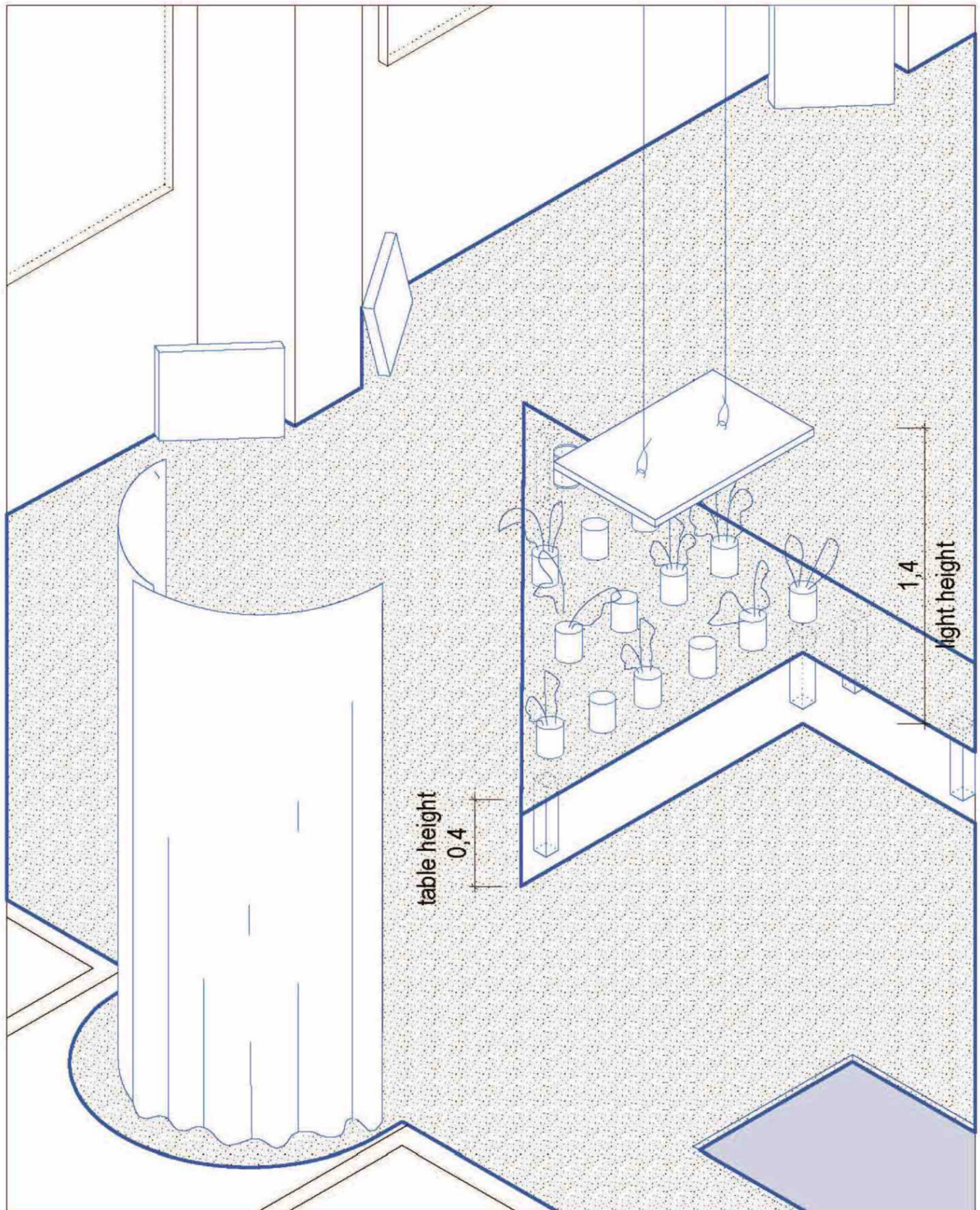


06/12/2017

Chinafrika.blackout at UABB Shenzhen



Shenzhen Notes

by Jochen Becker / metroZones for the exhibition 'Chinafrika.blackout' at the Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism/ Architecture (UABB) in Shenzhen, China (see details below text)

Yu Gung Moves Mountains

"Today, two big mountains lie like a dead weight on the Chinese people. One is imperialism, the other is feudalism. The Chinese Communist Party has long made up its mind to dig them up. We must persevere and work unceasingly, and we, too, will touch God's heart. Our God is none other than the masses of the Chinese people. If they stand up and dig together with us, why can't these two mountains be cleared away?"

Four years before China was liberated, Mao recounted a utopian parable from the 4th century BC, in which a patient collective body is able to move mountains with merely shovels over a long period of time. It references the legend of the "foolish old man" Yu Gung, who wanted larger fields and access to the ocean. Generation after generation, his children and children's children would continue his life's work using hoes and baskets until both mountains have been removed: "When I die, my children remain; when the children die, the grandchildren remain... and so each generation will take over from the past one in an endless procession. These mountains may be high, but they can't get any higher; they grow smaller with every bit that we take away: why shouldn't we be able to remove them?" The emperor in the sky was impressed by Yu Gung's work and endurance, and ordered that the mountains be carried off on the backs of two heralds.

Big Bang

After Mao's death in 1976, colossal shifts became reality with a big bang. After Mao's successor Deng Xiaoping came to power, the formerly tranquil fishing village of Shenzhen turned into a 15-million metropolis in less than 40 years. The spectacular blasting of Shekou Mountain sparked the establishment of Special Economic Zones (SEZ) and transformed the Pearl River delta into the "factory of the world". The permanently repeating explosion is exhibited as a video installation at the center of the enormous Shenzhen city museum. One could say that all of metropolitan China became one special economic zone.

Ford Ruins

Established as "factory of the world" just decades ago, parts of Shenzhen are already being torn down again. Fordism – i.e. combining mass assembly line production, welfare state and standardized consumer goods – has entered into a new phase. Industries are being moved to the interior of the country, while badly needed living space is constructed in its place. As in the formerly industrialized Ruhr area in Germany, "creative industries" as well as educational institutions are meant to lead Shenzhen into a new, post-Fordist phase.

SEZ Export

Based on the Shenzhen model, Special Economic or Free Trade Zones are now being exported by Chinese state enterprises. In 2006, the Government of the People's Republic of China announced that it would support the establishment of as many as 50 overseas "economic and trade cooperation zones". Of the 19 zones approved so far, eight are on the African continent: Lagos (Lekki Free Trade Zone, Ogun Guangdong Free Trade Zone), Sambian Copperbelt (Zambia China Economic and Trade Cooperation Zone), Sambias capital Lusaka (Lusaka South Multi-facility Economic Zone), Egypt (Suez Economic and Trade Cooperation Zone), Mauritius Island (JinFei Economic Trade and Cooperation Zone) as well as Ethiopias capital Addis Abeba (Eastern Industrial Zone, Bole Lemi Industrial Zone), etc.

Illuminated Fields

The "illuminated fields" evoke memories of the investment ruins in East Germany after the fall of the Berlin Wall, stretched out in an open green field with paved roads and lamp posts. It somehow reminded us while visiting the SEZs in Lagos or Sambia, as little industries are at work. Here, the future still seems open and the promise of not just extracting natural resources, but also refining them in the country has relevancy.

The Chambishi ZCCZ Zone was established as a Zambian/Chinese joint venture at the heart of the Zambian Copperbelt. In one of the few buildings already standing, we were led into a large, almost museum-like showroom with a giant A-380 hovering over future factory halls drawn onto the wall. In the Nigerian Lekki Free Trade Zone, there is a single Metal Piece factory as well as a projected truck assembly at work.

By contrast, the Huajian Group alone employs ca. 3,800 workers in the Eastern Industrial Zone in the outskirts of Addis Ababa. Ivanka Trump's collections are produced amongst other things in a shoe factory there. The Ethiopia-China Dong Guan International Light Industry Zone is currently being built near Addis Ababa's Chinese built central station, planned as a complete industrial town, with factory halls, worker accommodation and consumption zones.

Robots & Automation

As yet there are still workers in Ethiopian factories. But already Foxconn, known as a manufacturer of iPhones, plans to purchase 10,000 industrial robots. These robots could just as easily be located in the US, working day and night without union control in the darkness of a cellar and in immediate vicinity to their markets. With these fully automatic machines on site, lengthy shipment in containers from Shenzhen to San Francisco would be saved and "just in time" reactions to market shifts made quicker.

In northern Saudi Arabia a completely new economic zone called 'Neom' is in planning. Here machines, drones and robots will do the work instead of people. At the same time, the AI robot "Sophia", developed in Hong Kong, obtained Saudi citizenship.

Blackout?

"Despite the speed and scale of its urban development, Shenzhen has not experienced

housing shortages, serious failures to provide basic infrastructure for most residents, or other typical symptoms of megacity urban blight” (Weiwen Huang on ‘Shenzhen Speed’). Compared to other boom-cities of the Global South, at least in China’s metropolises, there are no slums in noticeable proportions. However, the hukou system splits the rights between city dwellers and immigrants from the countryside.

Africa is referred to as the last major growth region in the world. By 2050, today’s population of one billion could almost double, with more and more people moving into the cities. The gap between the village and the metropolis paradoxically unites China and Africa. As in China, the migration pressure from the country to the African metropolises is massive and unbroken. However, in the fast-growing urban centers on the African continent, little is being invested in housing or public infrastructure, so that the everyday life there, shaped by informality, will become even worse. The use of cement per capita in Africa is less than 50 kilos, while in China 1,737 kilos and in Europe 230 kilos are consumed.

And what might be the future of a “chinafrikian” industrial situation? On the one side, we will see dirty mining by individuals in the Congolese copper belt, digging deep with a shovel on high individual risks – and on the other side the future robotic-automated industrial parks. Both are in deep darkness: Only with a bad light under ground for the artisanal miners, or the work of robots as well as data and other logistic spaces or the bellies of a container ship/plane, which are running with no need to have light.

‘Chinafrika.blackout’ Exhibition List for UABB

Duration: December 15, 2017–March 17, 2018

Main Venue: Nantou Old Town, Shenzhen, China

Di Fang 2017 The Destination to Promising Land

Bodil Furu 2017 The Letter

Christian Hanusseck / Gerda Heck 2017 Guangzhou Mapping Wallpaper

Huang Xiaopeng 2017 One step forward, two steps backward

Elke Marhöfer / Mikhail Lylov 2015 Primate Colors

Sary Mwaba 2014 Copper, Cobalt and Manganese Cabbage

Adam James Smith / Song Ting / Wang Qihan 2014 The Land of Many Palaces

Guangzhou Working Group (Di Fang, Huang Xiaopeng, Lu Shan, Luo Xiye, Payne Zhu, 3d group)

Jochen Becker 2014-17 Contact Zones

Daniel Kötter 2014-17 Establishing Shots

Daniel Kötter 2017 Chinafrika. mobile

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