

Introduction: Along the Aesthetic-Ecological Edge*

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Abstract

This Special Section on ‘Imaging the Environment’ is a companion to ‘Archiving the Environment’, and our task has likewise been to question how techniques of imaging such as photography affect environments, and vice-versa. This Introduction considers how the question of extraction is deeply enmeshed with the ethics of seeing, and how we are frequently made aware of the problem even as the medium is part of the problem. Our starting point is a specific focus on medium and mediation in relation to rapidly changing ecologies, but the issues have demanded that we also think about time and scale as we push further towards a sense of anthropocentric displacement. What is crucial here are new modes of looking, and experimental practices of visual and sensory encounter that turn attention to nonhuman worlds in ways that might alter conceptions of human life.

Keywords

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He did not often go down on the beach. It was too big, too wide and flat, and the water worried him. Why did the breakers always come in, even against the wind? It seemed like they might go out when the tide went out and come in when it came in, but even with an east wind and the tide on the ebb the waves came straight against the land and bashed and broke themselves against it. The sound of them underlying all other sounds in his life was peaceful to him, but not the sight of them senselessly breaking. And sometimes the great breadth of the beach and the sea discomforted him. It was ... an uneasy sense of dwindling, weighing nothing, in the great desolation of the wind.¹

The above quotation from Ursula Le Guin's *Searoad: Chronicles of Klatsand* speaks to sight, sound, horizontality, scale, immersion, natural forces and, within a set of human-nonhuman relations, a sense of impending displacement. These lie at the core of this Special Section of *Kronos* on 'Imaging the Environment'. According to James Cahill, any process of 'anthropocentric displacement' requires a 'perceptual pivot' that shifts attention 'from self-regard to nonhuman other'. This has suggestive ripple effects on the self-image.² As John Paul Ricco puts it, this is potentially 'an attunement, disposition, ethos, or way of dwelling in resonance with each other and with other things in the world'.³ Ricco speaks evocatively of the openness of this 'exposed edge of the aesthetic-ecological' which has radical implications for the self.⁴ What does this mean in terms of finitudes and futures, and how a self is thus constituted?

In mulling over such questions, we have turned to Shawn Michelle Smith's 'orientation to the sea' which refers to the contemporary as 'an era marked by climate change, rising and warming oceans, and perilous migrations at sea'. But the liquid element also takes us back millions of years into deep time and the inception of life on earth, whose 'temporal and spatial scales ... exceed human perception even as they also subtly call forth the human histories of empire and diaspora anchored in the seas'.⁵ This last point is a reminder of the imperative to keep together what Ian Baucom refers to as the forces and the forcings of history, where human intervention has produced both vast social inequalities and irreparable damage to the planet. It is to try and hold in perspective both the 'sovereignty of race-capital' and the 'sovereignty of ice'.⁶ Both oblige us to rethink *perception* along Ricco's 'aesthetic-ecological edge'. This Introduction is an initial attempt to navigate some of these contours.

In southern Africa and former colonial territories elsewhere, we face legacies of an assumed sovereign gaze that has clung to hegemonic white male dominance and been instrumentalised, bent on subordinating both persons and nature. It has been

1 U. Le Guin, *Searoad: Chronicles of Klatsand* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1992), 59.

2 J.L. Cahill, *Zoological Surrealism: The Nonhuman Cinema of Jean Painlevé* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 3.

3 J.P. Ricco, 'The Invisible Flight of the Birds' in Anna-Sophie Springer and Etienne Turpin (eds), *These Birds of Temptation* (Berlin: K Verlag & Haus der Kulturen der Welt, 2021), 376.

4 Ricco, 'The Invisible Flight of the Birds', 388.

5 S.M. Smith, 'An Orientation to the Sea' in *Art Journal* 80 (2021), 1, 49.

6 I. Baucom, *History 4 Degrees Celsius* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 13.

integral to what Ajay Skaria terms the ‘violence of the Enlightenment’. Skaria speaks of ‘the not-yet’ and ‘the never’ of a history that has been produced by this violence, where ‘the not-yet’ is made up of those whose race and gender have made them the ‘laggards of history’, and where ‘the never’ refers to the nonhuman.⁷

Almost a century ago Siegfried Kracauer pointed out that ‘photography is a secretion of the capitalist mode of production’, a statement with much wider implications now.⁸ It seems we have shifted from Josiah Mhute’s argument concerning the ‘capitalist gaze’ in Zimbabwean mining photographs that peripheralised black labour and exalted geological penetration,⁹ to a deeper understanding of the colonial and its extractive ways of seeing.¹⁰ Such considerations strongly inflect the concept of a Black Anthropocene which holds white supremacy, extractive capitalism and (visual) cultures of disposability to account for our planetary predicament.¹¹

In the companion section on ‘Archiving the Environment’ in this issue of *Kronos*, authors explore the ways that ‘archive’ and ‘environment’ change each other. Our task likewise has been to consider how techniques of imaging such as photography also affect environments, and vice-versa. Our starting point therefore is a specific focus on medium and mediation in relation to rapidly changing ecologies, but it has also demanded that we think about time and scale. To this end our section draws on work from two international workshops in Visual History & Theory held in 2023 and 2024 that addressed these themes,¹² as well as postgraduate research and photographic work conducted around ‘Photography and the Anthropocene’ from 2021.¹³

The historic procedures of making analogue photographs with all their mechanical and chemical components have long fed off extractive processes such as mining and alkali industries. In its turn, digital photography is heavily implicated in present-day forms of extraction and massive energy consumption.¹⁴ As Siobhan Angus puts it, ‘resource extraction is one condition of possibility for photography and visual culture’.¹⁵ Given that photography has an equally long record of drawing critical attention to resource exploitation, environmental destruction and pollution through press, media and artistic work that is ongoing today, the question of extraction is therefore inevitably enmeshed with the ethics of seeing. We are frequently made aware of the problem even as the medium is part of the problem. All of this lands

7 A. Skaria, ‘Presentism? Democracy Between the Historical, Genealogical, and Historial’ in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* (CSSAAME), ‘Borderlands’, March 2024.

8 S. Kracauer, ‘Photography’, *Critical Inquiry* 19, 3 (Spring 1993), 434.

9 Kracauer; J.R. Mhute, ‘Downcast: Mining, Men and the Camera in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1890–1930’, *Kronos* 27, 2001, 114–132.

10 D. Foliard, *The Violence of Colonial Photography* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), Ch 1; K. J. Brown, *Mortevivum: Photography and the Politics of the Visual* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2024).

11 Cajetan Iheka, *African Ecomedia. Network forms, planetary politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020).

12 The theme of the 2023 workshop was ‘Power: Remaking Selves, Archives, Environments’ with Leigh Raiford (University of California, Berkeley) as keynote speaker; the 2024 workshop revolved around questions of ‘Deep Time, Shallow Time’ with keynote speaker Christopher Morton (Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford).

13 Our initial turn to these questions was embarked on jointly in a Global Classroom with John Paul Ricco and students in Art History at the University of Toronto, whose generous philosophical scope and rigorous methodologies are gratefully acknowledged.

14 Iheka, *African Ecomedia*; Jennifer Tucker, ‘Chemical affinities: Photography, Extraction and Industrial Heritage in 19th Century Northern England’, *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 44, 2022, 525–39.

15 S. Angus, ‘Mining the History of Photography’ in Coleman & James (eds), *Capitalism & the Camera* (Verso, 2021), 57. See also Angus, *Camera Geologica. An Elemental History of Photography* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2024).

us squarely within a deeply ambivalent set of dynamics. Nor do these relationships necessarily arise from 'a linear movement' that is straightforward but rather a 'more complex interplay' that suggests profound 'interconnections between the natural and cultural world'.¹⁶

At this juncture therefore it no longer suffices to attend to the 'not-yet' of history, and articles in this section push further in search of an anthropocentric displacement that attends to the 'never'. What is crucial here is a new mode of looking, an experimental practice of visual encounter that 'in turning its attention to ... nonhuman worlds', might also 'critically alter conceptions of human life'.¹⁷

Back notes

Such an experimental practice immediately lays bare a number of challenges. At one level it calls for a rethinking of tenets of received wisdom in the field of visual culture, where 'representation' can no longer be seen as something happening outside of us. When Tiisetso Dladla (this volume) argues with regard to the new immersive media that we can no longer 'stand outside the frame,' we would extend this to the frame of extraction and indeed, as Ricco would argue, the frame of extinction.

This kind of jolt is salutary in other ways, a reminder that there have long been perceptive observations thrown up as the cultural implications of time-based media such as photography and cinema burst upon the world. On revisiting a number of thinkers from the 1920s and 1930s, for example, one is struck anew by their uncanny perceptiveness in the light of current precarities. An older vein of thought exists that was perhaps less noticed, even deemed excessive, often conceived as a defamiliarisation of the world effected by technologically produced images. A new sense of its prescience cannot but obtrude.

A sampling of early thinkers brings home this point. In his study of the zoological surrealism in the scientific cinema of Painlevé and friends in inter-war France, Cahill touches on the way they harnessed the 'camera's productively inhuman gaze'.¹⁸ It was to immerse oneself in a process of estrangement'. Then there is Siegfried Kracauer's haunting depiction arising from the 'flood of photos' in late 1920s Weimar Germany:

For the first time in history, photography brings to the fore the entire natural shell; or the first time the inert world presents itself in its independence from human beings. Photography shows cities in aerial shots, brings crockets and figures down from the Gothic cathedrals; all spatial configurations are incorporated into the central archive in unusual combinations that distance them from human proximity.¹⁹

16 Angus, 'Mining the History', 58.

17 Cahill, *Zoological Surrealism*, 3.

18 Cahill, *Zoological Surrealism*, 23.

19 Kracauer, 'Photography', 435.

The photographic archive, he goes on to say, ‘assembles in effigy the last elements of a nature alienated from meaning’. This of course implies an alienation from human meaning, but it does not end there. Such reflections might serve as ‘the pivot’ back into a deeper human insight that Cahill identifies, because as Kracauer distinguishes human memory from photographs, the decentering is taken further in his claim that photographs bury ‘a person’s history ... as if under a layer of snow’. This apprehension reappears in André Bazin’s early writing on photographic media in the 1960s, where the medium’s ‘automatic inscription’ is said to have liberated it from ‘any anthropocentric utility’.²⁰ Such awareness of utter estrangement has long been there, running like a *fil rouge* through theories of the image.

While we seem to be saying that the nonhuman thread of photography has long been recognized which might put us ‘out of the frame’ when we now want to interrogate it, what we wish to emphasise is the human-nonhuman continuum is in fact something with which we have long been familiar, it is not new, only in a new degree of flux. Nor are its implications necessarily always negative or destructive. There is increasing recognition of the malleability of human perception which can absorb these extended or estranged ways of looking, making us part of a much larger, planetary ecoscape. As Michael Richardson suggests (see review essay in this issue), this malleability – the ability and even willingness to adapt to new technologies of sight and ways of seeing the world – alludes ‘to our cyborg existence, to the always more-than-human nature of human sensoria and knowledge-making’.²¹

Though a minor component in a veritable ‘jumble of history’, we have however played an outsize role in bringing the earth to its knees, threatening to literally bury all life forms under a layer of snow, or water, or fire, or other element. How have we come to this pass? What part have visual cultures – ‘floods of photos’ – played in the intricacies of this?

One route we can navigate through this tangle of questions is to think about scale and the ‘ethical thinning out’ that is facilitated by distance. While scale brings attention to the distance and difference between things, it is also, as Richardson reminds us, ‘an epistemological tool, a means of organising the world and its causal relations. It does not inhere in any given entity but is an imposed relationality between one thing and another ... This means scale can be intensely political because it constructs relations between entities and processes and, in doing so, can become bound up with questions of agency’.²² Related to this is what Clark calls a ‘derangement of scale’ (within climate crisis) in which ‘received concepts of agency, rationality and responsibility are being strained or even begin to fall apart in a bewildering generalising of the political that can make even filling a kettle as public an act as voting’.²³ For Richardson, the ‘defining scalar feature’ produced by climate crisis ‘might well be the collapse of scales, their folding into one another such that scale itself proves at once

20 Cahill, *Zoological Surrealism*, 21–22.

21 M. Richardson, *Nonhuman Witnessing: War, Data, and Ecology After the End of the World* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2024), 63.

22 Richardson, *Nonhuman Witnessing*, 121.

23 T. Clark, ‘Scale’ in Tom Cohen (ed), *Theory in the Era of Climate Change. Vol. 1* (Ann Arbor: Open Humanities, 2012), 151.

illusory and determinate, ephemeral and material'.²⁴ The human is simultaneously dominant and all-encompassing, and miniscule and completely insignificant in the world. Thus while scale may thin out ethical relations, it also thickens them in the ways it complicates and intertwines the statuses of the never and the not yet.

Scale and the Aerial Frame

The question of scale surfaces strongly in this Special Section, especially in the articles by Sheila Masson and Denis Skopin, who work explicitly with aerial photography. Mark Dorrian points out that the attenuation of the ethical relationship with distance is 'a thematic with a venerable philosophical lineage', but that all the stakes are intensified by the effects of 'flattening, abstraction, and the suppression of the figural that is characteristic of the vertical aerial view'.²⁵

Dorrian sets out some of the potential areas of increasing ethical complexity as the aerial view came to be detached from the more normative human vision. He asks for instance about the discourses within which the idea of the aerial view emerged, and how it has been variously staged or conceptualised within them. While thoughts may turn automatically to war and surveillance here, the variety of enthusiasms that have initially emerged around visual distancing also point to its creative and liberatory aspirations. Félix Nadar for example was the first to attempt aerial photography in a hot air balloon, and after some failures was able to make oblique aerial images over Paris. He insisted on the *droit au vol* or right to flight as part of an emancipatory agenda that resonated with wider republican and artistic sentiments.²⁶

Such tinges of excitement have not disappeared. Nsima Udo's recent study of drone operators and photography in the contemporary Calabar Festival and Carnival in Nigeria attests to the 'unexpected joy' that festival-goers expressed in the transcendent and inclusive views attainable of their city, laying bare its underlying structures and erasing signs of dilapidation.²⁷ Such associations are acknowledged by Dorrian when he speaks of a 'visual mode that is historically strongly associated with serene transcendence and thus also with the diminution of time's reach (if not its absolute cancellation)'. But 'linked to new time-based indexical representational modes such as photography', the ostensible means of escape from time and space endowing visual empowerment has all too easily been directed against others for the gathering of information which is subsequently weaponised. When the 'aerial view' becomes simultaneous with the discharge of actual weaponry, the scale of destruction also massively escalates. Dorrian's question circulates around the 'kinds of knowledge

24 Richardson, *Nonhuman Witnessing*, 125.

25 M. Dorrian, 'The Aerial View: Notes for a Cultural History,' *Strates* 13 (2007), 8.

26 Félix Nadar, *When I Was a Photographer* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2015), translated by Eduardo Cadava and Liana Theodoratou, xxxix-xli; Patricia Hayes, 'The Production of *Red*: Aesthetics, Work and Time,' *Kronos* 42 (2016), 108-114; see also Raphaël Dallaporta, *Ruins* (Giungamp: Éditions GwinZegal 2013) and François Hébel and John Fleetwood (eds), *Transition* (Paris: Éditions Xavier Barral, 2013), 32-43.

27 N. Udo, 'Expansive Visual Landscape: Aerial Photography, Drones and the Technology of Affect in Calabar Festival and Carnival', paper presented at the 'Deep Time, Shallow Time' Visual History & Theory Workshop, Cape Town, 19 September 2024. See also N.S. Udo, 'The Politics of Aesthetics and Performance: Visuality and the Remaking of Culture in the Calabar Festival and Carnival, 2004-2019' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of the Western Cape, 2024).

and action' that aerial imaging makes possible, or alternatively, forecloses. For many of the targets today, both human and nonhuman, almost everything is foreclosed.

But maybe further historicisation is needed because there are other and related scales at stake. Here the telescope and the microscope are often spoken of alongside each other, but we should note that they stage vision in quite different ways. The telescope involves looking upwards from below, and requires darkness or the 'suppression of terrestrial light'. For the telescope, 'light emanates from the object of vision itself'. The microscope by contrast requires the viewer to look downwards 'in aerial fashion into the eye-piece' on to the slide or screen which holds the object of study. Light does not emanate from the object of study but from above, via a mirror. Dorrian argues that this set-up reproduces the 'basic structure of the aerial view' and that early aviators felt this analogy. He cites Saint-Exupéry: 'All I can see on the vertical are curios from another age ... Below are men – protozoa on a microscope slide ... I am a scientist, and for me their war is a laboratory experiment.'²⁸

At different scales, both microscopes and telescopes image the environment. Postgraduate students in Visual History at UWC have sought to explore these propensities in work featured here in the photo essay on Pringle Bay, albeit metaphorically as they zoomed in and out to frame environments that resemble things under a microscope, or at the imaginary end of a telescope. In these playful displacements from the terrestrial to the aquatic and the planetary,²⁹ we were constantly alerted to how fruitful it is to be dislodged from a humanist scale.

Time and Humanist Frames in Flux

It seems significant here that the photographic format we have come to most commonly use is a rectangular frame that can be arranged into 'portrait' or 'landscape' – portrait to designate vertically arranged compositions, and landscape those composed horizontally. But there is something more in the way the portrait defines a picture of *someone*, a living subject, usually human, while a landscape is an image of an environment, a setting, a place. The latter can conventionally be broken down further into foreground and background, using the horizon as a form of spatial understanding – it is human sight which requires this. In fact, for Timothy Morton, 'there is no meaningfulness possible in a world without a foreground-background distinction. Worlds need horizons, and horizons need backgrounds, which need foregrounds.'³⁰

We could argue here that the vertical space is a 'humanist' space; the positioning of our ocular faculties meaning that we view things from a certain upright perspective, the landscape laid out horizontally in front of us, something we look *at*. The elevation of vision came with the 'human transition to a vertical posture as a critical moment'. Sigmund Freud referred to this as the 'momentous process of cultural evolution'

28 Dorrian, 'Aerial View', 3.

29 On terrestrial displacement see M. Jue, *Wild Blue Media: Thinking Through Seawater* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020).

30 Cited in Baucom, *History 4° Celsius*, 96.

which emerged as a consequence of man's raising himself from the ground, 'thus lifting his eyes and exposing his genitalia. Here the elevated view ... [i]s posed as the foundation of culture and, more generally, the human.'³¹

Newer visual technologies such as drone photography and virtual reality (VR) experiences offer a means of stepping into a vaster mode of looking that is perhaps less naturalised to human scale. Here Richardson describes how drones act as 'nonhuman witnesses', offering perspectives and ways of movement that are *extra-human*. Skopin insists that it is drones that make the current Ukraine war so singular (this volume). Another mode of looking that moves away from an anthropocentric stance and moreover where we look *with* rather than *at* is VR, which offers a 360° perspective. Tiisetso Dladla's paper in this issue shows us how the VR experience 'allows the audience to screen the VR film from *inside* [our emphasis] the picture ... Each experience of screening VR is unique, as it is self-guided and self-curated. Audiences screening a VR experience, guide their own gaze.'

The shape of the frame in these modes is thus amorphous, and perhaps shifts us towards a more 'watery looking' or liquid imaging in the ways that this kind of looking moves away from an enframing of the landscape and into a more *immersive* ocular experience – a liquid frame. This would mean to consider looking within a different format, and not a fixed one either, for as Zygmunt Bauman tells us, 'liquids, unlike solids, cannot easily hold their shape. Fluids, so to speak, neither fix space nor bind time.'³² Bauman discerns that for liquidity, time is more significant than space: '[F]luids do not keep to any shape for long and are constantly ready (and prone) to change it; and so for them it is the flow of time that counts, more than the space they happen to occupy: that space, after all, they fill but "for a moment".'³³

Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer describe a version of the liquid time of the photograph in which the image moves *through* space when they say, 'Over time ... we might say that photographs keep developing in unforeseen directions when they are viewed and re-viewed by different people in different presents. In "liquid time" they are not fixed into static permanence; rather, they remain dynamic, unfixed, as they acquire new meanings, in new circumstances. And as they do so, they can also reveal a great deal about their subjects and about their viewers.'³⁴ With VR and drone photography, the move is rather *within* space, meaning changing constantly and instantaneously. Something of these liquid dynamics emerges in the artist conversation with Ange-Frédéric Koffi (this volume), whose slow work and emphasis on the latent image in contrast to pressures to produce ever-new work are yet faithful to this artist-curator always in constant movement.

Here we could return to Baucom who, drawing on Morton, describes the effects of climate change as "a quake in being": a quake that has rendered all things "interobjective"; a quake that has annulled the distinction between "foregrounds" and

31 Dorrian, 'Aerial View,' 1–2.

32 Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000), 2.

33 Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 2.

34 M. Hirsch and L. Spitzer, *School Photos in Liquid Time: Reframing Difference* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2020), 13.

“backgrounds” on which the separatist correlation of the “world” and the “human” depends.³⁵ This is a move away from directionality or spatiality *toward* or *to*, which implies a temporality. In the accumulation of damage – debris, waste, toxins – however, it is perhaps more accurate to say that time thickens rather than flows.

Towards an Aesthetic-Ecological Edge: Articles

Articles in this section begin with Caio de Simões de Araújo’s ‘amphibian history’ of the southern African shoreline. This shoreline is cast as a queer or *muddy* space that interweaves the elements of earth and water through multiple temporalities and materialities. Mindful of what Iheka terms the ‘aesthetics of proximity’, the author thinks along with the shore as a means to suggest countervisualities and address seemingly subtle precarities and violences particularly in relation to race and sexuality.³⁶ De Araujo ‘drifts’ with the material from three watery archives of weather events, underwater photography and personal photographic collections, all documented on the Mozambiquan coastline. The author explores what it might mean to approach human identity through watery eyes or, put differently, through the nonhuman in all its varied forms.

In contrast with these amphibian and submarine musings, though also moving in and out of ‘humanist space,’ Sheila Masson takes us literally into the air through her narrative of an intense twentieth-century phase of aerial photography that speaks to both imaging and archiving the environment. The British Department of Surveys (DOS) conducted systematic aerial surveys of its colonial and dominion territories between the late 1940s and 1990s, building an extraordinarily dense archive of images. These ‘transcendent’ aerial photographic prints that served mapping purposes after World War II by the DOS were on the verge of being tipped into a landfill outside Bristol in 2012, but were rescued and redirected to the Archive of Aerial Photographs in Scotland. Underwritten by an international collaborative project on geomapping, the photographs are now in the process of being scanned by cobots to provide a ‘time portal’ that will potentially give access to longer-term patterns of climate change.

Masson’s article speaks to the ambiguity inherent in the abstraction that comes with scale, where aerial images can move from their associations with war and surveillance towards other purposes, and where their marking of time and space offers a new portal into apprehending some of the duration of the ‘slow violence’ of climate change. Duration is key here. Santu Mofokeng summed it up in the deceptively simple question: “When you say climate change what photographs do you take?” Both climate change and photography have particular relationships with time: the one long term, the other abrupt.³⁷ There is a double blindness at risk of operating here: the blindness ‘to the whole’ and ignorance of effect that Susan Buck

35 Baucom, *History 4° Celsius*, 96.

36 Iheka, *Ecomedia*.

37 S. Mofokeng and C. Diserens, *Chasing Shadows. Santu Mofokeng: Thirty Years of Photographic Essays* (Munich: Prestel, 2011), 207.

Morss identifies with capitalist desire,³⁸ and the blindness of once-off photography to the passage of time.³⁹

Duration, scale and temporality surface strongly again in Denis Skopin's study of photographs of environmental damage in the Ukraine war, especially in terms of making visible what many consider as ecocide. In addressing the latter, Skopin draws on Sharon Sliwinski's argument that genocide only becomes acknowledged when it is sufficiently visualised. He examines the destruction of the Karkhovka dam which resulted in massive flooding that was photographed at different scales. In Skopin's view, the humanist scale of photographs of flood survivors taken in proximity fails to produce any single effective iconic image, whereas aerial and satellite imagery showing more abstract patterns enable viewers to appreciate the extent of the catastrophe, even as their emotions may not be engaged. Skopin concludes that only an 'ongoing, multi-faceted and unfolding' process of imaging could conceivably represent credible features of ecocide in such a conflict. The Ukraine war highlights many of the issues encapsulated in Jacques Rancière's concept of the 'distribution of the sensible'. In one formulation, this is a 'delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the status of politics as a form of experience.'⁴⁰ According to Domietta Torlasco, the 'distribution of the sensible' thus regulates the relationship between different temporalities as well as our relationship to what we might describe as the time of war.⁴¹

Tiisetso Dladla shifts emphasis and explores Virtual Reality (VR) in its connections to sacred geo-heritage sites. The approach here is 'immersive attunement'. Dladla points out how documenting sites in VR is in danger of reinforcing a colonial mindset, as attested to by the race to use the latest technology and be the *first* to document certain sites. From her perspective however, the virtual realm potentially offers access to a freedom and movement – politically and socially – that is not always possible in actuality. With its stereoscopic vision, its inclusion of sound and the 'spectral' qualities of a site, VR may in part reconstruct that which has been destroyed or act as a mnemonic device: a veritable 'redistribution of the sensible'. VR artists aim to use photogrammetry as a reparative tool instead of an exploitative one. This speaks to the concept of immersing oneself in a foreign environment while being culturally conscious of the impact that the filmmaker's physical presence and the audience's virtual presence imposes on a given space. Picking up on indigenous knowledge and the connection to location, this may allow for an alteration in how history is *felt* in a certain space.

The 'artists' conversation' between Ange-Frédéric Koffi and Rory Kahiya Tsapayi meditates on what it might mean to find a balance between the urgency of production and careful, mindful intent in one's work as an artist (or *plasticien*) and curator,

38 S. B. Morss, 'Envisioning Capital: Political Economy on Display,' *Critical Inquiry* 21 (Winter 1995), 452.

39 These issues surfaced in the late Mofokeng's own work on climate change, especially in how to envision the effects of an economy which possesses the 'destabilizing surplus of a [capitalist] desire'. Cited in Patricia Hayes, 'Poisoned Landscapes' in S. Mofokeng and C. Diserens, *Chasing Shadows. Santu Mofokeng: Thirty Years of Photographic Essays* (Munich: Prestel, 2011), 206.

40 J. Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, translated by Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004), 13.

41 D. Torlasco, 'Impossible Photographs: Images of War from Rossellini to dOCUMENTA 13,' *Discourse* 40, 1 (Winter 2018), 110.

reflected in the Latin phrase of the title *Festina Lente*, ‘to make haste slowly’. Koffi’s work is largely concerned with materiality and questions of production, packaging, storage and transport, and attempts to make visible these ‘invisible’ processes. It asks what the photographer’s responsibility is to the planet – what are we actually *doing* when we take a photograph? Koffi advocates for the idea of the latent image, drastically slowing down the time between the making and the display and seeing of an image in order to have a more intentful and intimate relationship with it.

Curated by Emma Minkley, the photo essay on ‘Watery Looking and Planetary Time’ pays attention to student photographic work from Hangklip in the Western Cape, a site where ‘historical injustice and climate injustice’ are layered into the coastal landscape. In her commentary, Minkley draws on the notion of colonial Anthropocene where such layers become blurred or indistinct, and she highlights the need for ‘simultaneous vision across sensorial registers’ that is suggested in Hugo ka Canham’s use of the term *okwakumkanya*.⁴² This ambiguous notion registers multiple other ways of looking or seeing: it is *anything but* the sovereign gaze. The students participating in this exercise were accessing sites in a postapartheid landscape. They came with their own sophistications but always encountered something new and unanticipated that is shared here, whether infinitesimal, finite, or seemingly infinite. Minkley accomplishes a move that invites us to no longer think of the photograph as something shallow and abrupt, but as something connected to the fossil that helps to thicken our geological perception, carrying layers of time within its own palimpsestual frame. Moreover, in contemplating these images we get a sense of how our own ‘verticality’ as humans is set aside, for these photographers literally went horizontal, going to ground to glimpse micro-beings, crawling to craggy edges to feel the immense cliff shudders of waves crashlanding, or hanging over rock pools to peer into the water. These photographs are a gesture towards that ‘aesthetic-ecological edge’ that Ricco urges us to approach.

42 H. ka Canham, *Riotous Deathscapes* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2023).