

**Peter Krieger**

*Müll in der Natur. Eine Mikrostudie zur politischen Ikonographie, Ideengeschichte und Forensik des Anthropozäns*

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„In this book, Peter Krieger develops a Political Iconography of the Anthropocene: via optical forensics, the history of ideas, and visual studies, he explains why human beings abuse wilderness as refuse dumps. His microhistory of a Mexican nature reserve polluted by garbage reveals, as a striking example, how waste has become a new stratum of the Anthropocene (this non-official, but still valuable and critical category of the Earth's history). The precise analysis of this globally representative scene of an environmental crime at the same time serves as a basis for the elaboration of a realistic utopia, which aims at rethinking and changing our destructive relation with nature.

An important book, a rousing book – that horrifies us while it opens perspectives for alternative action.“

Jürgen Goldstein, Professor of Philosophy at Coblenz University, Germany

Research Professor Peter Krieger (Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, National Autonomous University of Mexico / UNAM) and Professor at the university's graduate program in architecture and art history, has been vice-president of the International Committee of Art History CIFA/UNESCO, and in 2016, the Aby Warburg professor at Warburg Haus, Hamburg University. His research and publications emphasize the political iconography and geo-aesthetics of landscapes, cities and architecture.

## **TECTUM publishing house, Interview with Peter Krieger**

TECTUM: In your book you are arguing that waste in nature is not only an ecological problem, but also a research topic of Political Iconography and the History of Ideas. Could you explain this more precisely?

PK: The book deals with a topic which is essential for human survival, but mostly reduced to the analysis of technical expertise and scientific research. I think that it is necessary to consider different impulses, especially from the field of visual studies, which tries to reveal the epistemic potential of the images of waste as a source of alternative understanding. The precise analysis of the photographs of the crime scene can generate complex environmental knowledge and stimulate ecological “response-ability” (Donna Haraway). The act of seeing is an essential cognitive capacity of human beings. The visual material presented in this book reveals an archaic political issue of humankind since the first settlements: the exploitation and thus contamination of soils. By means of the History of Ideas – for example with regard to the ideology of consumption and the “throw-away society” – we can understand why wild nature still is not widely recognized as an eco-systemic, and even aesthetic value. My reflections start at this point.

TECTUM: Your book is a “micro-study”. What do you mean by this and why did you choose this method of research?

PK: In this book I am trying to explain a significant detail of landscape pollution through garbage: an environmental crime scene, located in Mexico City, which is a paradigmatic case for a global problem. I am considering two important conceptual inspirations, on the one hand Carlo Ginzburg’s “micro-history”, established 50 years ago, and on the other hand, Hans Magnus Enzensberger’s book on the details (*Einzelheiten*, in German), the specific conditions of the local which are transferable to the global. I am extending these historiographical and literary approaches to the visual world, which constitute world views. Thus, seemingly peripheral objects of study, such as a Mexican nature reserve, claim academic relevance. Implicitly, my research also reanimates the conceptual heritage of Alexander von Humboldt, who related scientific *and* aesthetic research on the landscapes in Mexico, thus generating complex knowledge on botany, geology, and environmental issues of planet Earth, more than 200 years ago.

TECTUM: You are proposing a “realistic utopia”, in order to change our irresponsible relation to nature. Could you explain this utopia and how could this be concretized?

PK: It was important for me in this book not only to express a fundamental environmental critique of illegal waste disposal in nature, but also to show models and perspectives of how to make it better. Part of this is promoting wilderness *within* cities – a key point of the political biodiversity goals for 2030. As a countermeasure to the drastic and threatening reduction of species richness, it seems to be indispensable, in ecological terms, to create more free spaces for the autopoietic development of flora and fauna, beyond any human intervention. However, contrary to this habit stands the common disdain of “wild” nature. Still dominating is the cultural repression of nature, the domestication of exotic plants and trained, educated pets.

My book aims at changing this collective habitus, stimulating a change of mind, which recognizes the archaic beauty and eco-systemic functions of wilderness – and not to abuse nature reserves as garbage dumps. The book also shows concrete artistic interventions and examples of environmental urban interventions, alternative proposals for a better development of cities and landscapes.

