

## THE PLACEBO EFFECT OF UTOPIA: A RESEARCH PROJECT ON URBAN SPACE

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As a curator doing research in Rio de Janeiro on art dealing with urban space and utopia, Stefan Zweig's *Brasil - the Land of the Future* is a reference worth mentioning. The book's title has been widely quoted and Zweig's 1941 text visualizes a country of enormous wealth and mixed cultures. His Brazilian contemporaries saw Zweig's book as utopic to some extent. Zweig's starting point into Brazilian civilization was his escape from Europe and Vienna that had transformed dramatically and rapidly during his lifetime and in relation to this Brazil must have been seen as the land of the future.

As in the example of Stefan Zweig the ideas of utopia are always in relation to a current situation or a collective experience. Pedro Victor Brandão images in the series *Uncivilized* are related to the hectic city of Rio de Janeiro. In his photographs he has removed every trace of urban landscape and human interaction and let nature be in charge. The city is only recognizable because of its hilly landscape that civilization has never been able to interfere with. In the photographs it is impossible to know if the place they describe is before or after humans. One of the original photographs can be seen on the wall.

The slide projection is showing the early stages of the research of my project and different themes relating to urban utopias are passing by. Blueprints, like the one of the city of Brasilia or of the Swedish ABC-planning, where the division between work, housing and the city center were in focus, are a part of this projection. Pictures showing failed utopias like Henry Ford's Fordlandia, a failed city in Brazil. Several more of Pedro Victor Brandão images are on view but also images of the Norwegian artist Espen Gleditsch's series *White lies*, where the 1927 modernist housing exhibition *Weissenhofsiedlung* in Stuttgart is under scrutiny. Gleditsch's series explores the colors of the original facades and the idea of functionalism that is related to them and the "white lies" that are constructed.

Utopias always reflect on the current situation, fears of what might come and solutions to what is happening. Even if the utopic societies are unrealistic or even impossible, their placebo effect is visible, and in times of political turmoil and confusion serves as a necessity for the future.

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