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“Geocinema” as a Mode of Seeing Xenospaces

The text examines images that exceed the capabilities of the optical apparatus of the eye, explored to date through studies on infrastructure¹ which help analyse images as factors generating information flow² or else as tangible elements (server rooms, cabling, sensor networks) and intangible elements (wi-fi signal, meteorological data) which extend technical infrastructure. The relations between images and data are analysed via theory as well as artistic theory and practice by e.g. James Bridle³, Tung-Hui Hu⁴ and Hito Steyerl⁵. They prove that the notion of a cloud is but a rhetorical construct and a full mapping of the world is illusory as new territories are always yet to be discovered. Their novelty is paradoxical and consists in a secondary “discovery” of a given area by e.g. new opportunities of seeing it.

Images generated in this manner can be counted among the emerging new genre of media I will call *geocinema*. I owe this notion to the authors of a film polyptych *Geocinema* (2017-2018)⁶, an outcome of the interdisciplinary research project *The New Normal*, carried out in the Strelka Institute for Architecture, Media and Design in Moscow⁷. The work

- » 1 For infrastructural studies critical cartography is particularly helpful. See <https://cistudies.org/> (Strelka Institute: 28.12.2019), I. Burrington, *Networks of New York. An Illustrated Field Guide to Urban Internet Infrastructure*, Melville House, Brooklyn, NY 2016.
- » 2 See: L. Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., London, England, 2001, p. 27-31.
- » 3 J. Bridle, *New Dark Age: Technology and the End of the Future*, Verso, Brooklyn, NY/ London 2018.
- » 4 T.-Hui Hu, *A Prehistory of the Cloud*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 2015.
- » 5 H. Steyerl, *Too Much World: Is the Internet Dead?*, “e-flux”, November 2013, #49, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/49/60004/too-much-world-is-the-internet-dead/> [access: 28.12.2019].
- » 6 *Geocinema* (2017-2018) is a subproject created by young scholars participating in *The New Normal* project implemented at the Strelka Institute: art historian Asia Bazdyrieva, graphic designer Solveig Suess and filmmaker Alexey Orlov, <https://www.geocinema.network/> [access: 28.12.2019].
- » 7 Strelka Institute for Architecture, Media and Design was set up in 2009. It conducts educational and research projects, involving invited specialists from abroad. The main area of research is city space in its urban, social, cultural, and aesthetic aspects. The Institute’s projects

progresses within a think tank⁸ and art is a legitimate research method with both a theoretical and practical aspects (*art as research*)⁹. *The New Normal* (carried out since 2016), led by Benjamin H. Bratton with the contribution of e.g. Liam Young¹⁰ and other leading scholars and artists, exemplifies the use of the above method. The project's title refers to a reality developed by technologies which are too new to have been examined by research methods. The language of art comes to the aid here, enabling a different, more idiosyncratic view. In this context, the concept of a new normality requires a speculative inquiry aimed at studying the contemporary landscape. Both the landscape itself, transforming from natural to technologically naturalized through to the limits of alienation (*xenospace*), and the opportunities of its mapping and representation, change under the impact of factors triggered by the post-anthropocentric (r)evolution. The results of the studies conducted so far are interdisciplinary, theoretical and practical in nature. This is evidenced by a review of the films created within the project, treated as scientific essays and fully-fledged artistic statements. Their topics are, e.g. "economies, ecologies and cultures"¹¹. They address questions on post-human forms of imagery and designing "not for humans" within artificially delineated and by definition uninhabited areas (e.g. sterile glasshouses, dry docks, etc.). Therefore, the term "geocinema" denotes a technologically conditioned apparatus of total visibility which produces an incessant excess of images seen as a(n) (over)production of data. The notion of geocinema may be useful for the discussion of those forms of imagery which allow a xenospatial description of the world. This stems from the growing autonomy of image media which are slowly but steadily moving towards post-human media, comprising e.g. expanded technical infrastructure¹²; not only image-recording tools, but also channels for their circulation online. In this way, the concept of geocinema can be extrapolated to broader areas of visual technoculture in order to reflect on the interfaces in the production of images and data, based on examples of art as a research method suitable for exploring xenospace. •

are carried out and documented bilingually, therefore I use the English versions of Russian names and surnames, as adopted by the Institute. <https://strelka.com/> [access: 16.06.2019].

- » 8 Scheduled for three years, *The New Normal* was divided into twelve thematic modules led by scholars representing a variety of disciplines. Practical input from designers and (audio-visual) artists is of great importance, too. See *Themes and Modules*, <https://thenewnormal.strelka.com/> [access: 28.12.2019].
- » 9 See *Art as Research. Opportunities and Challenges*, ed. S. McNiff, Intellect, Bristol, 2013.
- » 10 Liam Young is the leader of the Unknown Fields Division and an active member of a group of speculative scholars and artists, *Tomorrows Thoughts Today*: <http://www.tomorrowsthoughtstoday.com/> [access: 22.12.2019].
- » 11 *Ibidem*.
- » 12 See G. Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, P. Dutton & Co., Inc., New York 1970.