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Taming the Leviathan: The epic of the domestication of the world and Peter Behrens's Gibraltar Dam

This paper examines the symbolic and monumental significance of water infrastructure as an expression of humanity's ambition to dominate nature. By exploring cases such as Peter Behrens's Gibraltar Dam and Soviet hydrological projects, it considers how water infrastructure has transcended its functional purpose, embodying the "domestication of the world" by asserting control over water, a force both essential and potentially destructive. As hallmarks of the Anthropocene, these structures represent modernity's rationalising spirit, showcasing both technical prowess and a cultural ideology of human supremacy over natural forces. However, in the context of escalating environmental crises, this article questions whether the subjugation of water remains the only viable approach in contemporary design.

> *Until the last ton of fossil fuel is burned out, capitalism and bureaucracy force humanity into an 'iron cage' of dependency, ushering in the ' domestication of the world.'*[1]
>
> **—H. Spode**

Introduction: Water infrastructure—beyond functionalism

Diverting rivers, draining lakes, and dredging oceans—the transformation of bodies of water into forms and configurations suited to human development, beneath its evident utility, reveals a complex and layered design philosophy. Interrogating the symbolic meanings of these practices offers a powerful lens through which to grasp the Promethean tension that characterises design in the Anthropocene era. Through case studies—from Atlantropa and Soviet hydrological projects to contemporary "green" initiatives—this paper examines how water infrastructure, particularly from modernity to the present, embodies the enduring human ambition to control and rationalise the wild forces of nature. The current environmental crisis is a powerful challenge to this paradigm, and raises a critical question: Can water have powerful agency in contemporary design?

To address this question, this paper explores the meanings and symbolic power associated with the subjugation of the aquatic element in infrastructural design. Investigating the underlying design codes of infrastructure means challenging some of the most deeply rooted assumptions within contemporary

design practice. As Marco Biraghi states: "Like the most representative monuments and public buildings of a civilisation, infrastructures are also a direct expression of the dominant ideology of a given era."[2] Through its role in governing and rationalising natural forces, infrastructure exposes the conflict and drive for domination that characterises the human–nature relationship in the Anthropocene.[3] The domestication of nature enacted by the infrastructural object can be seen as a salient expression of a broader cultural process set in motion by modernity, one that finds a meaningful echo in a passage by Karl Marx:

> For the first time, nature becomes purely an object for humankind, purely a matter of utility; it ceases to be recognized as a force in its own right; and the theoretical discovery of its autonomous laws appears merely as a ruse to subjugate it to human needs, whether as an object of consumption or as a means of production.[4]

From modernity onward, nature has been perceived as an entity entirely tameable by human agency. This paper interprets infrastructure as the symbolic and material apex of this tension, affirming and crystallising the domestication of the natural world through human intervention. By spatialising this Faustian ambition, infrastructure emerges as a monument to the Promethean ethos underpinning design in the Anthropocene. This elevation of infrastructure's role becomes particularly significant when considered in light of Alois Riegl's definition of the monument: "A monument is a work of man erected for the specific purpose of keeping particular human deeds or destinies alive and present in the consciousness of future generations."[5]

In this sense, infrastructure becomes a true monument, capable of materialising and fixing in time the act of hybris[6] against the forces of nature—a gesture that lies at the very core of the design logics of the Anthropocene. This reading becomes even more relevant when applied to a resource as vital—and as potentially destructive—as water. The process of interaction between humans and the aquatic element becomes one of the most radical manifestations of the anthropocentric paradigms that continues to shape—and at times destabilise—contemporary design.

Domestication of the world: Designing the geography of rationalisation

Before undertaking a thorough analysis of the role of infrastructure, it is essential to reflect on the theoretical and cultural frameworks through which the design codes of the Anthropocene observe, measure, and represent nature. It is crucial, in fact, to clarify a radical shift in modes of interpreting the natural world—one that stands in sharp discontinuity with the "nature idolatry" which, as Marx observed, defined premodern culture.[7] This transformation, both epistemological and operational, introduced new logics of control and interpretation of nature, finding one of its most emblematic expressions in the infrastructural project. This profound shift in European modernity continues to shape contemporary Western conceptions of the natural world, grounded in the belief that nature is inherently interpretable and measurable. This appears to be closely linked to one of the foundational principles of modernity: rationalisation as both a theoretical and operational framework. In this regard, Hasso Spode's reflection on what he defines as the "grammar of rationalization" is particularly illuminating:

> This grammar is based on the idea of decontextualization and of disassembling and recombining: isolating complex processes from their context, breaking them down into their individual components, then combining them again to form a new structure. That which is superficial can be discarded; that which is mixed can be separated. Processes laden with significance, meaning, morality, traditions, and arbitrariness can be melted down to the pure scaffolding of relations as translucent as crystal and as unsurprising as double-entry bookkeeping. This grammar, as everybody knows, provided for the victory of capitalism, step by step conquering science, technology, economy, judicial systems, management, the arts, and philosophy.[8]

This fundamental modernist theoretical tool had a decisive influence on design cultures and, more broadly, on the perspective of natural-human relations as a whole. Using Max Weber's words, the "iron cage"[9] of rationalisation's grammar imposed a rigid framework for interpreting natural elements. Modernity not only transformed chaotic premodern cities into efficient and orderly urban systems, it also placed environmental control as a cornerstone of its ideology. This process of ordering can thus be viewed as connected to interpretations of reality —and especially of nature—that inform the perspective of the Anthropocene era. James C. Scott's analysis of how modernity conceptualises natural territories identifies a key characteristic of this domestication and control. Scott highlights modernism's relentless drive to render the world legible through the imposition of simplified, abstract models. A paradigmatic example of this "high-modernist" logic, he argues, is found in the environmental policies of late eighteenth-century Saxony and Prussia, where scientific forestry emerged. In response to timber shortages, German foresters began to conceive of the forest as a calculable grid of uniform, economically valuable trees. Once adopted by the state, this schematic vision became prescriptive rather than merely descriptive—imposed upon real forests at the expense of ecological complexity and local knowledge, all in the name of administrative efficiency.[10] Thus, the "iron cage" of modernity subjugated not only productive principles and human societal structures but also applied the same principles to forests, deserts, and oceans. The application of this abstract model to natural systems reflects a particular conception of natural entities: a chaotic system to be corrected and simplified through human rationalisation. Therefore, the world could be interpreted and governed through the lens of Spode's "grammar of rationalization." This process, defined by Max Weber as the "domestication of the world," represents the foundational theoretical core of this thought and assigns a structurally important role to a specific design instrument: infrastructure.

Infrastructure, as artefact, becomes a material tool to physically implement the process of domesticating the world, its aleatory dynamics controlled and designed to serve humanity. A particularly significant example of this is found in the pre-war USSR, vividly illustrated in the words of Soviet geographer Nikolai Mikhailov:

> Western scientists lament: 'The landscape is our irrevocable fate.' 'No!' we say. 'With our hands, using well-considered projects, we are building our country; we are creating a new landscape.' Bourgeois scientists say: 'Geography is not created but emerges on its own.' 'No!' we say. 'By building communism, we are reshaping the country with rational calculation, changing its geography.'[11]

Mikhailov accompanied these words with concrete proposals for redesigning Soviet territory. This statement of intent was followed by a series of maps illustrating a radical vision for transforming Russian geography through titanic geoengineering and infrastructural interventions. Nature was seen as an element entirely controllable and subject to human will. Following these publications, the regime funded vast projects: immense funds were allocated by Stalin to redesign Russia's vast territory. By the 1930s, the Soviet state aimed to reclaim swampy lands in the north and make the desert regions in the south arable through water infrastructure, thereby expanding the nation's arable land. These grand operations were accompanied by propaganda publications that sought to monumentalise these extensive territorial design projects. In this context, the mastery of water took on a fundamental role: to construct a new world through the redesign of its hydrography. Locks, canals, and dams became essential components of the "domestication of the world" process. It is important to emphasise that the governance and control of hydrography was not conceived merely as an engineering undertaking, but as a symbol of the power of the Stalinist regime. An example of this can be seen in Aleksandr Rodchenko's photomontage of the construction of the canal between the White Sea and the Baltic Sea (known as the Belomor Canal), published in 1933 in the magazine *USSR in Construction*. On the first page, the magazine explicitly displays this celebration of power: a photomontage of Stalin looms over a continuous water background with the caption: "[. . .] 'Belomorstroy,' the White Sea canal construction scheme, was a child of the will of the Communist Party, at the initiative of its leader, the leader of all workers, Comrade Stalin."[12] Later in the publication, monumental representations of locks and dams appear, depicted as colossal architectures, the transformation of land and water ascending to the status of a monument. Water infrastructures transcended their purely functional role, becoming symbols of humanity's ability to design a world entirely shaped by its own will. They became heroic monuments to overturning and manipulating natural laws, through humans' absolute power, a way of subduing the power of water through a Faustian desire to domesticate the world.

The Leviathan and the Dam: The cult of hybris and the confrontation with water

It is worth noting how the "grammar of modern rationalization" generates a symbolic logic and a design-driven tension that goes beyond its apparent techno-functionalist framework. The world's domestication, through modernist logics of rationalisation and control of natural resources, has crucial symbolic and mythopoeic dimensions. If, as we have observed, modernity rationalised nature through infrastructures capable of transforming the environment—reducing nature's complexity to a legible and manageable system—it is important to recognise that this transformation does not end with a mere technical gesture. It entails a profound redefinition of the symbolic mission of design. Infrastructure, in this sense, is not merely the result of a will to organise territory; it embodies a radical shift in the relationship between design and nature—one that, as Martin Heidegger suggests, is rooted in the modern technological disclosure of nature as a resource to be exploited. Heidegger argues that this process fundamentally alters how we relate to the natural world.[13] It is precisely through this radical transformation in our relationship with natural entities that modern culture

enacts one of its most profound symbolic revolutions. The domination of nature—achieved through the rationalisation of territory—does not end with a technical operation; rather, it emerges as one of the cornerstones of the modern design imaginary. This symbolic drive, to sublimate, symbolise, and domesticate the world, has Promethean heroism as its core. Within this framework, infrastructure sheds its apparent technical neutrality and assumes a mythopoeic and symbolic centrality: it becomes one of the privileged instruments through which modern design affirms its authority over the world. The elevation of infrastructure to the status of monument was driven not only by a new way of perceiving the material world, but also by a reconfiguration of the symbolic order that had long underpinned premodern thought. As Walter Benjamin argues, every shift in historical epoch also entails a transformation—often a radical one—of the symbolic order that had structured the worldview of the Ancien Régime.[14] From this perspective, the elevation of infrastructure can be read not merely as the material execution of the will to transform territory—central to the "domestication of the world"—but also as the embodiment and symbolic expression of its Faustian ambition. Hybris defines the aesthetic core of modernity's poetic imaginary, where the Promethean defiance of natural order—framed as an act of human liberation—emerges as a central motif in the project of world-domestication.

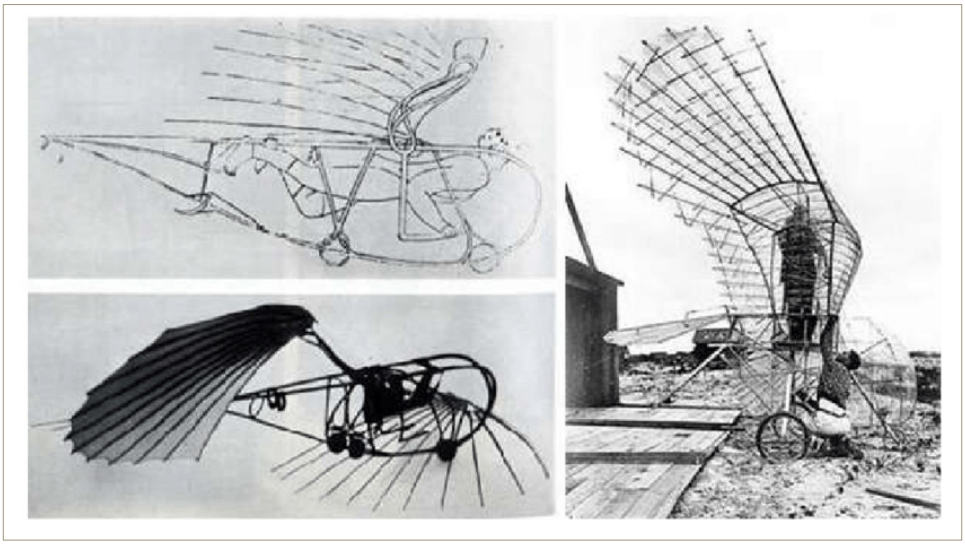

Fig. 1 Vladimir Tatlin (1929–32). More than an experimental flying apparatus, *Letatlin* symbolises the avant-garde's mythopoeic challenge to gravity and natural law—an icon of modernism's heroic imagination and its cult of *hybris*. [Wikimedia Commons]

This fascination with such acts of hybris is clearly visible in the experiments of the twentieth-century avant-garde. A particularly emblematic case is Russian Constructivism, which found in the defiance of gravity fertile ground for experimentation—as evidenced by Georgy Krutikov's *Flying Cities* (1923), and, above all, Vladimir Tatlin's *Letatlin*. Tatlin's flying machine, a work that embodies the utopian, Promethean, and mythopoeic momentum of Constructivism, represents perhaps the most literal projective manifestation of the modern cult of *hybris*. The Icarian fascination that marked the Constructivist experience reveals a radical mythopoeic component within avant-garde design practice, which, rather than being an isolated feature of Constructivism, is central to the poetics of the avant-garde. At times veiled behind a cold functionalism, at others openly proclaimed—as in the rhetorical musings of Le Corbusier—the Promethean *tension* emerges as a foundational and structuring theme of modern design thought: an intense and creative aesthetic tension, capable of breaking through the limits of rationality.

Viewed retrospectively, the heroic ethos of modernism manifests most radically in its encounter with infrastructure and the elemental force of water. Whereas Constructivism found poetic momentum in its defiance of gravity, hydraulic infrastructure discovered its symbolic mission in confronting the power of water. To oppose and subdue the force of seas and rivers became a poetic act of asserting the power of design itself. Water infrastructure emerges as the privileged object of this process: not merely a technical device, but a means of exerting both symbolic and material control over a resource that is at once essential and unpredictable. A mythopoeic reading of the domination of the aquatic element—one intrinsically tied to the logic of "world-domestication"—invites a retrospective revaluation of modernist hydraulic infrastructure. Dams, canals, and locks transcend their operational function and are inscribed into the symbolic pantheon of modernity. In this sense, one may extract from the symbolic imaginary of the modern a fundamental dyad: the Leviathan and the Dam. The Leviathan—understood in its most archaic form—represents the archetype of a natural (and aquatic) force that is chaotic, overwhelming, and uncontainable.[15] This power, as described in the book of Job, is, by definition, beyond human reach:

> The sword that reaches him has no effect [. . .] Iron he treats like straw [. . .] He makes the depths churn like a boiling cauldron and stirs up the sea like a pot of ointment. Behind him he leaves a glistening wake; one would think the deep had white hair.[16]

A symbol of boundless and violent aquatic energy, irreducible to human control, the Leviathan embodies the ideal adversary of the poetics of *hybris*. And it is within this symbolic framework that the figure of the Dam emerges. More than a mere technical object, the Dam becomes the emblem of the heroic power of modern design: the instrument that bends the unbendable, rewrites geography, and transgresses the limits imposed by nature. Aquatic infrastructure thus becomes one of the paradigmatic projective forms through which the limits of the natural world are overcome and a new order, grounded in human supremacy, is asserted. This rhetoric finds explicit expression in the monumentalisation of infrastructural form, most notably in one of the most radical infrastructural visions ever conceived: *Atlantropa*. The analysis of Herman Sörgel's "realizable utopia" stands not only as one of the clearest and most recognisable manifestations of this phenomenon, but also serves as a valuable lens through which to trace the enduring presence of modernity's Promethean poetic unrest within the contemporary imaginary.

Messianic infrastructure: Atlantropa and Peter Behrens's Gibraltar Dam

Atlantropa, conceived by German architect Herman Sörgel in 1927, is one of the most radical expressions of modernity's messianic vision of infrastructure—an extreme assertion of control over the dynamics of water. Sörgel's "realizable utopia" stands as the ultimate example of world-domestication and human dominion over the Leviathan. Sörgel's plan, conceived as a response to Europe's twentieth-century decline, aimed to create a macro-continent uniting Europe and Africa by enclosing the Mediterranean with a series of massive dams, generating new landmasses and connecting the continents with rail and road bridges. Despite its visionary nature, Atlantropa can hardly be dismissed as mere fantasy.

Sörgel's idea became central to contemporary political and artistic debates, engaging leading intellectuals and even inspiring political parties. The vision of the German architect became a pivotal topic in early twentieth-century Europe, attracting not only strategic considerations but also intense spatial focus: many architectural giants, including Peter Behrens, Erich Mendelsohn, and Hans Poelzig, collaborated on this project, underscoring its cultural significance.

Atlantropa represents the most radical expression of rationalisation's power, reaching an almost messianic dimension. The project arose from the geopolitical emergency that affected Europe in the early twentieth century: How could Europe compete with the Pan-Asian and American power blocs? Faced with overpopulation, unemployment, resource shortages, and an insufficient energy supply,[17] European states found themselves in a weakened position relative to rival powers (notably the USA and USSR). Sörgel proposed a radical solution: draining the Mediterranean through the construction of a massive hydroelectric dam at the Strait of Gibraltar, making the exposed land arable, reclaiming the Sahara Desert, and physically uniting the African and European continents, thus creating a new geopolitical entity capable of competing with the USSR and the United States. Sörgel saw the supercontinent's creation as a sincere means of ensuring world peace, reflecting his blind faith in technology's power. This belief is captured in his verses from the *Atlantropa Symphony*: "Not with cannons, but with turbines, not with deceit or murder: with dams and machines technology will prevail and finally bring peace to all with its liberating word."[18] The German architect, therefore, saw himself on a dual mission: to save Europe and secure world peace through Atlantropa's construction. This titanic (and ultimately unattainable) endeavour centred on a singular principle: to create a new world by fully mastering nature. This view is evident in Sörgel's thoughts:

> The vast energy supply network across all of Europe and North Africa, made possible by the hydroelectric plant at Gibraltar, will only reveal its true value after the next war—a war instigated by ideology but determined by fuel—when we are forced to replace the combustion engine with electric cars, when 'white coal' finally replaces black coal. Then, we will need energy sources—hydroelectricity—at any price! Only then will we remember that the power of twelve Niagara Falls has lain dormant in the Strait of Gibraltar for thousands of years, while people slaughter each other over a few oil wells, that 240 million horsepower lie unused in the Congo, thoughtlessly wasted while humankind's technical ambitions focus solely on self-destruction.[19]

Sörgel's vision represents perhaps the clearest and most radical manifestation of world-domestication principles. A distinctly high-modernist approach, as previously described by Scott, clearly emerges: the Mediterranean is reduced to a system to be optimised and rationalised, its complexity diminished to a mere resource. What matters most is harnessing its energy potential and creating new arable land. The taming of the Leviathan becomes the primal act of a total rationalisation process. The Mediterranean's recession renders obsolete the settlement structures that once governed the development of cities like Marseille and Genoa. For example, to replace Marseille's port (which, in this new scenario, would become an inland city), the radical redesign of Port du Rhône was proposed, fundamentally disrupting centuries-old settlement patterns that shaped southern France. An even more radical proposal was made for New Genoa by Ferber and

Fig. 2 Diagram of land gain from the Atlantropa project, Hermann Sörgel (1932). This hand-coloured map illustrates the territories that would emerge from the partial drainage of the Mediterranean Sea, as envisioned by Sörgel. The project projected a land gain of 576,000 km² and 200 million horsepower from hydroelectric energy. A striking visualisation of modernity's ambition to redesign geography at a continental scale. [Wikimedia Commons]

Appel.[20] The old town of the Ligurian city was relegated to a mere tourist hub, connected only by a narrow saltwater canal to the new city, whose morphology and settlement patterns became detached from the historical configurations that had defined Ligurian spatial development for centuries. Atlantropa thus embodies a totalising ambition: reshaping the Mediterranean basin becomes an operation that not only reconfigures geopolitical balances and everyday life but also allows for a complete subjugation of nature through extreme spatial rationalisation and simplification.

In Sörgel's "realizable utopia", a symbolic centre stands out: the Gibraltar Dam. By sealing the Strait of Gibraltar, the monumental dam enacts the heroic gesture at the heart of Atlantropa's messianic vision: the draining of the Mediterranean as an act of total design over nature. This exemplified Sörgel's proposed new world order and its foundational act in the subjugation of the Leviathan. This pushes the veneration of water infrastructure to its ultimate limits: taming the Leviathan's force transcends mere system optimisation, becoming the primal origin of an almost messianic mission. This mythic dimension finds significant spatialisation in Peter Behrens's Gibraltar Dam design. Behrens's project, beyond its technical role, aimed to symbolise the power of the new supercontinent, intentionally making it a monument to the dominating ethos of the endeavour. The dam rises from the ocean like a mighty, cyclopean stepped pyramid, with a sharp skyscraper rising from its façade. These forms convey nothing less than the poeticisation of the worldview underlying this spatial vision: a world in which humanity dominates nature, overturning its fundamental laws. The celebration of the Leviathan's defeat thus becomes an essential component of the dam's symbolic aura. The cyclopean dam thus becomes, both functionally and symbolically, the generative act in Atlantropa's messianic geography: the new macro-continent emerges from a fundamental act of hybris—the complete subjugation of the aquatic element. The Gibraltar Dam represents the elevation of water infrastructure to be the ultimate monument of Promethean unrest

underlying world-domestication. Behrens's dam thus encapsulates perhaps the most important spatial and poetic feature of this domesticating design ideology: an artefact gains symbolic authority through its capacity to subjugate the fury of the elements, liberating humanity from the chains imposed by natural laws. Viewed from a contemporary perspective, the analysis of this experience raises a pressing question: is the Faustian hybris of Behrens's dam merely a historical relic, or can it be an active force in our time?

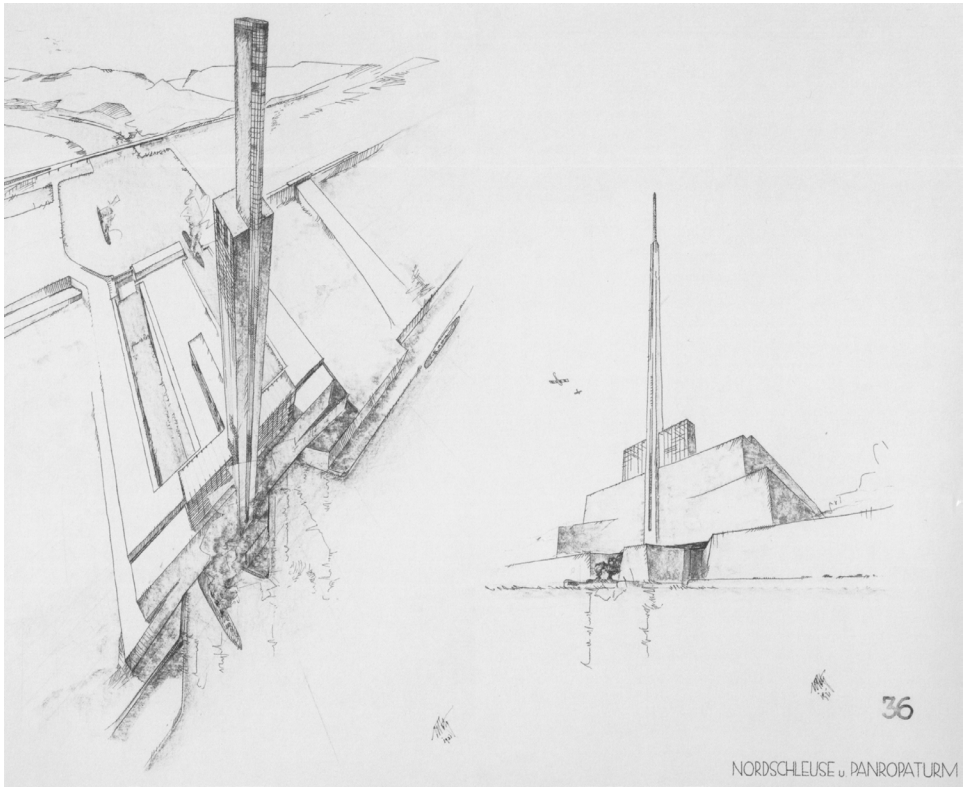

Fig. 3 Peter Behrens (1931). Northern Lock with Skyscraper at the Gibraltardam, bird's view (left) and from the perspective of the lowered Mediterranean Sea (right) [Wikimedia Commons]

Beyond domination: Rethinking water infrastructure's role in contemporary design

The examination of Atlantropa prompts a rethinking of water's agency, its symbolic influence on infrastructure monuments, and contemporary design theory and practice. Sörgel's Promethean spirit seems to remain an active design force in contemporary design: since the post-war era, numerous projects have emerged that echo the mission evident in Atlantropa. An example of this is the Snowy Mountains Hydroelectric Scheme. This was a colossal project aimed at providing irrigation water and energy in New South Wales, Australia, developed between 1949 and 1979, covering over 3,200 square kilometres and including sixteen dams, seven power plants, 80 kilometres of aqueducts, 145 kilometres of tunnels, and 2,000 kilometres of roads.[21] Another example is Muammar Gaddafi's unfinished Great Man-Made River project in Libya, started in 1983.[22] Perhaps the most explicit example of this continuity between mid-twentieth-century and contemporary perspectives, however, is the South-North Water Transfer Project in China, still under construction. As of 2014, the People's Republic of China invested over $79 billion, making it one of the most expensive undertakings in

human history. The project aims to transport water from southern China to the arid north, constructing three major aqueducts to convey 44.8 billion cubic metres of fresh water annually.[23] The most paradoxical aspect of this continuity in world-redesigning approaches appears in so-called green infrastructure projects. While the environmental crisis is intimately linked to the high-modernist worldview and its spatial manifestation, contemporary green water infrastructure solutions often stem from the same spatial conceptions. Benno Albrecht's insights on this point are useful:

> [. . .] an axiom of contemporary environmentalism is understanding large-scale problems in order to address them on a smaller, local scale. 'Think Globally, Act Locally,' the popular slogan attributed by some to René Dubos, by others to Patrick Geddes, and later revived by Jackie Tyrwhitt—secretary of CIAM and collaborator of Siegfried Giedion, who went on to edit *Ekistics*, the journal of Doxiadis. But it is also clear that the reverse is true today, 'Act Globally, Think Locally,' and that addressing immediate problems now requires large- and mega-scale intervention strategies.[24]

Albrecht's words suggest that even in the twenty-first century, architects, even those working in ecological fields, tend to adopt a worldview in which nature is fully mouldable and controllable by human intervention. Indeed, contemporary design emphasises infrastructure's role as even more decisive: today, these structures seem to be the only plausible way to attempt control over the planet's environmental collapse. Modernist ideology is therefore still integral to contemporary design. This recognition reveals a profound underlying contradiction. To address environmental upheaval caused by human exploitation, contemporary design culture proposes yet another artificial infrastructural intervention. This suggests that, despite formal declarations, nature is still viewed as a set of forces to be dominated by humankind: human rationalisation can not only disrupt the world's spaces but is assumed able to re-stabilise them through its actions. One might even argue that, given the environmental disasters caused by sea level rise or floods, the subjugation of the Leviathan has become even more imperative for contemporary design practice. This principle materialises in projects like the MOSE system in the Venetian Lagoon. Operating since 2020, this network of barriers is crucial for protecting Venice from sea level rise-induced flooding, an act of domestication appearing to prove that taming of the Leviathan is central to contemporary design thinking. While the persistence, and in many cases the necessity, of practices that subjugate the aquatic element is evident, it is increasingly urgent to question the paradigm that sustains them. Is the violent subjugation of the Leviathan the only possible destiny for infrastructural form and symbolic content, or can we imagine more nuanced relationships with water as an active agent? In light of growing ecological awareness, there is a pressing need to complement existing strategies of control with more sophisticated approaches—ones that recognise and engage with the agencies of the aquatic element. The notion of water as a purely chaotic and antagonistic force is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain, both ethically and materially. And yet, contemporary culture still struggles to produce a symbolic and operative vision capable of rivalling the modernist paradigm of world-domestication.

The present moment appears ripe for a redefinition of the relationship between water infrastructure and aquatic power—one that exceeds the aesthetic and ideological bounds of the modernist cult of *hybris*. A promising first step in this

Fig. 4, Sea Dam Between Gibraltar and Tangier, sketch by Josef Moser, ca. 1932. Part of the Atlantropa Project. The dam's monumental character is preserved even in alternative designs to Peter Behrens's original, such as this version by Moser. [Wikimedia Commons]

Fig. 5, Intersection of the South–North Water Transfer Project with the North Juma River, Dongchengfang Town, China, 2024. [Wikimedia Commons]

direction involves a more complex resemanticisation of the Leviathan–Dam dyad. It is compelling to reconceive the Leviathan not as a blind, monstrous force to be vanquished, but as a figure of environmental force, potentially destructive yet essential to planetary equilibrium. And contemporary theory and practice must respond, and be challenged to reimagine the Dam, no longer as a monument whose aura derives from the subjugation of nature, but as an artefact capable of mediating the difficult dialogue between human and more-than-human actors. If water infrastructure is to be symbolically and functionally relevant, then it is time to ask whether its monumental aura might be reoriented—no longer as an expression of *hybris*, but as a site for rethinking the relationship between design, environmental responsibility, and interdependence. In contrast to the Promethean ambitions of projects like *Atlantropa*, the future of hydraulic infrastructure may lie not in conquest, but in careful negotiation.

NOTES

1. Hasso Spode, "Fordism, Mass Tourism and the Third Reich: The 'Strength through Joy' Seaside Resort as an Index Fossil," *Journal of Social History* 38, no. 1 (Autumn 2004): 128.

2. M. Biraghi, "From the Perspective of Architecture: Twentieth-Century Infrastructure," in *The Architecture of the World: Infrastructure, Mobility, New Landscapes*, edited by B. Albrecht, M. Biraghi, and A. Ferlenga (Editrice Compositori, 2009), 50.

3. Following Susan Ballard (*Art and Nature in the Anthropocene: Planetary Aesthetics*, 2021), the Anthropocene is understood not merely as an environmental epoch but as an operative cultural framework that shapes design epistemologies and representational practices.

4. Quotation from Karl Marx as cited in M. Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy* (Cheshire Books, 1982), 133.

5. Alois Rriegl, *Der moderne Denkmalkultus. Sein Wesen und seine Entstehung* (W. Braumüller, 1903), 1. Translated as *The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Origin*, in *Oppositions* 25 (Fall 1982): 21–50.

6. *Hybris*, in its original Greek meaning, denotes an arrogant transgression of the limits imposed on human beings, often against the divine or natural order, and is traditionally framed negatively as a sacrilegious act. However, as an artistic topos, *hybris* takes on an ambiguous value: it can signify both a transgression and a heroic gesture of human liberation from its own constraints.

7. The premodern worldview was grounded in a conception of nature as an almost sacred force. This concept is well exposed, for example, in M. Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom.*

8. Spode, "Fordism, Mass Tourism and the Third Reich," 129.

9. The term "*iron cage"* is Talcott Parsons's 1930 translation of Max Weber's original expression "*stahlhartes Gehäuse,"* which more literally means "steel-hard casing" or "shell as hard as steel." Parsons's choice has been the subject of scholarly debate, as it arguably dramatises and distorts Weber's original nuance, shifting the emphasis from structural rigidity and inevitability to a more metaphorically imprisoning condition.

10. See James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (Yale University Press, 1998).

11. N. Mikhailov, quoted in E. A. Dobrenko, "The Art of Social Navigation: The Cultural Topography of the Stalin Era," in *The Landscape of Stalinism*, edited by E. A. Dobrenko and E. Naiman (University of Washington Press, 2003), 195–196.

12. A. Rodchenko and L. Slavin, *USSR in Construction*, no. 12 (OGIS, December 1933).

13. See M. Heidegger, "*The Question Concerning Technology*," in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (Harper & Row, 1977).

14. See Walter Benjamin, "*Theses on the Philosophy of History*," in *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn (Schocken Books, 1969), especially Thesis VI.

15. It is important here to clarify the specific interpretation of the Leviathan adopted in this text. The figure of the Leviathan carries a rich and varied symbolic tradition, often subject to contrasting readings. In this context, the Leviathan is understood in its original sense: the biblical version, where it represents the untameable and chaotic power of the waters, and the Mesopotamian one, in which it symbolises the primordial element of marine chaos. It is therefore essential to distinguish this interpretation from another well-known reading: that of Thomas Hobbes, in which the Leviathan becomes the emblem of the ordering power of the modern state. In contrast, the present work takes the Leviathan as an embodiment of natural energy resistant to human control, positioning it symbolically against the dam, an instrument through which modern design seeks to subjugate what has traditionally been regarded as indomitable.

16. *The book of Job* 41:26–32, in *The Holy Bible*, New International Version (Zondervan, 2011).

17. R. Vidal and I. Cornils, *Alternative Worlds: Blue-Sky Thinking since 1900* (King's College Press, 2014), 20.

18. H. Sörgel, *Anregung zu einer Atlantropa Sinfonie*, quoted in Vidal and Cornils, *Alternative Worlds*, 25.

19. Vidal and Cornils, *Alternative Worlds*, 29.

20. Vidal and Cornils, *Alternative Worlds*, 23.

21. B. Albrecht, "Infrastrutture globali," in *L'architettura del mondo: Infrastrutture, mobilità, nuovi paesaggi*, edited by B. Albrecht, M. Biraghi, and A. Ferlenga (Editrice Compositori, 2009), 74–112.

22. Albrecht, "Infrastrutture globali," 74–112.

23. Albrecht, "Infrastrutture globali," 74–112.

24. Albrecht, "Infrastrutture globali," 79.