



# Man Made Clouds

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## *Man Made Clouds*

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Wolken nehmen einen besonderen Platz in unserer Phantasie ein und Ihre unendlichen Formen und Kombinationsmöglichkeiten bieten unbegrenzte Möglichkeiten für Metaphorik. Ganz im Gegenteil zu Ihrer immateriellen Anmut sind Wolken nicht neutral. Die Repräsentationen von Wolken verbildlichen oft verschiedene Ideologien. Obwohl viel über Wolken publiziert worden ist und die Wolke ein jüngst sehr modischer Begriff in Kunst, Design und Architektur geworden ist, haben sich wenige Autoren mit der menschengemachten Wolke unserer Konsumkultur beschäftigt. Künstliche Wolken aus Industrie- und Autoabgasen, Zigarettenqualm, Ozonfeldern sind sozialkritisch geladene Landschaftsbilder. Nachdrücklicher als bei den natürlichen Wolken dienen die Formen der menschengemachten Wolken als Träger von politischen Botschaften. Das Buch erforscht das Phänomen, die Wahrnehmung und Darstellung der menschengemachten Wolken und versucht die Botschaften, die sie übertragen, zu verschlüsseln.

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*Clouds occupy a special place in our imaginations and their countless forms and combinations offer infinite possibilities for metaphor. In visual culture, far from being neutral, representations of clouds embody ideology. However, although much has been written about clouds, and they are often represented in art, design and architecture, few authors have addressed the man-made clouds produced by consumer culture. Artificial clouds, produced by industrial emissions, vehicle exhaust or cigarettes, offer a landscape charged with social and critical meanings. More explicit than the clouds formed by nature, the contours of man-made clouds have been shaped to carry political ideas. This book researches the perception, representation and phenomena of man-made clouds and seeks to unravel the multiple meanings they can convey. The man-made cloud is at the heart of consumer culture; as it dissipates into the air it is a conspicuous sign of consumption. However, in daily life the producers of emissions frequently make them invisible by disguising, burying or displacing them. In the process, industrial production and the consumption of finite resources disappear from public consciousness. In this book, the cloud is explored as a metaphor to aestheticise and draw critical attention to emissions. Here, man-made clouds are highlighted and transformed. By displacing our fascination with natural clouds onto man-made clouds, we look upon them and ourselves in a new way. The artworks of Helen Evans and Heiko Hansen (HeHe) reflect on the inseparable relationship between humans and the environment. The notion of pure clean and natural clouds, untouchable by mankind, belongs to a previous age.*



Following the introduction by Jens Hauser (Atmosph-air? Atmos-faire!) *Man Made Clouds* is in three parts. Part one is made up of three essays by HeHe about man-made clouds. The central section contains photographs of HeHe's installation projects on the theme of man-made clouds. Part three is made up of four essays by Noortje Marres, Gunnar Schmidt, Malcolm Miles and Jean-Marc Chomaz.

*Smoke Signals* looks at the perception of the air we breath. In everyday life, tobacco smoke wafts across the invisible boundary separating personal and public space, and transforms the air into an olfactory and visual experience. By its presence in air smoke arouses controversy and sparks political meanings. From pipes, cigars and cigarettes to the new language and culture of vaping this essay discusses the symbolic power wielded by tobacco clouds and the change in consciousness that they bring.

*Architecture and clouds* looks at clouds as hypothetical constructions: conceptual clouds, conceived and designed by philosophers, architects and computer engineers. Since Galileo, clouds have been used as metaphors for subversive and for utopian and mystical ideas that transform our understanding. For the radical experimental architects of the twentieth century the cloud was an important utopian motif and was used to exercise poetic critique. Today the cloud has become the emblem of digital information stored remotely and accessed over the internet. What is it that makes the cloud a meaningful sign to describe these ideas? What happens when these signs take physical form?

*Factory Clouds: The art of pollution* looks at the cloudy by-products of industrial culture: the factory clouds emitted by nuclear power plants, fossil burning plants and incinerators. Far from being simply a sign of pollution, the factory cloud has been manipulated to represent divergent ideas such as productivity, wealth, labour, energy, revolution, altered mental states and the power of the human imagination. In post-industrial culture, a sanitised version of the factory production metaphor has been appropriated by the cultural industry, where all references to ideas of pollution are absent. How does the the idea of contamination and pollution relate to the practice of art? This essay reflects on how art illuminates the delicate relationship between production and factory emissions.

The artworks pictured in this book explore man-made clouds as a material medium and in the process bring them from the periphery to the centre of attention. *Nuage Vert* (Green Cloud), the most ambitious project in the book, is a laser light projection onto the vapour emission of a power plant. Its purpose is to generate a vibrant social process, engaging residents, activists, politicians and industrialists in a joint action on the theme of energy use and consumption. It acts as a projection which is open to interpretation. A selection of documents from the project archive are published here. After the happening of *Nuage Vert*



in Helsinki (2004–08) the project was commissioned to be realised in the region of Paris, but in sharp contrast to Helsinki it was censored by local authorities despite the support of many local actors. Nuage Vert in Paris had to be enacted in defiance of the authorities. The letters, emails, articles, photographs and blog posts elicited by Nuage Vert over several years reveal specific meanings attributed to the cloud and are an integral part of the artwork.

To shed light on the sociological meanings of the cloud, Noortje Marres' essay *Who is afraid of the green cloud?* Environmental rendering of controversy uses the project archive as source for analysis. Marres discusses the cloud as a surface that embodies and articulates local environmental issues and controversies already present but invisible. By proposing to illuminate the emission, it both seduces and provokes actors into producing accounts of the environment that reveal its multiple meanings. Marres calls it a theatre of definable concerns, where interpretation, speculation, and documentation unfold as an environmental event. It dramatises how we are all situated in the production of energy. By emphasising the formal beauty of the cloud, Nuage Vert deliberately undermines the definition of industrial production as simply the negative space of pollution.

Death has a symbolic presence in man-made clouds. In his essay *Smoke Screens: Phantasmagoria and the Origins of Media Art*, Gunnar Schmidt looks at the representation of smoke, from its religious heritage to phantasmagoria where it was deployed as a surface for image projections to represent the idea of extinction. Schmitt analyses phantasmagoria and its reception by audiences in the eighteenth century and argues that the origins of media art lie in the aesthetics of these early special effects. He suggests that Nuage Vert is an extension of phantasmagoria that unearths the spectral side of technological culture.

In the context of climate change, denial and narratives of environmental catastrophe, *A Green Ellipsis* by Malcolm Miles discusses the ambiguities and paradoxes evoked by Nuage Vert. Miles argues that in creating multiple readings, Nuage Vert interrupts routine and provides a visual shock that suspends the status quo. In doing so, might another reality become possible?

In the chaotic dynamics of a world that is perpetually evolving and mutating, Jean-Marc Chomaz in *Latent Impacts, catastrophes in slow motion* describes how humans impact on the earth's ecosystem and the long delay between cause and effect. From ozone holes, contrails, acid rain, atomic mushroom clouds, to the nuclear clouds from Chernobyl and the radioactive water plumes into the ocean from Fukushima-Daiichi, Chomaz explains man-made clouds through flux. His knowledge of fluid dynamics provides a compelling variant on the hypothesis of the book. Man-made clouds not only inspire our imagination



and fuel critique: understanding their shapes, forms and movement can also give clues about their eventual effect. *Man Made Clouds* is also a work of craft.

Each book contains an ex libris of paper, hand-made from 100% organic tobacco, specially cultivated in the soil of Pollinaria, in Abruzzo, Italy. Each tobacco leaf was dried, cooked and transformed into paper using artisanal paper-making techniques. In this single page, two artefacts meet: hand-made paper as a carrier of information and the cylinder of tobacco leaves ready for consumption. *Man Made Clouds* is a book about the image of man-made emissions and it is an object which can, at least in part, volatilise into the air. Please smoke.



## Curriculum Vitae

HeHe, Helen Evans (UK, 1972) and Heiko Hansen (Germany, 1970), are an artist duo based in Paris. With humour, their work questions the ever present energy needs of contemporary life, visualising social, industrial and ecological paradoxes that result from today's technological landscapes. The repertoire of HeHe comprises worst case technological accidents: confronting and exposing the hidden dimensions and implications of such ecological threats. The actors of HeHe's performance installations are the machines themselves: oil rigs, nuclear power plants, incinerators, cars, cranes, trains, and the electric devices of mass consumption. Installed in real world environments or eerie staged settings, the machine becomes a theatrical device, placed in apocalyptic chromatic landscape and dressed in an unnatural green afterglow.

In their vehicle probes, a research into abandoned railways and mobility named "The Train Project", participants are lured into a dream-utopia for transportation.

HeHe has been commissioned to make site specific work for the Bruges Triennial (2015, 2016), Maison des Arts Georges Pompidou in Cajarc (2016), Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb (2015), Nuit Blanche, Paris (2014), Le Voyage à Nantes (2006 & 2013), FACT & The Arts Catalyst (2013), Skor, Amsterdam (2012), Cape Farewell (2012), Invisible Dust (2011), Centre Pompidou (2007), Luxembourg European Capital of Culture (2007).

Their monumental project "Nuage Vert", realised in 2008 in Helsinki, used a laser beam to draw an outline onto a cloud released by a power plant, the green cloud changed in size relative to the energy consumption of local residents. This installation won a Golden Nica in Hybrid art at Arts Electronica in 2008. Further international prizes include an Honorary Mention at Arts Electronica (2012), the Environmental Art Fund, Finland (2008), Zero One Prix, San José (2008) and Cynet Art prize, Dresden (2001).

Bridging the spheres of technology-focused arts and that of contemporary art, they has participated in exhibitions at the Palais de Beaux-Arts, Bruxelles (2015), Parc D'Arte Viventi, Turin (2012),



Helen Evans and Heiko Hansen

National Art Museum of China, Beijing (2011), Biennale de Lyon (2009), San José Museum of Art (2008), Biennale Internationale Design in St Etienne (2006, 2010). Their work Champs d'Ozone is in the Collection of the Fonds municipal d'art contemporain de la Ville de Paris. Forthcoming events in 2016 include their first book "Man Made Clouds" (mid-September) edited by Editions Hyx supported by Pollinaria (Italy), the Andrea von Braun Foundation in Germany and the Centre National des Arts Plastiques in France. A series new site-specific installations titled "Cloud Crash" for the Lovelock Art commission organised by the Cape Farewell in collaboration with the Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester and a large scale public sculpture "Gone with the Wind" in Utrecht commissioned for Public Works. HeHe is represented by the gallery Aeroplastics Contemporary in Bruxelles.