Die Zukunft gehört dem Ingenieur:
Herman Sörgel's Attempt to Engineer Europe's Salvation

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ABSTRACT

Herman Sörgel devised a plan, beginning in 1927, to usher in a new era of peace and prosperity for the whole of Europe. *Atlantropa* was his answer to the perceived threats that the European people faced from international competition, overpopulation, and lack of resources. The plan would have resulted in the lowering of the Mediterranean Sea and the ultimate creation of one continent comprised of the former Europe and Africa. Though the plan was never implemented, it poses a fascinating model through which historians may reconsider the time period between the end of the First and Second World Wars.

This thesis examines some historical socio-political movements through the lens of Sörgel's megaproject. Original publications from Herman Sörgel himself as well as those of two notable Atlantropa scholars, Alexander Gall and Wolfgang Voigt, explain in great detail the technical and sociological aspects of the plan. Additionally, theories from Jeffrey Herf, Richard von Coudenhove-Kalergi, and Dina Brandt aid in the understanding of the man who attempted to engineer Europe out of crisis.

The following analysis reveals the difficulty in placing Herman Sörgel into any singular political or social movement in his time. Though he espoused some of the same rhetoric as that of the National Socialists and pan-European movements alike, he failed to conform to any particular group. The unwavering obsession with his project consumed all of Sörgel's energies until his death in 1952. Though all-but-forgotten, the project offers an uncommon means by which to view a tumultuous time in Europe.

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Introduction:

Classification and periodization, by which we label spans of time, guide our understanding of history. In the course of mankind's history, criteria for these periods include names derived from simple time-based numbering, ruling elites or figureheads, cultural developments, or technological advancement. In forming mental maps of the human story, symbolism plays an integral role, and ages come to be known by societies' progress, stagnation, achievements, as well as failures. Large-scale projects occupy a unique position in the study of history. Grandiose plans stand as symbolic representations of both cultural and political thought. Great undertakings provide benchmarks for historians seeking to delineate beginnings and endings of particular ages. Albert Speer's blueprints for the transformation of Berlin provide an exceptionally ominous example of *Großprojekte* (megaprojects) in Germany's history. Hitler was not the first to show enthusiasm for his chief architect's concept – it was an idea dating back to 1908 (Voigt 108). Especially after industrialization, feats of engineering can be seen as symbolic of a period's cultural Zeitgeist. Recent examples of American projects might include the digging of the Panama Canal in the early twentieth century or the damming and concurrent development of river systems in the Southeast overseen by the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), beginning in the 1930s. The Panama Canal is indicative of the time period, which saw the United States flexing diplomatic muscles, and the TVA highlights a turning point in the Great Depression for its role in fostering

economic growth. Both of these examples were highly successful ventures that brought prosperity and prestige to the American cultural story – victories of a sort.

Winston Churchill said that history is written by the victors. Taking these words into account, of what importance are failed or rejected proposals to the greater narrative of history? Without careful preservation of documents and texts, these "defeated" ideas are likely to be forgotten with the passage of enough time, but that does not necessarily decrease their relevance to a period or to our understanding of it. The Strategic Defense Initiative proposed by U.S. President Ronald Reagan is a poignant example of a well-known aborted program that maintains relevance in interpretations of the Cold War. "Star Wars," as it came to be known, is now an icon of the 1980s and the "Reagan Era" because of its influence on American scientific development, domestic politics, as well as Soviet-American relations.

In much the same way, Herman Sörgel's all-but-forgotten "*Atlantropa*" project is one instance of such a grandiose project, abandoned before construction could begin. There exists here a great irony, because of the media attention paid the project at its onset, and perhaps more importantly, the sheer breadth and grandeur of his proposal. The piqued interest of the international press was not lost on Sörgel, who included extracts from well-known newspapers inside the front cover of his Sammlung (collection),[1] *Mittelmeer-Senkung; Sahara-Bewässerung (Panropa Projekt)* (Sörgel 1929, 3). Said the *New York Times*; "It is the 'reawakening of the Sahara' through fructification by the Mediterranean's waters, that gives to the German engineer's project its

[1] In his foreword, Sörgel explicitly invited the press to take note of his plan

attractive twist." *The Illustrated London News* concurred, "How to enlarge Europe and Africa: The Mediterranean offers such an opportunity. Modern Engineering shows the way." (3). Even sources in lands so distant as South America commented on Atlantropa. The *Revista Menendez Behety* wrote,

> Si existiera una idea que fuera más elevada que el actual espíritu de partido de la familia internacional europea, una idea, que con ayuda de la téchnica diera amplia base para une nueva vida de los pueblos: no se podría entonces evitar el inminente peligro de naufragio de nuestra cultura, no se podría con ello iniciar y dejar establecido un conjunto cultural completamente nuevo?[2] (3).

In 1932, in the German-speaking realm alone, the Atlantropa Institute collected one hundred and forty-seven newspaper articles concerning the intriguing plan (Gall 38).

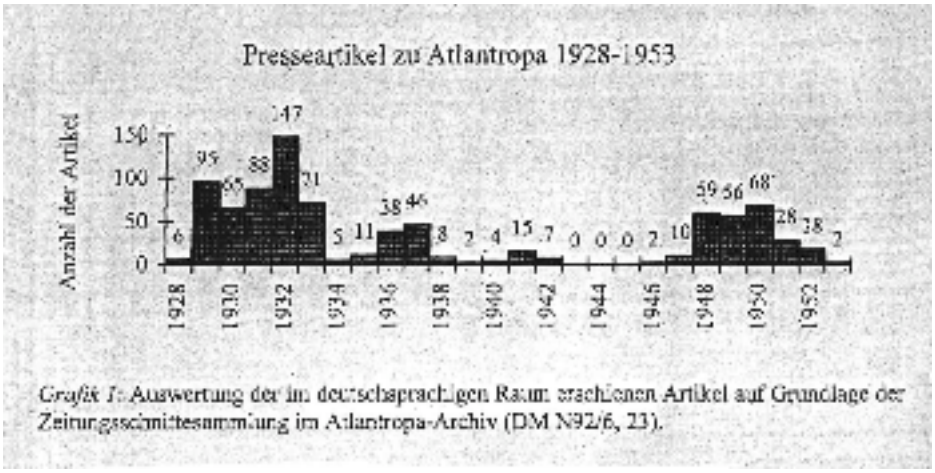

Figure 1: Table from Alexander Gall, noting number of press articles published on Atlantropa in the years between 1928 and 1953
Alexander Gall, *Das Atlantropa-Projekt: Die Geschichte Einer Gescheiterten Vision : Hermann Sörgel und die Absenkung des Mittelmeeres.* Frankfurt: Campus, 1998. 38.

[2] Translation: If a more elevated idea than the current European political party spirit were to exist, one idea, with the help of technology, would give a broad base for a new life for the people. Then, would one not be able avoid the imminent danger of a cultural shipwreck, could one not initiate and leave established a completely new cultural group with it?

Sörgel's plan did not call only for a change in national realms – but instead would have accomplished no less than a very distinct change on the cartographic face of our planet by damming the Straits of Gibraltar and lowering the Mediterranean Sea. Despite nearly a century of technological advancement, engineering on such a gargantuan scale as Atlantropa is unparalleled and unlikely in the foreseeable future. Curiously, Sörgel was able to amass a healthy following of enthusiasts to aid in his efforts, including some very esteemed individuals, especially in the field of architecture (10).

The dream of Atlantropa deserves scrutiny, not solely due to the curious nature of the project. A unique perspective of the Inter-War and post World War II time periods may be gained through the lens of this megaproject and the rationale behind its inception. Historian Jeffrey Herf coined the term "reactionary modernism" in his 1984 work of the same name to refer to the paradoxical nature in which some post-World War I German intellectuals simultaneously rejected rationalistic ideals of the Enlightenment. The philosophers were in favor of a more Romantic nationalism while accepting technological advances born out of that same enlightened, liberal thinking. Irrationalist ideology combined with modern technology led to the devastating philosophy of the National Socialist regime (Herf 1-2), and also contributed heavily to Sörgel's motives.[3]

[3] It is discussed later that, although Sörgel disagreed with the National Socialist philosophy, one of his primary influences was an adherent of reactionary philosophy.

One proponent of this “highly technological romanticism” (2) was Oswald Spengler, whose work *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, cataloguing and detailing the life cycle of great civilizations, provided an impetus for Atlantropa. Though the cultural pessimism moved Sörgel and informed the desperate nature of his project, the common thread of nationalism seems abandoned in his vision, in favor of a more pan-European ideal. Atlantropa would necessarily require cooperation amongst European nations, a fact not lost on Sörgel, who considered and planned a central bureau for his project in Switzerland, which would oversee much of the organizational and operational aspects of planning and building (Sörgel 1932, 135).

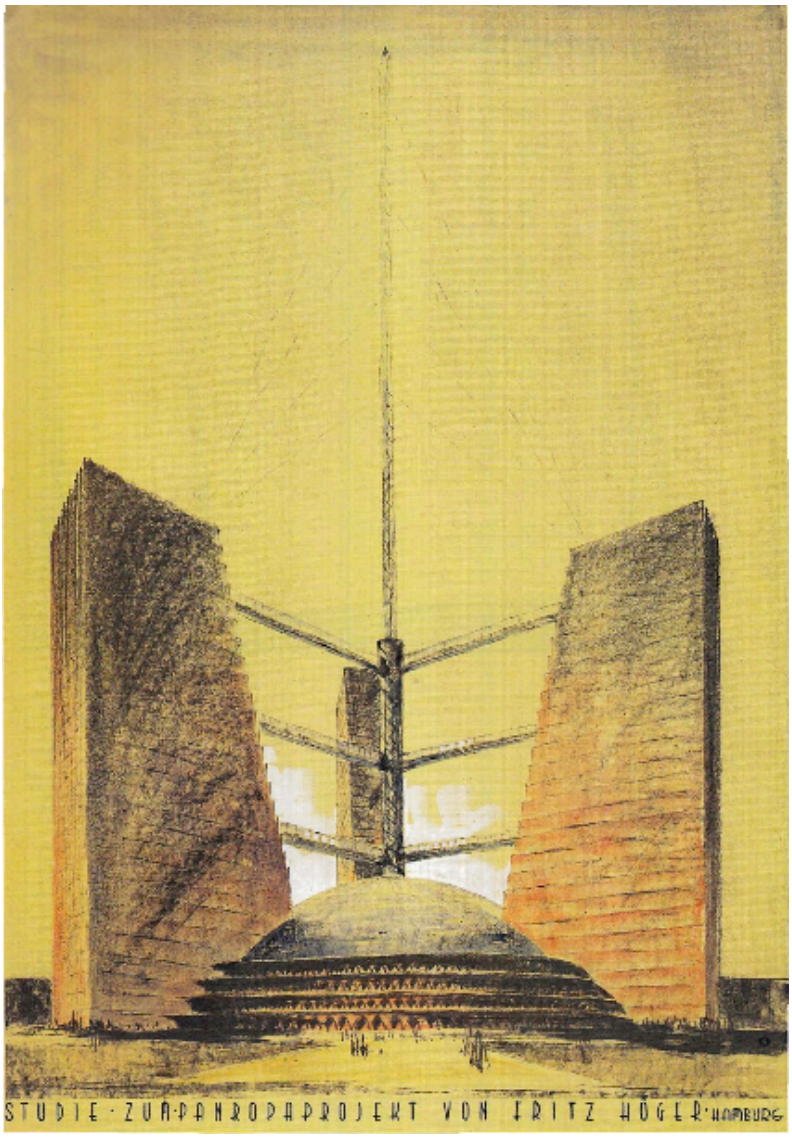

Figure 2: Proposal for the Atlantropa central bureau from Fritz Höger, 1931
Wolfgang Voigt, *Atlantropa: Weltbauen am Mittelmeer ; Ein Architektentraum der Moderne*. Hamburg: 2007. 78. Print.

Fears of upcoming American and Asian dominance contributed to, what one might call, a European nationalism advanced by Sörgel. The aftermath of the First World War left a tattered Europe, rife with pessimism. That pessimism was prevalent amongst many German intellectuals and politicians. The idea pervaded many of these circles that the Americas were on a road toward unification, which would spell economic downfall

for the European continent and peoples. Asia occupied the other frontier, whose might lay in the sheer size of its population and the wealth of resources. Sörgel feared that Europe's shortsighted political interests diverted attention away from America and Japan, who were wresting the last markets of the world out of European hands (Sörgel 1929, 38). He saw the solution to both of these threats in technological innovation and a strong alliance amongst the constituent states of Europe and their African colonies. The importance of binding Africa to Europe was paramount to Atlantropa, and to creating an identity for the new continent. Only then could it stand as a wedge between the impending dominance of the Asian and American juggernauts, while simultaneously providing Europe with desperately needed resources (Sörgel 1932, 128).

The idea of Atlantropa spanned four decades. Sörgel enunciated most of the technical aspects by 1932. He then keenly adapted the rhetoric in which he presented the megaproject to suit the shifting political situation in Europe, though the project itself remained largely the same. This megaproject reflected cultural pessimism and optimism in the Interbellum Weimar Republic, the vivacity of technological progress, as well as imperialistic ambitions of both Germany and other European nations. Atlantropa is an amalgam of early twentieth century history – not entirely utopian in nature, and not representative of any one particular trend of thought. The purpose of this study is to examine socio-political ideology and dogma between the First World War until shortly after World War II through the lens of the Atlantropa project. The study makes use of original publications from Herman Sörgel and the analysis of two Atlantropa experts, Alexander Gall and Wolfgang Voigt. These works detail the

technical, economic, and social aspects of Atlantropa. The historical cultural investigation of Oswald Spengler by Jeffrey Herf contributes an important historical context to Sörgel's world. Finally, Dina Brandt's exploration of German science fiction of the Inter-war period further enriches our understanding of the enthusiasm of the period. This aggregation of literature makes relevant Herman Sörgel's failed vision of a world, grossly changed both physically and politically.

1. Atlantropa: Technical Aspects of Continent-Creation

Herman Sörgel was born in 1885 to Hans Sörgel, a prominent building authority representative in Bavaria, who served as an inspiration for his son. His father and mother were elevated to noble status in the Kingdom of Bavaria, but this distinction was not hereditary. Though Herman followed his father's footsteps, he never attained the same level of recognition bestowed upon his father (Voigt 15). A desire to reach the same status of his parents may have informed much of Sörgel's though processes with regard to his own project.

Sörgel wrote in the foreword to his 1932 publication *Atlantropa* that he first decided to make the project his life's work during Christmas 1927. Within two years, he had made great strides in refining what was, at first, merely a pipe dream. The necessity of cooperation among experts from varying fields required to allow for any successful development of his idea was immediately clear to him (Sörgel 1932, V). It was in this spirit that Sörgel published a summarized collection of various articles that he had written about the Mediterranean project in 1929. He declared in his foreword,

> The purpose of this record, drawn up in four languages, is to gain for the project popularity, sympathy, and co-operation of any nature whatsoever. Further work on the lines of this project is only possible if it becomes an affair of the people, if little by little the will of the people ranges behind the idea of the individual. Thus, this short record may be regarded as above all an invitation to the entire Press to aid as much as possible in making this project popular. (Sörgel 1929, 6).

With these words, Sörgel plainly stated goals that would become a decades-long obsession. This collection of ideas was the first of four detailed works that Sörgel published between the years of 1929 and 1948. In each of these texts, he defines his twofold vision. He first elaborated upon the technical aspects of the project. Next, he rationalized both the socio-political cost and necessity of Atlantropa.

Figure 3: Sörgel at his desk, around 1932
Wolfgang Voigt, *Atlantropa: Weltbauen am Mittelmeer ; Ein Architektentraum der Moderne*. Hamburg: 2007. 16. Print.

Dr. Otto Jessen, a prolific professor of geography at the time, made two expeditions to the Strait of Gibraltar in 1922 and 1924, and the results of his studies inspired and lent credibility to the feasibility of damming the Mediterranean. Jessen found that, despite its size and position, the Mediterranean Sea could not survive in current form. The primary vein of nourishment, through which this sea receives its ”Blut“ (lifeblood), is the Strait of Gibraltar. Jessen added that, the ocean floor in the strait only needed to be raised one hundred meters in order to produce the desired effects. The sea would then slowly shrink, leaving smaller saline lakes (Jessen 101). Estimates at the time placed the inflow of water from the Atlantic Ocean around 88,000 cubic meters per second, totaling around 2,762 cubic kilometers per year. Yearly water flow from the Black Sea amounts to around 152 cubic kilometers, and estimates from other tributaries range around 2,230 cubic kilometers annually. With a total evaporation surface of ~2,511,000 square kilometers and an average yearly evaporation of 165 centimeters from this surface, Sörgel calculated an evaporation of 4,144 cubic kilometers per year. In his words, “*Das Mittelmeer ist ein Verdunstungsmeer*.”[4] (Sörgel 1929, 8). The quantitative research of Jessen and others provided Sörgel with great inspiration.

A dam along the Strait of Gibraltar would not only provide immense hydroelectric profit for both Europe and Africa, but also would allow for the lowering of the Mediterranean water level, exposing huge tracts of “*Neuland*” (reclaimed land) to

[4] The Mediterranean is a sea characterized by evaporation. The rate of evaporation exceeds replenishment from river runoff and precipitation. See: Pinet, Paul R. p. 202.

be agriculturally cultivated and settled. This new land would provide *Lebensraum*,[5] and in so doing prevent Europe from self-destruction caused by rampant overpopulation (Sörgel 1932, 9-10). In order to develop Northern Africa and the Sahara regions into usable farmland, an enormous quantity of waterpower or "*weiße Kohle*"[6] would be required. The Gibraltar dam would provide electrical power, and, by accelerating the sinking of the sea via artificial pumping, the Sahara could be irrigated. Only with the complementary cultivation of land does the project become economical, argued Sörgel – the two goals are one and the same (Sörgel 1929, 12).

At the outset, Sörgel's plan was to sink the level of the Mediterranean by four hundred to five hundred meters through a series of dams at Gibraltar, each one hundred meters lower than the previous. Due to concerns for maritime traffic, however, Sörgel and his colleagues decided that a lowering of one hundred to two hundred meters would be sufficient (11-14).

The raising of a dam at Gibraltar was, without doubt, the most technically demanding part of Sörgel's plan, requiring the most time and effort (22). Instead of constructing a dam at the narrowest point in the Strait of Gibraltar, a distance of around fourteen kilometers, Sörgel decided that a more satisfactory location lay slightly west, toward the Atlantic. Here one finds the shallowest average depths, with the deepest

[5] Space to live: In biology, this term is used to refer to the habitat of a species. Friedrich Ratzel, who is often credited as the founder of political geography and a proponent of Social Darwinism compared nations to organisms. States, like organisms required adequate space to live. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the term came into heavy use in the realm of Geopolitik due to perceived overpopulation. The National Socialist party used the concept of Lebensraum to justify expansionist policies. The term has also been adopted into the English language. For more information, see Ratzel, Friedrich. *Der Lebensraum: Eine biogeographische Studie*

[6] Literally: "white coal." Sörgel frequently used this term to describe hydroelectric power.

stretch “only” three hundred meters below water level and stretching 5.2 kilometers. (It should be noted that a height of three hundred meters was, at that time, over two hundred meters taller than any dam then in existence.) The dam was to form a slightly asymmetrical arch of around thirty-five kilometers between two offset points near the Bay of Tangier and the Cabezos Reefs (Gall 20, Sörgel 1929, 22). The raising of the dam was to begin simultaneously at at three points: at both ends in Spain and Morocco and in the center of the strait. It would be necessary to begin all three stages at the same time due to the prevailing deep and surface currents. Sörgel called for pontoons to be filled from land by conveyers, each carrying up to 10,000 tons of material. After that, they would be placed in the desired position and then sunk accordingly. In the early phases of planning, Sörgel estimated that the dam would comprise some 10,000,000,000 cubic meters of material (Sörgel 1929, 22).

In *Atlantropa*, published in 1932, Sörgel outlined the development of the plans for the Gibraltar dam in phases, though he did not elaborate on as many smaller technicalities and measurements as in his 1929 publication. The first phase dealt with the development of the main dam at Gibraltar, described earlier. The second phase implemented power plants and canals on either side of the dam based on detailed maps of the ocean floor. Due to the mountainous nature of the banks, the third step necessitated a stretching of these power plants over ten kilometers. In the fourth phase, the power-producing turbines were relocated to the European side and the overflow cascades moved to the African side. Bruno Siegwarts, a colleague of Sörgel’s, came up with the idea to bow the ends of the dam toward the east, such that the

Atlantic Ocean would itself serve as a head race channel. In a fifth design stage, many defensive technical features were added to the dam, foremost among them a secondary levee on the Atlantic side. Further studies of the topographical nature of the Strait of Gibraltar allowed a more precise planning of the ports and the traffic infrastructure in the sixth planning stage. In addition, a more exact estimate of the materials needed in construction of the dam was made, and the width then estimated to be around two kilometers, including the levee dam. In the seventh and final stage published in the 1932 work, a single, larger lock replaced the graduated locks on the northern side of the dam – an idea introduced by Professor Peter Behrens of the Wiener Akademie. Also, Behrens suggested an "Atlantropaturm" – a tower of up to four hundred meters in height. The Atlantropaturm would serve as a defensive anti-aircraft station as well as an aesthetically pleasing tourist destination (Sörgel 1932, 15-19).

Figure 4: Conception of the *Gibraltarwerk* with main dam and protective levee: Georg Zimmerman, 1932
Wolfgang Voigt, *Atlantropa: Weltbauen am Mittelmeer ; Ein Architektentraum der Moderne*. Hamburg: 2007. 44. Print.

The Black Sea was another concern that Sörgel had to address, because of its characterization as an *Überflutungsmeer*,[7] discharging most of its water into the Mediterranean (27). In order to preserve the coastline of this sea, Sörgel proposed another dam at Chanak (today Çanakkale), at the narrowest point in the Dardanelles. To retain ships' ability to reach the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas, a canal would be dug at the narrowest point on the Gallipoli Peninsula, creating a passage to the Gulf of Saros. The deep nature of the Gulf of Saros simplified this solution, as the two hundred meter drop in water level would not affect navigation in this particular area. The hydroelectric dam would also add to the already powerful new electricity network (27-29).

Sörgel noted several other important locations for the construction of other hydroelectric projects and canals. He envisioned smaller dams on the Rhone and Ebro, as well as a complex system for the nearly depleted Adriatic Sea (34-38). Included in his estimations of power were other, smaller river systems, but Sörgel did not elaborate much on these, simply estimating the amount of power to be gained from all of them (38).

Without doubt, the most complex project, other than the Gibraltar works, was to be completed near Tunis and Messina. The work on a dam between Tunis and Sicily could not begin, however, until the water level of the Mediterranean had sunk at least

[7] Sea that is characterized by its overflow into another body – The Black Sea has a positive water balance.

one hundred meters.[8] Sörgel calculated that construction could first begin on this dam a little over one hundred years after the commencement of work at Gibraltar. He saw little need to explain in great detail these plans, because "…in 100 years, the technology will surely be more developed" (32-33). Basic ideas for the Tunis dam were given – it would be built at the shallowest point in the newly formed "Strait of Sicily," and it would only need to be around one kilometer wide. No extra levee would be necessary because of its location within the Mediterranean. This dam would extend some sixty-six kilometers, a facet given little attention by Sörgel – most likely because of his abiding faith in forthcoming technology. This point would serve as a third axis for travel between Europe and Africa, allowing a direct line of traffic through Italy into central Africa. A secondary dam of six kilometers was to be built along with a canal allowing ship passage (32-34).

With the exposure of new land due to the sinking of the Mediterranean, many coastal cities would be left completely landlocked. Sörgel was well aware of this issue, and he and many colleagues also included provisions for the future of these ports. He expected that cities located on steeper banks would simply expand in the direction of the retreating waters (Sörgel 1929, 32). This would be the case of many cities in the western basin, such as Marseille and Genoa (Sörgel 1932, 51-54). Other cities like Venice would require a more complex approach. At first, Sörgel considered Venice and

[8] "Tunisdamm" – This dam, deriving its name from the African city of Tunis – the African terminus of these works – was to divide the western and eastern basins of the sunken Mediterranean. In addition to a dam, Sörgel envisioned a bridge with capacity for automobile as well as rail traffic, connecting an enlarged Sicily to the African coastline.

Ravenna as “fit for the lethal chamber,” (Sörgel 1929, 32) but he later recanted (due to public outcry) and devised an intensive system of canals and dams to preserve Venice. Yet another dam would preserve Venice’s lagoon, far enough out such that it would still appear to be a city on the sea (Sörgel 1932, 60). That lagoon would link to the eastern Mediterranean basin via canals through the former Adriatic Sea.

Figure 5: Overview of the various projects on the Mediterranean and *Neuland* gained through its damming
Wolfgang Voigt, *Atlantropa: Weltbauen am Mittelmeer ; Ein Architektentraum der Moderne.* Hamburg: 2007. 66. Print.

2. Sörgel's Inspiration: Preserving *das Abendland*

Not only did Herman Sörgel expound upon the technical aspects of Atlantropa, he also provided substantial economic and political reasoning for the project, which served to highlight the dire necessity of such a venture. He gave most detail to that end in the 1932 publication. He repeated much of it with a much more reactionary tone in *Die Drei Großen A* (*The Three Great A's*) in 1938.

Sörgel first briefly addressed the role of the project in the overall energy budget of the Earth. Coal and oil undoubtedly played the most important roles in energy production in his time, though it was clear that these were finite sources of energy. By way of example, Sörgel estimated that reserves of coal in England would last only another two hundred years, and those of Germany only a possibly three hundred fifty. America's abundant reserves could not be counted upon as a source of energy without sacrificing European autonomy (Sörgel 1932, 76). Seeking to become a world-class engineer like his father, Sörgel turned to the Mediterranean as the solution to Europe's energy problems, saying "There is no other sufficient source for Europe's future other than the Mediterranean" (Sörgel 1932, 78). He considered waterpower, the so-called "white coal" not only a solution, but also an absolute necessity for Europe, to be properly developed.

New sources of power would be necessary to fuel the expansion of a growing European population. In order to accommodate that population, more Lebensraum would have to be found, conquered, or created. The pacifist Sörgel chose the latter. He

felt that adequate space for growth was the only way to ensure a bright future for Europe. Indeed, he feared that the acquisition of Lebensraum and a sufficient source of power would be the only way to avoid Europe's downfall.

Though Sörgel saw a bright future for Europe in completion of Atlantropa, the prevalent cultural pessimism of some contemporary thinkers, such as Oswald Spengler, informed his planning and reasoning. Herman Sörgel's numerous references to the European realm as "*Das Abendland*" serve to highlight his awareness of the political and cultural philosophies of the Weimar period. The particular invocation of of Spenglerian terminology also accentuates Sörgel's familiarity with Spengler's works and processes. Sörgel states early in his first published work on Atlantropa that the ultimate "fate of [*das abendländische Kultur*] – as that of most others – will be settled on the Mediterranean" (Sörgel 1929, 38). Where others found the soul of their nation, Sörgel spoke of a greater, European soul. The Spenglerian reference surfaces repeatedly throughout Sörgel's published material on Atlantropa – making a clear connection between Herman Sörgel and so-called "reactionary modernists."

2.1 Herman Sörgel: Modernist. Reactionary?

Jeffrey Herf begins his 1984 book *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in the Third Reich* by asserting, "there is no such thing as modernity in general. There are only national societies, each of which becomes modern in its own fashion." He noted that most sociological theories of European modernity are dominated by dichotomies – tradition or modernity, progress or reaction, community or

society, rationalization or charisma (Herf 1). Where many theories argue that German nationalism and National Socialism stemmed from a rejection of scientistic modernity, as well as the values of the French Revolution and Industrial Revolution, Herf reexamines this theory and reconsiders the role of technology in the post-Weimar period.[9] He coined the term "reactionary modernism" to describe the paradoxical cultural tradition of the time (1). In particular, Herf uses this to refer to the way in which National Socialists married the romantic ideas of *Volk*[10] and *Land*[11] to the utilitarian augmentation of technology – technology made possible by Enlightenment ideals.

Logically, one would assume that any rejection of technology would accompany a rejection of Enlightenment ideals, for an acceptance of reason would also be in line with the marriage between Enlightenment philosophical and the period's technological pursuits. Instead, those who Herf named reactionary modernists simultaneously rejected Enlightenment reason while embracing technological advance (3). The reactionary modernists sought to integrate the technological component of Western

[9] Herf is speaking of traditional dichotomies in studies of German ideology in the Weimar Republic. He says, "Dichotomies – tradition or modernity, progress or reaction, community or society, rationalization or charisma – predominate in sociological theories of the development of European modernity." Herf instead argues for a "more nuanced view" of the German ideology (Herf 1).

[10] People, population, or nation – Here the term is used in a nationalist sense, implying the people of a particular nation.

[11] Land, or country – Once again, the use here implies a Romantic notion of country, the home of a certain group or nationality.

"*Zivilisation*" into the German "*Kultur*"[12] (1), answering the question of "technology *or* culture" with the response, "technology *and* culture" (2). Those advocating strong technical progress knew that, in order to avoid stagnation, they had to embrace technology. They sought to create a *stählernde Romantik* (steel-like Romanticism) in the words of Joseph Goebbels (3).

The paradox of German sociological development[13] had its roots in its late, but "thorough" industrialization as compared to England and France (5). Ralf Dahrendorf considered industrialization a filter of sorts, through which all societies pass before approaching the modern problem of liberalism (Dahrendorf 34). In the German case, the machinations of industry were very quickly adopted from the examples of western neighbors, but the societal structure remained largely unchanged (35). Said Jeffrey Herf in his preface, "Germany's scientific and technological advances occurred without the benefit of a vital tradition of political liberalism" (Herf ix). This combination of the "inherited structures of the dynastic state of Prussia" with rapid industrialization left little space for political liberalism (Dahrendorf 35), but also accounted for the speed and success with which Germany became an industrial power. Herein lies the paradox: a rejection of rational thought despite making use of the fruits born of that same though.

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[12] Herf explains that, by use of "…a coherent and meaningful set of metaphors, familiar words, and emotionally laden terms … had the effect of converting technology from a component of alien, Western *Zivilization* into an organic part of German *Kultur*." Here, particularly, the contrast of these terms highlights the conflict between rational and irrational mindsets (Herf 1).

[13] With the term "paradox," Herf is addressing "the manner in which the German Right incorporated the Enlightenment" and he therein sought to "accentuate the positive contributions the Enlightenment has made to modern society." He adds, "It is not paradoxical to reject technology as well as Enlightenment reason or to embrace technology while celebrating reason. These pairings are the customary outcomes of choosing between scientism and pastoralism." (Herf ix, 3).

Herf posited that nationalistic ideology would then argue that the *Volk* needed protection from the influences of Western *Zivilisation* (Herf 6).

Herf used the term "reactionary" to emphasize the link to the traditional political right (11). A rejection of 1789 principles was typical of the reactionary modernists, and they found in nationalism a "third force," which offered an alternative to capitalism and Marxism. The addition of that nationalistic third force fueled the National Socialist movement in Germany, and informed the way in which they detested communists and the "capitalist Jews." Herf then elaborated on his use of the term "modernist," saying that they were first and foremost technological modernizers, advocating the industrialization of Germany. Secondly, the reactionary modernists "articulated themes associated with the modernist vanguard" – a collection of thinkers in the western world forming a movement not associated with the political Left or Right, but instead a "triumph of spirit and will over reason and the subsequent fusion of this will to an aesthetic mode" (12).

2.2 Oswald Spengler as Pessimistic Impetus

Herf named Oswald Spengler as a typical prototype of a reactionary modernist (11), and as such, Spengler warranted an entire chapter in Herf's *Reactionary Modernism*.[14] Spengler's most well known work, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*[15]

[14] Herf cites other examples of those, who "articulated themes of the modernist vanguard: Ernst Jünger and Gottfriend Benn in Germany, Gide and Malraux in France, Marinetti in Italy, Yeats, Pound, and Wyndham Lewis in England" (Herf 11).
[15] *The Decline of the West*: Translation into English 1926

espoused a highly anti-*Zivilisation* rhetoric that was typical of critics of the Weimar Republic and of the post-War period. Herf, however, found another, often overlooked, undercurrent within Spengler's text – a similar "reconciliation of romantic and irrationalist sentiments with enthusiasm for technical advance" (49) – and, as such, classified him as a typical reactionary modernist, albeit one who "straddled the fence" between a traditional Prussian conservatism and the more revolutionary postwar conservatives (11).

In *Preußentum und Sozialismus*, Spengler made clear that he disagreed with Marxist ideas, on the basis that Marx applied conflicting societal customs onto his theory of class struggle. He likened the English attitude toward work to that of a Viking – focused not upon "patching the sail" but instead only upon capturing the "loot." The primary objective in wealth acquisition was the possibility of entering the ranks of "gentlemen," and to escape the difficulties of *Handarbeit* (manual labor) into the realm of *Händlergewinn* (mercantile gain).[16] Spengler argued that Marx took this "purely English" dichotomy and incorporated it into his theory of the Bourgeoisie and Proletariat (Spengler 1920, 73). This false analogy only highlighted Marx's erroneous logic with regard to labor, argued Spengler, who felt that the true honor of hard work was lost on both Marx and the English. Had Marx understood the Prussian concept of work – a business of service to the greater society as a whole, not only in service of oneself – he would have likely never written his Manifesto (Spengler 1920, 74).

[16] Here he is speaking of the mercantile class.

The rebuke of Marxist philosophy (and more specifically of Marx himself) took on a highly nationalistic tone as Spengler ridiculed the latter, suggesting that Marx had become English, because of his desire to move capital from the hands of the private interests into the hands of the *Handarbeiter*. Only two parties were found in play in this system, much like the English parliament (Spengler 1920, 75). Spengler, however, put forth the example of the Prussian-socialist state as an alternative to such a system. This state functioned as a whole, where both worker and business are fundamentally and equally civil servants. The principle of civil service to the state "*…ist die innere Form der politischen Zivilisation des Abendlandes…*" (…is the inner form of the civilized politics of the West…). Moreover, Spengler found symbolic evidence of this in the Gothic cathedrals, where every small detail is a necessary component of a greater whole (Spengler 1920, 76).

As Herf noted, Spengler's attack on Marx in *Preußentum und Sozialismus* constituted a "metamorphosis of philosophical-political categories into nationalist ones." Spengler considered himself modern in comparison to the nineteenth century (worker class) materialism. Marxism was, to him, too rational and unromantic to be considered modern, and Marx's obsession with the dichotomy between capitalists and the proletariat was a byproduct of Manchester liberalism and of his own Jewishness (Herf 50). Here, Spengler revealed some reactionary tendencies, saying, "the feeling that life dominates reason, … that knowledge of men is more important than abstract and general ideas." "Knowledge" here does not to refer to advancements won through

rational thought of the liberal Enlightenment tradition. Spengler favored Prussian qualities, such as fate, instinct, and the organic (50-51).

Before *Preußentum und Sozialismus*, Spengler published his most recognized work *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* in 1918, which contained a sort of philosophical reflection on world history. John Farrenkopf called this work "an unconventional, multidisciplinary, and wide-ranging work on the philosophy of world history," and noted that Spengler sought not only to chronicle the philosophical history of both Western and non-Western cultures, but also to create "a kind of unconventional textbook on the philosophy of statecraft." Spengler hoped to advance the causes of neo-conservatism and imperialism in light of democratic and capitalist developments of the Weimar Republic and Western Europe (Farrenkopf 20-21). In the first volume of his work, Spengler defined and contrasted two competitive perspectives on understanding: *Gestalt*[17] (form) and law. Where the latter is a method of examination akin to the "exact deadening procedures of modern physics," the former, Gestalt, "operates in the realm of moving and becoming" (Spengler, qtd. in Herf 53). Moreover, the employment of law in an evaluation destroys the object observed through thorough dissection and analysis. Spengler advocated instead a more organic and intuitive approach to analysis based on Gestalt (Herf 53).

Der Untergang des Abendlandes, with its relative popularity in Germany, expanded dialog with regard to historical depictions, in that it provided a non-

[17] Here the term is used in a more metaphorical sense, implying "wholeness," and it echoes Spengler's advocacy of a more organic perspective.

Eurocentric perspective on the rise and fall of civilizations (Farrenkopf 27). Instead of a chaotic chain of cause and effect, Spengler saw in the history of great civilizations and cultures the same indicators of life as with organisms (30). Each civilization displays ascertainable stages of "childhood, youth, manhood, and old age" (Spengler, qtd. in Farrenkopf 30). This idea that civilizations have life cycles necessarily implies that there must also be a death, or, at the very least, a decline into obscurity. Spengler's great concern for western civilization, his *Abendländische Kultur*, hinged upon this axis of thought, and because of the natural and organic order of history, he saw no route through which such a fate could be avoided (Spiering and Wintle 191).

Though Herf finds Spengler's judgments about the impending decline of western civilization "dubious," he credits Spengler with influencing a "mood of impending disaster and possible salvation" in the postwar Weimar period. The story depicted in *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* is constructed upon a so-called "morphological" perspective – a romantic notion that the typical mechanizations of modern civilization form a "shell" or outer skin of something greater within. The political and cultural institutions, architectural forms, and economic organizations are simply surface material of an inner "soul" (Herf 52).

2.3 Rejection of Europe's "Inevitable" Fate

Sörgel exemplified many modernist tendencies as well as some of the reactionary inclinations prevalent in Weimar Germany. His inclination to look toward technology as a saving grace for the otherwise doomed culture places him in the ranks

of many other right wing ideologues that Herf describes, a great many of whom were National Socialists. Although many Europeans distrusted technology in the aftermath of the First World War and the devastation it brought about, modernists managed to sway opinion in the other direction. Sörgel addressed the relationship between technology, economics, and politics. He made a case for the use of technology, saying "*Nicht im Kampfe gegen die Maschine, sondern nur im Bunde mit ihr kommen wir weiter.*" (Not in fighting the machine, but instead only in league with it, do we advance) (Sörgel 1932, 85). The faith that Sörgel placed in Europe's technological abilities is inherent in the Atlantropa plan and underscored by the fact that he envisioned a completed dam at Gibraltar in a mere ten years time (Gall, 24). Contrasting the breathtakingly brief period of time envisioned for the completion of the *Gibraltarwerk*,[18] Sörgel proposed an exceedingly long-term vision for Atlantropa's completion, coming only after the passage of two hundred fifty years (Sörgel 1932, 24). So great was his faith, that he did not bother to address some of the difficulties regarding the *Tunisdamm*, trusting that the technology would naturally be available by that time (32-33). In his own texts, Sörgel remained deliberately vague about important details and numbers involved in the project, choosing instead to rely upon sketches or the expertise of specialists (Gall, 27). In this respect, he appeared blind to legitimate obstacles, as well as sociopolitical forces, at least because of an obsession with technical and mechanical potential, and an increasing fixation upon the looming specters of Asia and America, as will become evident below.

[18] This term refers to the dam and hydroelectric works at Gibraltar, as a whole.

Much more difficult to pinpoint are Sörgel's reactionary tendencies. He was a self-proclaimed pacifist, and detested the idea of using military might to advance culture. This alone separates him from many of Herf's National Socialist reactionary modernists, but it does not alter the fact that Sörgel still adhered to many neo-romantic ideas of nation-building, or in the case of Atlantropa, continent-building. The romantics of Germany valued the promotion of *Volk*, a discernable culture bound by the borders of a nation. Traces of this thought pattern are found in the imagination of a European *Volk* – one made up of the white races of *das Abendland*. The goal of preserving culture took precedence over other economic considerations. Atlantropa was not fundamentally meant to be a moneymaking venture, but was merely to ensure the stability of Europe and her markets. This mindset aligns with the anti-capitalist, culture-focused neo-romantics of the Weimar period, who certainly embraced the doom-and-gloom predictions of Spengler. The same prognoses of decline informed Sörgel's verdict: "*Entweder: Untergang des Abendlandes Oder: Atlantropa als Wende und neues Ziel*" (Either: Decline of Western Civilization Or: Atlantropa as turning point and new goal) (Sörgel 1932, 106). Sörgel simply saw Atlantropa as a way out of Europe's declining fortunes.

3. "Supranational" Designs

The ominous impression of the decline of Europe was perhaps the most obvious influence upon Sörgel's Atlantropa concept, references to a European "*Untergang*" and a contrasting "*Gefahr*" (danger, threat) from the Americas and Asia permeating Sörgel's publications before the end of World War II. The Spenglerian school of thought was, however, not the only important contributor to Sörgel's design. The popular apprehension of Europe's demise promulgated by Oswald Spengler and the empire building of the late 19th and early 20th centuries coalesced and gave birth, not only to Atlantropa, but also to a number of conceptions of a future Europe.

Alexander Gall notes in his book, *Das Atlantropa-Projekt*, that Europe saw not only a powerful new wave of nationalism at the end of the First World War, but also an unprecedented number of proposals for a unification of Europe (49). Indeed, the interwar period witnessed the creation of the League of Nations, ironically championed by United States President Woodrow Wilson, despite his nation's refusal to join. Many founding members and those who joined later would ultimately leave the League due to its inability to fulfill the dictates of its own charter. This discord, created by nationalistic ambitions opposing aspirations of unity, characterized the interwar period in Europe, as well as around the globe.

In the 1929 publication, Sörgel made brief mention of his belief that Europe and Africa must be consolidated into one unit in a section entitled "What is the political importance of this project for the world?" He advocated creating Atlantropa, not solely

as an essential political and economic fix for an ailing Europe, but additionally as a bulwark against a "threatened external destruction between and from the hands of America and Asia" (Sörgel 1929, 38). Later in 1932, he elaborated on his perception of these external threats, explaining that America had no need for colonies because of its inherited wealth in natural resources, industrial capacity, and land in every [climactic] zone of the Earth. America would be autarchic (Sörgel 1932, 79). Asia, on the other hand, would be a threat to *das Abendland* because of the "racial antipathy" of India, China, and Japan (Sörgel 1929, 38), and because of the Asian burgeoning Asian population (Gall, 50).

In considering his options, Sörgel notably consulted two previous suggestions for the unification of European (and other) territories, if only to point out their flaws and improve upon them. He first considered Woytinsky's proposed "*Vereinigte Staaten*," and quickly dismissed it as an improbability. Sörgel found the East to West format of Woytinsky's idea unsustainable because of the aforementioned antipathy between the "Asian and European races." He maintained that, even if a European were to live twenty years within the Asian culture, or vice-versa, the two would never quite fully understand one another (Sörgel 1932, 80).[19]

[19] Also seen as *Die Vereinigte Staaten von Europa* – The United States of Europe, Woytinsky's plan is only briefly mentioned in Sörgel's volumes. Woytinsky envisioned a union which would have included the Asian portion of Russia, which Sörgel viewed as being too Asiatic a culture to function well within any union with Europe. (Sörgel 1932, 80).

3.1 Coudenhove-Kalergi's Paneuropa

The second world-organization ideal Sörgel considered was that of Count Richard Nikolaus von Coudenhove-Kalergi. Coudenhove-Kalergi documented the foundations of his own personal crusade to assemble the separate nation states of Europe into "*Paneuropa*."[20] Not unlike Herman Sörgel, Coudenhove-Kalergi took note of the rapidly evolving political landscape of Europe (and the greater world) in the period between the two World Wars. He saw the Interwar period as a battle between pessimists and optimists, between those who promulgated nationalistic competition between nations and peoples and those who invested their hopes for the future in rationality and thoughts of peace (Coudenhove-Kalergi 56). Before the League of Nations began to "heal the wounds" of the First World War, its mandate was severely diminished by the American Senate's declination to join the union. Without the initial support of the Americans or the Soviets, the League was rendered impotent and could no longer claim to speak for the majority of the world's citizens. Some continued to support the "amputated" union, and they formed one of three groups vying for power in Europe, to Coudenhove-Kalergi's estimation. The nationalists and the communists constituted the other two camps (57).

[20] Meant to inspire pan-European cooperation, this term became the name of Coudenhove-Kalergi's imagined federation of European states. Herman Sörgel changed the name of his project from *Panropa* to *Atlantropa* to avoid any legal action due to the similarity between the two names. See Gall, pgs. 38-39.

Because of the abbreviated mandate of the League of Nations, many lost faith in the plausibility of a peacekeeping union in Europe. Coudenhove-Kalergi, however, felt that history provided ample precedent for the viability of such a conglomeration of states. In a chapter entitled "*Geschichte der Paneuropa-Bewegung"* (History of the Paneuropa Movement), Coudenhove-Kalergi began by crediting the Greeks as the first to have divided their known world into three separate wholes – Asia, Europe, and Africa – and created the concept of the European continent. The Roman Empire, he continued, was a Mediterranean empire, but laid the basic groundwork for a "second Europe" – one that was united through a common language (Latin) and through religion (the Catholic Church). During the Crusades, the common enemy of this newly arisen *Abendland* was Islam, but the efforts of the Europeans failed ultimately, due to a lack of cohesive unity among princes, states, and cities, who continued to quarrel with one another despite the efforts in the Near East (52-53). In light of these events, two contrasting figures came to develop some of the first, albeit disparate, ideals of uniting Europe in the early fourteenth century. Coudenhove-Kalergi held that the Italian poet, Dante Alighieri, and French politician Pierre Dubois with the original conception of a "Paneuropa." Where Dante dreamed of a renewal of the Roman Empire based upon Christian ideals, Dubois encouraged a federation of European states under the guidance of the French crown (53). Dante and Dubois' ideas failed to win favor with the crowns or commoners of Europe, and the dream of union was laid aside through the centuries, despite advances made by the Turks in Southeastern Europe in the fifteenth and Napoleon's expansionist conquests in the early nineteenth centuries. The goal was

made more challenging because of the Reformation and the spiritual split that afterwards ensued (54-55).

Only in the aftermath of World War I, with a measure of desperation in the face of a most divided Europe, did Coudenhove-Kalergi make his plea for Paneuropa. He recounted the chronology of his thought processes regarding Paneuropa in his book of the same name, published in 1923. In a subsection entitled, "*Die Hoffnung*" (The Hope), he revealed that his muse for his cause was the Swiss Confederation. This "*europäisches Weltwunder*" (European world wonder) acquired Coudenhove-Kalergi's interest and respect because of the sovereignty that each of its Kantons retained under the federal law within the Swiss nation (39-40). He also found remarkable the cultural plurality that not only existed in Switzerland, but which was also advocated by the federal government. Such cultural development is most obvious when considering the languages spoken within Switzerland. Coudenhove-Kalergi chose Switzerland as an archetype with critical awareness of the nationalism brewing in the rest of Europe in order to provide an exemplar that directly contradicted notions of right-wing nationalism (42-43).

In "*Das Europäische Manifest*," published on May 1st, 1924 and included in later versions of *Paneuropa*, Coudenhove-Kalergi laid out a framework for the consolidation of the European "continent." He first called for a grouping of European states after the design of Pan-America, if necessary by calling a conference of the affected states. An important second step would be the canceling of obligatory separation treatises and border guarantees between states, followed then by a defensive pact among all Pan-

European states. The fourth and final step mentioned by Coudenhove-Kalergi was the introduction of a customs union and periodic economic conferences for the new entity (109-110). These steps were perfectly plausible steps to a unified Paneuropa, a union of states that already shared a common "soul." Coudenhove-Kalergi said of this soul, "*Die europäische Seele ist dreidimensional: christlich die Tiefe, hellenisch die Weite, germanisch die Höhe.*" (The European soul is three dimensional: Christian the depth, Hellenistic the breadth, and Germanic the height.) (121). That same common soul would be symbolized by the red cross of Christ imposed upon the golden sun of Apollo – in Coudenhove-Kalergi's words, "supranational humanity conjoined to the brilliant spirit of the Enlightenment" (58).

3.2 Contrasting Paneuropa and Atlantropa

Herman Sörgel found many facets of Coudenhove-Kalergi's proposed Paneuropa to be in line with his own expectations of Atlantropa, going so far as to call the two projects "brothers" and "confederates." In order to distinguish the two propositions, however, Sörgel sought to differentiate them in his 1932 publication, stating that although the goals and outcomes of both unions were similar, the primary dissimilarities lie in the genesis of each project. Sörgel said of the two, "Paneuropa is the idea of a philosophizing politician, Atlantropa the idea of an organized technician." Sörgel revealed once more his pessimism in contrast to Coudenhove-Kalergi's perceived optimism in his elaboration on the two proposals. The successful implementation of Paneuropa would rely on "victorious reason" and healthy common sense within

European politics. Sörgel immediately answered with his typical pessimistic dichotomization: "*entweder Untergang oder Verständigung*" (Either decline or understanding). Europe would only be united when its people finally understood the desperation of their situation (Sörgel 1932, 82).

Sörgel wished to make another distinction between Paneuropa and his Atlantropa poignantly clear. He considered Paneuropa an idealist notion; one that would come from the top (politicians and leaders) and filter down (to the people). This notion of movement at the higher levels of government seemed too "good and nice" to Sörgel, who favored his own "bottom-up" approach. Atlantropa instead would be "*ein Antrieb"* (drive, or impulse) to ignite the European people's spirit of activity and desire to work. In a sense, Sörgel here justified the fantastic proportions of his project, because of his belief that engineering and technology should lead to a unification of Europe through the material work involved in such a project (82-83). Political unity would be a logical, if not necessary, consequence of the work involved in creating Atlantropa. An Atlantropa headquarters in Geneva would foster that unity: unity in a political, economic, and technological sense, represented by the three towers of the Atlantropahaus.

A common feature of Sörgel's rhetoric and that of both the conservatives and National Socialists in the early twentieth century was the use of the concept of *Lebensraum* to advance albeit very differing campaigns. The overpopulation of Europe had become a concern since the onset of the Industrial Revolution, with many prominent thinkers such as Thomas Malthus warning of the potential dangers of

population to the well being of society.[21] Sörgel reduced the "vitally important" symptoms plaguing the "politico-economic body of Europe" to three basic factors – *Lebensraum*, *Bevölkerung,* and *Energiewirtschaft* (*Technik*). He provided a graphic representation of the three factors and their interaction (see Figure 5 below) (95). In his estimation, the events of the First World War were the natural consequence of these three factors – the "kettle" of European *Lebensraum* simply could not withstand the pressure of the boiling "water" of the *Bevölkerung*. The catalyst for the ensuing explosion was the "fire" of an ever-expanding *Technik* (96).

Figure 6: A graphic depiction of Sörgel's three basic factors affecting the politico-economic body of Europe
Sörgel, Herman, *Atlantropa.* Zürich: Fretz & Wasmuth a.g.; etc, 1932. 95. Print.

[21] Malthus felt that the necessity of food and its limited nature combined with the tendency for man to procreate would lead to a world burdened and in decline due to overpopulation. See Malthus, T.R. and Geoffrey Gilbert, pp. 12-13.

There could be no change to the variables of technology and population (despite the death toll of the war), so the only variable left to change would have to be that of *Lebensraum*. Sörgel answered the *Lebensraumfrage* clearly and definitively by stating that the future home of *das abendländische Volk* existed in the lands won from the Mediterranean and, especially later, in Africa. Sörgel wrote:

> Das Atlantropaprojekt zeigt solche Entwicklungsmöglichkeiten im adäquaten Ausmaß zu den immer bedrohlicher werdenden Gefahren. Europa, das mechanisierteste Land der Erde, muß sich die Herrschaft über Afrika, das jungfräulichste Land der Erde, sichern durch die Länder- und Wirtschaftsbrücke, wie sie das Atlantropaprojekt schafft.
>
> (The Atlantropa project shows such possibilities of development in adequate proportion to increasingly threatening dangers. Europe, the most mechanized land of the Earth, must secure control of Africa, the most virgin land of the Earth, through the land and economic bridge, as is accomplished by the Atlantropa project.) (103).

The enthusiasm for claiming far-away lands was hardly new at the time Herman Sörgel began planning Atlantropa. Indeed, his extensive planning for the African continent can clearly be viewed as an extreme manifestation of colonial fantasy of the time period.

4. Imperialism and Atlantropa

4.1 The Short-Lived German Appearance on the Colonial Stage

Though many of the German states had acquired some small colonial holdings prior to unification in 1871, the unified German empire needed to close an ever-widening gap between its own colonial program and those of the other European nations. Compounding the issue was a seeming lack of initial interest in developing holdings overseas in leaders such as Bismarck, despite a broad belief amongst the population that a well-developed colonial empire would officially signal Germany's arrival on the world stage (Schinzinger 22-23). The reach for colonies went hand-in-hand with the desired development of a powerful overseas economy that could rival the British (23).

Despite the greater public interest in the prospect, Bismarck only grudgingly gave into the demands for a colonial empire, citing a need for the domestic economy in Germany to remain competitive with rivals Britain and France. Between the 1880s and the outset of World War I, the empire established colonies in the Pacific (*Deutsch Neuguinea*) and several in Africa as well – *Togoland, Kamerun, Deutsch Ostafrika,* and *Deutsch Südwestafrika*.[22]

Given the frustration in Germany due to the loss of its colonies after the First World War, and the expansive holdings that Britain and France maintained, many

[22] Togoland (today, Togo), Cameroon, German East Africa (today, Tanzania), and German Southwest Africa (today, Namibia)

Germans must have responded positively to the dream of once again taking part in the great colonial race. Despite the actual loss of the colonies early in World War I, made official by the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, an awareness of colonial affairs continued through the Weimar Republic and World War II. Even after the German defeat in the latter war, with Germany divided amongst the victorious Allies, there continued to be an interest in the other European colonies and their activities in the well-informed German populace. Monika Albrecht notes in her essay, "German Debates on Colonialism and Decolonization in the Post-War Era," that there was no "post-colonial amnesia," even after the Second World War. She references many articles from *Der Spiegel* in the post-war era that attested to journalists' historical knowledge of German colonialism. Pains were taken to make the reader aware of many colonies' former German patronage, sometimes going into details in footnotes and special features about these lands' histories (Perraudin and Zimmerer 187-188).

4.2 Atlantropa: Solidifying European Hegemony over Africa

Herman Sörgel's vision for the African portion of Atlantropa can only be described as imperialistic in nature. It would have solidified European hegemony over the African continent. The rhetoric of his campaign focused heavily on an "equitable" exchange of resources and finished goods between the southern (African) and northern (European) components of his new continent, respectively. The stark imagery brought about by comparing the mechanized North with the "*jungfräulich*" (virginal) South (Sörgel 1932, 103) implied not just a continuing rape of African lands, but moreover one

intensified through technical prowess. This crucial exchange would have protected essentially European business interests against a burgeoning North American capitalistic powerhouse and an ever-increasing Asian population. Sörgel included many provisions for the development of African infrastructure through European intervention, perhaps the most important of which was the irrigation of the Sahara and the construction of a canal network between manmade lakes deep in the interior of the continent (Gall, 24-25). While some provisions of the Atlantropa project certainly implied substantial benefits for the African continent and peoples, there was little to nothing to suggest that there were any altruistic notions regarding the betterment of the African people and their living conditions. Any development would have been based upon purely European interests.

Sörgel's Atlantropa differed from traditional imperialistic ambitions in its, albeit loosely defined, supranational focus. Forgoing the designation of particular national gains in the new continent, Sörgel focused on Atlantropa's dividends for the *Abendländische Kultur* as a whole – acquisitions for the greater European *Volk*. Despite the lofty, nearly utopian language that Sörgel used to describe his new continent, there existed no concurrent vision of a future in which race relations were somehow to be improved or mollified. The integral nature of the African continent in the Atlantropa plan surely provided a sense of unease amongst many, given the prevalence of racism during that time. Fears of miscegenation must have made it more difficult for Sörgel to push his agenda, especially later in the 1930s and 1940s in a National Socialist Germany, and on the greater European scene. In order to combat fears of race mixing, Sörgel

chose his words carefully when referring to the peoples of Europe and those in Africa. Europeans were called the "*weiße, nordische*" (white, Nordic), or the "*technische*" *Rasse* (technical race). In a classic spirit of imperialism, he categorized Africa as "*der Rahmen ohne Bild*" (frame without a picture), and as the "*jungfräulich, unbeschriebenes Blatt*" (virginal, unwritten page) of the Earth (Sörgel 1932, 126; Sörgel 1938, 57). There would be no problem of miscegenation between the black workers and their white, European entrepreneurial bosses (Sörgel 1938, 56). This ideology, incredibly racist in nature, is made poignantly clear through Sörgel's constant mention of the "yellow peril" and simultaneous disregard for the African cultures. To imperialists and Sörgel, there was no culture to fear in Africa, and hence no impediment to European control over the continent. He summed up this point quite neatly, declaring: "*Amerika den Amerikanern – Atlantropa den Europäern – Asien den Asiaten!*" (America for the Americans – Atlantropa for the Europeans – Asia for the Asians!) (Sörgel 1932, 115).

In an effort to make his project more palatable to the National Socialist regime, many of whom were skeptical of Atlantropa, Sörgel published *Die Drei Großen A* in 1938. Sörgel had been granted permission by Hitler's office in 1935 to publish work on Atlantropa as a private individual, though he remained under the watchful eye of the regime (Gall, 75). In *Die Drei Großen A*, he revised some of his rhetoric to match that of the Hitler's regime, employing much more frequently buzzwords such as "*Lebensraum*" and using propagandistic sketches showing Europe bursting at the seams with people. Sörgel also called for a world exhibition to promote his idea, and he wanted to hold such an event under the motto "*Brot für Europa – durch Atlantropa*" (Bread for Europe –

through Atlantropa), mirroring Hitler's promise to once again put bread on the tables of frustrated Germans (Sörgel 1938, 82). Moreover, he titled chapters and subheadings in the 1938 work in a cunning manner, likely designed to catch the eye of National Socialists or Fascists. One chapter was subtitled "*Achse Berlin-Rom bis Kapstadt verlängert*" (Axis Berlin-Rome extended to Cape Town), no doubt evoking a positive reaction from many land-hungry party members (76).

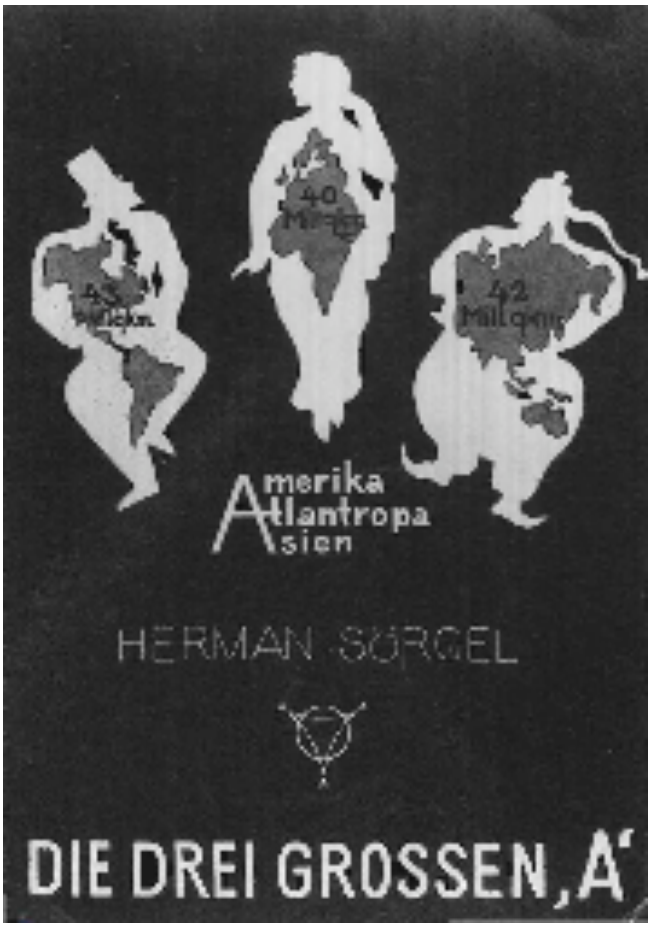

Figure 7: Title cover of Sörgel's *Die Drei Großen A*, 1938
Wolfgang Voigt, *Atlantropa: Weltbauen am Mittelmeer ; Ein Architektentraum der Moderne*. Hamburg: 2007. 107. Print.

Die Drei Großen A, more so than any of his other published works, shed light on the conflicting ideologies at play within Sörgel's own mind and in the politics of Europe. Some of the aforementioned chapter titles and subsection titles, though having made clear allusions to common Nazi jargon, were then followed by text that lacked the same fervor. Opening with a quote from Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*,[23] Sörgel presented Atlantropa as a project championed by the "pillar" of Greater Germany and the Italian Empire, as is suggested in the book's subtitle.[24] Though quoting Hitler was no doubt an overture to the men in power, Sörgel wasted no time in contradicting the National Socialist agenda in his own introduction to the book, saying,

> Wenn es eine Idee gäbe, die höher und stärker wäre, als der Haß und Neid in der europäischen Völkerfamilie, eine Idee, die mit Hilfe der Technik eine breite Grundlage zu einem neuen Leben der Völker schaffen würde: könnte man dann nicht durch ungeheuren Ländergewinn, vor allem aber durch die noch größere Aufgabe und gemeinsame Arbeit die Gefahr des Krieges und des Unterganges unserer Kultur abwenden? ... Eine Friedensarbeit so groß, daß kein Krieg Energien findet, durch die Mittel der modernen und zukünftigen Technik, welche die Völker naturnotwendig und zwangsläufig verbindet!

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[23] Sörgel quoted Hitler: „Aufgabe des Programmatikers ist es nicht, die verschiedenen Grade der Erfüllbarkeit einer Sache festzustellen, sondern die Sache als solche klarzulegen, das heißt: er hat sich weniger um den Weg als um das Ziel zu kümmern. Hierbei aber entscheidet die prinzipielle Richtigkeit einer Idee und nicht die Schwierigkeit ihrer Durchführung."
In English: "The task of the programmer is not to ascertain the viability of something, but instead to define that task, which means: He should attend to the goal more so than the path. Though while doing this, the deciding factor of an idea is its principled virtue, and not the difficulty of its implementation." Translated from original publication. (Sörgel 1938, 8).

[24] *Die Drei Großen A: Großdeutschland und italienisches Imperium, die Pfeiler Atlantropas* (Sörgel 1938).

> (If there were an idea, which were greater and stronger than the hate and envy in the European cultural family, an idea, that with the assistance of technology would create the foundation to a new life of the people: could one not then, through enormous land gains, and above all through the larger task and collective work, avert the threat of war and the decline of our culture? … A work of peace so great, that war finds no energy, through the apparatus of modern and future technology, which binds the peoples through natural necessity and inescapability.) (8).

This sort of peaceful enterprise and cooperation among European states contradicted the Nazi's own plans to forcefully annex territory (Voigt, 106). Sörgel attempted to sway far right elements with a change in tone and rhetoric, but did not change the heart of the plan, which required cooperation. Despite a concurrent desire to regain colonies lost to the Treaty of Versailles and the opportunity offered by Sörgel, the regime prioritized annexing *Lebensraum* for the German people in the East. Sörgel and many of his supporters ultimately remained opposed to the *Kriegs- und Ost-orientierte Politik* (Politics of war and eastern-oriented politics) of the NS regime, and as a result, never gained much ground with the fascist government.

This Euro-centric perspective mirrored the common colonial attitudes of the time period and made Atlantropa arguably more accessible to the general public. Given the frustration in Germany due to the loss of colonies after the First World War, and the expansive holdings that Britain and France maintained, many Germans must have been drawn to the idea of once again being a part of the great colonial race.

5: Atlantropa in Science Fiction Literature

The colossal scope and timeframe for completion of the *Atlantropaprojekt* could have destroyed Sörgel's credibility as an engineer and architect. Despite the daunting nature of the plan, Herman Sörgel managed to amass quite a following of loyal supporters. Most of these men and women were fellow pacifists, who favored a peaceful solution to Europe's perceived problems and found mutual understanding in a technocratic vision of the future. Though personal interest in his concept waxed and waned amongst the greater populace, some of his followers actively promoted his brainchild as if it were their own. Sörgel worked with a small army of engineers, mostly from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland – as well as with artists – most notably Heinrich Kley, who provided numerous visual representations of his unrealized dream (Sörgel 1932, VII-VIII). Beyond the more practical development of engineering schematics, there were creative individuals who brought Sörgel's world to life through their published stories. Novels making manifest a world to come enjoyed popularity in the post World War I era, and several so-called "*Zukunftsromane*" (science fiction novels) were published detailing the construction of Großprojekte, such as Atlantropa.

5.1 Georg Güntsche's *Panropa*

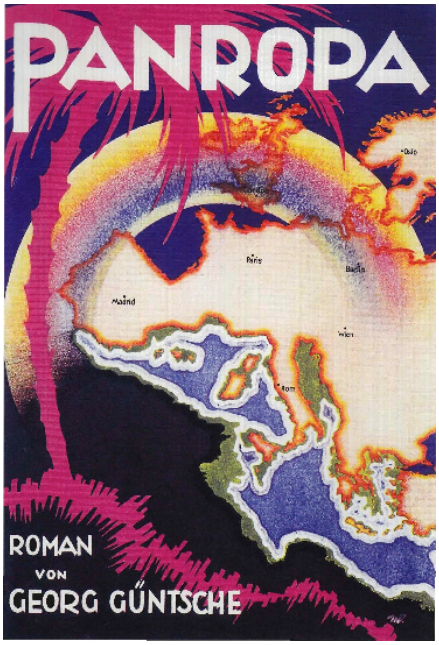

Figure 8: Title cover of Güntsche's *Panropa*, 1930
Wolfgang Voigt, *Atlantropa: Weltbauen am Mittelmeer ; Ein Architektentraum der Moderne.* Hamburg: 2007. 80. Print.

One such novel, first a series in newspapers and in 1930 published in book form, was *Panropa*, by Georg Güntsche (Spiering and Wintle 177). *Panropa* nearly perfectly mirrored Herman Sörgel's own Atlantropa plan. Indeed, the title is borrowed from the original name of the project, and Sörgel himself wrote an introduction to the book in October of 1930.

Güntsche's novel details the socio-political situation of a drastically different world in the year 1970. In the aftermath of World War I, Anglo-American competition sparks a war between the British Empire and the United States, with the Americans emerging victorious. In the aftermath of that war, the world reorganizes into four blocs

of power – Pan-America, Asia, an African Union, and a European Union. The European bloc, of which Britain is a member, is given the form of a *Staatenbund* (confederation of states), similar to that advocated by Coudenhove-Kalergi. Güntsche portrayed the American and Asian contingents as highly aggressive superpowers, placing Europe and Africa in much more precarious positions.

Here enters a hero. A German, Dr. Maurus, proposes a mammoth engineering project – dam the Mediterranean at the Strait of Gibraltar and the Dardanelles, thus lowering the level of the Sea by two hundred meters. Dr. Maurus, despite his German heritage and pride therein, considers himself a man of Europe. Quite early on in a scene with an American representative, Maurus refers not to a German Vaterland, but instead to *ein europäisches Vaterland* (a European Fatherland) (Güntsche 14).

Through determination and patience, Maurus is able to bring about a convention of the European powers in Geneva, and despite the protest of a British representative, the delegates of the council are persuaded to pursue his idea. Though convinced of the validity of the plan, the representatives conclude that they cannot raise the money, and are surprisingly provided funding by the president of the African Union. This president, named Mao-Ssai, is described in terms befitting a dictator or monarch, and is also very wealthy. His contribution would be in the form of money and a substantial labor force for the project. It is no coincidence that Mao-Ssai is so amenable to the idea of cooperating with the European Union – he himself being the son of a German and an African queen. In addition, he has fallen in love with Adelgart, the daughter of a powerful German industry leader, Geheimrat Verschüren.

Verschüren is every bit as much inspired by Maurus's idea as Maurus himself. He manages to insure that a great deal of the construction work done on the great dam will be contracted by German industrialists – ensuring Germany's ability to pay back a large debt still owed due to the First World War, decades earlier.

With the support of the African mogul, construction begins. Despite constant attempts by American and Asian agents to sabotage construction and an incident involving the bribery of British guards to ignore a bombing plot, the construction is successfully executed. Only four years after initiation, the dam at Gibraltar is completed in 1974, and the world gazes in awe at the spectacle of a shrinking Mediterranean. The love story of the novel also blossoms with the marriage of Adelgart and Mao-Ssai, symbolizing the bond between the European and African Unions. In the end, Mao-Ssai congratulates Dr. Maurus and his masterpiece – Panropa, the new state (266).

Perhaps the greatest and most intriguing discrepancy between Güntsche's novel and Sörgel's own vision came in the form of race relations. Menno Spiering documents this contrast in his essay "Engineering Europe: The European Idea in Interbellum Literature, The Case of Panropa." Though there can be no conclusive determination of how Sörgel felt about Güntsche's end product, Spiering aptly assumes that the "suggestion that black and white might intermarry must have dismayed Sörgel" (Spiering and Wintle 188-189). The African president Mao-Ssai is presented as essentially European, not because of blood, but instead because of acculturation. Adelgart's sister, Hella, is the voice of "progress" in the novel, calling Mao-Ssai "*ein weißer Neger*" (a white negro), inferring that he is the equal of the European white

races (Güntsche 33). This progressive depiction of the future was not lost on the National Socialists, who condemned *Panropa*. Their newspaper, *Völkischer Beobachter*, condemned the novel, calling it a "Zionist '*Völkervermischungsprojekt*'" (race-mixing project) (Voigt 112). Though *Panropa* may not have been well-received by the NS regime, Sörgel himself maintained his line that Africans were far inferior to Europeans, and as such, would simply receive the gracious European intervention with gratitude and appreciation.

5.2 J. E. Wells' *Projekt Atlantropa*

J. E. Wells published another novel detailing the realization of Herman Sörgel's dream in 1956 with the title *Projekt Atlantropa*. J. E. Wells was the pen name of Eberhard Setz, most likely honoring the father of science fiction, H. G. Wells (Voigt, 138). *Projekt Atlantropa* presents a storyline nearly identical to that set up by Güntsche, with some minor changes, mostly due to the later, post World War II publication date.

In Well's account, the "yellow" peril is replaced with the "red" peril – giving credence to the rise of the Soviet Bloc and their influence to Europe's east. Furthermore, many of the residents along the Mediterranean coast protest what would ultimately be the destruction of their homes. The difficulties overcoming the objections of this population gave a nod to some of Herman Sörgel's own difficulties convincing some countries – most notably Italy – to come on board with his plan. Once again, a German engineer, Kai Manner, spearheads the push for Atlantropa. The primary driving force behind the project is to create desperately needed *Lebensraum* for the United

States of Europe. In Well's account, the burgeoning population is swelling due to a huge influx of refugees fleeing the Soviet Union. Like Güntsche's story, Well's narrative ends positively for the proponents of Atlantropa. The novel ends with an all-too-familiar rallying cry first envisioned by Herman Sörgel: "Zwei Erdteile haben einen dritten geboren" (Two continents have born a third) (Wells 270).

Spiering notes that the implementation of such a mega-project did not seem as foreign in the period after the Second World War because of a heightened sense of optimism, contrasting the mood after the First World War. In addition, the advent of nuclear technology and the incredible power behind it made the feasibility of such great project more believable. This apparent feasibility was lent credibility by the proposal of the Dawvydow Canal system in the Soviet Union, which would have seen a series of canals built with the aid of nuclear detonations through the U.S.S.R. (Spiering and Wintle 196). Ironically, this very same validation lent by the dawning of the atomic age also spelled doom for the practicality of damming the Mediterranean, and hydroelectric power in general (Gall 166).

Georg Güntsche's *Panropa* and J. E. Wells' *Projekt Atlantropa* both fictionally chronicle the fulfillment of Herman Sörgel's personal quest to oversee the lowering of the Mediterranean through damming. The engineers in both novels so closely resemble the actual Herman Sörgel that one can refer to Maurus, Manner, or Sörgel interchangeably in the discourse on Atlantropa. Both novels present this narrative in an extremely similar manner, involving many literary motifs common to science fiction novels of the time.

5.3: *Der Deutsche Zukunftsroman 1918-1945*

Dina Brandt explores many prevailing motifs in German science fiction literature in the years between the ends of the two World Wars in her dissertation *Der Deutsche Zukunftsroman 1918-1945: Gattungstypologie und sozialgeschichtliche Verortung*. One can draw many conclusions about Sörgel and his personal perspective through her analysis of these fictional works. In her work, Brandt first delineates the characteristics constituting a *Zukunftsroman* as such:

> Die erzählte Handlung in einem Zukunftsroman kann zwar zu dem Zeitpunkt (oder früher), zu dem das Buch erschienen ist, beginnen, sie muß aber
>
> – technische oder/und
>
> – politische oder/und
>
> – soziale Elemente/Konstellationen aufweisen, die zu diesem Zeitpunkt noch nicht möglich, aber für die Zukunft denkbar sind.
>
> (The narrated plot in a science fiction novel may actually begin at the time (or earlier) at which it was published. The plot must however present: technical and/or political and/or social elements that are not possible at that specific point in time, but are conceivable in the future.) (Brandt 81-82).

Without question, both of these novels (and Sörgel's project itself) fulfill the guidelines laid out by Brandt. She refers directly to Atlantropa when analyzing the common theme of autarky – especially in the sense of obtaining new resources. In particular, she focuses on the obsession with *Lebensraum*, which was a commonality amongst many works of science fiction in the time (81-82).

In her analysis of over four hundred *Zukunftsromane*, Brandt finds an extremely high incidence of what she calls "engineering fantasies." These *Ingenieurphantasien* (engineer's fantasies, or engineering fantasies) stand in contrast to other novels that focus primarily on *Völkerbund-* or *Weltkriegsszenarios* (International alliance/league scenarios or world war scenarios), in that the significant driving force of the narrative is placed upon the project itself. Other considerations – political, social, or economic events or repercussions – are secondary (104). The engineer has no direct personal interest in changing the political landscape. He does not set out to create any union of states. Instead, he only interested in presenting to the world the possibilities made available to it by the realization of his concept. In *Völkerbund-* and *Weltkriegsszenarios*, there exists instead an explicit desire to affect political and social change, often as a result of technical achievement. The technical details are then, however, downplayed (105).

Though Brandt categorizes Herman Sörgel's *Atlantropaprojekt* and the novels fictionalizing its construction as *Ingenieurphantasien* (81), there is an argument to be made that they combine both engineer's fantasies with the "union" literature. Sörgel presented Atlantropa as the engineer's solution to the decline of European culture and distanced himself from "politically motivated" solutions like that of Coudenhove-Kalergi, but he relied upon the necessary amalgamation of European nation states in order to accomplish his goal. It goes without saying (and is assumed) that a fusion of some sort must take place amongst European states. His was the engineer's solution to uniting *die Abendländischen Völker*. One can then reason that Güntsche and Well's works, which

merely add characters to Sörgel's vision, must then be amalgams of *Ingenieurphantasie* and *Völkerbundszenario*.

Another commonality of the *Zukunftsroman* is the presence of a technocratic hero. This figure, according to Brandt, is simultaneously secretive and ingenious, suddenly coming to the forefront of society to present a new "super weapon" to combat the ails of the nation. In the pursuit of his goal, he is autocratic and virtually dictatorial – showing a nearly "Hitler-like mentality" – in his actions. She notes also that the engineer hero desires no political power or capital, beyond what is necessary for the completion of his project (236). The fervor that Brandt describes here is certainly befitting Sörgel and his fictional counterparts Maurus and Manner.

Our "hero" Sörgel differentiates himself, however, from Brandt's depiction in his relationship with the public and the inclination to propagandize Atlantropa. She writes that the *Ingenieurheld* does not move to inform the public more than is necessary about the project – the effects and results of the *Großprojekt* alone stand as reason and propaganda enough (236). Sörgel, by contrast, openly sought to inform the public about his plan from the onset. He published his first volume describing Atlantropa in four languages with the intention of reaching and convincing as many in the European public as possible. Where Brandt's heroes might only openly advertise their projects in order to gain financial support, Sörgel and his fictional incarnations, Maurus and Manner, were quite open to the public, seizing any opportunity for discussion.

Brandt directly addresses Atlantropa and Georg Güntsche's *Panropa* in her work as archetypal of German *Zukunftsromane*. Though the project and its fictionalization

both share many of the motifs that are common to these novels, there is a strong case for their uniqueness. Indeed, the fact that Sörgel and his alter egos contradict the typical hero in her analysis – even if only slightly – lends credence to the atypical nature of the Atlantropa within the historical narrative.

Conclusions – *Atlantropa*: Snapshot of a Dynamic Time Period

Herman Sörgel's Atlantropa project, despite its breathtaking expanse, is nearly forgotten. It remains little more than a flash point in some of Western society's most sordid years. Though it is not alone in this regard, it certainly was unique in terms of scale. Atlantropa belonged to another era – an era in which technocratic *Großprojekte* were the answer to desperate tribulations in the form of wars and social strife. Despite some brief mention in several science fiction books and stories in the early twentieth century, Atlantropa or other similar incarnations have not since garnered much attention in recent science fiction. Today, Herman Sörgel's dream and life's work lives on in the minds of a handful of historians and a documentary film[25] focusing mostly on the technical aspects and ludicrous nature of the proposal.

One must then question the relevance of one man's compulsive quest to, quite literally, build a new continent, especially a quest that never came anywhere close to commencement, much less fruition. At surface level, Atlantropa holds little relevance for our world today as a solution to the energy, environmental, social, and political problems that we (still) face. It goes without saying that the environmental consequences of fundamentally altering the face of our planet would be nothing short of devastating – though such environmental balances were not fully understood in Sörgel's time. In cases where those consequences were apparent, they might have

[25] Morales, Michel Harald Rauser, and Chris Hof. *Atlantropa – Der Traum vom neuen Continent* – DVD

simply been ignored. Beyond this most obvious environmental issue lie questions of feasibility based upon the sheer proportions of his dams and infrastructure. Sörgel himself avoided answering some of these questions on many levels, placing his faith in forthcoming advancements in technology and the powerful will of "*das Abendländische Volk*." An engineering project rife with impracticalities and on such a monolithic scale – that it has not been attempted nearly a century later – is perhaps best suited to a study of "what not to do" in the engineering world.

What attention does then such a ludicrous proposal deserve in the narrative of Western history? Arguments may be made against Atlantropa's significance because of the general failure of the project to ever get off the ground, despite any brief excitement of the public about the proposal. Although numerous megaproject proposals filled the pages of newspapers and the literature of the post-World War I time period around the world, very few were brought to fruition. Prominent examples of megaprojects actually realized might be the Panama Canal, the Tennessee Valley Authority, or the Channel Tunnel. Nonetheless, these projects very obviously pale in comparison to something of the magnitude that Herman Sörgel proposed – altering the very physical composition and appearance of the Earth. Perhaps Atlantropa merits closer examination based solely on its curious nature as a monumental undertaking.

A closer inspection of Atlantropa and its designer quickly brings to light justification for its place in the history books. Both project and designer, in particular, exemplify not just one, but indeed many different socio-political movements in Weimar and National Socialist Germany and of Europe as a whole. One cannot classify Sörgel as

a member of any singular movement or of any political mindset. Though contrary to a natural tendency to "label" historical figures, Atlantropa begs closer, more thorough inspection of differing mindsets.

Could one consider Herman Sörgel a reactionary modernist? Sörgel certainly embraced the cultural pessimism that engulfed Europe in the aftermath of the First World War. A well-read man, Sörgel adopted Spenglerian terminology and promulgated the notion that Western civilization, *das Abendland*, stood on the precipice of a devastating decline. Sörgel also exhibited many tendencies resembling nationalism – he simply did so on a supranational level, speaking of a European people. This contradicted the neo-romantic focus on a particular national *Volk*. Be that as it may, Sörgel rejected the Spenglerian notion that nothing could be done to deter the fate of a declining civilization. He turned to technology for salvation from this fate.

Was Sörgel an imperialist? Though popular sentiment encouraged the reacquisition of colonies lost with the Treaty of Versailles, the National Socialist regime did relatively little to revive a German colonial empire, instead focusing energy on the Eastern European front to attain new *Lebensraum*. Sörgel, by contrast, saw the world as developing into three enormous superpowers, with Europe and Africa necessarily coming together to prevent domination from American and Asian aggressors. Though these three blocs were not imperialistic in a traditional sense, his plan for Europeans to colonize Africa was certainly reminiscent of the way in which the imperial powers settled "virgin lands." Moreover, Sörgel's obvious racism targeted against African peoples – *die schwarzen* (the blacks) – epitomized years of colonial oppression.

Even within science fiction novels, representations of Sörgel proved themselves difficult to pinpoint. Dr. Otto Maurus and Kai Manner, main characters in two novels depicting the successful implementation of Atlantropa-like projects, exhibit nearly all qualities typical of heroes of the genre. Their multi-faceted natures and willing use of propaganda (reflecting that of Sörgel) contradict still the normal mode of most *Ingenieurhelden*. Moreover, Sörgel's introduction to Güntsche's book suggests that he had a hand in steering any offshoots of his idea. Though not a boisterous person, Sörgel displayed both a "*fast scheuen Innigkeit*" (almost shy intensity) as well as "*eiserner Entschlossenheit*" (iron determination) in interviews with the press (*Münchener Staatszeitung* qtd. in Voigt 15). Indeed, the depiction of the project and its straightforward and necessary political implications defy the notion that engineers kept a hands-off attitude toward politics. Atlantropa's champions explicitly sought political union.

The political union that Sörgel sought is embodied somewhat by the European Union today, albeit on a much smaller scale. He lived and worked during a time in which many advocated the peaceful cooperation of European nations. That same time period bore witness to two of the most destructive conflicts in history. The First World War left the European continent in tatters and forced its people to search for a purposeful path forward. In that effort, a myriad of social and political movements emerged, each featuring ideological dogmas. Oswald Spengler's pessimism served as inspiration for many of the tactics used by fascist regimes. With Hitler and the Nazi regime's rise to power, the impact of pacifist proposals for union in Europe were heavily diminished.

Still, the events of the Second World War do not lessen the historical significance of proposals and campaigns that counteracted reactionary policy. The legacy of Richard von Coudenhove-Kalergi's drive to create a *Staatenbund* in Europe lives on today in form of the European Union.

Atlantropa was a megaproject devised in this most tumultuous of time periods. It provides us a rare perspective on Interbellum cultural phenomena. That perspective offers cultural historians an enriched spatial imagination of well-known events. Herman Sörgel and his beloved Atlantropa manifested qualities belonging to many differing political ideologies. Sörgel was a racist pacifist seeking to build an empire-like union of nations in order to overcome the nearly inevitable impending decline of Western civilization through technological prowess. Herman Sörgel promoted the construction of the single largest project ever conceived. He did so earnestly and without any doubt in his cause or in man's technological capabilities. Herman Sörgel tasked himself with engineering society. He failed. Today, Atlantropa exists as a blip on the radar of Western history. The impetus and motivation behind this project, however, inspire a most intriguing glimpse of an already fascinating time in history.

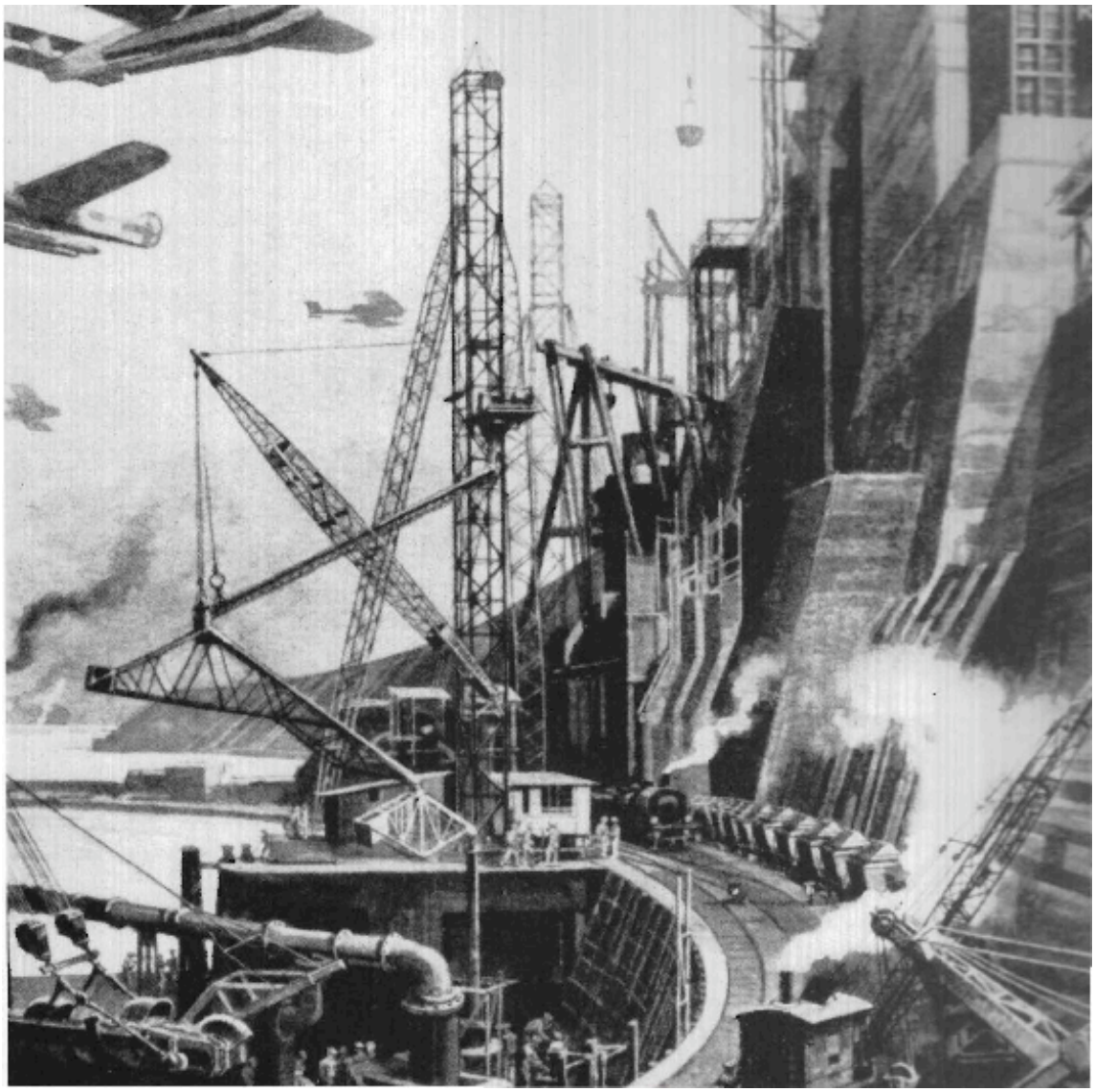

Figure 9: Construction of the *Gibraltarwerk*; Picture by Heinrich Kley, 1932
Wolfgang Voigt, *Atlantropa: Weltbauen am Mittelmeer ; Ein Architektentraum der Moderne*. Hamburg: 2007. 119. Print.

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