

The gentle art of settling

Emptiness and freedom

Our hill, lying as a roundabout in the middle of the Ruhrgebiet, a silent centre surrounded by traffic, cities and industry. The world around it only reaching the top filtered by height and distance. A special place, the way it has been created from the bowels of the earth combined with the way generations continued to build it higher and higher created a place outside the surrounding landscape. As a waste mound it has always been outside the mind of its creators, with its height the distance to the origins of its material grew. Calling the hill of waste landscape was the first step by the surrounding world to reclaim the unused void, but the hills almost defensive forms prevented the world from reaching the top. The top has by its inverted-hill-morphology become the essence of the hill. A valley on the top of a hill, the waste product of its surroundings grown beyond its creators, a ziggurat honouring a void. Emptiness is the essence of this location.

It's impossible for such a large building to remain without a function for long. For a large object to be just itself without having a function is impossible. Claiming the hill as landscape was the first step to a function, dwelling the second. The hill claimed by true pioneers as a place to live in and on, the hill now proclaimed landscape as a backyard for its occupants. While the first step created the slopes of the hill as barriers between the world and the top, it also created the emptiness at the top. This emptiness was now to be inhabited, a shared tabula rasa for its colonists. Filling the void became the new task.

On this choice-free island where the colonists had landed a strategy had to be chosen. Even not choosing a strategy would have been a choice of strategy. The problems of freedom and community were first examined by looking at the known strategies for settling. A grid laid over the hill, laying a road over it, using the total hill as a place for agriculture, giving a new function to the hill, many options passed our review, none of them completely satisfied us. By rebuilding the hill to something already dominating the surroundings would be the end of the hills special character. In the end all colonists agreed that the freedom of this place had to be conserved, this choice-free emptiness including infinite possibilities. In the end only one thing has been decided, the choice to leave the emptiness be by keeping the place that best demonstrates it intact.

The valley on the top is to remain empty.

By people living on the hill the surrounding world penetrates it even more. The houses of its initial colonists react only at objects in their direct presence; there is no master plan or hierarchic structure. As the population gets denser the people on the hill will create their own rules, thus allowing the world to finally reach the top, but by the growing of the community the contrast between the surrounding colony and the void at its centre will become greater. We can only hope that this colony will remain a community that critically watches the place it comes from and will always respect the emptiness in its centre that makes it different.

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