

A brief interview on a text that was commissioned by  
Moritz Behrens, Christian Berkes and Sophie Wohlgemuth and  
written by Sebastian Michael:

**“Earth Portal Report 513118-000816. A Sentiment Utopia”**

**Sophie/Moritz/Christian:** Out of curiosity we wonder what the Portal number refers to?

**Sebastian:** I am so glad this isn't entirely obvious (I thought it might be too, too easy to decipher!): The two numbers are simply the GPS coordinates in Degrees, Minutes and Seconds, whereby the “-“ here isn't in fact a hyphen, but rather denotes that the longitude is West as opposed to East. (If the latitude were South as opposed to North, the number would logically have to start with a “-“ too, and if the longitude were East, then instead of the dash, or minus sign, as it accurately should be described, you could either have a plus sign “+”, or a blank space, if the assumption were that all values are positive unless indicated otherwise.)

If you go to <http://www.gps-coordinates.net/> and enter the first part of the number as 51 31 18 in the DMS Latitude North fields and 00 08 16 in the DMS Longitude West fields and hit enter you will get the precise address of where the 'portal' was located... (Don't use the DD or Decimal Degrees fields, though! Although the number looks like it might be a simplified notation of decimals, it actually isn't: if you were to enter these two numbers as they are in the DD fields, you'd get no result, and if you were to insert a decimal point after the first two digits in each case, you'd get the wrong location. I deliberately used DMS values in an unlabelled notation to convey the idea that the writer of the report and its readers would have settled on the simplest possible form that requires the fewest characters, signs or markers, but is nevertheless unequivocal in its geographical meaning, when naming their portals...)

**Moritz:** Can you elaborate a bit on the issue of data surveillance in the context of art and commercial projects. Why did you choose not to put it at the heart of your Sentiment Utopia? Or to phrase it differently, what might have been the 'research context' of Earth Portal 513118-000816?

**Sebastian:** We think of data as scientific and therefore objective and therefore reliable and trustworthy, neither of which, of course, it entirely is: data is easily manipulated, easier still to be

flawed and easiest of all to misinterpret. Even the most conscientious researcher is liable to empathy bias, cultural context distortion and objective-orientated affirmation skews, or similar pitfalls.

We also know that at quantum level the assumed certainties we derive from our science break down and have to be really completely rethought and reimagined, and since we similarly know that with our current science we will not be able to meaningfully overcome Einstein's limitations on the fastest possible speed of travel through space, somebody – either us or some other civilisation – will at some point have to be able to tap into quantum science (or some equivalent) if intergalactic communication, let alone inter-universal transportation, is ever to be possible.

The idea of not focusing on data surveillance as the substance of the research that is being carried out by the civilisation that sets up these portals is that such a civilisation would have to be sufficiently evolved to have moved way beyond our Newtonian concept of science. Having completed the fusion process between 'artificial' technology and organic 'life', it can now carry out research with a post-empirical, post-digital, post-data methodology, which one might describe as 'sapient intuitive' (as opposed to, perhaps, 'naive intuitive', which would have been the case pre-science and pre-data). This idea in itself is, of course, absolutely not scientific: I have no evidence that this is a probable evolutionary trajectory either we or any other civilisation in any of our known or imaginable universes is on, but it's an attractive-enough one, which, in terms of a presumed progression towards a greater awareness of a collective (pan-universal) conscious and an increased ability to gain access to its potentialities – whilst defining for ourselves both identities and expanded domains of freedom within it – would appear to make sense. To me, at least; and having been given licence to explore these themes from a purely subjective point of view, I somewhat latched on to it.

To answer the second part, or alternative phrasing, of your question though: I imagine – and perhaps this Earth Portal Report is a little too implicit rather than explicit in this – that the point of the research carried out is principally behavioural study and anecdotal evidence gathering. What we might describe as 'people watching', but carried out on an inter-universal plane and for the purpose of gaining insights into who on earth these earth people are, here with a focus on a group of people who have a great deal of influence on shaping their own and their fellow human beings' built environments.

The 'report' itself also makes reference though to the inescapable phenomenon that the act of observation changes the nature of the observed. So these researchers are aware that no matter

how subtle and unintrusive they are trying to be, they will have an impact on the subjects of their research, and they view this impact as broadly beneficial, rather than disruptive, in no small measure due to the diligence and care they themselves are taking for it to be so.

There is an additional fundamental question all of this raises, of course, which is: if there were to be a civilisation advanced enough to generate portals on our planet and to carry out research here of any description – and even taking as read the assumption that they would be so advanced that their motives for doing so would be entirely non-predatory and benign – would they in fact feel, let alone be, ethically obliged to remain unnoticed and to us invisible so as not to disturb our own evolution trajectory, as the piece suggests, or would the opposite be the case: would the imperative of the greater collective conscious and what in the piece is referred to as *The Mind* not in fact impel them to as quickly as possible share all their knowledge, insight and capability with us, so as to achieve the fastest possible advancement of yet another species, even if that meant entirely overwhelming a significant portion of it?...

**Moritz:** I am struggling a bit with the detailed location of where the portal has been deployed. I see the point when it comes to the responsibility of the social group (engineers) towards shaping the built environment. On the other hand I am wondering if it does sound a bit too much Arup PR?

**Christian:** I think it's crucial to pinpoint the portal's location exactly the way you did, because we asked you for a review and a critique of the cocoon and not for some pure fiction.

**Sebastian:** I'm inclined to agree with you, Christian, here: Certainly I understood the brief to be essentially a review of the installation I saw; and to the concept of the Sentiment Cocoon as originally proposed, executed and then experienced by me, the location seems integral.

**Christian:** I do like your last chapter, but it ends a bit too cosy – at first sight. Does the "Good Thing" (written in capital letters) refer to an understanding of a thing ("*Ding*") as something that assembles other entities (humans and non-humans) around it; as Bruno Latour might put it? Or is this the final rating of the technical report? Or something completely different? What do you think?

**Sebastian:** This is really meant to be taken with a pinch of salt: here too I was keeping in mind the brief of the piece as a review, and so it's the 'report' writer saying that the 'portal' was a success and convincing the readers (who are presumed to have some type of decision making

capacity) that creating these things and carrying out these projects is worthwhile; it's a subtle nudge towards those human readers who might wonder: what's the point of having this kind of art in the first place; it is, in effect, an endorsement, then, of the cultural thinking that allows for these projects to be financed and carried out on the whole. So the capitalisation of the expression Good Thing is also a little ironic. Talking about a 'good thing' is very idiomatic, and a shorthand for conveying magnanimous overall approval, and having previously in the text capitalised major concepts, such as the Great Intelligent Virtual Energy or The Mind – which are in themselves of course meant to be to some extent ironic – I thought that ending on the notion of an Encompassing Positive (here called "a Good Thing", to emulate a conversational tone of generosity) would be appropriate and perhaps a little amusing.

*The original text is featured in the book:*

*„Sentiment Architectures. A field trip to behaviour and cognition in time and space“  
(botopress, 2016)*