was falling. Nowadays, however the interest in utopia is increasing again – even if it is slow and has a new direction: on the agenda are projects for the “enduring city” or the “social city”, city as form for integration and communication.

Daniel Libeskind drafted in fall of 2005 - together with the University of St. Gallen a model – like abstract city utopia FuturoPolis. Supported by renown architects, artists and scientists students of economics, law and political sciences developed diverse desirable images of urban communities.

How Art can Deal with Cities Today

So what does all this has to with art? – Always, architects and artists had their visions along with and against the trends of their time. Antonio di Pietro Averlino, named „Filarete“ (“Friend of Virtue”) designed the city Sforzinda. Artists from da Vinci to Dürer, from Pieter Breughel (just remember his “Tower of Babel”) to Ilya Kabakov drafted cities and city - concepts. Way back in Fin de siècle Camillo Sitte mentioned the “city planning according to its artistic principles “. The painter, scholar, musician and urbanite Nieuwenhuys, called Constant, created the imaginary city landscape “New Babylon“. And Joseph Beuys saw in cities like Hamburg the ideal starting point for his “Social Plastic“.

For Hans-Joachim Manske, Rose Pfister und Florian Matzner it is evident „No Art - No City!“ Das book by that name was released on the occasion of the thirty year anniversary of the city of Bremen program of “Art in Public Space“. It introduces more than thirty artists, who have dealt with the urban and sociological aspects of cities and have developed their totally individual visions, utopia and fantasies about life in and within a city. The editors remark that the old industrial communities have transformed “remarkably unnoticed“ into global networks of an information society, while at the same time there is a retreat in ones own four walls taking place. Nevertheless - or maybe because of that – the importance public space in the cities is constantly increasing and has not lost its obligation of being the interface for human communication.

2005, in Münster the “Annual Program Art meets City“ studied “urban disruptions“. It was asked: how flexible is our city structure, how flexible in assessing quarters new and differently and what is art’s role thereby?

Also the documenta-series in Kassel is addressing questions of urban aspects for some time already and at least since e the documenta X – and also special cases such the influence of post – colonialism on the cities of Europe.

What does all of that mean in regard to Karsten Neumann?

Utopia and city art are the background in front of which his art can be perceived – not necessarily does it need to be perceived like that. – So, Neumann does indeed pursue the approach of treating a city in an artistic way (“No Art - No City!“). He makes transparent that cities need ideas and a discussion about

these ideas. In regard to utopia he does not value its purity but rather the improvisation which is open to the future. Thereby rather anti - totalitarian impulses than idealism and clearly drawn out truths. He detests nostalgia and the construction of an untouchable past. But needed things and used things interest him more than the new erection of the absolute. He makes it clear that the still valid parts of utopia: the social aspect, the integration and the enduring are also a challenge for art. His works react on problematic areas of post - colonial times and intercultural encounters. And when he is also interested beyond any sense – establishing details and objets trouves room and space, then it is not so much related to their geometric quality but rather in what is growing on top of it.

Questions on Ecology - Nature, Recycling and Guerilla-Gardening

Folke Köbberling and Martin Kaltwasser tell in their publication "Ressource Stadt - City as a Resource" – or even more poignant „One man's trash is another man's treasure" – about the affluence as a treasure chest and of the metamorphoses of all the "material – for - free" which accumulates everywhere. The book shows – with examples - simple methods to vitalize and regain the "Ressource City" and, thereby offers modules for a counter model to the traditional city planning.

This pleasure in the utopian Bricolage also exists in Bethang. Neumann's stamp marks are evidence for this: "found in ‚Bethang"; „reparée à ‚Bethang"; „directly recycled in ‚Bethang"... to be continued ...

Neumann imagines "things coming from the barrel again", and "we carry around lathes". And once he explained: "Bethang? – that means mending a pair of pants ."

"In Bethang the production of new automobiles will come to a stop, if at all, only the inner parts of vehicles will be renewed - better motors etc. "

Rust will be covered by colorful primer. "This by itself is an esthetical pleasure", says Neumann.

"The artist is using plastic only in an act of recycling, because oil is a resource for which wars are waged." – "And tar should be replaced by wooden pavements anyhow in the long – run" – "It is also urgent to think about street sweepers" - But: "In the end there will practically be no waste anymore because we avoid waste and make progress with direct recycling".

„We know the sentence ‚Swords turn into plough blades!', but this mere short – term thinking," says Neumann. "Swords turn into plough blades - and these turn into vehicle parts and these to paintings and these to bookshelves." And also a map of Bethang could be turned any time into envelopes or wrapping paper for sandwiches or love letters.

In another instant he reflects on the fact that it is indeed interesting that mid – Bethang is a place which is cultivated by farmers. This is the area between the existing cities which is not much developed by construction yet, where at present salad and asparagus grows.

In a performance Neumann made an intern sow 32 small bags with respectively ten gram of "seed for a flower meadow" in all zip code areas in the city triad (or : "in the number circles of Bethang"). Because "everything needs to grow together."

This points to half – anarchical attempts of recent years to bring life in the cities, especially "Guerilla Gardening", which means to sow plants in public spaces on tree rings, green street dividers and parking places. – In the meantime it is known that there is farming even on the roofs in Manhattan: vegetable gardens, fowl and bee stocks.

These, however are the disruptions of meaningfulness, change processes and forms of special application which are also characteristic of Bethang.

Globalization - The Untere Kreuzgasse is now named Untere Mandalagasse

1961 Jane Jacobs wrote with „The Death and Life of Great American Cities" a basic book of modern urbanism. And her entire life she fought for a society where the

Cosmo political aspect is seen as the real utopia of modern times. But can you also reanimate also the city as a model for civilisation by this?

In its World report for the future of cities: Urban 21“ the Bundesministerium für Verkehr-, Bau- und Wohnungswesen (German minister of traffic, construction and housing) remarked around the millennium (according to the old calendar) that the development of European cities will have to take place in a global context. But up till now only the global economy has profited from a connection between a macro- and micro level. Global institutions were also the ones to take hold of the areas of emotional relationships and exploited them for maximizing profit.

But Bethang would also mean to learn at home from other cultures – and exactly thereby discover the own culture again - and this – with all due respect – would also mean lively interaction, change and mixture, mutual inspiration, maybe even cross – over activities such as building toys in Africa from soft drink cans and the very Indian English spoken in India.

This cultural interaction will not be implemented entirely without problems, as Neumann explains, who happens to live in Bethang for quite some time. There, white is the color of grieve. But if it should happen that the own grandmother dies, who has spend all of her life in a Franconia village, in that case – so he admits – he would certainly have a hard time “to stand as a white sheep amongst all the black ones.“

Bethang will keep all the partner cities of its three original cities and will look additionally for cities from so – called developing countries as partners, maybe even this certain Bethang in India.

Future and Farewell to Bethang

The buddhist and fan of homeopathic medicine (“When the energy of flow are released there is no room for solutions with compromises”), sees himself without much restraint as a “shaman who works within society“, with this he comes pretty close to Beuys’ “Social Sculpture“.

And the reproach, one could mistake his interest and his engagement as artistic craftsmanship (shot glasses and ornaments), ecological banalities („recycled in Bethang“) or ethno - kitsch (rosary with plastic) , he replies that his art represent a way – of - life and demonstrates a way to handle material which has immigrated from other cultures and which meets here with something that is still rudimentary but has not evolved because under the conditions of affluence it is still considered as something that could be done without. And in this case even small and crazy objects are attacks on collective mechanisms of repression , attacks on everything that is too smooth on the surface and on the crazy normality of compulsory consumption.

Neumann says “You do not really have to be poor, but you should absolutely act out of the spirit of poverty.“ ... because thereby, so the artist, something essential will develop: “Awareness“. How can you envision this? Maybe the best explanation is a story which actually happened:

The artist is sitting in a subway station with a Tibetan monk. After some silence the monk asks him what one would do here in case of a power breakdown. The monk does not look like he would really seem to expect an answer. But suddenly the fully lightened station seems to have disappeared and is only an unpleasantly dark cave where you are waiting for a train that does not come.

So some things are already living in the “spirit of Bethang“ as one of Neumann’s stamp marks is called. But his stamp mark „processversion“ – which has also been stamped on the world here and there – reminds us that projects are always only versions ... handy - work, puzzling, experimenting, trial – and - error fits more into Neumann’s concept. Alas, all is in transit. And “Bethang will also dissolve at one time or another “, – but maybe for good. And before, before that there is at least something there.

In an anthology about what he considers civil society“ Michael Walzer, editor of the magazine „Dissident“ states:

“Society is a project of projects. ... It requires a receptiveness for all that which is local, specific and

contingent and most of all a new awareness about this ..., that good life lies in detail.“

... and this probably in the fantasy which allows a cup of yogurt in Bethang to be recycled to art or sees New York from below and unmasks it of its myth.

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