

Ben Greber Bram Kuypers

PROCESSIONS





Transrapid-Versuchsanlage Emsland

Germany

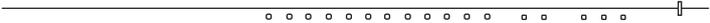
Length: 31,800 meters



Aérotrain d'Orléans test track

France

Length: 18,000 meters



Hyperloop Test and Safety Site

Nevada, USA

Length: 500 meters



Forgotten Future

For the video series PROCESSIONS, Ben Greber and Bram Kuypers embark on a journey to various test tracks for high-speed transportation systems. The starting point of the trilogy is the Transrapid test site in Emsland, in northern Germany. The second part explores the former track of the Aérotrain in France. Finally, the last episode was created at the test track of the Hyperloop in the hinterlands of Nevada in the United States. The artists' exploration of these test systems for high-speed trains is based on their overarching interest in technological utopias of the industrial age. In the films, Ben Greber and Bram Kuypers approach the respective transportation systems and associated ideas of the future in different ways. Combining performative elements with panoramic shots of the landscapes, they create an atmosphere that is at times surreal.

PROCESSION 1 shows the Transrapid test track, which was shut down in 2010. The Transrapid had been developed and tested since the late 1960s. The track in Lathen was built in the 1980s and, in 1991, the magnetic levitation (or maglev) train became operational there. Parallel to the development test runs, tourist trips were also offered, until the tragic accident in 2006. The track is still maintained to this day, to keep the structure from falling into disrepair – and also in case it is repurposed in the future. While the



technology of the Transrapid has been virtually forgotten, the track still stands there like a monumental memorial to a utopia of a new form of transportation that has failed for now, at least in Germany. Laid out in the form of an elongated infinity sign, the architecture of the track ignores the existing structure of the landscape, which is shaped by agriculture. In their work, Greber and Kuypers address these aspects of artificiality and sacrality. The drone follows the maintenance vehicle's slow journey along the track, accompanied by abstract sounds from a cello. The special vehicle emits red smoke, lending the scene a liturgical character. The slow pace of the film contrasts with the actual idea of the maglev train – after all, it was once supposed to be the fastest train in the world.

The Aérotrain, developed and tested in France beginning in the mid-1960s, was a precursor to the Transrapid. The second part of the PROCESSIONS series explores its track, which also still exists and is no longer in use. Here, test runs were carried out with a hovertrain on a concrete track. In the film, a camera drone once again follows the action: a person – the artist Bram Kuypers himself – is running along the elevated track at a regular and sustained pace. While PROCESSION 1 thematizes faith in technological progress, and the cultivation of this faith (the track's maintenance) is presented as analogous to a religious procession (a traditional ritual), PROCESSION 2 offers a view of the relationship between humans and technology, their speed, and their perception of landscapes when in



motion. The view follows the runner's steady, almost meditative rhythm. A train suddenly appears on a railroad track in the background and just as quickly disappears again from the scene. A moving car can also be seen in one shot. On the remnant of a technological future that has not arrived, humanity is moving at the speed at which it has progressed since the beginning of its current existence, even as it is being overtaken by the present state of technology. In this image, the artists link the temporal levels of future, past, and present. At the same time, it also shows the transience of utopian future scenarios that are still based on the Olympic motto of "higher, faster, further."

In the final part of the trilogy, Ben Greber and Bram Kuypers explore our current conception of the future. In PROCESSION 3, the drone, slightly below eye level, works its way through the Nevada desert towards a gigantic steel tube. While the associations with science fiction are only peripheral in the other two films, here they are evident not only in the desert landscape but also in the film's opening credits. In this episode, the drone's camera confronts a dystopian vision of landscape: desertification as a symbol of ecological catastrophe, of humanity's failure in its treatment of the planet. The area seems abandoned by humans and yet is full of traces of them. The drone makes its way past scrap metal and dried-out cacti, through the wasteland to the horizon, where the giant white tube appears, in which goods – and, ideally, also people – are to be transported at the speed of sound. While the Transrapid and Aérotrain are still evocative of a classic train journey, in which the journey itself can also be the aim (namely, watching the passing landscape), this

aspect recedes completely into the background with the Hyperloop. Consequently, one cannot help but wonder if our current idea of the future is to ignore the landscape, nature, in favor of technological progress. However, for now, the Hyperloop is also merely an attempt, and we do not yet know to what extent it will become reality.



In their three-part video work *PROCESSIONS*, Ben Greber and Bram Kuypers undertake a kind of time travel, interweaving past hopes for the future with present ideas of the future, which soon will also be past. The constant in all three films and times (past, present, and future) is the procession, the moving forward. The liturgical ritual of the

procession symbolizes faith in technological progress, in a technological future that, in many cases, remains unfulfilled. At the same time, the artists' examination of the various rail lines paints a picture of the landscape of the present, of the Anthropocene, into which humans inscribe themselves with their infrastructural needs, shaping it accordingly. This critical examination is also evident in depictions of landscapes from the 19th century, the century of industrialization. Just as, for example, the social conditions of the time are always discernable in William Turner's railroad pictures, Ben Greber and Bram Kuypers's artistic exploration of high-speed railway lines in *PROCESSIONS* is also a reflection of our contemporary society.

Marijke Lukowicz



PROCESSION 1 - 3





PROCESSION 1

Video loop 6:51 min













Unfinished Past

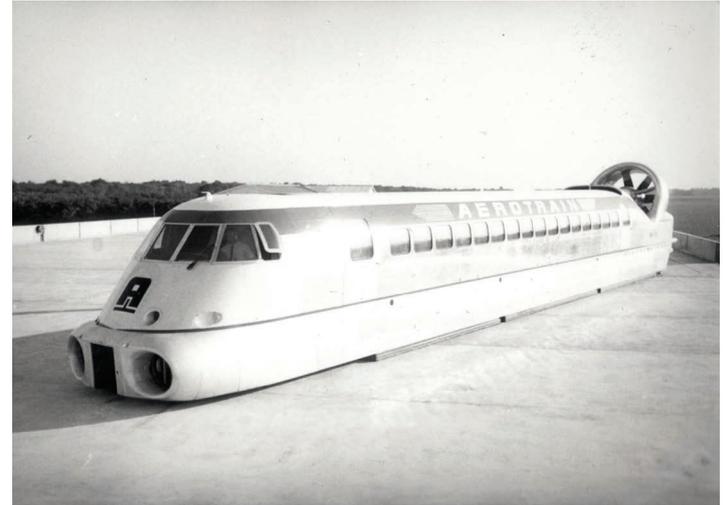
Ben Greber and Bram Kuypers
in conversation with Marijke Lukowicz

ML What is the PROCESSIONS trilogy about? What was your starting point?

BK For me, it started when I accidentally discovered this huge circle on Google Maps and, when I zoomed in, saw that I'd been there once as a little boy: the Transrapid test track. I'd almost forgotten about it; it had been sometime in the 1990s. When I then looked at photos of the track, I was fascinated right away – because of its vast dimensions and strange appearance, which is similar to an aqueduct – something from the past but at the same time something modern. I asked Ben if he wanted to go there together, and he was very interested. But I'm sure he had his own reasons for that. So we drove to Lathen and took a look at the track. We were excited about the architecture and especially about how it seems to point both to the future and to the past at the same time. The track is falling apart but still looks very futuristic. I think that was the initial point: not only to explore the track more closely but also

to look for other examples of ruins of innovative experimental systems. And we soon discovered that there are several such sites – in Japan, for example. There were also other projects in Germany, like the Alweg monorail in Cologne. But most of the tracks have been destroyed and are no longer visible. The Transrapid track and that of the Aérotrain in France are the most intact. They're very similar, at least in terms of their architectonic quality. And, I think [laughs] because of the Holy Trinity, we needed a third situation. And the Hyperloop was a very logical choice.

BG We ourselves hadn't expected to discover a religious formal language while standing in front of the Transrapid track.



BK Of course, the motives are technological and economic, but you can only create them if you believe in something that doesn't exist yet at that moment. And this faith seems to be visible in the architecture. You can also see that the idea of the future looks different in the '60s than in the '80s.

ML This picks up on an important idea of the modern age: that it's possible to create a better, perhaps utopian world through innovation and technological progress. Which has a lot to do with a faith that isn't necessarily religious in origin. With the Transrapid test track, there's this moment when you realize that the future has overtaken itself – to come back to the aspect of temporality that's inherent in the work.

BG I do think that a change happened at some point in history. While the idea and representation of utopia was connected with religious ideas for a long time, from some point on – maybe in the late 20th century – it suddenly became associated with technological progress.

ML And this association is especially evident in the first film, for which you chose the title PROCESSION 1. To what extent does the second part continue to deal with this idea?

BG In the second part, we film Bram running along the abandoned Aérotrain test track in France. Which was actually the initial idea for the whole project. From the outset, we'd seen this running along the track as a procession, procession as a ritual, and ritual as a connection between the past and future. Because it's something that always recurs and that you do over and over again in the same way.

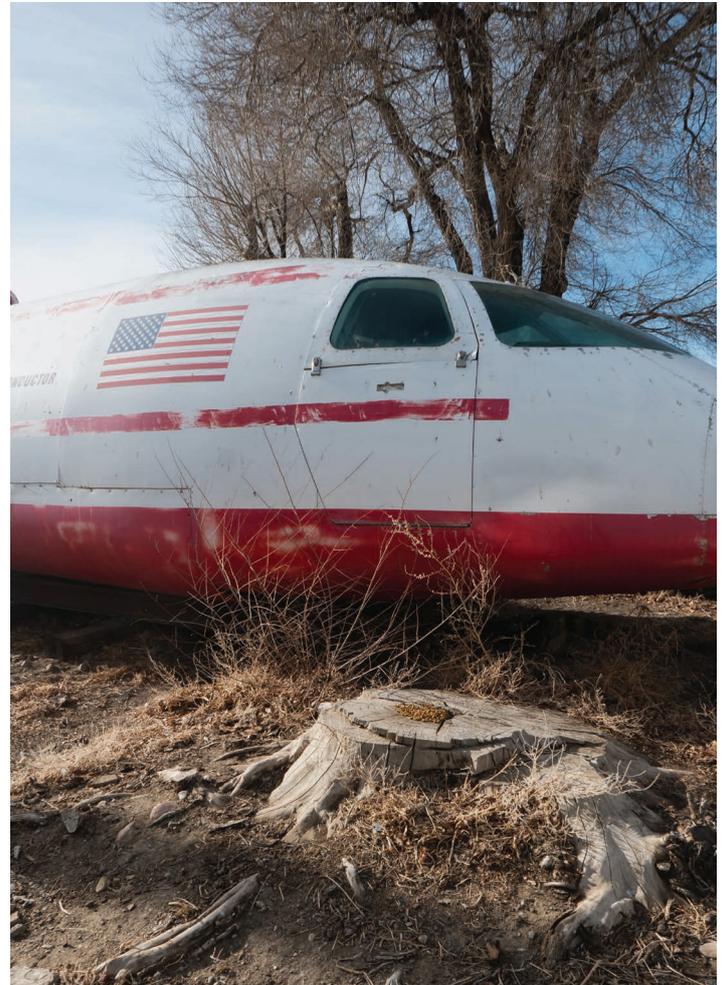


In the sense that: a train used to run here, and there's this idea that this technology might be used again in the future. So this act of proceeding along the track is a bridging act of hope and faith.

BK I'm just thinking about the fact that, ultimately, in PROCESSION 1, the utopian object – the expected high-speed train – is represented by a structure as primitive as a maintenance vehicle. Reality and this stupid maintenance vehicle completely destroy the whole idea of future. And it strikes me that maybe that's how it always is. In the end, the future is always a compromise between utopia and reality. It was the same with the Aérotrain. After all, the idea was all well and good. But, in the end, they had a jet flying across the landscape at 400 km/h at a height of 10 meters. Obviously, that didn't work. With a jet turbine! It was so idiotic that of course, in the end, they built the TGV. The compromise is what can ultimately be implemented. And that's what I also find so interesting about the Hyperloop. The grand idea of putting a tube around the whole world but, in the end, what's the point of that and how's it supposed to be feasible – also politically?

ML How did you hit on the Hyperloop? After all, it has a completely different aesthetic. And, formally, moving through a tube is also a completely different story. The work in PROCESSION 3 has also changed accordingly. This time you didn't run along the track but observed it from the outside instead.

BG While filming the Aérotrain test track from the '60s and the Transrapid test track from the '80s, we'd noticed what



different ideas of the future were inscribed in them. We absolutely wanted to continue to explore this difference, so in the final part of the trilogy we also wanted to document the most recent technology, which is currently only just in development.

All three parts of PROCESSIONS are also always about the relationship between the structure and the landscape. In other words, what does being intersected by this line representing the future do to the current environment?

BK We have a really nice brochure from the Transrapid. It includes an illustration that shows how easily the track can negotiate the landscape since it's on piers. I think there was also a Hyperloop promotional video. It shows how the track just cuts through the landscape wherever it wants. It's always at the same height. Then there's a tunnel, then a lake, then another lake...

BG So, basically, it completely ignores the landscape around it?

BK Yes, exactly. I think every high-speed line is built that way.

ML Did you have a chance to take a look inside the Hyperloop?

BG No. We were in touch with Virgin, but in the end they didn't let us in. So we took a chance and just went, because it basically fit into our concept. From the start, we'd talked a lot about the fact that, unlike the Transrapid and Aérotrain, here everything happens in secret, inside the tube. When you're



standing outside in the landscape, you don't notice that people are gliding past you at supersonic speed. It was already dawning on us that this exclusion of the surrounding environment could become an important theme in the third part. Which it did. When we started filming, it became increasingly clear that what happens off the track is actually much more exciting to us. But that had already started in France, where we began collecting empty shotgun shells and liquor bottles lying next to the track.

But the landscape in Nevada is much more archaic because it operates much more slowly. Both geological change and the flora evolve much more slowly there. You can discern many processes that point far into the past. The remains of human influence also hardly weather. We found so many artifacts of human use, which then played a major role in PROCESSION 3. It's about the tension between the past and a utopia that hasn't been realized yet.

BK I also find it interesting that, this time, the drone doing the filming is itself the one on procession, approaching the future. Through the broken landscape, it proceeds towards the future (in the form of the Hyperloop tube). Yet what's shown is mainly the landscape.

ML What I find exciting about the Hyperloop is that it is – as you say – part of the landscape but at the same time totally excludes it, so maybe it's also a kind of dystopia, a kind of separation between humans and nature. While the other technologies still allow you to perceive the landscape, here it's actually completely disconnected. The earth around it could



fall prey to complete desertification. No one would notice.

BG Totally. Bram and I both took multi-day road trips to Nevada. Bram was coming from Arizona and I was coming from LA. And the shoot was very influenced by our trips through this apparent wasteland. Where people sit in their fenced-in properties and shoot at tin cans because there's nothing else to do. They struck us as so completely excluded from society.

BK The windows of the carriages of European kings were covered with carpets to spare them the sight of misery. Which is also a kind of exclusion.







High Speed Slow Motion







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Holy Spirit





P.4 Rear segment of the Transrapid TR 08 on the INTIS company grounds in Lathen, Germany 2020



P.7 Transrapid test track in Dörpen, Germany 2019



P.8 Aérotrain station in Ruan, France 2020



P.10 Campfire site next to the Hyperloop test track in Nevada, USA 2022



P.12 Transrapid switch in Lathen, Germany 2019



P.15 PROCESSIONS, digital collage 2020



P.16 Transrapid test track in Germany, PROCESSION 1 screenshot 2020



P.19 Transrapid test track in Germany, PROCESSION 1 screenshot 2020



P.20 Aérotrain test track in France, PROCESSION 2 screenshot 2020



P.23 Aérotrain test track in France, PROCESSION 2 screenshot 2020



P.24 Hyperloop test track in Nevada, USA, PROCESSION 3 screenshot 2022



P.27 Hyperloop test track in Nevada, USA, PROCESSION 3 screenshot 2022



P.28 Aérotrain station in Chevilly, France 2020



P.31 Aérotrain 180 at the Station in Chevilly, France 1969



P.33 Aérotrain 02 1969



P.33 Grumman TLRV, Garret LIMRV and Rohr Aero-train in the backyard of the Pueblo Railroad Museum, USA 2022



P.35 Garret LIMRV in the Backyard of the Pueblo Railroad Museum, USA 2022



P.37 Transrapid TR06 at Deutsches Museum Bonn, Germany



P.37 Transrapid SMT Shanghai



P.39 Section of the Transrapid TR07 on the INTIS company grounds in Lathen, Germany 2020



P.41 Virgin Hyperloop capsule presentation in Washington D.C., USA 2022



P.41 Hyperloop Transportation Technologies capsule presentation in El Puerto de Santa Maria, Spain 2018



P.42 Hyperloop tube segment, Hyperloop Test and Safety Site, Moapa, USA 2022



P.44 Smoke boxes from PROCESSION 1 2020



P.46 High Speed Slow Motion, detailed view 2021



P.48 High Speed Slow Motion, detailed view 2021



P.49 High Speed Slow Motion, detailed view 2021



P.50 High Speed Slow Motion, detailed view 2021



P.52 Europe Insoumise, Aérotrain test track in Ruan, France 2020



P.54 Fragments of a planned but never completed transport canal, built between 1938 and 1942, which runs parallel to the Transrapid test track and is used as a fishing pond.



P.56 Stalactites found at the Aérotrain station in Saran, France 2020



P.57 Fossils, found at the Hyperloop Test and Safety Site in Moapa, USA 2022

Imprint

PROCESSIONS

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