

KÜNSTLERHAUS STUTT GART

Stadtstaat. A Scenario for Merging Cities A Project by Metahaven

Episode 1:
Künstlerhaus Stuttgart
Opening: Friday, July 10, 7pm
Exhibition: July 11 – September 12, 2009

Press preview: July 10, 11am

Episode 2:
Casco Office for Art, Design and Theory, Utrecht
September 27 – November 15, 2009

Metahaven is a studio for research and design in Amsterdam, working between art, theory and graphic design. For Künstlerhaus Stuttgart, Metahaven has developed its first large-scale exhibition titled "Stadtstaat." The exhibition is co-produced with Casco Office for Art, Design and Theory in Utrecht, where a second episode of the project will be shown. "Stadtstaat" evolves from extensive research on the current relationship between design and space. Starting from the specific situation of regional centers like Stuttgart and Utrecht, Metahaven investigates both the impact of new information technologies as well as economic and political facts, that structure space through design, and develops a speculative alternative model, merging Stuttgart and Utrecht into a new spatial and political entity. During the exhibition, the extensive monograph "Uncorporate Identity" by Methaven will be published by Lars Müller Publishers.

New informational procedures, such as encryption and compression, are some of the main issues in the work by Metahaven. In various designs and projects, the group reflected on these and other usually invisible mechanisms and their impact on design practice. More than just a matter-of-fact situation describing the informational technocracy which surrounds us, procedures of encryption and compression raise fundamental questions about identity, communication, the access to information and the changing role of the designer. As symbolic representation slips away due to the growing significance of informational properties of encrypted or compressed forms over their appearance – a prime example is the bar code –, our understanding of visibility and evidence is ultimately changed. There is a new regime of forms which are, on the face of it, illegible, unreadable or incomprehensible and unfold their true message only through electronic tools which read and scan them. In this regard, encryption and compression work as tools that organize access to information and control traffic and information flows. Designing means less and less to enable open communication, but instead draws borders and demarkations.

For the exhibition "Stadtstaat," Metahaven is developing a research scenario that deals with fundamental questions relating to methodologies and political realities connected with data encryption and compression. Responding to the specific situation of the two cities Stuttgart and Utrecht, the scenario forms a highly speculative, almost utopian narrative, centered around a possible new entity

with a new political agenda. The exhibition will present research material, branding proposals and detailed design applications for a new type of city-state, in which Stuttgart and Utrecht will be merged or "compressed." The works and models in the exhibition operate between information architecture and experimental branding, focusing on the notion of legibility and the relation of information and space. Thematically, the exhibition presents possible alternatives to current forms of border management both in graphical and architectural space, discussing the issue of encryption and compression beyond its meaning in information technology and exploring the resulting effects on politics and visual epistemology. The fictional brand represents a radical policy experiment that critically examines current procedures of city branding as well as possible alternatives to the neoliberal political agenda. In this new city-state, the biometric profiling, face recognition, RFID tagging and data mining, which dominate in the international geopolitical space, have been replaced by an "advanced social contract."

Metahaven is a studio for research and design based in Amsterdam and Brussels, consisting of Daniel van der Velden, Vinca Kruk, and Gon Zifroni. Metahaven has previously created a visual identity for the mini-state Sealand and research projects around the former House of the People in Bucharest and the European Internet search engine Quaero. Metahaven's work was most recently exhibited at the Architectural Association London, Arnolfini in Bristol, Stroom in The Hague and the 2008 Venice Architectural Biennial. In 2008, they showed "Affiche Frontière," a solo exhibition at CAPC, Musée d'Art Contemporain in Bordeaux. In addition to design, research, and writing, Metahaven lectures widely, and its members teach at institutions including Yale University in New Haven, the Academy of Arts in Arnhem, the Sandberg Institute in Amsterdam, and the School of Visual Arts in Valence, France.

Curators: Axel John Wieder (Künstlerhaus Stuttgart) and Binna Choi (Casco Utrecht)

The exhibition has been co-produced with Casco, Office for Art, Design and Theory Utrecht.

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