

## Conclusion

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The thought that things can be infinitely suppressed, that they are without rights, without a will, without feelings and without the need for autonomy can only come from someone who thinks that they have neither life nor power. But they do. What else would all those poems, paintings, verses, history, dreams be about [...]?

*Erich Kästner, Aufstand der Dinge, The Uprising of Things*

As pastoral theologians we need to be attentive for all things and even the most mundane. This happens only through subversive tactics and not via a great plan. This is why pastoral workers should pay attention to their surroundings, the stories of church buildings and the community ecclesiology they embody. But this is also why pastoral workers should themselves become active, take on the roles of architects, designers, and community organisers to change the world around them. Furthermore, everyone within theology who is interested in the fate of human existence needs to find not only a way to give humans a voice but also a language to make the rich network around us speak.

### An Artistic Intervention: Thing Photography

Before I come to a conclusion of this book, I want to remind myself and the reader of what is at stake if we take the world of things seriously. I thus come

back to the second part of this book and Richard Learoyd's photography of a crashed and burned car, albeit from a much subtler angle.

Figure 43: Thomas Demand, *Badezimmer (Beau Rivage)*, C-Print (1997)

Thomas Demand's image can be found, for instance, in the collection of the *Kunstmuseum Bonn*.

The artist THOMAS DEMAND builds life-size models of historical scenes in paper and produces large-format photographs of them. His models are minutely exact representations of historically important places, but the materiality, the smooth paper texture and the lack of any imperfections, makes us acutely aware that we are looking at a picture and not at a real scene. The bathroom where Uwe Barschel, then Prime Minister of Schleswig-Holstein, drowned in 1987 or the table to which the entrepreneur's son Jan Philip Reemtsma was tied by his abductors in 1996<sup>1</sup> are as objects part of our collective memory. The tragedy that is associated with these objects shows how powerful the material world around us is for our lives, even in life-and-death situations.

Demand's photography makes us aware that our lives are tied to things and that photography can bring out that eigenvalue in them. In her dissertation on everyday life objects in photography, CHRISTINA PACK looks at the the history of object photography. She focuses on photographic positions that emphasise the independence of things.<sup>2</sup>

It is noteworthy that Pack looks at the connection between humans and things in photography through the signs of usage that things show. Because the photographic portrait is increasingly questioned as a means to show the essence of a human being, the things that are used by humans are employed as a proxy. Thing photography thus shows the paradox of photography itself. With Walter Benjamin (cf. Benjamin 1939) Pack argues that "the technical apparatus deprives reality of life [...] on the other hand the photographic representations of lifeless things are seen as having a life of their own"\*(Pack 2008, p. 18).

<sup>1</sup> Benjamin von Stuckrad-Barre reflected on the artwork in his book *Remix 3* (Stuckrad-Barre 2019).

<sup>2</sup> Pack's own position is influenced by cultural studies (cf. e.g. Böhme 2006).

I want to focus on the fourth chapter of Pack's analysis of different photographic positions, which she has captioned with *das Eigenleben der Dinge*, the independent existence of things. In it the author analyses the photo series *Stiller Nachmittag*, quiet afternoon, of Peter Fischli and David Weiss as well as the series *Vasen-Extasen*, vase ecstasies, of Anna and Bernhard Blume. The Rube-Goldberg-like balancing contraptions of Fischli and Weiss and the humorous spectacle of an attacking vase that Anna and Bernhard Blume show are both ways in which photographers argue that things have a life of their own. Pack sees this as a comment on the increasing importance of everyday life objects in the industrial age. With Jean Baudrillard's *The System of Objects* she argues:

The objects are no longer accompanied by the spectacle of hands in which they merely have minor roles, but today their high grade of finality makes them the lead actors of a global process in which man has taken on a minor role\* (Baudrillard 2001, 74 in *ibid.*, p. 198).

Her résumé is therefore that on the one hand things show, through traces of human use<sup>3</sup>, their close relation to humans. Referencing another important work of photographic theory, *Chambre Claire* (cf. Barthes and Leube (translator) 1989), Pack argues that "if Roland Barthes says that the referent 'adheres', the same can be said about used things" (Pack 2008, p. 274). Yet at the same time they evade a close relationship and have a life of their own (cf. *ibid.*, pp. 276–277). The medium of photography shows this relation and evasion. But, moreover, with the aforementioned philosopher Vilém Flusser we can say that we as humans have the capacity to take a step back from this close relationship as well.

The medium of photography seems especially suited to step back from the every day world of objects and come up with a new image of things\* (*ibid.*, p. 277).

Thomas Demand masterfully employed the medium to that effect.

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3 This is also Pack's link to the medium of analog photography where the things leave *traces* of light on film.

## Churches as Open Artworks and Museums for the Future

Religious and monastic communities have a long tradition of building, both sacred and profane spaces, churches and libraries,<sup>4</sup> hospitals and community centres. What they have also built to great extent are museums – one might think of the *Vatican Museums* in Rome or any of the small diocesan museums in one's diocese. But while these museums host great collections of art, what they are missing from my perspective is a testament to the open artwork. This is the final perspective with which I want to release the reader into the open with.

Most of the demands for a new sensibility towards the interconnected world have been realised in smaller projects which are too many to mention here. But what I see lacking is a bigger picture, a flagship project that could show the local church communities how they can realise a new way to interact with space, the materiality, and the people around them. As religious life in Germany and other countries in Europe and around the world changes, churches and religious communities have to think about their future presence – which includes their built presence as well.

An interesting example how to build for the future, which takes up a lot of the aspects I have mentioned above, is the *futurium* in Berlin. It is a museum built by the German *Ministry of Education and Research* which does not see its role in the collection and display of objects – in contrast to the equally newly built ethnographic museum *Humboldt Forum* also in the centre of Berlin – but to enable citizens to think about the future. The museum shows potential technological developments and asks its visitors how they relate to them. It is in that sense the exact opposite to the walled-off research campus of large technology companies. It is the social laboratory I see as complementing, and in many functions replacing, the technological laboratories of the past.

In its brochure, the museum opens with a quote from one of the first futurologists, Robert Jungk, from the 1990s:

We need a strong fantasy movement where not just a few experts but everyone interested – which includes laypeople – should participate. [...] Only

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<sup>4</sup> E.g. the main library at the *Catholic University of Eichstätt* was built by the aforementioned Günter Behnisch and his partners.

someone who invents the future in advance can hope to effectively influence it\* (Zipf and Luckas 2009, p. 8).

The idea is to turn visitors into inventors and with that change the way a museum functions. Museums of the past had “an instrumental role in the building of modern nations [...] they celebrated the past glory and present objectives.”\* The museums of today “must look forwards instead of backwards”\* (ibid., p. 24).

The exhibition space in the *futurium* is organised in different areas: From the use of robotics to sustainable energy sources, from the power of artificial intelligence to the future modes of transportation, the museum tries to envision what the future could look like. But it does not only show the technology side of these developments, it also demonstrates how they will influence man and nature. Throughout the exhibition the visitor is asked to take a stand as to what developments they find beneficial, where they see caveats, and where they want to know more. Thus the exhibition changes constantly. As visitors record their opinions, the museum adapts its exhibition as well as its educational programs.

I will highlight two aspects for the future of the material presence of churches. First of all the attention to and engagement with the world of things. There is a powerful strand in both theology and official church talk that criticises the mass-produced and mass-marketed goods, especially electronic devices. Yet at the same time both theologians and church officials use technological artifacts. This double standard reminds me first of all of Heidegger’s very narrow definition of thing as something stemming from the world of handmade rural production and secondly of Bruno Latour’s criticism of current philosophy which shuns away from an engagement with the world of things and instead focuses on the old critique of the things being mere fetishes.

The *futurium* takes a different route in that it devotes a whole section of its exhibition to the question “What do all the things do?”\* (ibid., p. 68) In it, the curators focus on our everyday lives and the way things are integrated. They ask how much we rely on things but also how sustainable that reliance is, without neglecting the importance of things not just for the individual but for the growth of society as a whole.<sup>5</sup> Therefore a space for a positive appreciation

<sup>5</sup> I am particularly drawn to the idea to look at everyday life. Cultural studies have a long tradition to approach the everyday, the mundane. E.g. the sociologists Alfred Schütz and Thomas Luckmann analysed how we are both born into a seemingly self-evident lifeworld and at the same time are constantly inter-subjectively working on the construction of that

and reflection of our interwoven-ness with things, like Latour's parliament of things, must be a necessary feature of pastoral practice today. But it must also feature in our church buildings.

The second aspect I want to single out is the design of the *futurium* as a building. The exhibition hall on the first floor is surrounded by open spaces for discussion and experimentation on the ground and second floor. The architects Richter and Musikowski say that the building spatially structures the program of the museum, namely exhibition, events, and workshops. They also mention that they wanted to create a house that was as flexible as possible to function as a "vessel for the future [...] a space where different futures can move in"\*(Zipf and Luckas 2009, p. 39). In that respect the *futurium* can also become a role model for churches to open up their spaces for experimentation.

The *fablab* movement, which started at the MIT in 1990, has emphasised the need to share knowledge worldwide but produce things locally. This approach links to the co-production of knowledge in citizen-science projects and real experiments as mentioned earlier but also refers to the need for a tangible engagement with the materiality of the world.

Opening up that definition to also include the local grassroots activities and worldwide network of knowledge that faith communities have to offer would be the task for the future. In the scope of this book I can only do as much as to argue that it would fit right into the demand for new and experimental form-finding processes to happen within the church.

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world. As mentioned before (cf. page 48), with Henri Lefèvre we also find a critic of everyday life as determined by the constraints of the capitalist market economy (Schütz and Luckmann 1972; Lefebvre 1987).