Performing Imaginary Landscapes

Instagram Communities in the German Ruhr

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In the past few decades, scholarship engaging with human–material encounters in the field of heritage and tourist sites has called for a higher attentiveness to concepts of embodied meaning making, considering the mutual engagement and circulation of emotions in human and material entanglements and their performative character (Bærenholdt, Haldrup and Urry 2004; Crang and Tolia-Kelly 2010; Edensor 2001, 2006; Franklin and Crang 2001; Staiff, Bushell and Watson 2013; Tolia-Kelly, Waterton and Watson 2017; Urry and Larsen 2011; Waterton 2014, 2018). While this kind of research is often tied to a thinking termed more-than-representational theory (Lorimer 2005) and is mainly situated in the work of British geographers, cultural anthropology and ethnography have already been serving as points of reference to explore the role of everyday practices in terms of cultural meaning making. Nevertheless, literature in the field of visual anthropology concerning photography and visual media has just recently begun to place particular emphasis on practices and interaction (Lehmuskallio and Gómez Cruz 2016; Pink 2006, 2009; van House 2009). Therefore, such approaches allow a focus on sensual and affective dimensions and on the sociomaterial assemblages that are interwoven with visual representations. Such an understanding provides the scope to go beyond a notion of photography defined by its relationship to a referent. Following these endeavours, views in literature exploring visual or linguistic representations in digital environ-

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ments claim that cultural meaning cannot be grasped by semiotic concepts, but needs to be understood from a broader perspective, taking into account nonhuman agents (for instance, objects and technologies like software and hardware, as well as emotions and atmospheres) along with practices and situations beyond those observed online (De Souza e Silva and Sutko 2011; Gómez Cruz and Ardèvol 2013; Hine 2015; Hjorth and Pink 2014; Ritter and Schönberger 2017).

In order to bring together these similar interests from different fields of research, this chapter focuses on practices and situations entangled with the image production on Instagram located in the Ruhr region in Germany. It deals with the following question: how do human–object relations evolve around digital image practices and how do they produce and reproduce regional landscapes? This calls for an understanding of digital photography and the production of images in general as an open 'spatio-temporal event' (Massey 2005: 130) in which human and nonhuman agents shape the meaning of regional space (Latham and McCormack 2009). As Nigel Thrift (2003: 2012) stresses, it is not about ignoring the representations or their relevance for meaning making, but it is an approach that acknowledges the messiness and complexity of the world by understanding it as a contingent assemblage. Despite their dynamic and open character, events in which the world is created are not considered incoherent acts due to chance; their potential is always constrained (Thrift 2008: 114). I understand 'the taking place of everyday life' (Cadman 2009: 459) as a moment of emergence that 'instigates the routine and mundane but also improvisation, play and, inevitably, change' (2009: 459). On the basis of the concept of 'more-than-representational landscapes' (Waterton 2019), I argue that the conditions, experiences and situations under which Instagram images come into being merge with the images, and that they shape and contest the meaning of regional landscapes. To investigate these occurrences, it is necessary to participate in the situations in which people look at photographs, produce images, talk about Instagram posts and editing software or plan their hikes to capture specific views of the landscape. Therefore, my ethnographic approach includes participant observations along with interviews and digital ethnography.

The chapter is organized as follows: the conceptual framework of more-than-representational landscapes and its relation to the emergence of regional imaginaries in the field of representations on Instagram is scrutinized in the first section. Therefore, the development of material artefacts of industrial heritage in the Ruhr and their relevance is described for the representation of the region. The depiction and analysis of the interview and observation data (collected between 2018 and 2019) connects to this, exploring the Insta-grammers' practices of producing images on regional sites of former heavy industry. Taking up the interest in the more-than-representational, the link-

ing of these situations of regional representation with the Instagrammers' individual performances at spaces intertwined with creative labour is foregrounded in the second section. Thus, the traces between the symbolic and affective qualities of representations of the past and imaginaries of a regional future are unmasked.

Regional Imaginaries in Sociomaterial Assemblages

Since its launch in 2010, Instagram has become an embedded part (Hine 2015) of many people's everyday practices.[1] The Ruhr, the former German leading region of coal industry in the North-Rhine-Westphalia state and the region that is the focus of this chapter, is also widely represented on Instagram. This is apparent by the range of regionally connoted hashtags, as the following selection and quantity shows: #ruhrpott (633,035 posts), #ruhrgebiet (539,176 posts), #ruhrpottromantik (55,096 posts) and #everydayruhrgebiet (35,198 posts).[2] I assume that images on Instagram bound to regional hashtags and topics are not just representing space; rather, they should be considered objects with their own biography (Kopytoff 1986), which are embedded in different situations and relations, and move forward in time and space (Hjorth and Pink 2014: 45).

Hence, I understand the discursive formation of representations linked with hashtags as a textual hook (Highfield and Leaver 2016) from which I focus on related practices: how these hashtags and images come into being, what meanings, emotions and practices they are bound to, what narratives are associated with them, and who does what with these images after they have been published. These are questions that cannot be dealt with by representation analysis. Therefore, I understand these images as part of an iterative and performative doing of a regional imaginary, and thus tied to collective meaning making. In situations of visualizing the Ruhr, Instagrammers refer to imaginations of the region and the official fifty-three cities that make up the region. They make use of collective meaning repertoires to produce images that can be interpreted in an intended way. To understand these dynamics, I use the term 'imaginary' to illustrate this social amalgamating of individual imaginations of regional and urban spaces into a prefigurative representation unit. Matthew James Kelley defined imaginaries as 'the collection of unique perceptions, experiences, interpretations, and images of cities (and the smaller places within them) that we all carry in our minds. And as our unique imaginaries coalesce (through face to face communication, print media, television, the Internet, etc.), places begin to acquire their own collective imaginaries' (2013: 182). This implies 'that imaginaries are not simply passive representations of socio-cultural reality, but are instead

active elements in the structuring of individual social, cultural and spatial practice' (2013: 183).

The concept of more-than-representational landscape draws attention to these dynamics. This idea of landscape does not build on reducing landscape to a material arrangement that can be solely gazed upon; on the contrary, it draws on the contingency of everyday human and material encounters, and considers all the sensuous and affective qualities, as well as singular practices and interactions at the moment to be essential for the creation of a landscape. This entails an engagement with imaginations, expectations and wishes during our interaction with landscapes that surround us. Therefore, I argue that imaginaries concerning urban and regional spaces as the Ruhr, for instance, also develop in these situations of emerging landscapes as 'socially transmitted representational assemblages' (Salazar 2012: 864), and consider their representational character, simultaneously, focusing on moments of sharing, producing and linking diverse elements of a regional imaginary in different contexts.

Researching Instagram Communities in the Ruhr

My field of research consists of different actors: from those with political and official status through regional marketing companies to Instagram users as private individuals. As 'communities of practice' (Lave and Wenger 1991), all actors gather around Instagram practices related to the Ruhr. For this chapter, I draw on the interview and participant observation data of two communities and their members grouped around commonly managed Instagram accounts. They either focus on visual representations of the Ruhr or meet regularly in the region and visualize mainly regional subjects. The two groups partially overlap, though they have different meeting times and locations; some members are active within both communities. In addition, I interviewed Instagrammers who occasionally participate in these meetings or are in some way loosely connected with the communities by following their activities or, for instance, organizing joint photowalks. Photowalks are announced walks that are open to the public, but often are only accessible to the community that organizes them. They usually focus on taking pictures of a particular place or topic as a group event. So far, I have conducted participant observations during eight photowalks and seven regular meetings. By attending the regular meetings, I was also able to draw on informal interviews to complement my data.[3]

Since 2018, I conducted thirteen semi-structured interviews with Instagram users who are either participating actively in or somehow connected to these communities and thirteen unstructured interviews with Instagram users I met during my participations in regional photowalks and meeting events.

The semi-structured interviews included a photo survey that collected narratives tied to pictures published by the interviewees on Instagram accounts. Furthermore, I connected to the communities through other social media channels to stay informed about upcoming events and ongoing discussions. Between 2018 and 2020, I captured numerous posts and comments from my research partners on Instagram in about 500 screenshots. I also used Netlytic as a visualization software to track the activities of Instagram users and the links between posts and accounts. This provided the ability to freeze online interactions and archive them for asynchronous access regardless of the Instagram interface.

Material Landscape Transformations in the Ruhr

Regional marketing companies have recently presented the Ruhr as a region of green and blooming landscapes. Following these undertakings, the Ruhr museum, the regional history museum located at the former coal mine Zollverein, the UNESCO World Heritage Site, designed a special exhibition for 2017 with the title *Green in Essen City: More Than Parks and Gardens*, which highlighted nature as an important part of the Ruhr. Essen also received the European Green Capital Award in 2017 for 'making admirable efforts to establish itself as a "City in transformation" that is overcoming a challenging industrial history to reinvent itself as a "Green City" and a leading example for others' (European Commission 2017: 15). The award is a prelude to further green-denoted regional presentations that are thought to shape the image of the region in the near future.[4] One highlighted event will be the coming to an end of the Emscher Conversion in 2021. The Emscher River is an important infrastructural actor, which disposed of the heavy industry waste from the whole of the Ruhr region. The reconstruction of the Emscher River has a representative function regarding the deindustrializing transformation of the region because it can be regarded as an attempt, financed by different political actors, to restructure the landscape and mark the beginning of the region's postindustrial future (Emschergenossenschaft n.d., 2006).

Furthermore, the restructuring is a sequel to the extensive transformations in the course of Emscher Park (1989–99), realizing a high budgeted action programme to regenerate the environment and eliminate the industrial damage. The landscape engineering in the Emscher zone was followed by a broad industrial heritage programme highlighting former industrial buildings in the midst of recreational and natural areas evolving into a new kind of aesthetic landscape citing symbols of European park history: 'In the course of these projects, a classical theme of European park history experiences an unexpected renaissance: the ruin. From the 16th into the 18th century, European garden architecture set up artificial ruins as symbols of decay and

impermanence in the middle of gardens and landscape parks' (Siemer and Stottrop 2010: 59).

Social Space Intertwined with Material Arrangements

Endeavours to preserve landmarks of the industrial landscape by giving them heritage protection and treating them as monuments directed the way to today's materialized presence of the Ruhr's past in coal mining and the steel industry in its countryside (Berger, Golombek and Wicke 2018: 76). This material presence offers the possibility for citizens of the Ruhr to remember the past and phrase a coherent regional story reaching towards a common future (Prossek 2009: 161, 164). Berger, Golombek and Wicke term the dissemination of a consistent story of the Ruhr based on the industrial past and its widespread acceptance 'mainstreaming industrial heritage' (2018: 71). Despite the Ruhr being a good example of managing the difficulties of structural change through the careful treatment of memory and the past, scholars have been warning of foregrounding the aesthetic staging rather than contextualizing the ruins concerning their historical meaning for the region (Rüsen 1994: 4, quoted in Berger, Golombek and Wicke 2018: 85). While the 'aesthetic exaltation of industrial heritage … promoted the acceptance of industrial heritage among the regional population' (Berger, Golombek and Wicke 2018: 82), the materiality of rust and blast-furnace facilities not only refers to industrial labour, but is also planned to act as an aesthetic reference to European Romanticism and its affective contexts. Critical views in literature (Zukin 1991; Zukin et al. 1998; Bendix 2002; Frank 2016) have been addressing similar processes on heritage sites as developments resulting in commodification and touristification entailing 'several private limited companies dealing with marketing the industrial heritage' (Berger, Golombek and Wicke 2018: 83). Furthermore, cultural anthropologist Jens Wietschorke (2010) notes a critical turn in the patterns of regional representation, beginning with the announcement of Essen representing the Ruhr as the European Capital of Culture in 2010. Wietschorke argues that a new cultural economy ought to be implemented in the Ruhr, which makes less use of representing the industrial and social history of the region, but – albeit vaguely linking to this – above all of the image of a young artistic and cultural scene (2010: 40). As I will explain in the following sections, the physical materiality of the industrial past still plays a role in the Instagram posts of this young creative scene. Building on this, I ask how Instagrammers deal with the industrial past in the present, including the types of objects and places they link to the regional past and how or whether they connect qualities of the past with their visualizations on Instagram. This, in turn, evolves into the types of sociality that are interwoven with the physical-material landscape and their emotional effects.

Visualizing Industrial Heritage Sites: Feeling, Imagining and Representing the Past

In the following section, I make the argument that the meaning of Instagram images of the Ruhr evolves in different fields that I have divided up for my analysis. First, I consider the affective conditions in the situations of image production: specific discourses regarding the perception of regional landscapes and affective states during the photowalks must be taken into account here. As I will show, notions of the atmospheric quality of the regional past also shape the meaning of the images. The Instagrammers translate these ideas and affects into visual symbols in order to combine them in new contexts and performances and to point towards a successful future, as I would like to make clear in the subsequent section.

Regional Landscapes: Aesthetics of Shame and Pride and the Production of Authenticity

With their visual representations on Instagram, the interviewees try to express the affective qualities of their sensuous experiences at former industrial sites. Their aim is to illustrate that the landscape of the Ruhr is not just a collection of abandoned industrial ruins, but that it reappears as an atmospheric stage for positive regional development. The Instagrammers meet at these places and also go there alone to select the subjects for their next Instagram posts. They discuss which perspective should be chosen for the images and what lens settings are most useful to capture the light conditions. They also include the use of image editing software and sometimes professional technical equipment like digital cameras with special lenses or even elaborate lighting equipment to illuminate the collieries in bright colours.

At first glance, the Instagrammers' practices of aestheticizing decay resemble those of the urban explorer movement. Both communities attempt 'to create new meaning' (Bennett 2010: 431) in public space. Whereas 'urban exploration is a nonlinear, cross-reading of [a] place' (2010: 423) and thereby governmental or private spatial concepts that regulate access to certain spaces are contested (Garrett 2014: 4), the Instagrammers in the Ruhr pursue the same goals as the regional administration and touristic marketing. As my ethnographic data makes clear, they plan to change the negative image of the region that is associated with economic decline and aesthetic devaluation. Therefore, they present aestheticized scenes of industrial remnants to show that the region has a proud industrial past as well as a bright future, which results from the efforts of the creative, who are able to lead the region out of its economic crisis. This illustrates the following statement of a successful Instagrammer, who was asked to write a book about regional highlights for trips into nature due to his successful appearance on Instagram:

> We must also show the positive image. Actually, you can live quite well here in the Ruhr area, especially since everything is changing. We are on the right track; I think everything will get better with time. I would say that this can be seen in every green area and every colliery where creative people are now working. (Interviewee A, 2018, translated by the author)

Hence, in situations of visualizing former industrial sites surrounded by green landscapes for Instagram, the Instagrammers regard the past as a yielding backdrop to depict the future of the region. As my interviewee puts it, this can be realized by capturing the transformation into a near-natural landscape with material representations of the industrial age in conjunction with new creative fields of work or with light art projects.

It seems to the Instagrammers that the region will only be connected by people from outside with a negative image of job loss, dirt and poverty. They know that the cities in the Ruhr have a lot of difficulties due to the economic crisis in the region. Nevertheless, they are aware of the fact that there is a difference between the economic conditions and the symbolic-discursive construction of the region. They know that images can have a symbolic effect on the regional imaginary of the Ruhr and that there is a difference between the self-image and the external image of the region. According to Rolf Lindner (1994: 216), a metaphorical connection[5] between the inhabited space and the social space is characteristic of the self-image and the external image of the Ruhr: due to the historical conditionality of a dominant heavy-industrial working class that has restricted any noteworthy social stratification, a relatively homogeneous social landscape is transferred to the external image of the physical–material landscape of the Ruhr. So, the younger generation today wants to overcome these collective experiences of shame because of the regional economic decline in encounters with external opinions about the region.

The Instagrammers put immense efforts into organizing photowalks at the sites of industrial remains under weather and light conditions they consider to be perfect for an authentic regional atmosphere to show that there are also reasons to be proud of the region. This is made clear when they try to compare the Ruhr with other regions in Germany (Huszka 2021). They point out that the Ruhr is a unique region with special qualities and promising landscapes to show that it is not characterized by dirt and poverty, as an interviewee tells me during a photowalk when I ask him about one of his Instagram pictures taken in Landscape Park Duisburg Nord, an industrial heritage site with illuminated steelworks:

> I am a Ruhr romantic! The illumination is so important to create this atmosphere in the picture, that it is necessary to take the photo in the golden or the blue hour … The crocodile here in the park as well as the port in Duisburg are great photo motives, well, 'industrial culture' in general, I think. The landscape
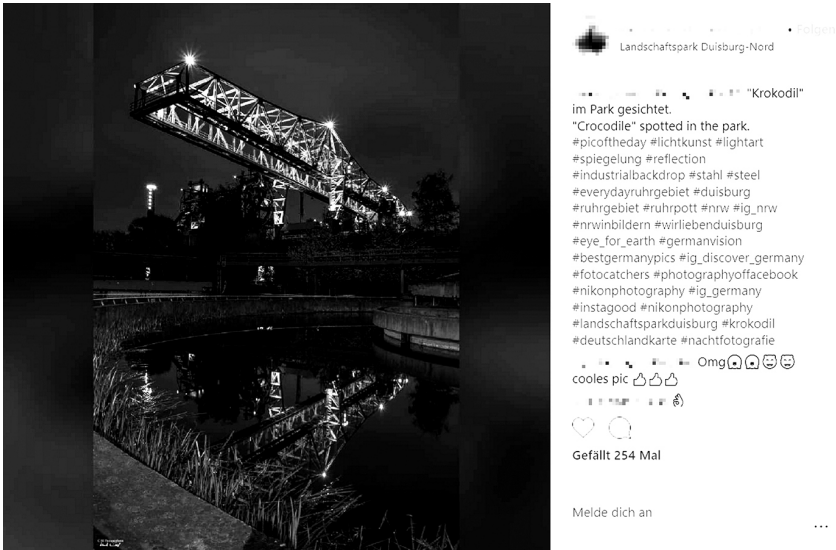
Figure 4.1. View of the 'crocodile', the central loading ramp of the former steel-works in the Landschaftspark Duisburg, published by an interviewee on Instagram. Screen capture by V. Huszka

> park has a special meaning, it is unique for Duisburg and for the Ruhr. A lake with a footbridge you could also find in Hamburg or Bavaria … The Ruhr has its dark sides, too, but every larger city has to deal with such problems, so it is important to show the positive aspects. (Interviewee B, 2018, translated by the author)

It seems quite important for the Instagrammers to stress the specificity of the industrial heritage for the Ruhr and to visualize recognizable regional sites. Due to the negative external image of the Ruhr, they see a special need to prove that the presentations are authentic for the region. The Instagrammers produce authenticity by evoking situations in which the affective qualities of their experiences at these sites can be transferred into visual representations. With the hashtag #ruhrromanticism,[6] they often refer to these perceptions of special light conditions, at sun dawn or sunrise and also to the feelings of excitement and fascination, which accompany their image production, when walking alone to take a photo of an illuminated cooling tower surrounded by a dark park in the middle of the night. They make use of the fact 'that things and representations have agency … and that they have the capacity to produce both effects and affects' (Staiff, Waterton and Lean 2017: 6). The interviewees intentionally choose these sites to take pictures because they consider them to be the spaces where they can experience and produce a positive atmosphere to overcome the negative image of the Ruhr.

Whereas photographers of the urban explorer movement usually try to take pictures of so-called lost places that are forgotten or at least not collectively remembered, risky and/or not accessible to the public, the interview quote referring to the special meaning of industrial culture for the region and the picture of the crocodile in the Duisburg Landscape Park show that it is important for my research partners that these sites can be recognized and associated with the Ruhr. For urban explorers, it is part of their experience to physically connect with the past and with the 'authenticity of "the real"' (Bennett 2010: 430). However, my research partners have a different focus: for them, it is the atmospheric quality of the industrial aesthetic they want to use for their purposes. Affects that arise during the perception of the images, so to speak, are a quality of this specific human–material assemblage and are anticipated in the Instagrammers' practices. They include the technical infrastructure and the discourses regarding the regional economy and a possible future. In these practices we can observe that affects are 'distributed between, and can happen outside, bodies which are not exclusively human, and might incorporate technologies, things, non-human living matter, discourses or even, say, a swathe of noise or swarm of creatures' (Lorimer 2008: 552).

To arrange aesthetic staging for objects and to connect these with affective qualities is a special form of labour: 'it is aesthetic labour, creative work for producing aesthetically new and singular things. Whether the objects produced are material or immaterial, what is of primary importance is their sensuous and emotional value' (Reckwitz 2017a: 122). Andreas Reckwitz defines authenticity as a fundamental characteristic of creating cultural value (2017b: 139). He understands authenticity as a term borrowed semantically from Romanticism (2017b: 139). The current phenomenon took on only the affective character, so it serves as an 'empty signifier' in late modernity (Laclau 1996, cited in Reckwitz 2017b: 139). Therefore, authenticity can emerge in various contexts as an enacted performance and serve as valorizing for goods, objects or even regions (2017b: 138). Accordingly, the Instagrammers make use of the valorizing quality of authenticity to transform the image of the Ruhr.

Imaginations and Densified Symbols of a Regional Past

As another interviewee mentions, the pithead stocks (see, for instance, in Figure 4.2) in the Ruhr region have a great affective grip because of being 'symbols of a regional myth' (Interviewee D, 2019, translated by the author). The interviewee, a young entrepreneur in the field of social media, argues that these places are becoming mystical because the past of heavy industry in the Ruhr is no longer relevant to the younger generation. There are just the remains left, symbols of that great past when the size of these monuments reflected their national economic importance. This perception recurring to the former economic importance of the region is densified in visual symbols, which he also reproduces in his pictures, for example, in images of cooling towers.

Figure 4.2. View of the Halde Rheinelbe, a pithead stock in the Ruhr. Photowalk. Photograph courtesy of the research participant

During a photowalk at the Light Festival in Essen, another Instagram user who works as a regional influencer with cities in the Ruhr mentioned how important it is to always include a visual reference to the past in his photos. He considers this the uniqueness of the Ruhr – that something new can arise from a broken past. He stated that he wants to capture this positive excitement and curiosity towards the future in his pictures. In addition to his photographs, he also referred to a fashion label from the Ruhr that upcycles materials of industrial labour and uses heavy industry-related symbols for its fashion designs – for example, they almost always contain the colour black or the silhouette of a mining tower to symbolize the regional significance of the coal. Thus, visualizations of industrial legacy, which serve as representations of the past, are newly mixed with elements representing change and transformation, as the interview statements show. This thoughtfulness regarding the past and its significance for the future development of the region was evident in other interviews and in my observations.

The Instagrammers' endeavour to produce an authentic atmosphere of the Ruhr results in representing architectures and sites of former heavy industry that serve as densified symbols of the past. Using Caitlin DeSilvey and Tim Edensor's words, we can speak of these processes as 'the ruin's non-representational power to activate memory and sensation' (2013: 487). László Munteán grasps this phenomenon as the atmospheric mode of pastness that remains when the original signifying function that qualified images as mne-

monic objects has disappeared (2017: 208). The Instagrammers themselves have no subjective memories bound to these places; they draw upon the collective memory of national economic relevance of regional heavy industry to capture it in the pictures. For them, the industrial remnants serve as material representations of a regional past that create 'an atmospheric scaffold governing our engagement' with the images (Munteán 2017: 211). As Munteán analyses the creation of photographic heritage on the digital platform Fortepan in Hungary where images of the past are shared online, he comes to the conclusion that his fascination by this world presented online 'is engaged at an affective register that both entails and exceeds nostalgia' (2017: 210) because of the past 'that feels within reach on the computer screen' (2017: 211).

Experiencing the otherness of an imagined industrial past is made recognizable under the visualizations of former industrial sites. The affective register, in which the situations of taking photographs are embedded, is transferred to the perception and presentation of images on Instagram. With the aim of reversing the feeling of shame into pride, the Instagrammers try to address the expectations of an imagined audience on Instagram by showing the region's industrial past, but leaving out the story of decline and loss, and instead mixing the remaining 'atmospheric mode of pastness' with symbolic and material elements of an imagined economic future in the Ruhr area (Munteán 2017: 208). In contrast to the loss of site-specificity in the ruin porn produced by urban explorer photographers, the Instagrammers in the Ruhr are not dehistoricizing and decontextualizing the places they capture (Apel 2015: 26). They do not want to create a mystery around these sites by not revealing where they can be found or by showing how abandoned the places are. Nor do they represent risky or dangerous sites; on the contrary, the places pictured are in fact mostly accessible to anyone living in or travelling to the Ruhr. Hence, it is an everyday regional landscape that can be experienced by anyone and that develops in these situations of encounters with material and technical arrangements. This means it is also shaped by the affordances of the software technology in this field.

The Formation of a New Regional Imaginary in the Performance of Instagram Communities

Specificities of Human Software Interaction

Researching and using Instagram has shown to be limited by certain possibilities and constraints of the software. I use the concept of affordances to understand these possibilities for action as 'functional and relational aspects, which frame, while not determining, the possibilities for agentic action in relation to an object' (Hutchby 2001: 444). In spite of that, as Sarah Jurkie-

wicz pointed out in her research on blogging practices in Beirut, for the analysis of digital media, not only the platforms themselves but also the related practices of networking and publishing as well as content creation are equally relevant (2018: 327). Concomitantly, the specificity of the engagement with Instagram has to be taken into account when investigating these practices. The interviewees' practices are entangled with the software and, in opposition to the digital platform on which László Munteán focused, sharing images on Instagram still means that the images are protected by copyright. Consequently, the images posted on an account always connect to a person's identity behind this account, as another interviewee tells me:

> Browse through the accounts, read what people write under the pictures, what moves them, what they communicate. Every single picture tells others something. Read my account! Interpret my pictures, then you will find out everything about me! You can learn everything about the person behind the picture. (Interviewee C, 2018, translated by the author)

In the interview statement, the communicative function of Instagram is important. The platform provides numerous possibilities to interact with other accounts. Social interaction therefore becomes quite important and entails an engagement with images and postings that focus on actions in the present: 'I don't want to put artistic works of photography on Instagram, but rather what I'm experiencing right now, you know?' (Interviewee A, April 2018). In spite of the collective creation of an affective atmosphere that emerges from imagining the industrial past, this statement emphasizes the importance of these sensations and perceptions for the Instagrammer's individual acting in the present.

The statement mentioned first foregrounded the indexing function of the images pointing to the actor who took the pictures. This links the posts on Instagram even more to the situations in which they emerge and therefore to the Instagrammers themselves. As a result, the emergence of landscapes is strongly connected to individual subject positions and identities. Hence, practices of engaging with the regional past by feeling, imagining and visualizing it are entangled with the Instagrammers' individual performances. To shed light on this subjective relevance, in the following section I will explore situations in which Instagram users interviewed, transform the collectively shared and produced assemblages of imagined industrial pasts into a stage for their performances as members of a new creative economy in the Ruhr.

Spatial Narratives of Community Meeting Locations

Referring to the discursive and affective connections of regional images representing landscapes, Ryan, Foote and Azaryahu note that 'the symbolic meaning of a site is a function of its narrative potential, namely, it is a measure of how the site resonates with stories about events that took place there,

stories that are potentially inscribed on the local landscape' (2016: 215). Similarly, in relation to the Ruhr landscape, I consider the places of the regular meetings as a constitutive part of the symbolic-discursive production of a regional imaginary, which evolves around their 'narrative potential' (2016: 215). Furthermore, I want to argue that the symbolic 'site-specificity' is produced by and reproduces a spatial arrangement in order to point to the future of the Ruhr (Farman 2013: 6). Both spaces that serve as meeting places for the Instagrammers are interwoven with communities of immaterial labour and have a 'symbolic meaning' in this regard (Ryan, Foote and Azaryahu 2016: 215). Aesthetic practices aimed at creating material and symbolic frameworks for working practices labelled as creative must be considered in order to contextualize the regular meetings of the Instagram communities.

One of the two meeting locations is a designated café for creative communities and arts. With the help of signs at the entrance, the visitor can easily recognize that it is not an ordinary café, but a special place due to its illuminated facade and the architectural peculiarity compared to the other surrounding buildings. The core idea of the spatial concept of the building is openness: artists and creative workers are invited to use the working space, although it is open and accessible to the public. It is only necessary to announce a group if you want to rent a room for a certain period of time (as in the case of the Instagram meetings). The meeting rooms are accessible via an open café area. To gain access to these rooms, it is necessary to pay an entrance fee, which also allows the visitors to use the self-service bars on each floor to get free coffee and beverages.

The second meeting location has been designed as a coworking space for innovators and social entrepreneurs to have the opportunity to build a network. The aim is to exchange ideas for sustainable solutions on local and global issues to enable transformation potentials. Coworking spaces are usually designed for knowledge workers, as they are not bound to places of commodity production. In these spatial concepts, they are considered collaborative and interactive communities. Therefore, the conference room is of special interest, as is the interior equipment, consisting only of several dozen boxes as stools and larger boxes as counters. There are also two refrigerators, where beverages are available with a notice to make a contribution to the cash box. Apart from some plants, there is no decoration; even the walls have been left as exposed concrete. Social contacts and exchange in an informal setting seem to be the main purpose of this space. Notes on the wall convey the information that pictures are being made here with the aim of sharing them via social networks. The mobility infrastructures are easily accessible as both workspaces are located in the heart of the city centre in one of the larger cities of the Ruhr.

The work and meeting locations described above represent spaces entangled with creative economies, a concept that is expressed in the functionalist furniture as well as in unusual and colourful exterior facades. In addition to the intended functionality and instrumentality of the architecture, these spaces, in their scenic embedding, are to be understood as sites of staging and 'materialized imaginary' (Adler 2018: 300). Thus, 'they are meant to encourage creative sociability arising out of and fuelling further unpredictable interactions' (Thrift 2008: 45). Therefore, these spaces are not only places where specific working practices are meant to emerge, but also the setting for the enactment of a regional imaginary: as 'performative elements' (Ryan, Foote and Azaryahu 2016: 214), these spaces serve as 'spatial creations of creativity' (Adler 2018: 311) where actors perform the innovation of the Ruhr. In these spaces, the Instagrammers discuss their images, talk to each other about past hikes and walks in the Ruhr, and plan the forthcoming photowalks and meetings.[7]

At first glance, the biography of pictures taken on photowalks seems to end with their posting on Instagram. However, taking into account the embeddedness of images in the situation of their creation as well as its relevance for the Instagrammers' subjective identities, we can consider the meeting situations in creative spaces to be intertwined with the representations of the past of the Ruhr. The software Instagram includes the affordance of signing in with an account to post a picture. Thus, Instagram users can publish information of themselves and geotag places or establish a certain visualization style on their account. This allows them to connect the materialized signifiers of the photowalks on industrial sites (the posted images on Instagram) to their subjective identities. Furthermore, the images serve as instruments to meet and exchange with others who belong to this community of practice. As a result, they bring these experiences of visualizing together with their lived presence in a disparate space. A postindustrial landscape evolves in this constellation that bridges these different spaces and temporalities and creates a new situation of being in the world. As I have shown in the first section of my analysis, the meaning of the Instagram images cannot be reduced to its representational content: both the situations of producing the images on former industrial sites and the meeting situations where the Instagrammers discuss their images are performances where the meaning of visualizing the region is negotiated.

Performances of Creativity

The importance of presenting one's Instagram images and accounts at the meeting locations was evident in many situations I observed. The Instagrammers performed as creative workers by combining aesthetic and vi-

sual references to the past with their working in the present. The effect of these creation and arranging practices was intensified by their performance as protagonists of a future-oriented regional economy. As the following text shows, the Instagrammers' interaction with their audiences further stresses the performative character of their activities. The organizers of one of the regular meetings implemented a poll as a story on their Instagram account, asking their followers: 'What clichés about the Ruhr do you know?' Later, they presented the collection of answers they had received: for example, dirt, labour, traffic jams and the Ruhr dialect were mentioned. At the next meeting, they showed a two-minute promotional movie for their Instagram account, which they had already shown at an event pitching their startup. Therefore, they used the answers they had received from the poll and contrasted them with their photographs, where the Ruhr was depicted as a region full of green flourishing landscapes with industrial remnants in beautiful scenery. The movie ended with the question: 'What if home is not a place but a feeling?'[8] They contrasted the stereotypes and the negative image of the Ruhr with the images on their Instagram account. They expect their audience to understand this reading of the region they produced: as a beautiful landscape with a great past and prospects for a future as bright as the past has been. In this situation, the Instagrammers playfully tried to make use of the affective register and the imaginations of the past that governed their encounters with former industrial sites.

Building on Geertz's 'metacommentary [as] a story a group tells about itself' (Geertz 1980, cited in Turner 1982: 104), Victor Turner emphasizes the reflexive character of performances with the help of the metaphor of a mirror:

> In a complex culture it might be possible to regard the ensemble of performative and narrative genres, active and acting modalities of expressive culture as a hall of mirrors … in which social problems, issues and crises … are reflected as diverse images, transformed, evaluated, or diagnosed in works typical of each genre, then shifted to another genre better able to scrutinize certain of their aspects, until many facets of the problem have been illuminated and made accessible to conscious remedial action. (1982: 104)

Following this approach, I consider the self-referential character of these situations: the Instagrammers can be seen as protagonists of the regional imaginary, who connect their performance in the present with the 'atmospheric mode' of the visualizations of the past (Munteán 2017: 208). By doing so, their performance also points to a positive regional future: the development of the Ruhr from an industrial past to a new successful region led by creatives. They make use of the 'narrative potential' of the meeting place where they perform and of networking practices to present themselves as part of the creative community in the Ruhr (Ryan, Foote and Azaryahu 2016: 215).

Networking Practices of Creative Communities: Communication,
Interaction and Collaboration

As Hannes Krämer also points out, creativity in such communities must be read as the result of collective and interactive practices (2012: 129). The communities I observe emerge through networking practices, for example, communication, interaction and cooperation practices via Instagram and physical co-presence. Andreas Wittel examined networking as a basic logic of sociality and defined it as a 'paradigmatic social form of late capitalism and the new cultural economy' (2001: 71). In addition, he noted that network sociality is 'based on individualization and deeply embedded in technology' (2001: 71). He also observed that it is, above all, a social quality of urban postindustrial spaces that is characterized by 'its framing and institutional-ization in the form of new media networking events, parties, conferences, art openings, mailing lists and digital discussion forums' (2001: 72). As my empirical material shows, the continuous production and reproduction of social connections can be seen as evidence of its relevance as social capital (Bourdieu 1986; Wittel 2001: 72) that has to also be represented by stories and posts on Instagram.

At the meetings, Instagrammers have the opportunity to discuss their own concerns if they wish. At one of these events, a member of the public communication staff of a municipality in the Ruhr wished to talk about his strategies of storytelling. When he told us about the difficulties he faced in his daily work, everyone felt sorry for him. He presented the lengthy process he had to go through to get adequate equipment for working with social media. All participants agreed that this is a prerequisite for working with Facebook and Instagram. He told us that he had planned a video story for the municipality's Facebook account, but his direct superior gave priority to other concerns so that the story could not be published on Facebook because it was out of date. The speaker explained that neither his colleagues in other departments nor his superiors have any knowledge of the time structures associated with working with social media. Instead, they seem to keep to the 9-to-5 routine that is not compatible with social media, as he shows by telling another anecdote. Since his Facebook profile is linked to the com-munity profile (another fact that blurs the thresholds between life and work), he received a message on a Saturday night that someone had published a post about an act of violence on the municipality's profile page. Of course, he immediately took care of this problem by providing the person with more information so that they could contact the emergency services and thus avoid damage to the city's image by not acting in time.

In order to illustrate the entangling time structure of his daily work, which is completely different from the time routines of his colleagues at

work, the speaker cited the example of his presence at the meeting that eve-ning. His reports met with broad approval and others present started discuss-ing about different time structures in their working lives. They talked about shared experiences in dealing with the demands of working with Instagram and social media in general during their everyday work. Returning to his presentation topic of storytelling strategies on Instagram, he explained that those time logics do not work together because of different expectations and definitions of stories to be told on Instagram and Facebook. He stressed that he would rather use the municipality's social media channel to reduce the distance between civil society actors and municipality by revealing more details of the complexities of everyday work in administrative contexts.

Starting with an exchange of ideas regarding storytelling on Instagram, the group was later discussing and sharing common experiences regarding working practices. This shared range of experiences is based on specific work experience linked to creative workers within the scope of 'immaterial labor' (Lazzarato 1996), 'that is, labor that produces an immaterial good, such as a service, a cultural product, knowledge, or communication' (Hardt and Negri 2000: 290). The statements in the discussion mark the actors as members of a community of professionals who share the same experiences in everyday work due to the production of immaterial goods. I understand jobs related to Instagram and social media as those that 'are characterized in general by the central role played by knowledge, information, affect, and communication' (Hardt and Negri 2000: 285).

Although the use of Instagram is not necessarily bound to an occupation in the context of creative and immaterial labour, the problematic clash of different paradigms of separating working and life time is a shared experience and is narrated in the context of this informal meeting event. The tenor of the discussion showed that there is the wish to blur those fixed thresholds in order to be capable of working with social media that requires expanding the usual working time structures. Thus, those statements mark being affiliated to a community that collectively experiences a prevention of these desired blurring by various circumstances, for example, fixed working hours, sepa-rate spheres of working and life time, fixed hierarchies and structured work-ing procedures in a prescribed manner. I consider this insightful moment of shared experience to be networking practices that should be understood as community building.[9] Through networking, the members articulate being part of a creative community.

The depiction of this situation illustrates how Instagrammers perform their community identity as members of working contexts of creative economies. They make use of a specific cultural constellation to perform as protagonists of a new, future-oriented regional economy entailing forms of immaterial labour that are different from the traditional working contexts of

heavy industry in the Ruhr. Nevertheless, these industrial working contexts are represented in the images on Instagram to act as an atmospheric backdrop. The practice of visually representing the industrial past of the Ruhr is bundled together with arranging objects and practices of a new, creative economy. As the 'meaning of a story is affected by the place in which the story is told and, similarly, the meaning of a place tends to be told through stories' (Farman 2013: 6), the depicted meeting locations, the shared narratives of work and the feeling of being part of a creative community constitute this future story of the Ruhr. By bringing together these disparate elements, a new regional imaginary is formed.

Conclusion

As I have shown using examples from my ethnographic data, the actors position themselves as protagonists in a new regional imaginary by forming communities related to late modern immaterial labour. These communities are characterized by networking practices and working structures in creative economies. In their images posted on Instagram, the interviewees make use of the past as an affective framework. The industrial remnants do not evoke individual memories, but rather are a less concrete act of imagining a regional myth at these sites, giving rise to a specific 'atmospheric mode of pastness' (Munteán 2017: 208). The discourses and affective states in which the industrial past of the Ruhr is embedded, namely a collective shame that is to be transformed into pride, are related to these atmospheric encounters between Instagrammers, pithead stocks and cooling towers. The participants aesthetically valorized the Ruhr by capturing in their images that the past of heavy industrial work merely represents the affective qualities of romantic ruins and not economic decline. My observations show that spatial narratives, networking practices and the affordances of Instagram form a constellation that stresses the performative character of the meetings. In these meeting situations, the Instagrammers combine the backdrop and the affective atmosphere of a regional past with performances of 'the new': they perform as the new economic power that leads the region out of its past, as the depiction of the promotional movie has illustrated. The images taken at industrial heritage sites develop as elements of a new assemblage that connects to the Instagrammers' individual performances at the meetings. In this understanding, the images are part of a postindustrial landscape linking different material spaces: on the one hand, industrial heritage spaces, where the imagined past and its affective atmosphere is relevant for the Instagram users; and, on the other hand, spaces of a creative economy, where the Instagrammers constitute themselves as creative subjects in the Ruhr. With the help of my analysis, I

have pointed out that a more-than-representational understanding is able to unmask the cultural meaning of visual representations for the emergence of a postindustrial landscape by taking into account the conditions, experiences and situations under which Instagram images come into being.

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Notes

1. Instagram had reached 1 billion monthly active users in 2018; see Boland (2018).
2. Retrieved 9 November 2018 from https://www.instagram.com.
3. It is not necessary to follow an Instagram account to contact users; it is possible to send messages to a user utilizing the Instagram interface if you are not a follower of his or her account. Instagram also makes it possible to give likes and comment on a post despite not being a follower. I also have to take photos myself and upload them to my Instagram account because a neglected profile is not trustworthy.
4. For instance, the presentation of project results of KlimaExpo.NRW and klimametropole RUHR in 2022 and the International Horticultural Exhibition (IGA) in 2027 (cf. Land NRW 2016; Stadt Essen 2020).
5. Lindner is hereby referring to Bourdieu's elaborations on the relationship between physical and social space; see Bourdieu (2018).
6. In German #ruhrromantik.
7. The first meeting location was founded by an IT entrepreneur, while the second meeting location described was initiated by entrepreneurs based in the startup scene of the Ruhr.
8. At the same time, with this question they refer to the line of a song by a well-known German singer from the Ruhr, Herbert Grönemeyer (1999): 'Heimat'.
9. In contrast to the assumptions of Wittel (2001: 67), there are obviously still possibilities for common narratives in these working contexts.

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