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—Die Monde

The Earth as the Non-objective World—
On Sunah Choi’s *Monde*
Sunah Choi & Alex Taek-Gwang Lee



Kazimir Malevich was a pioneering Russian avant-garde artist who founded the artistic and philosophical concept known as Suprematism. His idea of the 'non-objective world' was central to this movement. According to Malevich, the non-objective world refers to a realm or reality that transcends the physical, objective world of material objects and naturalistic representation. He believed art should move away from depicting or imitating the external world and instead tap into pure form and color's internal, spiritual essence.

Malevich saw geometric shapes, especially the square and the circle, as essential and universal forms that could express this non-objective, suprematist reality. His famous Black Square from 1915 is considered the first purely abstract painting, depicting a black square on a white ground, a radical departure from traditional representational art. Through works like these, Malevich aimed to create a new visual language that did not rely on recognisable objects or scenes from the objective world. His non-objective compositions using essential geometric elements were meant to evoke a higher, spiritual dimension beyond the material realm.

Malevich believed that art could access a universal, transcendent reality outside Earthly confines by abandoning objective representation and embracing pure abstraction. This non-objective world, expressed through shapes, colours, and their relationships, was seen as a more profound truth than the physical world perceived by the senses. In essence, Malevich's concept of the non-objective world posited a new artistic reality free from material constraints, where art could explore the most profound metaphysical and spiritual ideas through abstraction's pure visual language. He clarified: 'Everything that we call nature, in the last analysis, is a figment of the imagination, having no relation whatever to reality. If the human being were suddenly to comprehend actual reality—in that very moment the battle would be decided and eternal, unshakeable perfection attained. . . .'¹

This is by no means the case, however, and so the hopeless struggle continues. What we are fighting for, as has been said, is nothing other than our consciousness and, in this connection, the fact that our nervous systems and our brains do not function always and absolutely under the control of our conscious minds but rather, are capable of acting and reacting outside of consciousness is left out of account. The artistic (pictorial) conception, based upon feeling, of linear. Two-dimensional and spatial phenomena is not supported on an intellectual understanding of the utilitarian relationships of these phenomena; it is non-objective and subconscious and, viewed from an intellectual standpoint, constitutes, as it were, a 'blind, uncontrollable norm'.²

Malevich's concept of the 'non-objective world' can be translated to the view of Earth or the planet itself as a non-objective entity. For Malevich, the objective world was the material, physical world of objects, and naturalistic representation that had traditionally been the focus of art. On the other hand, the non-objective world transcended this physical reality and existed in a higher, more spiritual, and universal plane.

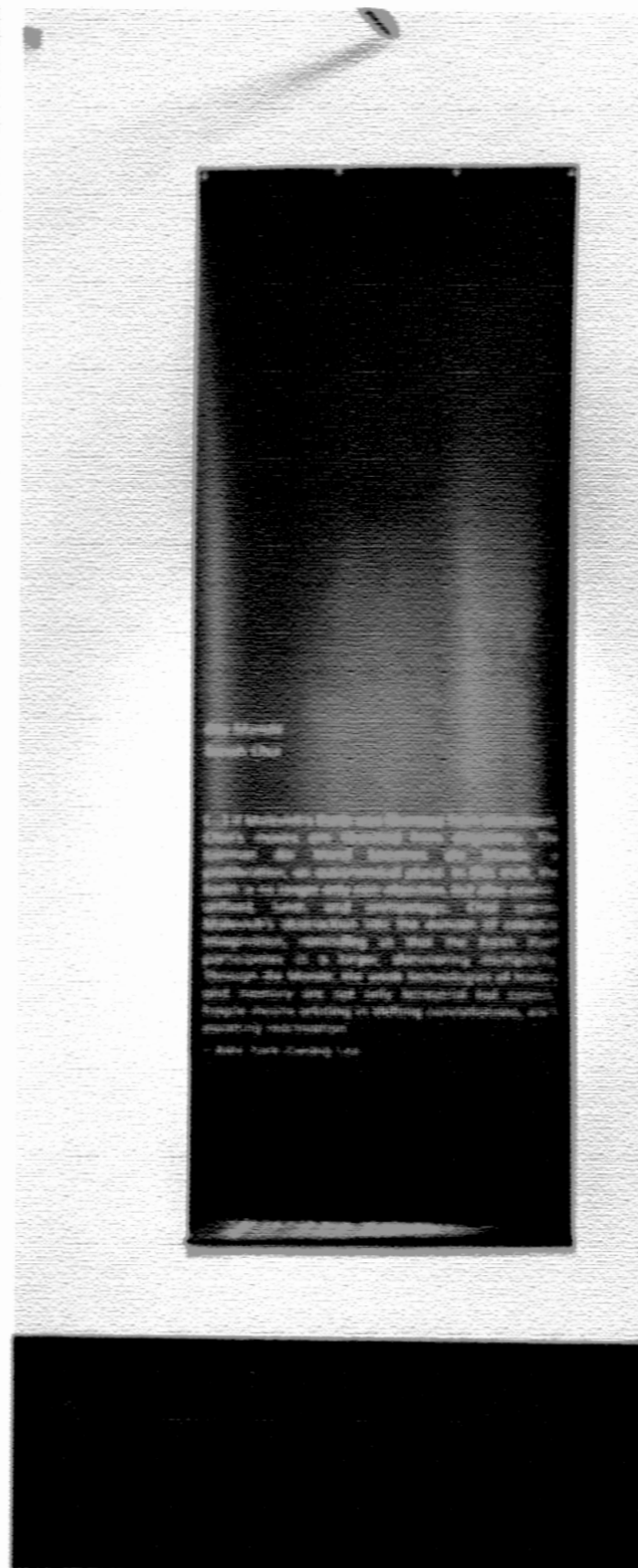
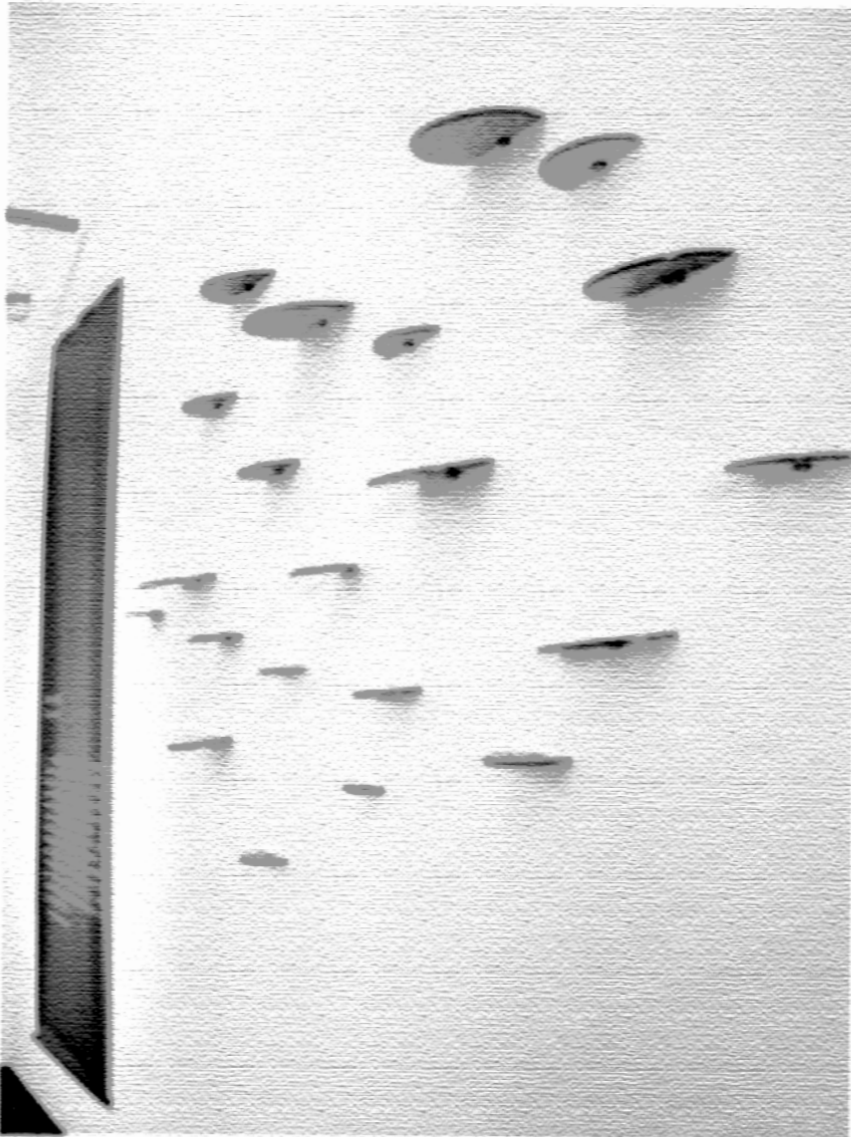
In this context, Malevich likely saw the Earth as a material planet and a vessel or embodiment of the non-objective world. Rather than viewing the Earth as an objective physical entity, he may have perceived it as a manifestation of the transcendent, suprematist reality his art aimed to express. Just as his abstract, geometric paintings using basic shapes and colours aimed to evoke the non-objective world through a new visual language, the Earth itself, with its fundamental geometric form (a sphere) and its array of colours and elemental components, could be seen as a concrete representation or expression of that higher non-objective reality.

From this perspective, it becomes natural to conceptualise the Earth itself as the embodiment of a pure, non-objective world that transcends physical territories and geographical boundaries. In this interpretation, the Earth is not merely a symbolic representation of the non-objective realm but is that very non-objective world itself; the primordial Urwelt that resists reduction into the objective constructs of nations, borders, and mapped lands. It allows these constructs to continually territorialise and re-territorialise themselves upon its surface.

Malevich likely perceived the arbitrary lines drawn on maps and the artificial delineation of territories as imposing artificial, objective boundaries on what is ultimately a singular, transcendent, non-objective reality, the Earth in its undivided state. Just as his suprematist paintings eliminated recognisable objects and figures to reveal the pure essence of form and color, the Earth stripped of humanly defined borders and geographical markers could be viewed as the true non-objective world, a unified planetary entity existing in its authentic, undivided state. The divisions of countries, states, and regions are subjective constructs overlaid on the objective physical world. But the Earth itself, unencumbered by these human conceptions, represents the pure, primordial, non-objective world.

It is the ultimate non-objective world, which art can strive to capture and express but which fundamentally transcends the mapped territories and geographical boundaries of the objective realm.

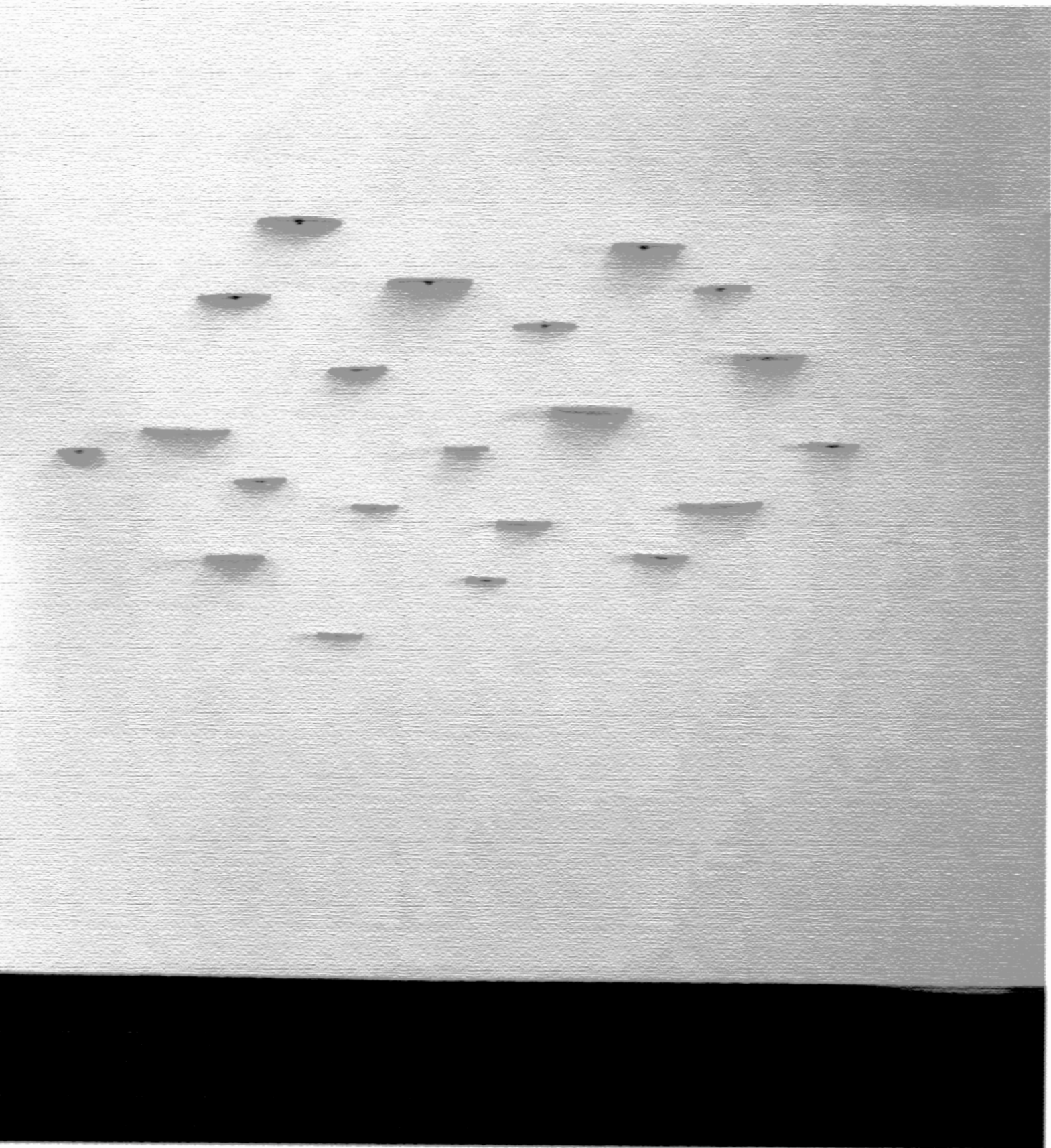
The concept of the Earth as a pure, non-objective world that transcends geographical boundaries can be elaborated through the metaphor of a palimpsest. A palimpsest refers to a manuscript or piece of writing material on which the original writing has been effaced and new writing inscribed over it, yet traces of the earlier writing still remain underneath.

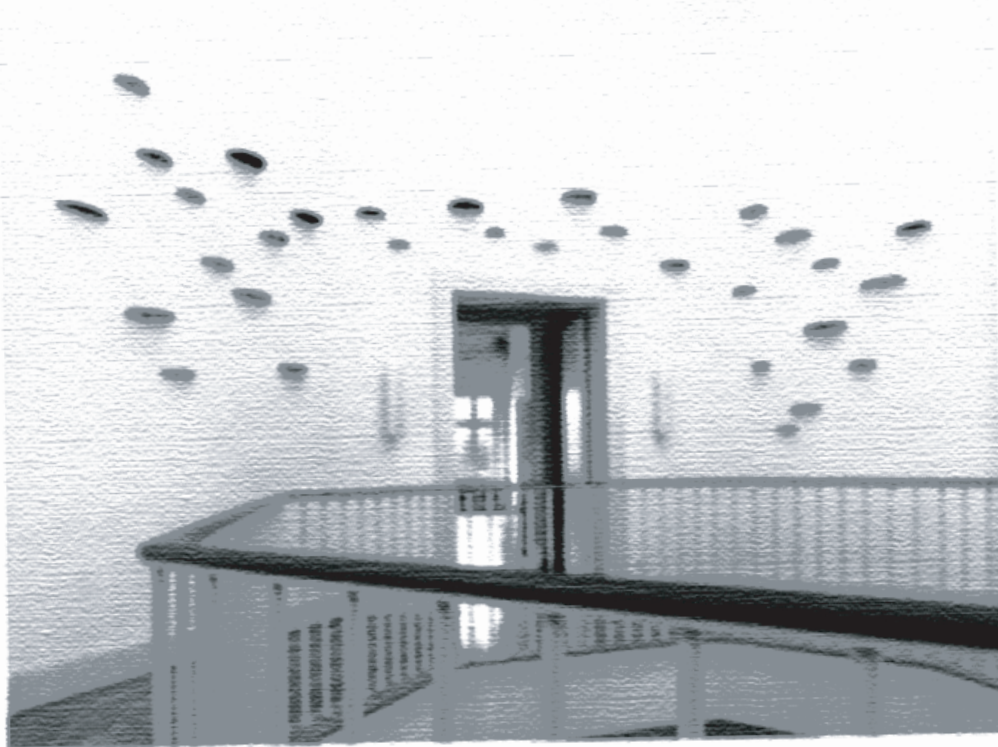


1, 2

Sunah Choi, *Monde*, 2025. Glass, varnish, steel, 21 parts, variable dimensions.

Exhibition view:
 The Earth Is Thinking All Along...,
 Museum of Contemporary Art - Skopje, 2025.
 Courtesy of Sunah Choi & VG Bild-Kunst
 Photo. Picture by Ana Lazarevska, 2025.





3

Sunah Choi, *Monde*, 2025. Glass, varnish, steel, 31 parts, variable dimensions.

Exhibition view: GLÄSERN forms of uncontrolled control, Schloss Biesdorf, Berlin, 2025. Courtesy of Sunah Choi & VG Bild-Kunst. Picture by Eric Tschernow, 2025.

In this metaphorical framing, the surface of the Earth itself can be viewed as a vast palimpsest upon which the human constructs of nations, borders, and territorial divisions have been continuously inscribed and re-inscribed over time. However, underneath these transient markings lies the pure, primordial 'text' of the non-objective world, the Earth in its fundamental, undivided past. Just as a palimpsest allows for endless re-writings and re-imaginings over the same surface, the Earth as the non-objective world offers a blank canvas that can be endlessly re-conceived and re-territorialised by human hands and ideological frameworks. The imposed borders and boundaries are but the latest inscriptions atop the pure, infinitely re-imaginable plane of the planetary whole.

Yet, much like the faded yet persistent traces of earlier writings on a palimpsest, the essential unity and non-objective reality of the Earth remains an indelible foundation beneath these temporary surface overlays of human geographical conceptions. Malevich's philosophy would suggest that while nations and territories ebb and flow across the face of the Earth, the true non-objective world endures, a singular, transcendent reality waiting to be re-discovered and re-expressed through new perspectives and fresh abstractions, just as the palimpsest eternally invites new inscriptions.

The Earth as a non-objective world is, therefore, a boundless, malleable realm, continuously open to re-imaginings and re-articulations that peel away the layered accretions of objective boundaries to reveal the pure, protean essence pulsing beneath. It is a palimpsest of infinite creative and philosophical possibilities. Thanks to this operation of the Earth as the *Urwelt*, as Walter Benjamin emphasised, 'history is the subject of a construction whose site is not homogenous, empty time, but time filled full by now-time (*Jetztzeit*).'³

It is in this register that Sunah Choi's *Monde* shines. The moon isn't merely an object hanging in the sky; it threads through romance, science, bedtime stories, and myth, multiplying its appearances. In German, *der Mond* gathers the moon into a solitary, masculine shell; yet *die Monde* scatters it like silver seeds across the sky, an astral chorus, a constellation of moons, infinite and plural. Choi's work takes us into this plural register, where the moon is not one but many, a fragile multiplicity of lights and shadows, a chorus of possibilities.

Monde thus embodies the lunar quality of history itself: revolving, waxing, waning, reappearing under new skies. Each moon is a weak technology, porous and transformable, never fixed, always awaiting reactivation. Through Malevich's non-objective Earth and Choi's many moons, we glimpse the Earth itself not as object but as a shimmering multiplicity, unfinished, unfinalisable, and an archipelago of temporalities.

To dwell in this Earth of many moons is to live history otherwise: not as inheritance alone, but as perpetual invention, luminous and fragile, a cosmos of weak technologies endlessly remaking the sky. Malevich's non-objective Earth already dislodged the ground from its objecthood, transforming it into an abstract field of pure forces and relations. By stripping the Earth of its representational burden, he opened the way for an ontology no longer tied to figure, ground, or mimetic capture. Yet where Malevich sought an Earth beyond objecthood, Sunah Choi extends this gesture into the cosmos. Her *Monde* multiplies Malevich's non-objective Earth into many moons, scattering it across the night sky of imagination.

If Malevich's Earth was liberated from objecthood, Choi's moons are liberated from singularity. The German *der Mond* becomes *die Monde*: a proliferation, an astronomical plural. In this shift, the Earth is no longer only non-objective, but also cosmic: unfixed, lunar, and archipelagic. Choi carries Malevich's abstraction into the domain of celestial imagination, reminding us that the Earth itself participates in a larger, shimmering multiplicity.

Through *Monde*, the weak technologies of history and memory are not only terrestrial but cosmic: fragile moons orbiting in shifting constellations, each awaiting reactivation. If Malevich freed us from the object, Choi frees us from the singular, opening a space where the Earth itself becomes one moon among many, luminous and unfinished, continually re-scribed across the sky.

We are taught to imagine the past as stone, sealed and finished, while the future stretches before us like a horizon of possibility. Yet this is an illusion, the grammar of a time bent to power. The future, increasingly bound by calculation, prediction, and the cold circuitry of control, lies heavy with inevitability. What breathes, instead, is the past. It remains porous, fragile, like a vessel never fully closed, always ready to be reopened, refilled, transformed.

This fragility is not weakness in the pejorative sense, but the potential of weak technologies. Every technical object, every shard of memory, bears within it a refusal of finality. They remain supple, awaiting the touch that reshapes them, the imagination that bends them toward other uses. The past is such a technology: not a relic to be guarded, but an instrument of reinvention, an unfinished script where forgotten voices wait to speak again.

Walter Benjamin called this act of awakening 'revolution': the sudden crack in time where buried stars flare once more. And Deleuze and Guattari, in their call for a 'new Earth', echo the same rhythm, an Earth not found but made, not given but continually sculpted. The Earth is no foundation; it is a canvas of trembling surfaces, where the past is endlessly re-scribed and futures dissolve like mist.

Here Malevich's vision of the non-objective Earth comes to bear. For Malevich, the Earth stripped of its representational burden, freed from mimetic capture, becomes a pure field of forces, an Earth of abstraction, without figure or ground. This non-objective Earth resonates with the openness of weak technologies: it is not a stable object to be grasped, but an ever-shifting horizon to be inhabited, where forms emerge only to dissolve, where meaning itself is provisional, transitory, and plural.

1 Kazimir Malevich, *The Non-Objective World: The Manifesto of Suprematism* (New York: Dover, 2003), 20.

2 Malevich, *The Non-Objective World*, 20.

3 Walter Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History', in *Selected Writings*, Volume 4: 1938-1940, eds. Michael W. Jennings, Marcus Bullock, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 395.

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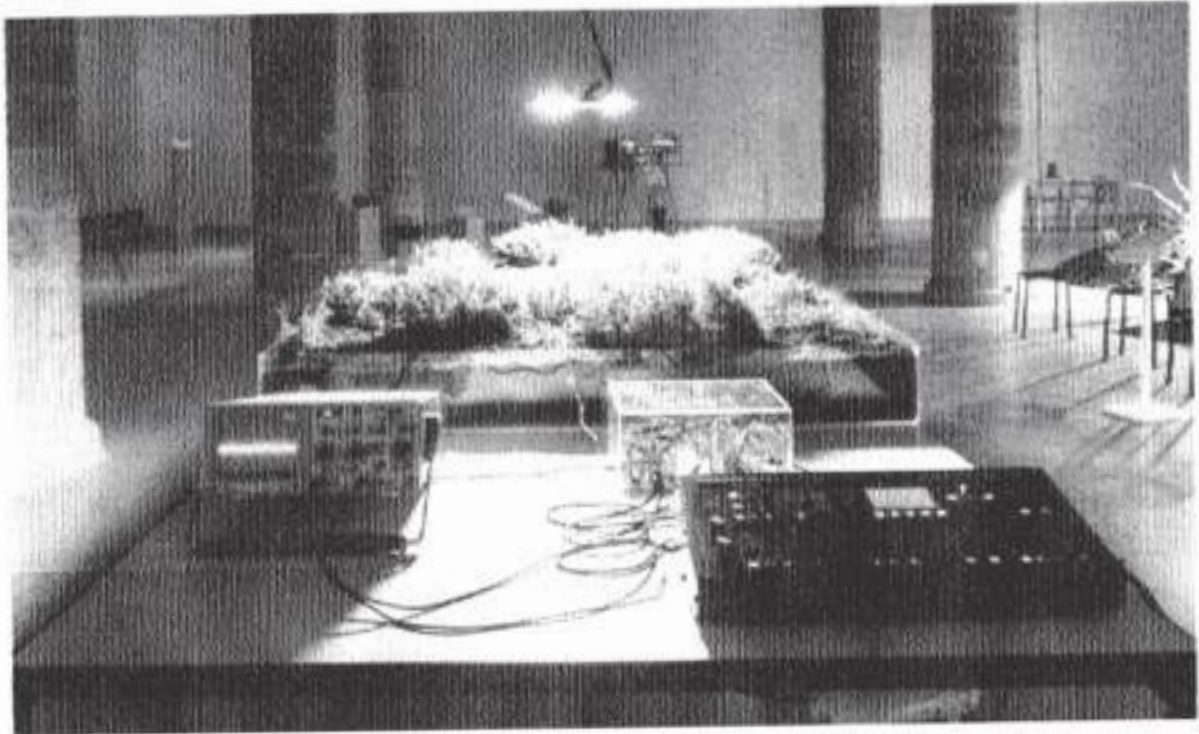
This text was written by Alex Taek-Gwang Lee in collaboration with Sunah Choi and produced on the occasion of the exhibition THE EARTH IS THINKING ALL ALONG... (13.06—27.09.2026) at RADIUS. Graphic design by Minhu Jun & Özgür Deniz Koldaş.

“ Thymus vulgaris generates an acoustic environment that indexes multispecies relations grounded in symbiosis, precarity, and mortality; a heterogeneity of steppe flora and fauna; erosions, sedimentations, and the paving of soils; dryland and irrigated agricultural practices; aeronautical, military, and war uses; tensions between conservationists and developmentalist sectors; social mobilizations, legal battles, and legal protections. ”

—Thymus Vulgaris

Assemblages of Biocultural Enunciation —
On Ferran Lega’s *Thymus Vulgaris*
Christian Alonso & Ferran Lega





1
Ferran Lega, *Thymus Vulgaris*, 2023

Photography by Jordi V. Pou. In
Multispecies Imaginaries: #Land of
Lleida, curated by Christian Alonso.
La Panera Centre for Art, Lleida,
Catalonia, Spain, 2023. See [https://
www.youtube.com/watch?v=VshdKgWkY_c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VshdKgWkY_c)

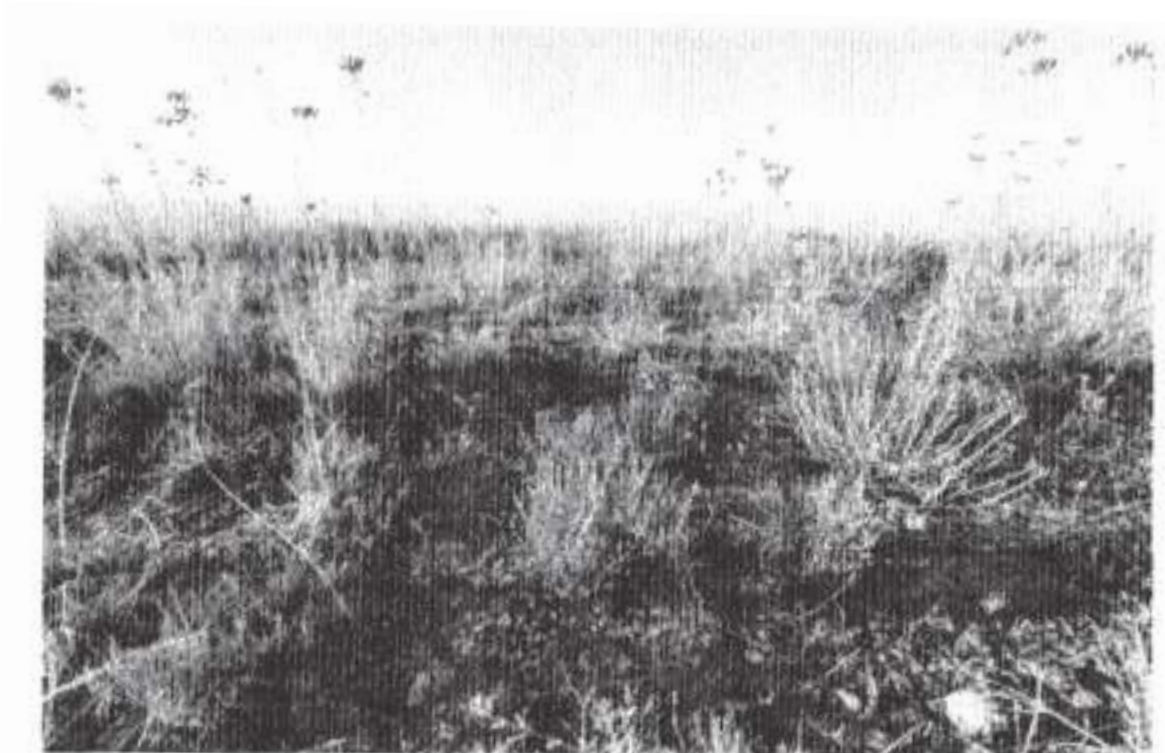
Ferran Lega investigates sound as a critical medium for exploring culture–nature–technology relations.¹ *Thymus Vulgaris* (2023) is the title of a sound installation linked to the multispecies ecologies of the thyme field of Alfés, a steppe environment in western Catalonia, Spain, where thyme grows wild, and endangered birds such as the Dupont's lark (*Chersophilus duponti*) nest.² This biotope has suffered numerous assaults caused by the irrigation of agriculture, sports and military uses of the Alfés aerodrome, and the lack of protection by public authorities. The threat of its disappearance sparked unprecedented environmental activism in the Catalanian province of Lleida. The installation *Thymus Vulgaris* consists of a planter filled with substrate and common thyme plants from cultivated stock, technical grow lights, an Arduino board, a MIDI system, a synthesizer, a spectrometer, and speakers (Image 1). These elements form a device that allows the plant to register voltage changes according to environmental conditions and human touch, rendering biological variations as acoustic environments. Throughout the exhibition, the artist takes sound measurements and translates them into visual scores so that visitors can also grasp human interaction and environmental conditions graphically.

The *Timoneda d'Alfés*, Catalan for 'the thyme field of Alfés', is an area of high ecological value located in the municipality of Alfés, in the Segrià comarca, eight kilometres from the city of Lleida in Catalonia, Spain. It is a singular habitat within the Mediterranean context, as it preserves the last wild thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*) steppe in Catalonia, and one of the few remaining on the Iberian Peninsula (Image 2). Despite the numerous pressures it has faced over time, this ecosystem has persisted thanks to the semi-arid conditions of the Catalan Central Depression, relatively limited human use, and three decades of advocacy by environmental organisations and civil society to ensure its conservation.³ After numerous legal disputes, the Timoneda d'Alfés is currently protected under several legal designations and forms part of the protected area known as 'Secans de Mas de Melons–Alfés'.⁴ Furthermore, it has been included in the Plan for Areas of Natural Interest (PEIN) since 1992 and the European Natura 2000 network since 2003, and is designated as a Site of Community Importance (SCI) and a Special Protection Area (SPA) (Image 3).

2

The *Timoneda d'Alfés* (Thyme field of Alfés, Segrià comarca, Lleida).

In the foreground, dry thyme plants can be seen, the plant's natural state at the end of summer and the beginning of autumn. Photograph by the author, September 14, 2025.





3

Natura 2000 Network sites of Catalonia.

The red pointer indicates the Secans de Mas de Melons-Alfés protected area. Source: Department of Territory, Housing and Ecological Transition, Government of Catalonia. *Hypermap. Natura 2000 Network Layer in Catalonia* (Creative Commons, CC0 1.0). https://sig.gencat.cat/visors/hipermapa.html#par-am=param&color=vermel-l&background=orto_ICC&B-B0154934.710744ers=ESPAIS-NATURALS_

The Timoneda lies on an ancient fluvial terrace of the Segre, a tributary of the Ebro river and features stratified landforms with a vegetation cover shaped by grazing. In terms of flora, the habitat is dominated by shrubland, grasses, rocky vegetation, willows, poplars, holm oaks, and pines.⁵ From an ornithological standpoint, it harbours larks (*Alaudidae*) and other steppe birds that are vulnerable or endangered, such as the little bustard (*Tetrax tetrax*), Eurasian stone-curlew (*Burhinus oedicephalus*), lesser grey shrike (*Lanius minor*), and black-bellied sandgrouse (*Pterocles orientalis*). The most notable species, however, is Dupont's lark (*Chersophilus duponti*), an endangered bird first recorded in the 1980s, which was thought to have disappeared by the late 1990s, but was rediscovered in 2005 (Image 4).⁶ The species inhabits the Iberian Peninsula and North Africa. In Spain, its population is concentrated in the Ebro Basin, and in Catalonia its only habitat is the Timoneda d'Alfés.⁷ Typical of low-shrub plains, this steppe bird nests on the ground, and prefers running to flying. Its population has undergone a severe decline in recent decades due to the conversion of drylands to irrigated agriculture and a high natural mortality rate.⁸ The Timoneda is part of the representative dryland agricultural landscapes of southern Lleida, particularly the counties of Les Garrigues and Segrià. For centuries, these territories were used for extensive cereal and nut cultivation and sheep grazing. Today, agricultural infrastructures from past centuries are still preserved, such as small wells or cisterns, dry-stone constructions, and vaulted huts. The Mas de Melons protected area, where the Timoneda is located, is a mosaic of herbaceous and woody crops (79%), natural vegetation (18.1%), and plants of other uses (2.9%).⁹ Plant communities stand out for their diversity and, in addition to thyme scrublands, include maquis, garrigue, holm oak woodlands, tamarisk thickets, and esparto (*Lygeum*) grasslands. The interaction between traditional human use and ecological dynamics has favoured the conservation of plant and animal communities over the years. However, the Timoneda d'Alfés has been at the centre of numerous social and political debates in recent decades and has become a flashpoint among representatives of environmental organisations, farmers, proponents of aeronautical activities, and public administrations.

4



4

Dupont's Lark (*Chersophilus duponti*).

Source: Environment and Sustainability, Government of Catalonia. Dupont's lark. https://mediambient.gencat.cat/ca/05_ambits_dactuacio/patrimoni_natural/fauna-autoctona-protegida/gestio-especies-protegides-amenacades/ocells/alosa_becuda/

5

Hangars of the Reial Aeri Club de Lleida, 2016.

Photograph by Manuel Portero (Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0). Source: Hangars of the Royal Aeroclub of Lleida at the Alfés airfield. 8 April 2017. https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/dd/Aer%C3%B3dromo_de_Alf%C3%A9s_%28Lleida%29.jpg

6



Remains of the Aerodrome of Alfés, used as a military base after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War.

Photograph by the author, September 14, 2025.

5



Conflicts began in 1929, when land was expropriated from farmers to build an airfield on the Timoneda. The airfield was operated by the aeronautical company Real Aeri Club de Lleida (RACL) (Image 5), and used for sports and leisure activities. With the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, the field became an operational base of the Air Forces of the Spanish Republic, and numerous military infrastructures were built, some of which are still visible (Image 6).¹⁰

The base fell under the control of the dictator Francisco Franco in 1938, and was used for the landing of Nazi German bombers and fighters. The airfield resumed its civil activity under the RACL in the late 1940s, when the pilot school was created.¹¹

In 2015, the RACL's activity was moved to the new Lleida–Alguaire Airport. In the same year, the Alfés Aerodrome was closed by a Supreme Court ruling, that deemed aeronautical activity incompatible with the protection of the natural area. While it is true that military ownership of the land helped preserve multispecies communities over the years by preventing irrigated farming or hunting, threats also came from its military use, such as the attempted paving of the runway to host 'Armed Forces Day' in 1988—a movement halted by military organisations—and environmental manoeuvres during the birds'breeding season (Image 7).¹²



7

Military maneuvers at the Alfés airfield

Photograph by Amado Forrolla, 2009. Segre.
Source: 'Alfés: el candidat a l'aeroport de Lleida que va deixar de ser-ho per protegir l'alosa becuda'. Segre, July 29, 2025. https://www.segre.com/ca/societat/250729/alfes-candidat-l-aeroport-lleida-deixar-ho-per-protegir-l-alosa-dupont_525786.html

Following the end of the Franco dictatorship in 1975, the Government of Catalonia considered converting the Alfés aerodrome—still owned by Spain's Ministry of Defence—into an airport. Environmental organisations such as IPCENA 13 opposed the plan, as paving the runways and expanding the facilities would have destroyed bird habitats. After acquiring the aerodrome in 2000 and passing several laws, the Government of Catalonia nevertheless continued to push for a regional airport, which did not come to fruition; in 2004, it was decided that Lleida's airport would be built in the municipality of Alguaire instead.

In August 2025, the Department of Territory of the Government of Catalonia decided to restore the Timoneda d'Alfés and demolish the aerodrome facilities.¹⁴ The project will preserve the Civil War fortifications, tear down structures linked to the RCAL, and build two viewing platforms for birdwatching. The site will become a space dedicated exclusively to ornithological interest and historical memory. To reach this point, environmental organisations and civil society fought for thirty years to protect the ecosystem by conducting studies on endangered birds, filing complaints with the European Commission, and urging regional and national governments to act, often by organising demonstrations and public actions (Image 8).

Ferran Lega's sound installation the *Thymus Vulgaris* (2023) captures the electrical bioconductivity generated by thyme and sonifies it, using MIDI scores created from biological data of thyme plants that the artist collected at the Timoneda d'Alfés in 2022. Using a programmable Arduino Uno micro-controller and electrodes attached to the plants, the artist obtained information on voltage variations; this biodata can be transformed into MIDI musical notes, that can be sent either to music-production software or to a synthesizer.¹⁵ The *Thymus Vulgaris* installation uses an Arduino Uno board connected to the plants, a synthesizer, and an oscilloscope, generating real-time sound patterns via Ableton Live and displaying electrical signals as graphical structures on a screen.¹⁶

Separately, Lega also converted the MIDI notes into visual scores with the help of a Digital Audio Workstation (DAW), the scores functioning as cartographies of the plants' biological processes. Finally, the artist made field recordings of the Timoneda d'Alfés environment, which constitute the base sound layer on top of which the MIDI notes are generated.

Ferran Lega's installation can be understood through Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of the assemblage.¹⁷ This concept describes a notion of multiple subjectivity, composed of social, biological, and technological components that is not governed by anthropocentric or personological domains. An assemblage is an 'intensive, non-totalisable multiplicity',¹⁸ a material—semiotic modulation that cuts across ecological, economic, social, and institutional strata, and is capable of enunciation.

An acoustic environment is not a single, stable, identifiable, graspable object, that we can contemplate from the outside and judge by normative categories. Rather, it is a modulation of bodies, rhythms, cadences, species, architectures, and listening habits. *Thymus Vulgaris* generates an acoustic environment that indexes complex multispecies relations; a heterogeneity of steppe flora and fauna; erosions, sedimentations, and the paving of soils; dryland and irrigated agricultural practices; aeronautical, military, and war uses; tensions between conservationists and developmentalist sectors; social mobilisations, legal battles, and legal protections.

This acoustic environment is not a 'soundscape',¹⁹ insofar as it neither functions as a visual metaphor nor subscribes to a representational ontology. Instead, it highlights shared experiences of symbiosis, precarity, and mortality. *Thymus Vulgaris* thus does not represent the environment; it produces subjective territories across social, mental, and environmental ecologies that are the basis of the assemblages we inhabit.²⁰



8

Demonstration in defense of the Timoneda d'Alfés, Lleida, November 3, 1996.

Source: 'La història de les amenaces a la Timoneda d'Alfés'. Ecologisme al dia. Pensament, opinió, denúncies ecologistes. <https://ecologismealdia.blogspot.com/2015/06/la-historia-de-les-amenaces-la-timoneda.html>

1 Ferran Lega (b. 1983) holds a PhD in Fine Arts (University of Barcelona) and received the University of Barcelona's Extraordinary Doctoral Award. He currently combines teaching and research as a lecturer at the University of Lleida with his artistic practice, in which he has specialised in producing art-science-technology projects through sound art. See <https://www.ferranlega.com>.

2 *Thymus Vulgaris* was produced for the exhibition Multispecies Imaginaries at La Panera Centre for Art in Lleida in 2023, and has since been presented at various institutions. See <https://www.lapanera.cat/es/programacion/exposiciones/imaginariis-multiespecies-terres-de-lleida>.

3 Salas i Arqués, Josep Ramón and Xavi Massot i Castelló, 'El tomillar de Alfés: un espacio natural único en Catalunya gravemente amenazado', *BoI* no. 15 (SEA) (1996): 61-62.

4 The Timoneda has an approximate area of 100 hectares. The Mas de Melons-Alfés protected area, however, covers 7,618 hectares. See https://mediambient.gencat.cat/ca/05_ambits_dactuacio/patrimoni_natural/senp_catalunya/espais_sistema/lleida/mda/

5 See https://iepnb.es/areas-tematicas/espacios-protegidos/ES0000021_ZEPA/secans-de-mas-de-melons-alfes.

6 Joan Estrada, Santi Mañosa; Gerard Bota, and Francesc Moncasí 'Present i futur de l'avifauna dels secans de caire estèpic de la plana de Lleida', *Butlletí de la Institució Catalana d'Història Natural* no. 71(2003): 155-168, <https://raco.cat/index.php/ButlletíCHN/article/view/235827>

7 See <https://seo.org/ave/alondra-ricoti/>

8 The species is included in the Red Book of the Birds of Spain (SEO/BirdLife, 2021) and in the Spanish *Catalogue of Threatened Species* (Ministry of the Environment and Rural and Marine Affairs, 2011). See https://seo.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Libro-Rojo-web-3_01.pdf#page=322 and <https://www.boe.es/eli/es/rd/2011/02/04/139/con>

9 See https://parcsnaturals.gencat.cat/web/.content/Xarxa-de-parcs/mas_de_melons_i_se-cans_de_lleida/coneix-nostra-feina/instruments_planificacio/esp_de_mas_de_melons-alfes/habitat_mas_de_melons.pdf

10 During the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), air-raid shelters and defences, a camouflaged hangar, trenches, a powder magazine, and several watchtowers, among other structures, were built. They are currently listed as Assets of Local Cultural Interest (BCIL). The base had electric lighting, radio stations, telegraph, and telephone connections.

11 <https://reialaeroclublleida.org/el-aeroclub/>

12 See <https://ecoogismealdia.blogspot.com/2015/06/la-historia-de-les-timoneda.html>

13 IPCENA (Institució de Ponent per la Conservació i l'Estudi de l'Entorn Natural) is the main environmental NGO in the province of Lleida. See <https://www.ipcena.net/>

14 See https://www.segre.com/es/comarcas/250804/luz-verde-en-el-plan-para-recuperar-la-timoneda-de-alfes-y-derribar-el-antiguo-aerodromo_914528.html

15 Ferran Lega Lladós, 'Visualización de datos MIDI a partir de la bioconductividad del tomillo en la Instalación sonora *Thymus Vulgaris*', *Artnodes* no. 35 (2025): 5, <https://doi.org/10.7238/artnodes.v0i35.428776>

16 Lega Lladós, 'Visualización', 6.

17 Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University Press, 1987).

18 Félix Guattari, 'Assemblages of Enunciation, Pragmatic Fields and Transformations', in *The Machinic Unconscious: Essays in Schizoanalysis*, ed. Félix Guattari (Semiotexte, 2011), 55.

19 Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester, VT: Destiny, 1994).

20 Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies* (London: The Athlone Press, 2009).

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This text was written by Christian Alonso in collaboration with Ferran Lega and produced on the occasion of the exhibition THE EARTH IS THINKING ALL ALONG... (13.06—27.09.2026) at RADIUS. Graphic design by Minhu Jun and Özgür Deniz Koldaş.

“ In ‘Swamp Body Tides’, the swamp first manifests as an atmosphere: dense, humid and unsettled. It is a relational medium where edges blur, water seeps into land and human bodies lose their illusory wholeness. There is no stable horizon or external vantage point in this thick, circling present; instead, viewers dissolve into a sensory tangle of ground and motion, an anti-horizon devoid of linear time.”

—Swamp Body Tides





Katarzyna Pastuszek in the performance
Braiding Time, Memory and Water,
(dir. Sue Schroeder), Chatahoochee River
Atlanta, Photo by John Ramspott.

If we listen carefully, we can recognise the pulsing line 'There are tides in the body' emerging from the heart of the *Swamp Body Tides*¹ video installation, where sound and visuals intertwine like roots in peat. The artist Nat Chylińska invokes the tidal poetics of Virginia Woolf² and the hydrofeminist concept of the body of water by Astrida Neimanis.³ Here, tides are cyclical rhythms of becoming: pulses that attune human identities to the flows of swamps and more-than-human environments. These embodied cycles—ebbs of withdrawal and floods of overflow—disclose our inseparability from watery environments and urge us to reconsider wetlands as co-constitutive kin in a post-anthropocentric era. During the silences between the tides in the song, we experience liminal stillness, where receding waters reveal buried histories and approaching surges hint at shared vulnerabilities.

From this tidal pulse, the first sequence suspends a body on a trunk veined with mycelium and lichens, legs submerged in peaty murk and torso arched towards the light. There is no plunge into the swamp's embrace, but rather a deliberate in-between state: flesh held, stretched and distributed across fungal slowness, mossy persistence and the quiet expansion of lichens. A white fabric, stained red with evocations of menstrual blood, wounded tissue and a queer archive, clings like a cartographic skin, echoing the performative walk from a previous performance, *Anatomies*, by Nat Chylińska and Katarzyna Pastuszek.⁴

This reuse enacts care as a continuum—clothed entrustment yielding to nude immersion—refusing isolated performances in favour of an ongoing ecological poetics. The costume thus pulses as a tidal agent, acting as a porous second skin that holds past eroticism while softening towards more-than-human becoming. These 'lines of life' migrate to the trunk, the body acting as a travelogue that traces the swamp's polychronic agencies: the fleeting drift of duckweed, the deep compression of humus, the migratory spill of sunrays, the cyclical perfume of the seasons, and the speculative pull of decomposition. Viewers attune through the screen: Can ribs lichenise? Do feet humify? Do fingernails drift as vegetal floes? These speculative scores rehearse relational softening, with the human tempo yielding to the teeming undeath of the ecosystem—a dead yet vital limb, where care entrusts the stained, clothed form to a precarious wooden hold. This evokes the mutability of queer ecology, where bodily boundaries blur into wetland thinking: the swamp as lover, cartographer and co-composer, whose tides ebb to expose the archived ecologies of peat.

Across suspensions and immersions, tides trace shedding: from a queer-marked garment on a multi-temporal trunk to skinless exposure in viscous depths. Protections are relinquished—fabric, footing and warmth—for an entangled rehearsal in black waters. Drawing on the posthumanist vein of environmental humanities, *Swamp Body Tides* posits the swamp as a form of cognition of the earth: a partial, embodied chapter in which affective cartography, multispecies sympoiesis and queer-soft politics converge. It challenges extractive logics by embracing co-existence, encouraging viewers to explore ecological queerness—opening to the damaged world through permeable, hydroerotic connections, akin to Woolf's waves gently caressing our shared, tidal flesh.

In *Swamp Body Tides*, the swamp first manifests as an atmosphere: dense, humid and unsettled. It is a relational medium where edges blur, water seeps into land and human bodies lose their illusory wholeness. There is no stable horizon or external vantage point in this thick, circling present; instead, viewers dissolve into a sensory tangle of ground and motion, an anti-horizon devoid of linear time. Here, the porous female body encounters more-than-human flows, countering stratigraphic mastery with horizonless affective transformations. Virginia Woolf's waves reveals itself not as solitary labour, but as tidal interdependencies: human forms pulsing alongside bacterial microbiomes, fungal networks and avian migrations. Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome further queers this entanglement, interweaving the themes of becoming-woman, becoming-animal, and becoming-imperceptible through the multiplicities of peat, moss, duckweed and pleasure—non-reproductive alliances in which Gaia's face emerges grinning from the muck, simultaneously terrifying and generative. To be swamped is to surrender to this rhizomatic pull, where the fear of dissolution is transmuted into the ongoing flow of body tides.

The tides flood in, offering nude immersion. Feet probe the textures of the silt; the cold black water contracts the flesh, yet the humid underworld yields a subversive warmth that is warmer than the air or the chill of the surface. Micro-gestures prevail: the heave of breath, the tidal surrender of weight, agency ceded to swamp forces. Mycelial imaginations spread through porous skin, riddled with orifices for water to enter, circulate and exit. Scales collapse from belly-stone singularity to multisensory swarm: bubbles tickle as they rise, duckweed slides between the buttocks and light ripples on disturbed surfaces.

A (sexual) hydro-commons pulses as bodily fluids mingle with swamp viscera in a slow, sensual co-circulation. Queer intimacies extend from human proximities in *Anatomies* to fungal-mineral partners: the thick caress of mud and the cold dispersion of water. Naked care enacts a soft insurgency, refusing anthropocentric dramaturgy in favour of receptivity amidst ruin—vulnerable epidermis sustained by impaired environments, where tenderness becomes a political ecology attuned to Neimanis' watery kinships.

Katarzyna Pastuszek in the performance
Braiding Time, Memory and Water,
(dir. Sue Schroeder), Chatahoochee River
Atlanta, Photo by John Ramspott.





When we engage with the landscape, our bodies are altered and made vulnerable. 'Being swamped' is overwhelming, eroding the myth of separation to expose porosity, dependence and entanglement that extend beyond human control—an inversion that upends the subject-landscape hierarchy. Care is distributed reciprocally through contact, exposure and responsiveness: the intruding body attunes to the rhythms of the wetland—filtering, storing, leaking and circulating—rather than imposing its own cadence. This co-presence honours wetlands as fragile dynamisms, not passive expanses awaiting management.

The handheld camera's immersion in the environment embodies this logic; its instability, caused by ground movement, water pressure and swaying vegetation, co-shapes the visual field. Rather than documenting from afar, filming participates in the wetland; images arise from embodied perception, echoing the emphasis on situated knowledge in environmental humanities. Undercurrents signify submerged vitalities: ecological processes that are inseparable from cultural resonances and link ecology to politics without collapse. Naked care circulates as a queer, soft politics of being-with in black waters—vulnerability and reciprocity practised in material immediacy, with the female body resonating centrally with the mire into which the artist burst.

This immersion reveals profound human-swamp relationships which have historically been fraught with ambivalence. Long maligned as wastelands or contamination zones, swamps have been subject to drainage, conversion and ecological flattening. Yet they persist as tidal archives, nurturing resilient, hydra-like ecologies in the silences between waves. *Swamp Body Tides* contemplates landscapes formed through entanglement, reimagining care as immersion in unstable, living terrain. The work dismantles the entrenched divide between nature as object and human as observer, framing the swamp as a dynamic ecological matrix that defies control. Decay and regeneration coexist, boundaries fluctuate, and relations eclipse fixed identities. In the shadows of Pomeranian wetlands, the work challenges the erasure of utilitarianism, celebrating the swamp's humidity, opacity, decomposition and multiplicity, embracing their messiness.

The concept of 'queering landscape' is central to this intervention, challenging normative views of environments as transparent, organised and ready for extraction. The swamp resists legibility: saturated and dynamic, its undercurrents weave together hydrological surges, microbial labour, sedimentary layers and atmospheric shifts with subtler currents of affect, memory, desire and labour. These are not merely material entities; they are intertwined with cultural and symbolic histories of use, neglect, valuation and representation. Wetlands emerge as crucibles where social and ecological narratives converge; their value lies in what renders them ungovernable. The installation challenges extractive paradigms by emphasising that swamps are valuable precisely because of their complexity—a subtle insurgency against oversimplification.

Temporality amplifies these stakes. Swamps evade human clocks, instead being governed by the slow accrual of peat, the patience of decay, the churning of microbes and the undulations of the seasons—cycles, depths and durations that out-strip lifespans. Bodily contact with water, bark, mud and flora synchronises with these layered rhythms, and the swamp body is formed in ongoing pulses. Woolf's tides and Neimanis' hydrofeminism emphasise the inseparability of things, compelling us to form post-anthropocentric kinships with wetlands in the face of climate precarity.

Yet the ebb and flow of the tides stirs up a sense of dread, fears of uncontrollability that obscure our innate porosity. In response, artists cultivate female swamps—precarious, inventive and osmotic—as an ethical practice, fostering entangled resilience. Swamps model interdependence: stability gives way to attunement and control to relationship. What endures is the tactile afterglow of transformation: the swamp receives movement, responds to it, resists it, cradles it and re-orders it. This reciprocity forges a new ethics—not of mastery or extraction, but of a tender readiness to embrace unstable, dense aliveness.

Swamp Body Tides names the landscapes that emerge when we yield to undercurrents: care ignites where dominion falters and relation surges. In human-swamp intimacies, anxiety is transformed into hydroerotic kinship, challenging extractive perspectives and paving the way for sympoietic futures. Wetlands cease to be peripheral; they become attached to earthly cognition, urging us to love damaged more-than-human beings through permeable, multispecies embraces. The installation lingers as a provocation: immerse, dissolve and recompose, not as loss but as the generative tide of shared existence.



Katarzyna Pastuszek in the performance
Braiding Time, Memory and Water,
(dir. Sue Schroeder), Chatahoochee River
Atlanta, Photo by John Ramspott.

1 In this essay and the broader *Swamp Body Tides* project, the term 'swamp' is deliberately used instead of the more neutral scientific term 'wetland' to capture its visceral, emotional significance: swamps are often considered inaccessible, dark, foul-smelling and dangerous—zones where established orders dissolve into the uncharted spaces where land and water meet. Although 'wetlands' serves as the overarching term in frameworks such as the Ramsar Convention, defining waterlogged transitional spaces including swamps, peat bogs, fens, marshes, mudflats, and artificial bodies of water, whether permanent, temporary, fresh, brackish, or saline, this clinical term glosses over the raw precarity and multispecies diversity of swamps. Swamps, peat bogs, fens, marshes and mangroves persist as liminal thresholds that are often reviled, periodically flooding or becoming saturated with groundwater, where human control falters amid decay and regeneration. By reclaiming 'swamp', the installation challenges landscape perception by embracing its opacity and perceived threat, thus unsettling anthropocentric mastery and aligning with the call of environmental humanities to attune to damaged thinking ecologies rather than managed resources. This linguistic choice tidalises discourse itself, pulling viewers into the humid, horizonless undercurrents of entanglement.

2 Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925)(Holland, Ohio: Dreamscape Media Publishers, 2021), <https://www.perlego.com/book/2787581>

Virginia Woolf's 'tidal poetics', central to *Swamp Body Tides*, pulsates through Mrs Dalloway as a metaphor for the body's involuntary fluxes — emotional, physiological and temporal— mirroring the rhythms of wetlands: ebb, flood and liminal pause. In one passage, Lady Bruton dozes as London 'murmurs' to her, their bodies linked by 'thin threads' stretching like rain-laden spider silk amid the sound of bells. Meanwhile, Richard Dalloway hesitates at Conduit's swirl, where the 'lapse in the tides of the body' meets contrary winds—newspapers kite, veils hang and traffic slackens in the petal-ruffling winds of Norfolk, confusing the waters. These tides evoke menstrual cycles, heartbeats and arousal, creating a hybrid of human interiority and environmental flows. Woolf's surges counter Big Ben's rigid ticks, affirming Dionysian vitality against Apollonian order—she queers embodiment beyond gendered norms into universal, fertile pulses. This dovetails with the installation's swamp(ed) body motif, where internal tides attune human flux to more-than-human rhythms—cyclical becomings of horizonless care.

3 Astrida Neimanis, *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017).

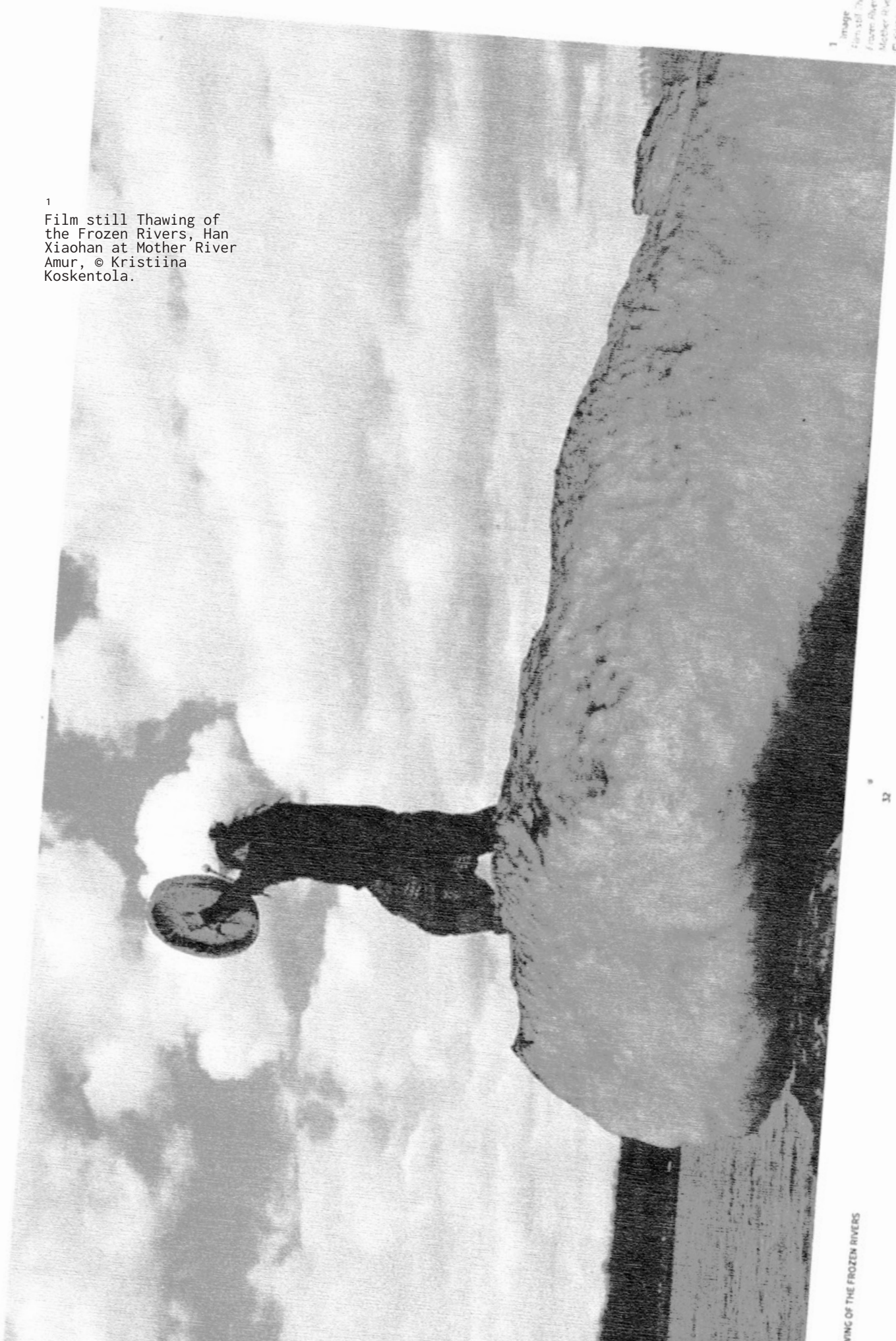
4 In *Swamp Body Tides*, Katarzyna Pastuszek revisits the stained white fabric from her 2022 performance, *Anatomie*, which was presented at the Grotowski Institute. She transforms it into a deliberate sympoietic bridge between urban queer cartographies and wetland entanglements. In *Anatomie*, the costume, marked by red evocations of blood, tissue and menstrual flow, serves as an active archive and landscape where choreography traces queer intimacies and affective geographies across skin and stage, turning the body into a multilayered map of shared encounters. Born from a walk through the streets of Gdańsk pushing a hospital bed to collect affectively labelled stones, this garment embodies relational histories: trajectories of memory, attachment and vulnerability, redrawn in motion. By suspending it on the mycelial trunk in *Swamp Body Tides*, Pastuszek transfers these 'lines of life' to blackwater environments, where the fabric's urban, anatomical and queer stains graft human intimacies onto fungal, mossy and humid temporalities.

“ The frequency of the shaman drum— or “the shaman’s flying machine,” as the Manchu used to call it —is the same as that of the earth. These electromagnetic fields and vibrations allow the shaman to unite with different dimensions of the universe, spiritual worlds and the gods. The cosmic vibration of the drum is the transmission of energy, that is passing through nervous systems and bodies and sharing a specific signal or a code to activate their own healing processes.. ”

—Spirit Songs



1
Film still Thawing of
the Frozen Rivers, Han
Xiaohan at Mother River
Amur, © Kristiina
Koskentola.



1 image
Film still Thawing of the
Frozen Rivers near Khabarovsk at
Mother River Amur
© Kristiina Koskentola

The collaborators are a growing number of practitioners and thinkers with stories, songs, and music. The project, at this moment, includes contributions by Mongolian- Evenki udgan (female shaman) Gaowa, Oroqen shaman Guan Jin Fang, Manchu composer and shaman Xiaohan Han, Finnish- Karelian lament singer Emmi Kuittinen, Finnish-Karelian artist Reeta Suvanto, Finnish tietäjä, healer and mystic Pekka Tuovinen †.

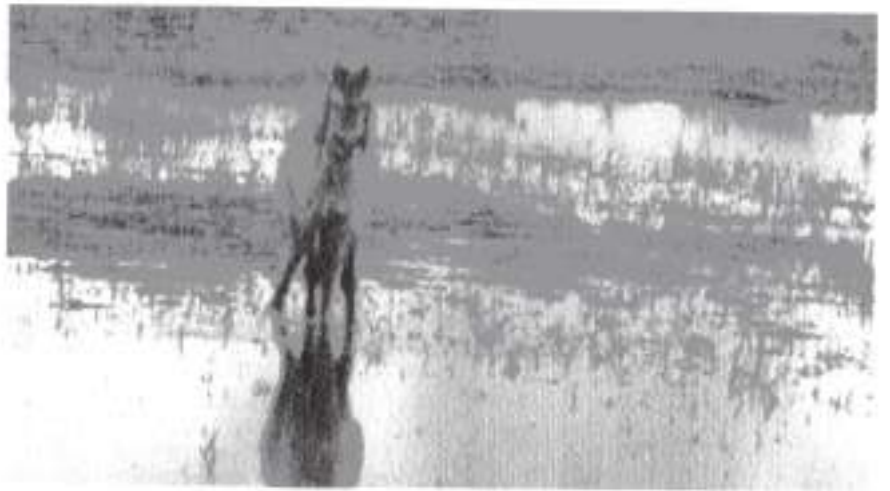
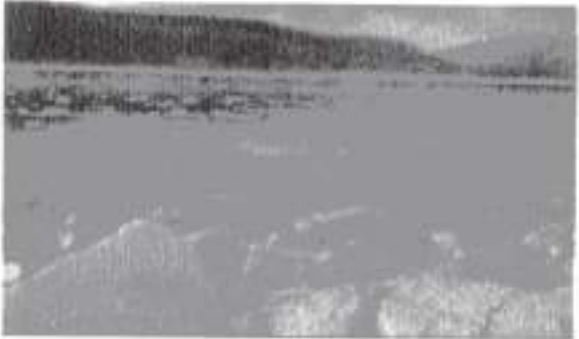
With the geophilosophical travelogue *The Earth is Thinking All Along...* we work with and through the boreal forests of the subarctic—the taiga—of the Northern Hemisphere, her trees, lakes, rivers, mountains, and ice. The magical taiga becomes a cosmological composition, otherworldly, and a geopolitical mediator and collaborator. *Thawing of the Frozen Rivers*¹ (2024-2025) and *Spirit Songs*² (2026-) are both multisensory moving image installations that contemplate across more-than-human and spiritual realms. While exploring the potential for decolonial geographies of relation, they aim to challenge modern geopolitics and epistemic and ontological divides.

Both of these projects conceived of a long-term research and collaboration between Han Xiaohan, a Manchu³ composer and musician and me. Han has been deeply committed to studying and practicing Manchu music, language and shamanism for more than two decades. Alongside with his contemporary work, Han is an heir of Ulabun music,⁴ and esteemed master of the shaman drum. I in turn have been working in China since 2007. After the demolition of my beloved studio and community in Beijing, Iowa at Caochangdi, in 2017, I headed farther north, in search of the knowledge and wisdom of the shamans⁵ Being Finnish, with a mother who was a Karelian from the Isthmus region,⁶ the stories, traditions, mythologies, and politics—her longing and sorrow—have played a strong part in my being deeply interested in Northern Eurasia as a whole and exploring the migration of cultural and spiritual practices of northern shamanisms, and their agency as an integral part of contemporary discourses.

With *The Earth is Thinking All Along...* and the projects we present we do not define ourselves as a philosopher-artist duo but rather work together as an entangled—and growing and developing—organism.

For over six years, Han and I collaborated in various projects and engaged with numerous shamans across Manchuria, Northeast China and the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region, in northern China. We have worked at regions of profound ancestral and geopolitical significance; territories that are divided between present-day nation-states: at the Finnish-Russian border area close to my ancestral home in Karelia (Kirvu/Svobodnoe)⁷ and the most northern part of Han Xiaohan's ancestral Manchuria (Northeast China), Daxing'anling, alongside the Amur River, which acts also as a natural border, where Manchuria was divided between Chinese Northeast and Russian Far East. These encounters revealed a profound 'northern connection', rooted in shared ancestral histories of shamanic tradition,⁸ our interconnected Ural-Altaic⁹ mother tongues, and how we both grow up on subarctic land covered with deep snow and forests and are shaped by it in so different yet very similar ways. But simultaneously we also share borders with Russia, and the colonial legacies of communism, imperialism, war and (in Finland) Christianity and all of their legacies—all of which also contributed to the systematic suppression of shamanic belief systems and practices.

With *Spirit Songs* we aimed to push the collaborativity and polyvocality further and entangle even more practices together in one work. However, rather than solely focusing on reimagining historical or ethnographic versions of cultural and shamanic practices, we look into what these worldviews and wisdoms, might mean in the 21st century; how their deep interconnections with Mother Earth and the cosmos might relate or contribute to contemporary thinking.



2-5

Film still Thawing of
the Frozen Rivers, Han
Xiaohan at Mother River
Amur, © Kristiina
Koskentola.

Shamanisms, and myriad kinds of earth knowledge and healing practices, are found in all cultures all over the world. It is important to acknowledge that shamanisms are not religions, but holistic regional belief systems; cultural, ecological, ethical, and social phenomena that each have their particular cosmologies and practices. Instead of solely addressing the human world and geopolitics, with these projects, we emphasise the limits and failures of human-centred knowledge and agency. This challenges the human-centric framing of time and space, in which relationships to past and future generations, to the ancestors and the earth, is lost. We aim to challenge the positions of power in various forms of human politics, alongside modern concepts of science, by exploring them in relation to equally valid shamanic practices and gods, the cosmos, and universe. As the boreal forests of the taiga also stories run across these territories and become connections that dissolve barriers and catalyse dialogic relationships. Like the lakes and rivers of the taiga possess magical properties and gateways to other worlds or portals to the depths underworld so do these stories. They allow becoming fluid of rigid and isolating systems— a shift away from entrenched geopolitical divides, rooted in state-centred power dynamics.

Like the magical taiga the stories thus house—and uphold—multiple realities.

Spirit Songs is a polyphonic, generative installation and a space, or environment, for contemplation and meditation. It consists of myriad Earth stories from the North; from Northeastern China- Manchuria and Inner Mongolia- across the Siberian taiga to Karelia, Finland. With songs, music and stories by shamans, healers and storytellers- performed in multiple languages such as Oroqen, Manchu, Karelian, Mongolian (Bargut dialect)- from along this route we created an audiovisual and spatial installation reflecting the spiritual and natural worlds as metaphysical geographies and landscapes as cosmological compositions. Many of these indigenous languages are minoritised and some of them having been on the brink of extinction are now thankfully being revived. The stories and songs emphasize nonhuman subjectivity and interconnectedness of all beings. (Re)generative and resurrection stories are found in all belief systems such as, for example, in Kalevala¹⁰ Lemminkäinen äiti (Mother of Lemminkäinen) who rejoins his sons body, that has been cut to pieces and thrown into the river of death, back together and resurrects it with help the of Bees, the Sun and her own shamanic powers. Or its parallel, an Oroqen story of a boy whose bones, defleshed by the fish after drowning in a forest lake are found by his grandfather with the guidance by the dead boy's spirit who kept singing. A Wolf's tongue becomes a power healing tool, the Bear's genitals form the male gender, lament song of mother's grief talk about the polluted earth in which her children are forced live in.

Furthermore, we can think about how a shaman, as part of the initiation rites, in a dream, disassemble their own body and put it back together again; in Spirit Songs these stories and songs are understood as metaphorical and ethical reflections that might generate of planetary healing. They talk about how the world is being ripped apart by human colonialisms and capitalist exploitation of nature and how embodied and embedded worldviews and practices could propose healing and regeneration.

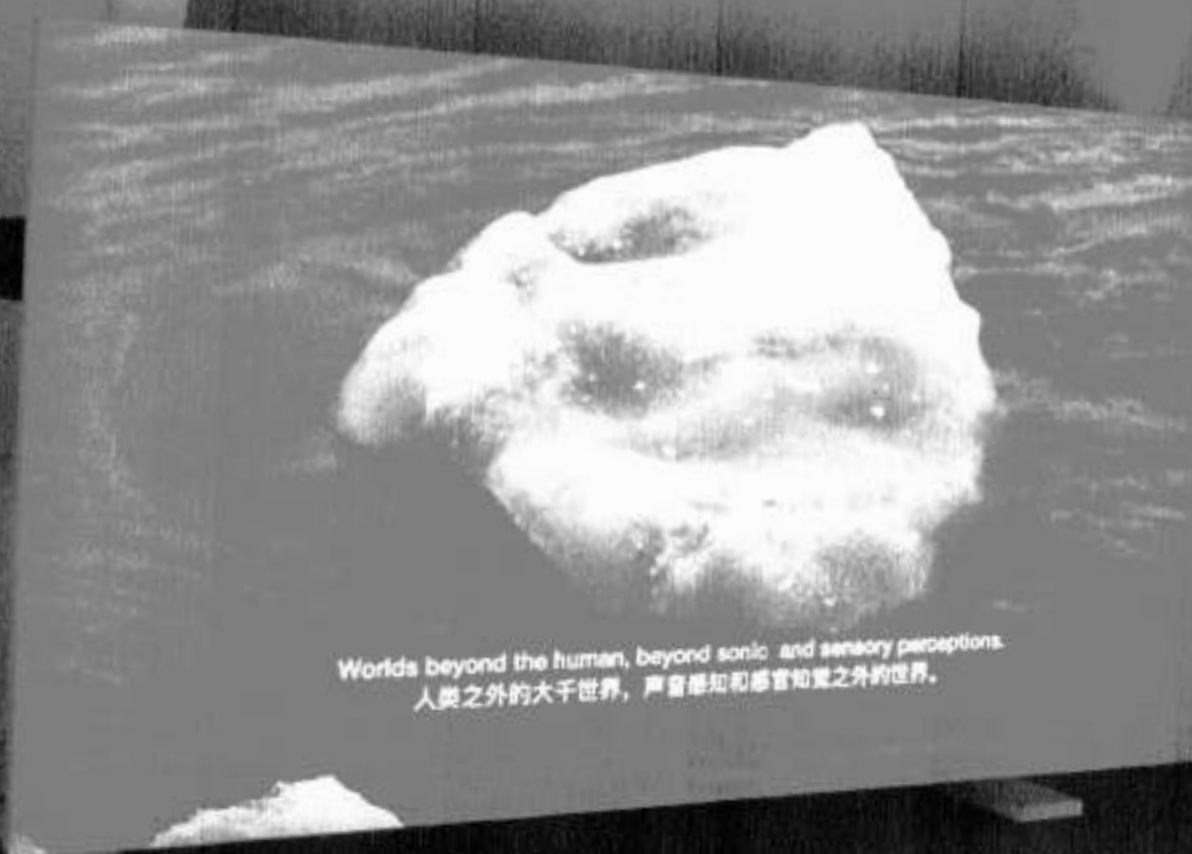
It is here, in the entangling of ecology, healing practices, and ethics that ancient knowledges and contemporary thinking meet.

The Earth's frequency, quantum theory, and its relation to the vibrations and transformative powers of the shaman drum, lament songs and stories, in our project, the music, chanting, moaning and reciting—sharing these interconnections—also forms a vibrating electromagnetic wave that stretches across these territories, from Manchuria and Inner Mongolia to Siberia and Karelia. These perspectives correspond with vital materialism, the idea that matter has inherent vitality and agency, in the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze¹¹ or Baruch Spinoza. We can think also alongside with philosopher and political theorist Jane Bennett's vibrations of matter, and how vital matter cuts across all bodies, human and not.¹² We can also think with feminist theorist and physicist Karen Barad, who's quantum theory of intra-active agential realism,¹³ or Bruno Latour's actants and their shifting human-non-human relationship.¹⁴

There are many parallels between contemporary posthuman and new materialist thinking, and shamanic and Buddhist philosophies that are emphasising the interconnectedness and interdependence of all elements of existence.¹⁵ In brief, existing means coexisting.

What constitutes science is among the most political questions in the world, as it involves what we consider to be proper knowledge, and who has the right to make such a claim. Writer Amitav Ghosh¹⁶ suggests that the development of Cartesian dualism,¹⁷ the division mind (thinking and non-extend thing) and the body (non-thinking thing), was the root of the transition from animistic to more human-centric worldviews, in which the natural world and its beings are made mute, deaf, and insentient. In this world, man was the only one capable of communication and creating meaning. Looking into this with a contemporary and ecofeminist lens, this modernist science is patriarchal, racialised, and reductionist, generating exploitative forms of knowledge that were necessary for industrialisation and the continual support of capitalisms. Sadly, it has become the only 'true knowledge', as opposed to knowledges fostering pluriverse, regeneration, and cultivation that could be considered as vital.

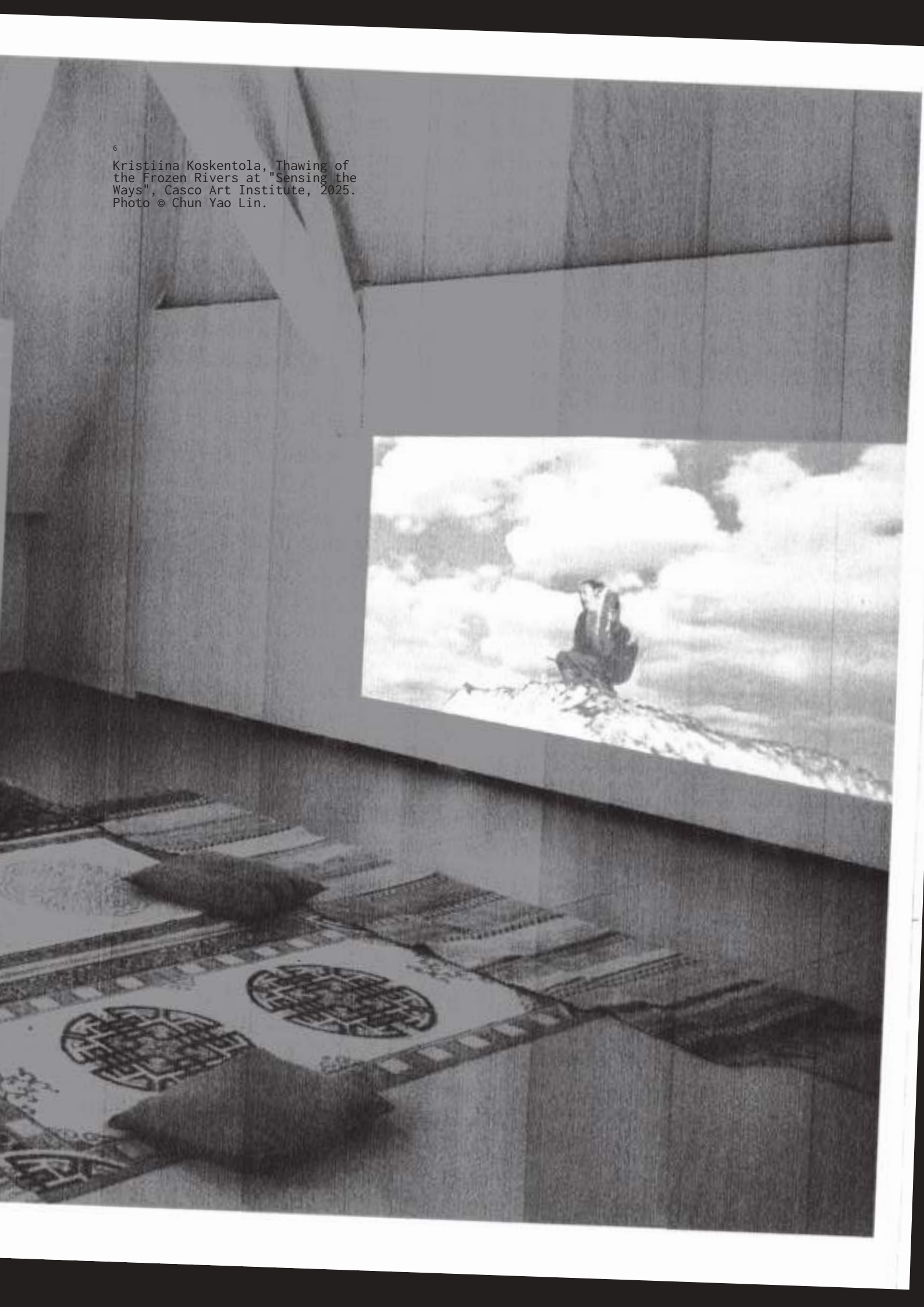
Science is not a new concept that started with Galileo, Copernicus, Francis Bacon, or Isaac Newton. Science goes beyond and is thousands of years old. This necessitates us to challenge the truth-making of empirical and exploitative sciences, to dig into space-time before and beyond the violent silencing of more-than-human agents of knowledge. It demands that we acknowledge and include indigenous ways of being in and of the world, with their multiple realities, beyond the institutionalisation of gods- who have been situated outside of the natural world, the earth, the universe, and cosmos.



Worlds beyond the human, beyond sonic and sensory perceptions.
人类之外的大千世界，声音感知和感官知觉之外的世界。

Image

Kristiina Koskentola, Thawing of the Frozen Rivers at "Sensing the Ways", Casco Art Institute, 2025. Photo © Chun Yao Lin.



In indigenous ontologies, there are multiple, parallel realities and the relationship that one has with the object is more important than the object itself. In this sense 'reality' is a relationship or multiple relationships:

'...there is no one definite reality, but rather different sets of relationships that make up an Indigenous ontology. Therefore, reality is not an object but a process of relationships, and an Indigenous ontology is the equivalent of an Indigenous epistemology.'¹⁸

Here we again return to quantum theories and ethics, but also on the terrain of the extra-natural, the not-yet known, re-enfleshing and untangling the body from the violence of science, politics, and economics.

'There are magical phenomena, but they are all part of this world.'¹⁹

Shaman Selehada, with whom Han and I spoke in Manchuria in 2023, highlights the shamanic philosophy that everything in the universe is energy. Multiple forms and agencies of knowledge vibrate and course through bodies and beings, organic, inorganic, thoughts, actions and imaginations, making the worlds. Shamanic philosophy is deeply embedded in oral histories and songs. Singing and music are vehicles of magical, mystical, ceremonial, ethical and communicative mediation. They express the wisdom, knowledge, and tones that the shamans transmit through their bodies and music. For shamans, storytellers and healers the rituals and practices are polyvocal, and generative, deeply rooted forms of knowledge production that affirm cosmic and worldly alliances, and solidarity with interdependent worlds.

The frequency of the shaman drum—or 'the shaman's flying machine', as the Manchu used to call it—is the same as that of the earth. These electromagnetic fields and vibrations allow the shaman to unite with different dimensions of the universe, spiritual worlds and the gods. The cosmic vibration of the drum is the transmission of energy, that is passing through nervous systems and bodies and sharing a specific signal or a code to activate their own healing processes.

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'Gods talking through bodies.'

Spirit Songs transforms the exhibition space into a meditative environment where animistic cosmologies, empathetic imaginations, and the voices of more-than-human entities converge, calling for planetary healing and fostering dialogic relationships across species and ecosystems. The installation and the stories challenge anthropocentric worldviews and critically examines geopolitics and extractivism through the lens of more-than-human agency, shamanic practices, and can be related to posthuman philosophies. From the perspective of posthumanism, the encounter between the human and the non-human should take place with respect for the other's nature, capabilities and knowledge while acknowledging the barrier to comprehending the other's world of experience and striving for an unreserved attitude toward otherness.

Spirit Songs aims to cultivate transdisciplinary relationships, building new alliances across artistic, spiritual and ecological fields, old and new ways of thinking, plural knowledge; alternative ways of knowing and being in and of the world.

In late summer 2024, we were recording Mongolian böö (male shaman) Erdunbaolige's songs at Han Xiaohan's studio in Mukden, Shenyang, in China. Erdunbaolige was singing and drumming in the isolated recording space. The camera filming the session was accidentally left on after we had finished. Magical and mystical shimmering spots of light appeared on the monitor, dancing around the empty space. They were the spirits that were summoned and still activated by the power of this sacred music.

Honoured and humbled, we watched them dance.

1 *Thawing of the Frozen Rivers* took part in the first exhibition of *The Earth is Thinking All Along...* in Skopje Museum of Contemporary Art, North Macedonia, November 2025–April 2026. As both works (*Thawing and Spirit Songs*) originate from the same research this text is building on the publication *The Large Glass 39/40* presented in the first exhibition.

2 *Spirit Songs* is part of the second cycle of THE EARTH IS THINKING ALL ALONG..., shown in RADIUS CCA.

3 The Manchu, Oroqen and Ewenk, among other ethnicities, are a Tungusic East Asian ethnic groups native to Northeastern China, Eastern parts of Mongolia, and Russia in Northeast Asia. Manchuria refers to a region encompassing the entirety of present-day north east China, and historic regions of the Russia's 'Far East'.

4 Han Xiaohan is a holder of the Intangible Cultural Heritage title. Ulabun is Manchu performative folk art. It includes music and storytelling traditions, often involving songs and recitals that centre around folk heroes, shamanic beliefs and practices, and histories of the Manchu.

5 The word shaman is an anthropological construct that comes from the Tungusic word *šaman*, common across the eponymous language family spoken in Eastern Siberia and Manchuria. It was first used in European languages—and generalized to apply for all related practices—when the 'Devil's Priest', the first known image of a Siberian shaman, appeared in the compendium *Noorden Oost Tartarye* (c. 1692), published by the Dutch statesman, mayor of Amsterdam, and merchant Nicolaes Witsen. For reference, a Manchu shaman is called *šaman* whereas, for example, Mongolian male shamans are called *böö* and female shamans *udgan*. In reference to the Nordic region, Sámi shamans are called *noaidi*. Hence, I deliberately use the plural 'shamanisms' to describe all of these practices.

6 Karelians are a Baltic Finnic ethnic group who are indigenous to the historical region of Karelia, which is today divided between eastern Finland and western Russia. Following World War II, over 400,000 Finnish Karelians were forced to leave from areas ceded to the Soviet Union and resettled within Finland's new borders. This displacement, covering almost the entire population of the lost regions, forced profound integration, with Karelians settling across Finland and adopting new lives while many retained a deep cultural connection to their lost homeland.

7 *Svobodnoe* means 'Free Village' in Russian, referring to common Russian expression for occupation of territories that is understood as liberation.

8 In Finland and Karelia Christianity began to spread relatively late, in the 12th century, first through Catholic influence by Swedish colonists and from the East via the Russian Orthodox tradition. This led to the profound devastation of shamanic beliefs and practices through forms of religious cleansing. In Manchuria and Mongolia, while these practices were influenced to varying degrees by Tibetan Buddhism, the devastation and suppression came much later, in the early 20th century, with the communist eradication of all religions in Russia and China. As a result, Finnish traditions were almost entirely wiped out, while traditions across Siberia, Mongolia, and Manchuria managed to retain some living, though hidden, practices. Today, these traditions are experiencing significant revival, but unfortunately, they remain marginalized and controlled by totalitarian governments—except in Mongolia, Tuva, and, to a more limited degree, other sovereign countries in Central and East Asia. In Finland and Karelia, the powerful shaman institution was followed by *tietäjät* (this Finnish word however means, just as the Tungus word *šaman*, freely translated the one who knows or possesses great knowledge) institution, which effortlessly mixed old belief and healing systems with Christian concepts.

9 Altaic languages include the Tungusic languages such as Manchu, Mongolic, and Turkic. Uralic languages include Finnish, Estonian, Hungarian, Sámi, Karelian, Komi, Mansi, Khanty, and Western Siberian Samoyedic languages, amongst others. Ural-Altai languages come together in myriad ways, for example, agglutinations (concepts expressed in complex words consisting of many word parts), vowel harmony, and lack of grammatical gender identity. Ural-Altai is a defined language area, formed through the historical interaction and convergence of four core language families (Uralic, Turkic, Mongolic, and Tungusic), and their more marginal influence on Korean and Japanese languages.

10 The *Kalevala* is the national epic of the Finns and Karelians. It is the most translated work of Finnish literature and part of world literature. The *Kalevala* is also a multi-layered combination of different oral-literary materials, worlds and meanings, which is why it escapes a single definition and interpretation. The first edition of the *Kalevala* was published in 1835. Elias Lönnrot compiled it from folk poetry recorded into notebooks in 1828–1834, during his several lengthy collection trips among poetry singers especially in the White Sea Karelian villages. At the time of publication of the *Kalevala*, Finland was an autonomous grand duchy of Russia, and before that, until 1809, part of the Swedish Kingdom. Especially for Finnish intellectuals, the *Kalevala* became a symbol of the Finnish past, Finnishness, the Finnish language and Finnish culture, a foundation on which they started to build the fragile Finnish identity. It also aroused much interest abroad, and brought a small, unknown people to the awareness of other Europeans. <https://kalevalaseura.fi/en/the-kalevala/>

11 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2004); Benedict Spinoza, *Ethics* (Wordsworth Editions, 2001).

12 Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010).

13 Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007).

14 Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social – An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford University Press, 2005).

15 One could look into, for example, the concept of 'interbeing' by Thich Nat Hanh.

16 Amitav Ghosh in Rick Dolphijn 'Cartesianism and its More-Than-Human Undercurrents', in *Enfleshed-Ecologies of Entities and Beings*, eds. Kristiina Koskentola and Marjolein van der Loo (Onomatopoe, 2023), 145-147.

17 Proposed by René Descartes (1595-1650).

18 Shawn Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (Black Point, NS: Fernwood Publishing, 2008), 73

19 Discussion with shaman Selehada, Manchuria 2023.

“ This is what we should call the creative act: a practice of ongoing reflection in which surfaces think, refract and recompose what passes across them, selecting and inflecting memories and ideas, forcing us to think with the Matters of Pearl, as they crack themselves across the Rhine river, across capitalism, across swampy Netherlands, across extractivism, across All-That-Is-Beautiful.

—Mother of Pearl



Undercurrents

What is being bred here? What are the undercurrents, invisible, subjected, that present the here and now? In Xandra van der Eijk's installation *Mother of Pearl* we see shells of mussels, repaired, after they were found at the banks of the Amstel river. Their surfaces bruised, but shiny and beautiful of course. An inside, that was supposed to be closed off, a world of mirrors, that was always radiant and reflective of all the light that was never supposed to enter. The animal itself (the mussel) produces the nacre (the mother of pearl) to record and respond to intrusions—by layering over irritants, sealing them off, again and again. And thus the irritants don't go away, they grow. On the shell's inside surface, the smallest bulges reveal the embedded grain of sand, which, as time passes, becomes at once *more hidden* and *more visible*, slowly turning into the pearls so beloved by humans since antiquity. The pearl's iridescent surface is remarkable because its colour arises from an exquisitely regular, self-assembled layering of mineral platelets and organic films, tuned to the scale of visible wavelengths, rather than from any pigment. This shimmer, that goes hand in hand with its smoothness, and its near to perfect roundness, made these pearls intensely desired by the wealthy, and, in combination with their vulnerability and rarity, they have long been tied to the global circuits of luxury and capital. This was never a local thing. Alongside gold and silver, an elite fascination with pearls helped connect Greece and Rome with the Persian empires, Imperial China and Mughal India.

At Xandra van der Eijk's installation, the mussels—cast in glass fibre, shimmering and dancing in the air—surround us, gaze back at us and reflect our images into their surfaces. What was hidden is exposed and, in doing so, mirrors us. At several levels there is a play of seduction, of secret desires stepping out of the darkness and flickering for attention. Even the colours seem to reveal themselves only occasionally, momentarily, and then hide again. In the installation, the shimmering surfaces are accompanied by melodies and harmonies that move with these lights and colours. The sounds do not, of course, 'understand' the light, and vice versa, so we cannot say that one 'responds' to the other, yet, both their movements, *transcode* the bruised surfaces that lay bare the mother of pearl. The mussel's biochemical system (irritation, immune response) *codes* the sand grain. But the nacreous layers and pearly iridescence transcode this intrusion by covering and revealing how the shape of the grain persists as a resonance in this sheen. That same shape—the slowly enlarging wound—returns in the industrial soundscape, where it is surrounded by other wounds (similar, accompanying), as all riverbed disturbances are folded into rhythm and harmony. This is what the transcoding is about. Light and sound 'make sense' together when they briefly synchronise and flow apart again, and it is in these moments that the disturbance at the heart of the work becomes most palpable. What is this disturbance about? What makes these matters resonate together in the event that is the artwork?

The Netherlands

The sounds draw on recordings from the industrialised beds of the Rhine, the main transboundary river that supplies around two-thirds of the Netherlands' fresh surface water, including that of the wider Rhine—delta system to which the Amstel belongs. As these activities pollute and reshape the river, they generate melodic and harmonic disturbances that may begin as slight misfits but ultimately form complex, uncanny resonances with the exposed mother of pearl, enacting the mistreatment of the Rhine—its beds, its waters, its more-than-human lives—as something at once more hidden and more visible. This sonic surface can initially offer a sense of smoothness, like the broad river itself slowly crossing the lowlands, shimmering with reflections. Yet its uneasy sounds veil what many already sense has been displaced: technological intrusions that are not rooted in the landscape but imposed through heavy machinery, agricultural monocultures (possessed by the Monsanto seed banks), and globally standardised procedures.

Let us be clear about this: the so-called natural landscapes that flank Dutch waterways are, by all means, artificial, and intensively cultivated. And they have been so for many centuries already. At the same time, the Netherlands, is one of the world's leading exporters of agricultural products by value. And it takes pride in that. Over centuries it has refined highly extractive forms of agriculture, by radically altering the earth, the crops themselves, the ecosystems in which the agriculture took place, all in order to maximise profit. The first radical experiments with this, took place in colonial settings such as Indonesia, but these 'lessons' were quickly learned by the agricultural industry that managed the land within its own tight borders, where land and near-shore sea were soon so over-organised that every square metre is made to yield. For anyone driving through the country today, the degree of utilisation should be immediately visible: fields typically run right up to ditches, roads and village edges; buffer strips or uncultivated 'in-between' zones are the highly exception, in contrast to neighbouring countries abroad mandatory rewilding margins are far more generous.

Most forests are relatively recent plantings, the result of a long history in which older woodland was felled for fuel and construction; already in 1576, with the so-called Act of Redemption that protected the Haagse Bos (the forest of The Hague) from further logging, we see the first legal attempt to halt this process, and of course today the few designated 'nature' areas remain closely planned and managed. But it's not a lot. Today, the estimated 'naturalness' (MSA) in the Netherlands is around 15%, compared with less than half that level for Europe on average and approximately 70% worldwide.

The waterways themselves are canalised, diked and straightened, designed primarily to move water and goods efficiently from A to B and to keep farmland dry. The entire territory is organised such as to benefit us humans, or narrower, our human-centred economy, rather than to follow the needs of other-than-human lives or the rhythms of nature. Springs and spontaneous wetlands persist, but they are rare, constrained and often muted by our hydraulic regime. In this sense, the celebrated success of Dutch agribusiness in global markets is predicated on a landscape that has been systematically attuned to extraction, a geo-engineering that continues to reconfigure ecologies far beyond the country's territorial borders. This condition is by no means restricted to the areas situated below sea level. Contemporary infrastructural and technological interventions are now so sophisticated that they largely obscure the ongoing disturbances they induce: most human inhabitants do not register that they inhabit a perpetually drained swamp, nor that the continuous replenishment of beaches, dunes and dikes is required to prevent the waters from once again asserting dominance over these territories. Also, without the operation of our system of pumping stations that continuously move excess water out of low-lying polders and canals to higher canals, rivers, or the sea, some of the polders would fill up within a few days to weeks, especially after rainfall and high water levels in the rivers. At the same time, inhabitants fail to apprehend that such ongoing regimes of extraction and organisation cumulatively magnify the scope and intensity of environmental damage.

Reveiling The Surface

Our mussels in the Amstel river, as they filter the river with such speed, taking in what feeds them and what harms them alike, build their outside and inside surfaces out of all these histories, layer by layer. Of course they don't build these surfaces as a chronology that would neatly stack 'before' and 'after'. The smooth and shiny *matters* by means of a thin 'present' in which different times brush against one another: everything that has happened, and everything that is about to happen—the possibilities as they announce themselves—meets on this plane of now. *The Mother of Pearl* expresses itself through the darkness and the light on the one hand and through the silence and the noise on the other. All four happen together, continuously giving form to sense. Thus, *Mother of Pearl* doesn't *document* the mistreatment of a riverine ecology: it *affects* us in the act of *revealing* the surface that may contain the landscapes, the pollutions, the capitalisms, the technologies, that have been flowing through the Rhine river. This is what makes the surface, the surface-in-change, essential to 'what-art-can-do', as it is the surface that brings together what matters and that continues to involve us in all that traverses the present. Surfacing the darkness and the light, the silence and the sound, the artwork realises itself.

With darkness and light, with silence and sound, the piece realises itself as a plane on which these forces can appear, interfere, and transform. When *Mother of Pearl* opens, the surface that was secret—so smooth, bearing no colour—begins to disclose itself as a creative act where very beautiful, and also deeply troubling histories and narratives become perceptible in the most delicate variations of shimmer. For Freud, the superego is noisy and bright, flooding the psyche with judgements and commands, while the id remains dark and largely silent, driving from the depths. Yet it is in their mingling that both find their highest pitch. The beauty of the pearl—so bright and polished, seemingly in perfect harmony—of course holds the intrusive sand grain at its dark core, the pollution, the disturbances. And it is not only the single pearl that matters: the entire mother of pearl, with its softly uneven surface, its tiny irregularities and shifts of sheen, reveals the hard work of this encounter. The shell's glittering calm is a labour of abrasion and response, a luminous record of the conflicts it accommodates.

Reflection

The surface reflects in that it folds back light onto our irises, folds movements of noise into our eardrums, bends every passing vibration toward a body that receives it. Yet these impressions never arrive alone. They are accompanied by memories and ideas—virtual pasts and possible futures that are neither in the shell nor in me, but that actualise themselves on the surface as it is struck by the present.

Art is not the consequence of a prior act of creation; it is itself a creative act, cutting through the narratives presented to us and setting new ones in motion by composing ever new circuits between perception and memory. Circuits that spiral and oscillate between everything that finds itself on the surface, but that just as easily cuts through Everything Else, Elsewhere.

This is what we should call the creative act: a practice of ongoing reflection in which surfaces think, refract, and recompose what passes across them, selecting and inflecting memories and ideas, forcing us to think with the Matters of Pearl, as they crack themselves across the Rhine river, across capitalism, across swampy Netherlands, across extractivism, across All-That-Is-Beautiful.

Like a crystal within a crystal within a crystal, ad infinitum.

Mothering a new, uncanny, history of pearly-presence.

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This text was written by Rick Dolphijn in collaboration with Xandra van der Eijk and produced on the occasion of the exhibition THE EARTH IS THINKING ALL ALONG... (13.06—27.09.2026) at RADIUS. Graphic design by Minhu Jun and Özgür Deniz Koldaş.

“According to Deleuze, artists are those who contribute new variations or combinations of affects to the world; they are the creators of imaginative deterritorialization. Thus, the deterritorialization of landscapes through these acts gives artists the possibility to combine their interests into an ethical-political demand. It highlights the role of rhythms of becoming, even in a symbolic and temporal way, offering opportunities to challenge the meanings of landscapes.”

—The Liquid Landscapes
of Our Situation

The Liquid Landscape—
In Situatedness
Tihomir Topuzovski



When I refer to landscape, I have in mind how the formation of a particular area depends on the local conditions, or how physiographic, geomorphological, and atmospheric features are formed in interactions with humans, or as consequences of human activities. In other words, I acknowledge that there is a long history of anthropogenic influences shaping the landscape. The landscape serves as a point of intersection between human and non-human worlds. It not only mediates their interaction but also dramatises questions of scale and significance, always in relation to specific geographic, social, and political contexts—or, put differently, ‘the spectres of geopolitical inequalities and disproportionate causes and effects’,¹ as the ‘consequences of production decisions made by the dominant states and corporations in the planetary system’,² but also the different circumstances in countries which subsist on the edge of various economic and social forms of deprivation, including energy poverty.

Take, for instance, the case of Southeastern Europe—more specifically, the Republic of North Macedonia, a country positioned on the geopolitical and economic peripheries of international relations. As one of the Western Balkan states, it has emerged as a pollution hotspot within Europe, largely due to outdated coal plants, heavily polluting vehicles, and inefficient industrial practices. This landscape thus exemplifies how histories of marginalisation, combined with present-day economic limitations, shape environments that are both distinctly local and deeply enmeshed in planetary patterns of inequality. Here, landscapes also reflect the conditions of communities grappling with economic instability, social deprivation, and chronic energy poverty, where access to essential resources is uneven and precarious.

In this sense, landscapes become a way of understanding not only ecological processes but also the social, political, and economic inequalities that shape the lived realities of different populations across the globe. Liquid landscapes are particularly important because they are constantly in flux and quickly bear and reveal degrees of contamination. This makes them highly sensitive indicators of environmental change, reflecting the impact of both natural processes and human activity. For instance, shifts in color, clarity, or chemical composition can signal pollution events, imbalances, or broader ecological disruptions.

The Liquid Case

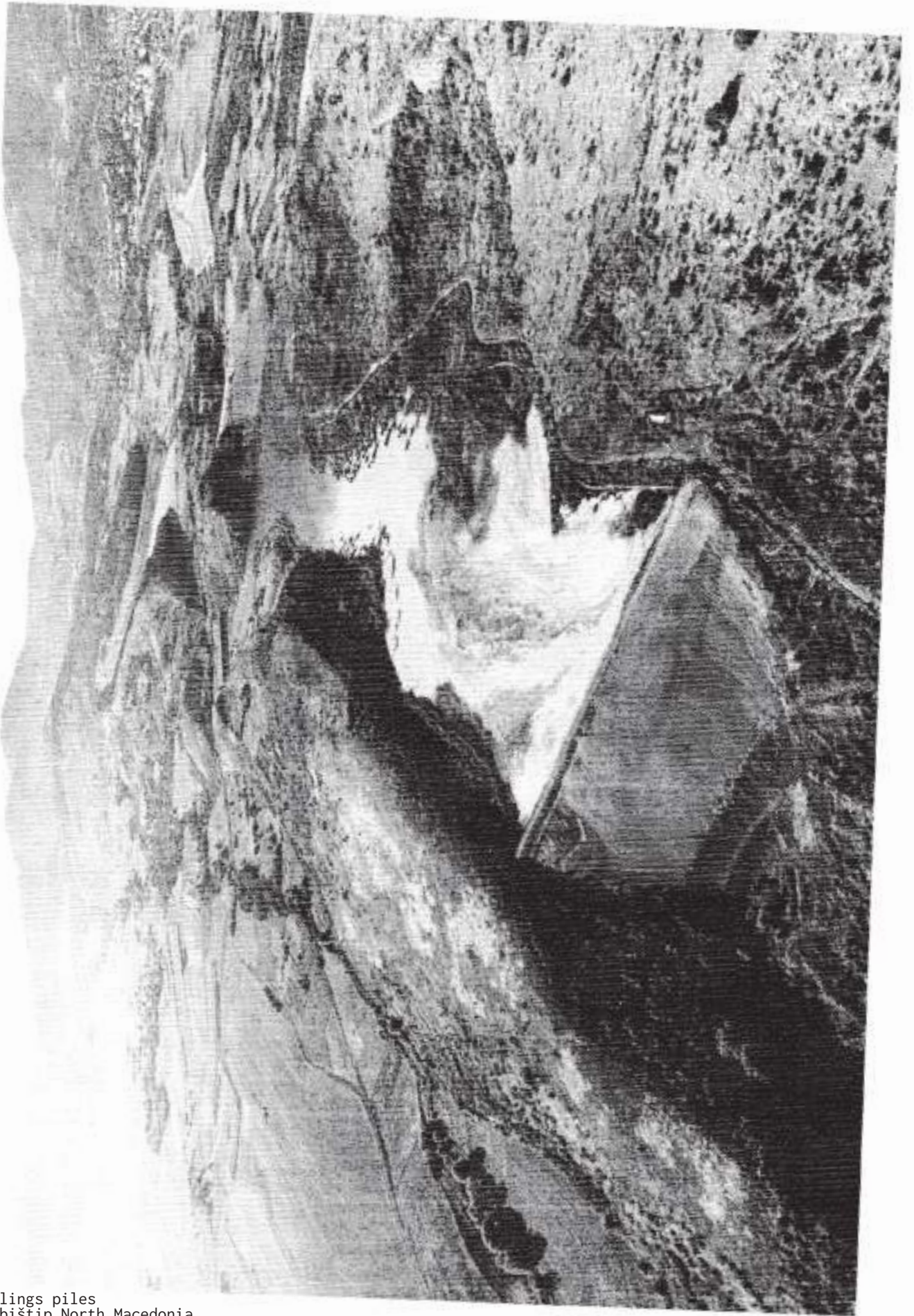
In this text, I examine the Zletovska River, the Black River, and Prespa Lake as examples of liquid landscapes, highlighting broader patterns of spatial fluidity that both reflect and respond to shifting environmental conditions.

First photograph (Image 1) depicts the Zletovska River, located in the eastern part of North Macedonia where, as a result of mining activities that started in 1947, large quantities of flotation waste (tailings) were deposited in the old, inactive piles nearby. As they are located along and nearby rivers, these tailings piles are now a source of drainage water, which is one of the main reasons for the high concentration of heavy metals in their runoff. The results of the investigations have shown that waters and soils in the wider surroundings of the small town named Probištip are polluted with heavy metals.

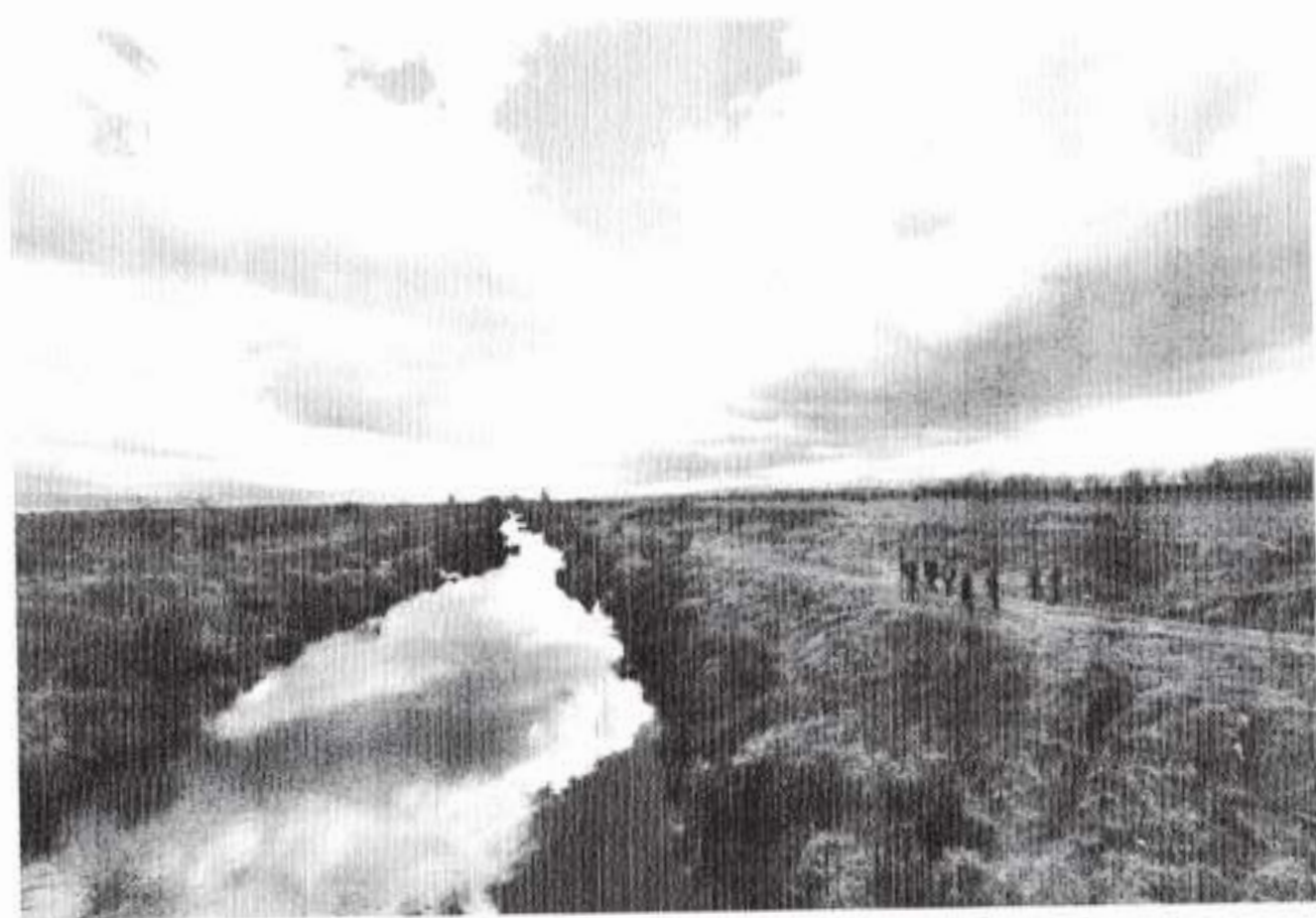
Further, Црна Река, or Black River (Image 2), serves as the final spectacle for wastewater carried by several rivers. These waterways transport a heavy load of pollution, drawing in both untreated sewage and industrial effluents from the near regions. As the river continues its course, its burden only grows heavier. Illegal landfills along the banks contribute further contamination, leading to the destruction of nearly all flora and fauna within and around the river.

Finally, the Prespa Lake (Image 3), whose water levels have been seriously declining over the last 30 years. The reasons behind these changes are different and demonstrated in various forms, such as increased air temperatures, decreased relative humidity, amplified evaporation, augmented cloudage, and reduced levels of sunlight, all of which are not only the result of the effects of climate change, but also of the use of water for irrigation systems by the three countries through which it runs—and the influx of polluting substances.

These three examples illustrate some of the liquid surfaces of North Macedonia, and how they mirror the environmental conditions. Each liquid surface carries its own stories of change. Their meaning can only be understood when viewed in context, producing layered stories of degradation. This implies how crucial visual approaches and methodologies are in understanding environmental contexts, as they provide a lens through which environmental processes can be interpreted.

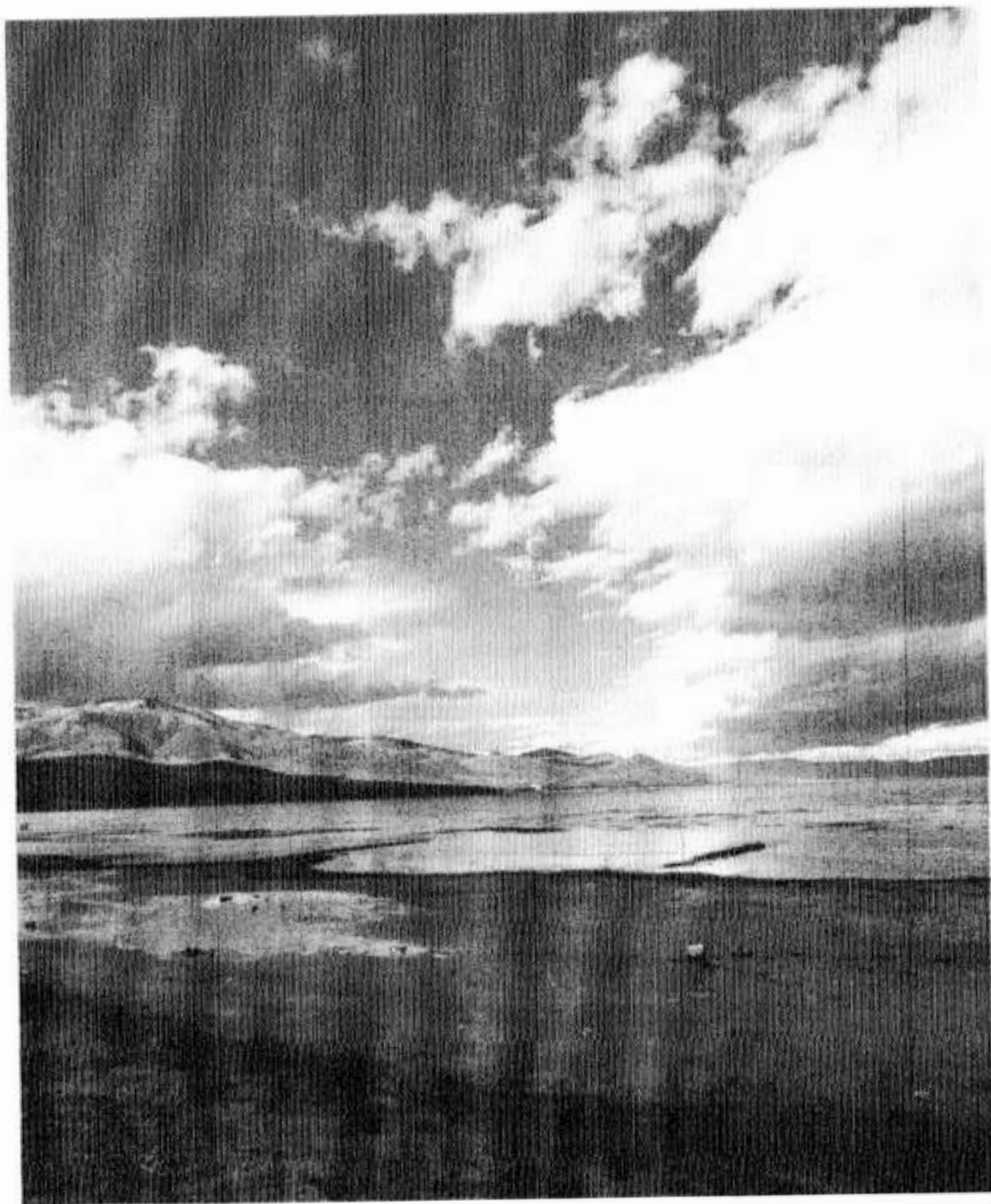


1
Tailings piles
Probištip, North Macedonia
2023 Photo © Denis Saraginovski



2
Black River
North Macedonia.
2022 Photo © Darko
Andonovski

3
Prespa Lake
North Macedonia
2022 Photo © Darko
Andonovski



The Artistic Perspective

This landscape itself constitutes a terrain on which artists interact through, for example, paintings, photographs, sculptures, and installations. Contemporary artistic practices also frame these themes through different modes of the visual: data visualisation, imagery, climate modelling, and other techniques of representation.

The questions that arise here are whether artistic approaches, or the act of visualisation, aestheticise the anthropogenic landscapes and build a critical relationship and, correlatively, what are the politics of their presentation.

The main focus here are the ways in which artistic practices can go beyond simple representation and can contribute to dealing with crises, that is, how these acts can become models for generating environmental engagements, while also prompting other important agendas. Indeed, it is important for those who work in visual-cultural production to offer understandings of landscape transformation's visuality and aesthetic modalities, pointing towards reimagining various ecological topographies. This implies modifying the conventional approaches, under which acting through art ought to connect with geological changes, in order to respond ethically to our current epoch.

What is more important at present is that in numerous artistic approaches there is a risk of images being transformed, through a barrage of already desensitised images, into banal familiarity, or abstractions detached from the reality of the given context. This can be understood with what is called 'the aesthetics of the Anthropocene', which thereby leads to the anaesthetisation of the perception of modern industrial pollution.'³

This fetishisation is illustrated historically through Walter Benjamin's analysis of *Art and the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1935), when, in reference to 20th century Europe, he points out that fascist aesthetics in 'its self-alienation has reached the point where it can experience its own annihilation as a supreme aesthetic pleasure.'⁴

This aestheticisation can fulfil all of the criteria for a 'sophisticated' representation of the landscape, according to landscape paintings throughout history: 'it comes to seem natural, right, then beautiful—and thereby anaesthetized the perception of modern industrial pollution.'⁵

That is what is happening when we admire such images, which are abstract and detached from any context and lived experience. Following Timothy Morton, 'art fails when it tries to mimic the transmission of sheer quantities of data; it's not artful enough.'⁶

It is the direct illustration that anaesthetises the spectator, into something like a subjectivity docility. The aesthetic experience isn't about data, but dataness, the qualities we experience when we apprehend something.⁷

As such, art can provide an additional perceptual horizon for understanding what the object is, or the situation being portrayed. In that sense, art is important to understanding our relationship to the environment, to grasping a sense of our existence in a complex relation to a non-human and more-than-human worlds.

This, however, implies defining the work of art as an ethical and socially responsible category. In this sense, Morton rightly points out that '[...] the experience of art provides a model for the kind of coexistence [of] ecological ethics and politics.'⁸

Ecological ethics means upholding and understanding our responsibility in relation to environmental contexts; furthermore, politics implies practising modes of justice in those contexts. This proposes the idea that an artwork can achieve solidarity with environmental situations and with what is given, allowing us to reconsider our trajectory in geological and historical terms, and provoking further actions.

What this model needs to recognise, or take, is a subjective position, that artists, curators, experts, activists, and citizens should develop collaborations and practices that express initiatives focused on air pollution, issues of water quality, local biodiversity loss, and industrial waste. This, frequently, can drive further collaborations insofar as the environmental contexts dictate. Therefore, the approach is to encourage new models, implying joint action. Thus, art is not based on an image of the world separate from the domain of lived experience, but rather that lived experience is a basis for creating or encouraging artistic practices.

Deterritorialisation of the Landscape

In this direction, the collaboration resulted with my own collaborative work *SLAG or How Many Works of Art Need to be Made to Have the Black Hill in Veles Dislocated?* (2023). The work consists of 0.03m³ of slag dislocated from Topilnica. The use of slag in the creation of this work considers how artistic production can be aimed at solving a specific environmental problem. The radical consequence of this work was that the museum became a space that provided discussion and awareness about the situation as well as anthropo-geomorphological challenges.

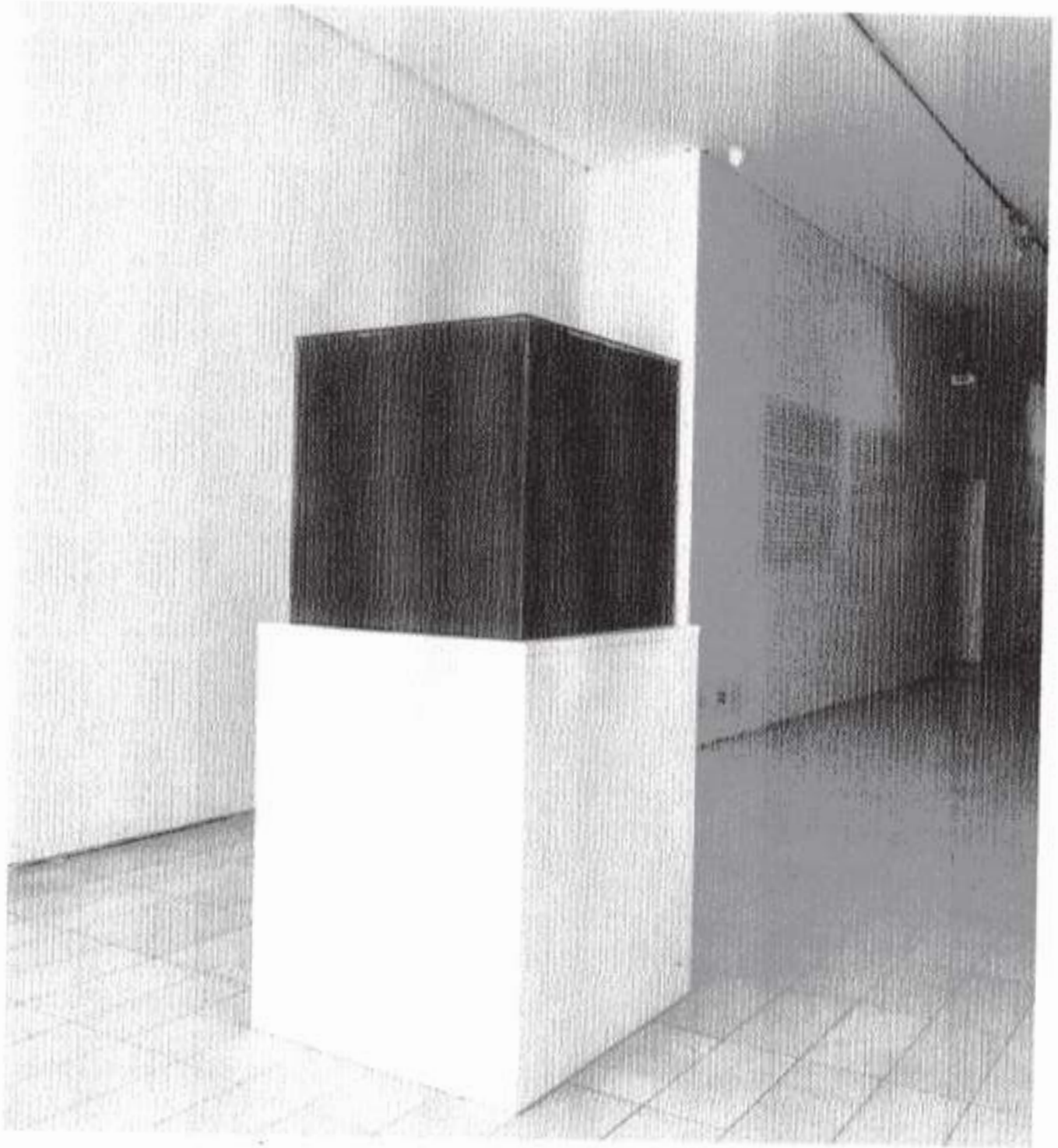
This speaks to Tim Ingold's claim, that 'the significance of the image of the globe in the language of contemporary debate about the environment' is problematic precisely because it renders the world 'as an object of contemplation detached from the domain of lived experience.'¹⁰ The project, conversely, comes from and is attached directly to the land.

Thus, new areas of artistic activity can emerge as a result of engagement with liquid landscapes, where 'art is less the name for an object or a discipline as such but again a name for a function of deterritorialisation.'¹¹ Thus, deterritorialisation gives artists the possibility to combine their interests into ethical and political demands. According to Gilles Deleuze, artists are those who contribute new variations or combinations of affects to the world; they are the creators of imaginative deterritorialisation.

Thus, the deterritorialisation of landscapes through these acts gives artists the possibility to combine their interests into an ethical-political demand, and challenge the conventional representations and meanings of landscapes. This highlights the role of rhythms—or flows—of becoming.

In this direction, following from the previous discussion of particular landscapes in North Macedonia, I will explain one collaboration with Vila Zora, a local ecological society from the city of Veles. The following section elaborates the collaborative work of art implemented in Veles with the aim of raising awareness and mobilising citizens around the issues of locally devastated living environments. Finally, it involves the Museum of Contemporary Art in Skopje, which was included by all participants involved in the project through different relations that express initiatives that focus on the environment.

The main problem in Veles is the smelting plant used for the production of lead and zinc from the Pb-Zn concentrates, that was put into operation in 1973 and closed in 2002. The heap of slag (ore smelting waste) at the smelter is still one of the most serious environmental problems not only in Veles, but also at the national and regional levels. Topilnica, known as the Black Hill, is estimated to contain over 1.8 million tons of waste, comprised of approximately ten percent zinc, one percent lead, as well as other hazardous metals such as cadmium, copper, arsenic, indium, and thallium, occupying an area of 33,000 cubic meters. The local organisation Vila Zora has been advocating for years about the importance of resolving the issue with the Black Hill, but the issue remains open, and the Hill still stands.⁹



4

Tihomir Topuzovski
*How Many Works of Art Need to
be Made to Have the Black Hill
in Veles Dislocated?*
2023

The work was produced in
collaboration with the
environmental association Vila
Zora from Veles. Photo © Denis
Saraginovski

THE EARTH IS THINKING ALL ALONG...

THE LARGE GLASS 39/40

- 1 T.J. Demos, *Against the Anthropocene: Visual Culture and Environment Today* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2017), 29.
- 2 Simon Dalby, *Anthropocene Geopolitics: Globalization, Security, Sustainability* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2020), 8.
- 3 Nicholas Mirzoeff, 'Visualizing the Anthropocene', *Public Culture* 26 (April 2014): 213-232.
- 4 Demos, *Against the Anthropocene*, 70.
- 5 Demos, *Against the Anthropocene*, 50.
- 6 Timothy Morton, *Being Ecological* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2018), 72.
- 7 Morton, *Being Ecological*, 72.
- 8 Timothy Morton, *All Art is Ecological* (London: Penguin, 2021),
- 9 Vila Zora is a non-governmental, non-profit and non-political environmental organization from Veles, dedicated to protecting and promoting the environment and nature by raising environmental problems, raising public environmental awareness, and promoting sustainable development.
- 10 Tim Ingold, 'Globes and Spheres: The Topology of Environmentalism', in *Environmentalism: The View from Anthropology*, ed. K. Milton (London: Routledge, 1993), 31–32.
- 11 Simon O'Sullivan, *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought Beyond Representation* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), (32.2006), 32.

“ Each island as part of archipelagoes is somehow similar to, or comparable with, ‘partial objects’ in psychoanalysis. They can never constitute a totality or fulfill a complete realization of desire but radically determine the singularity of formation of desire. In the same vein, archipelago can be articulated as ‘transitional objects’ in a certain type of psychoanalysis, as dislocated objects in some spatial, territorial, and geographical settings or locations. Like transitional objects in psychoanalysis, archipelagic moments are situated at (con/dis) juncture points of subjectivities with open-ended alterity. One point is always overlapped, layered, and superposed with others. ”

—Marginalands

Archipelagic Thinking—
On Floating Watersheds and Sunk Lands
Toshiya Ueno & Shintaro Miyawaki



Archipelago is not just a swarm of islands. This term has been mainly employed in the context of cultural geography or critical theory, under the bracket of the spatial turn. The so-called spatial turn in cultural studies, sociology, cultural geography, urbanism, etc., was presented as the criticism against the centrism of history or linear causality. Instead, a series of space, site, place, and location etc., is much more thematised in this theoretical turn. Some scholars in American Studies have already contended that the American continent as a whole treated as a gigantic island echoing with native American visions of America as turtle island, which inspired Gary Snyder's poetic imagination, amongst others.¹

From a different perspective, it can be said that watersheds exist everywhere. A living world is always held through omnipresent dynamics of border-waters and water-flows. The land always has a shoreline, constituting itself by infinite numbers of fragments of watersheds. The Archipelago is wandering, from land to sea, it is open to the waves and the dawn. The notion of vicinity mountain nearby cities or towns in Japan—Satoyama 里山, which literally means village-vicinity mountain—is a kind of interface or intermediary zone between wilderness and quasi-cultivated (artificial, manufactured, or constructed) nature, or territory of animals and humans. All village-vicinity mountains and common lands can be treated as varied enclaves, envisioned as islands or archipelago in land. Nowadays, in Japan, wild bears are frequently appearing in edges of suburbs, because of the disappearance of vicinity mountains.

Shintarō Miyawaki's photographic activity ranges from (deep or vicinity) mountain sites, via official documentation of the Setouchi Triennale, held every three years on the islands of the Seto Inland Sea to the marginal peninsula of Shikoku. His works always concern extremely depopulated remote areas and communities in Japan, mainly the west parts. He also runs Bookcafe Solow (in Takamatsu of Shikoku), a tiny second-hand bookshop about countercultures, subcultures, ecology, activism, and psychedelics since 2012. The name is a sort of conceptual pun, echoing the phonetics both the names of H.D. Thoreau (1817-1862)², a great writer on wilderness, and a work by great ecological feminist writers in Japan, Michiko Ishimure (1927-2018), which dealt with Minamata disease caused by industrial pollution.³ Mindful or careful clients of the shop can readily recognise Miyawaki's wit. Recently, he has been engaged with making a documentary film titled *Inochi* (the life) on hippy movements, which takes its title from a famous festival held every 12 years, and its influence on younger generations. For him, the intra-actions among different tribes and circles, are also dynamic nodal points of archipelago as metaphors and notions.

Archipelago is envisioned as an endless jigsaw puzzle in which a perfection of pieces can never be achieved, while all fragments are just fitting partially. Archipelago can be found even in lands, continents, mountain sites, cities, and flows of information. Many writers and scholars are now aware of this point, as some crucial works on archipelagic thinking made remarks on it.

Why is the notion of archipelago so significant, not only for sea but also for land? In archipelago, the common ground is always under the water. Just as poets would recognise and bring in the light what was concealed *under the surface*, both philosophers and artist—isolated islands themselves—have fulfilled the same task. However, something opaque is always operative in archipelagic thinking. A vision of reversibility of land and sea is quite similar to that of mutual inclusion, the included middle rather than the excluded third, as emphasised by Félix Guattari.

Usually, an insularity of islands is seen as an isolated site, despite a psycho-affective response to other places or locations. Édouard Glissant emphasises an openness of islands in relation, superposing the interaction between inside and outside onto the inter(a-)action between land and sea. No more reciprocity or dialectics between figure and ground, but rather unilateral duality, or unnatural participation and mutual inclusion, is crucially operated.

Dawn: The Light of the Iya Valley (2015) and *Children of the Fog* (2019) are two of Miyawaki's most important or representative works. Iya valley, located in the deep mountain site of Shikoku, is well known as one of the unexplored regions in Japan. His works focus especially on the beauty of fog and mist in the valley. The small village communities in Iya together constitute a constellation of small villages cascading terraced rice fields. Other villages side of the valley look very near from the standpoint of the slope, in fact, it takes some time to reach there by car because of the zig-zagging roads that traverse a river of the valley. Miyawaki conceives this geographical formation in the mountain site as an archipelago, which alternates between visibility and invisibility, transparency and opacity.

Glissant stresses upon a significance of opacity in various contexts in his works: in human communication, between land and sea, and among different genres of discourse or expression. The logic of opacity of relations works as both archipelago and assemblage. This can be extended to Japanese postwar literature and cultural-politics as well. For instance, Kōbō Abe (1924-1993), a Japanese novelist, theater and film director, amateur photographer, published a novel in 1959, titled *Inter-Ice Age 4* in which the Japanese archipelago is being sunk under the sea due to some global warming or climate change, electronically foretold by the artificial intelligence of computers in both Japan and the Soviet Union.

Interestingly, the novel is considered to be the first work of science fiction in Japan which also influenced bestseller novel *Japan Sinks* (1973) by Sakyo Komatsu, adapted into several films later.⁴ In the same period of the 1950s, there mushroomed many circles (meaning small groups known as groupscules or tribalised urban subgroups in Guattarian terms. These were subgroups of the Japanese communist party, but the term circle is still utilised for groups of students, or those pursuing particular hobbies and sports, in Japan today. The activity of these micro-circles meshed into each other like a web or archipelago, based not on arrow-like nomadism, through the violence invading others, but rather circular nomadism which lies in the permanent travel, movement, and wandering with and around each other. In the early 1990s, he was enthusiastically interested in the notion of the creolisation of cultures, including the Caribbean archipelago. At that same time, he became a good friend of Guattari.⁵

Since Miyawaki was a traveller—never a tourist—and belonged to the psychedelic techno tribe in his student days, he understood the significance of groupscules. Since 2016, Miyawaki and his friends have held an event called Thoreauvian in Iya. The event took place on H.D. Thoreau's birthday (July 12) at one of the mountain villages in Iya, and consists of workshops, talks, poetry readings, improvisational theater plays,

film screenings, dance performances, live and DJ music, and more. Ryūta Imafuku, a cultural anthropologist, critic, poet, performer, and, last but not least, troubadour, is a key person in this small festival. Imafuku is a pioneer of archipelagic thinking in Japan, and authored many books about archipelago and Thoreau. At the event in 2025, I happened to see a young participant holding a paperback edition of *Abe's Inter Ice Age 4!*⁶

Each island, as part of archipelagoes is somehow similar to, or comparable with, partial object of psychoanalysis. They can never constitute a totality or fulfil a complete realisation of desire but radically determine the singularity of the formation of desire. In the same vein, archipelago can be articulated as transitional objects in a certain type of psychoanalysis, as dislocated objects in some spatial, territorial, and geographical settings or locations. Like transitional objects in psychoanalysis, archipelagic moments are situated at (con/dis)juncture points of subjectivities with open-ended alterity. One part is always overlapped, layered, and superposed with others.

In this sense, archipelago can be operative not only in flat ontology but also in fractal ontology, which is a potential being or becoming which transforms, buds, and transfigures itself. When tidal waves are low, then each wave can be negligible, but infinite fractal patterns of coastlines are also formed. Endless self-repetitive multiple variation and dynamics of patterns across time—in geological or geographical locations weave unknown connections, links, and assemblages. That is the reason why Miyawaki's photographic gaze is much more concerned with the fractal structure, in which the same pattern is infinitely repeated, in both nature and culture, social and aesthetic, political scenes, rather than addressing the liminal or marginal in a conventional social sense.

In Glissant's speculative or ontological archipelago, the Caribbean sea is one of the places in the world where Relation presents itself most visibly. In my opinion, the Relation in Glissant can be compared with the notion of (machinic) assemblages in Guattari. For Guattari, both Brazil and Japan were the site(s) in which assemblages present themselves most starkly. Glissant called this effect diffraction or explosive flash (*éclat* in French)⁷; Miyawaki's photography and optical cartography expresses and performs such a-signifying signification or non-linguistic layers of the world, by: envisioning the flash or hearing the cry of land and sea, for instance.

Where things have no relations, but affect and encounter each other, the potential of unconsciouness and desire is operated in the subjectivity as ambience. Guattari subtly calls this process earthing, which doesn't imply a regression or inversion back toward the (mother) earth/land or the ground/fond. Miyawaki has never settled in such an attitude.

Guattari:

It is in passing through this chaotic earthing, this perilous oscillation, that something else becomes possible, that ontological bifurcations and the emergence of coefficients of processual creativity can occur.⁸

Thus, earthing doesn't mean rooting in any identity or existence related to fixed territories. Instead, this view implies the position of considering that all non-human beings, such as things, machines, animals, plants, microbes, even minerals, are posited transversally in the same flat plane. Guattari considers this 'earthing to be mutual inclusion and prehension, in which all existences or agencies are holding each other in multiple ways. Just as the parts for earthing in electric devices or lightning rods drive away the power from a thunder bolt, earthing in Guattari's ecosophy creates freaky pathways towards more consistent planes, in order to sustain or stabilise surroundings and environments, both natural and the technological), and affectively attuned immanent ambience.

In this sense, the term earthing is significant for Guattari, as it suggests a countless series of grasping among objects and things, livings and non-livings, a plane of consistency where absolute separation and absolute concatenation simultaneously take place. This idea is compatible with the recent notion of the democracy of things, proposed by speculative realism and new materialism. As a result it is possible to suppose the notion of production of subjectivity as an ambience, or becoming an environment within the view of a kind of inter-objectivity.

Towards the end of his *Poetics of Relation*, Glissant raised nuclear catastrophe as the case in which the planetary consciousness becomes the most passively experienced of commonplaces. Glissant had in mind the fatal incident of Chernobyl—Guattari too wrote *The Three Ecologies* just after the catastrophe.

Mitawaki's recent work, *UWAKAI* (2022), draws on the long and complicated coast line of the Uwa Sea coast, whose peninsula holds a nuclear power plants called Ikata. Without any direct ecological or political message, his series of photographs simply depicts how this site is now deeply depopulated, rural, and thus suitable for the construction of nuclear plants.

Now I posit a tentative conclusion of this essay. Nobody can escape from the aftermaths or future possibilities of environmental catastrophes, including huge tsunamis or earthquakes, as well as nuclear accident. We are all like the protagonist in Kōbō Abe's novel *The Woman in the Dunes* (1962). At the end of this novel, the protagonist happens to succeed in manufacturing a specific machine for capillary and osmosis in order to get water from sand (land) and finds an occasion

to escape from the sands (a virtual sea or ocean). Yet, he decides to live there and continue a life in the dunes. Paradoxically, to stay and remain in the sandpit as a cage becomes the very action of leaving or quitting it. The gesture also resonates with life in Japan, experienced and sustained after Fukushima, and the Minamata pollution of the past.

Now the term 'hope' the protagonist named the capillary machine shifts its meaning to a different direction. What is at stake here is not the acceleration of technology but what Guattari calls the primordial slowing down, as a deceleration by infinite speeds within finite speeds. Then the incorporeal complexity promises an advent-event of trans-nomadic singularities, in which everything can mutually grasping or earthing like sands in a dune. In these trans-monadic encounters, things, objects, tools, and machines that usually withdraw each other from any articulated relations, would generate substantial assemblages, triggering and offering a leaking, flight and exodus.

1

A girl wearing a fox mask whom I met at the Bon Odori dance. Obon is a special time for Japanese people. It is said that the spirits of their ancestors return, and people continue to dance with the dead until late into the night, in circles.

2

The tunnel that leads to the deepest part of Shikoku. This view has also changed to white light in recent years as light bulbs have been replaced with LEDs.

3

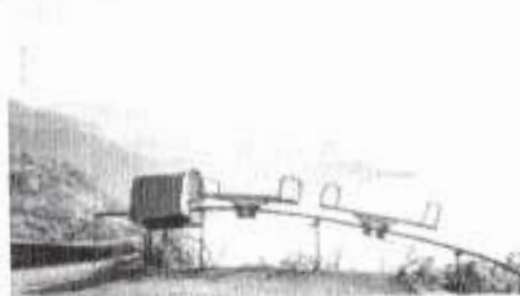
The mountains of Shikoku are covered in deep snow in winter. There are many landslides, and roads are closed in many places.

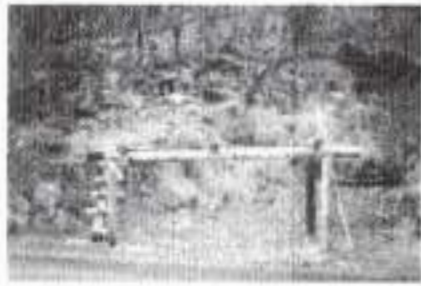
4

The only nuclear power plant in Shikoku is the Ikata Nuclear Power Plant. After the Chernobyl accident, large-scale demonstrations were held in opposition to the power output adjustment experiments. In January 1988, crowds from all over Japan flocked to Takamatsu City, where Shikoku Electric Power Company's headquarters are located.

5

The Heike clan is an ancient Japanese samurai clan. The head of the Asa clan is one of their descendants. The Heike clan, who were refugees, often lived in the shade of deep valley.





6

There are about 30 Asiatic black bears living in Shikoku, but the majority are wild boars. They sometimes swim across the sea and eat the island's crops.

7

Many fortresses were built to protect the entrance to the Seto Inland Sea, where one of the world's largest naval ports was located. Cape Sata is one of them, and various war relics remain, including an ammunition storehouse and the remains of a gun battery.

THE EARTH IS THINKING ALL ALONG.

8

Old prayer halls remain throughout Shikoku. Some are for praying for a good harvest, some for praying for rain, and some for exorcising curses. They may seem forgotten, but there are certainly signs that they were used by people recently.

9

Japan is an archipelago with little flat land. Since ancient times, people here have made a living half from fishing and half from farming. Houses are densely packed on small plots of land, and fields are cultivated all the way to the top of the slopes.

10

Shikoku is home to the highest mountains in western Japan, but Mt. Ishitate is said to be the most difficult of them all. The mountain trails are undeveloped and the distances involved are long. The summit is covered in white limestone, resembling a white pyramid. On top of the peak stands a single tree that has endured years of wind and rain. Its vitality is such that even after being broken, its branches continue to grow.



11
 Thatch is bundled and used as fertilizer. This is called 'Koeguro' and is a traditional way of life in the mountainous areas of Shikoku. When this scenery suddenly appears in autumn, it is as if the spirits of the season have visited the village. Photo by Shintarō Miyawaki.

12
 The Yosan Line is a railway line that runs through the mountainous region of Shikoku. The views from the train windows are spectacular. The railway, which runs along the Yoshino River, is one with nature, and you can see different scenery depending on the season.



13
 In fishing villages, you often see fishermen busy at work. They start work before dawn and often finish their work by noon. However, in the afternoon, they have to put away and clean up the nets and fishing gear they used in preparation for the next day's fishing.

14
 There are various bridges over rivers in the mountains. Most are iron bridges, but many areas still use suspension bridges. These are lifelines connecting roads and villages, and have supported the exchange of people since ancient times.

15
 Most of Japan's mountains are covered with planted cedar trees and other trees. Spring hay fever is well known. However, deep in the mountains, there are still some virgin forests that remain untouched by humans. These can be found on sacred mountains and along steep mountain ridges. Forests with many deciduous trees are bright, while planted forests are dark.

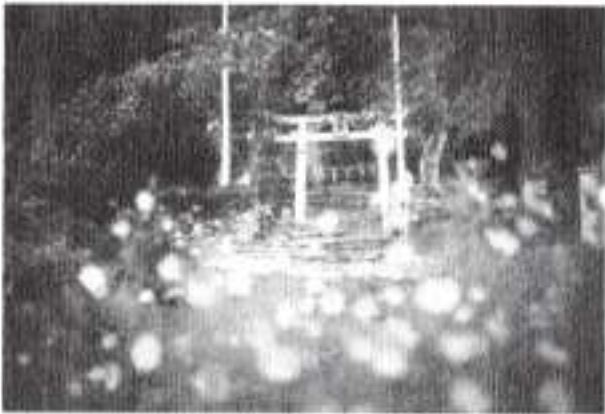
When there is absolutely no wind on a ria coast, the water surface can become like a mirror. The world becomes horizontally symmetrical, and when you take a photo, it becomes difficult to tell which is the real world. Only silence envelops the place.

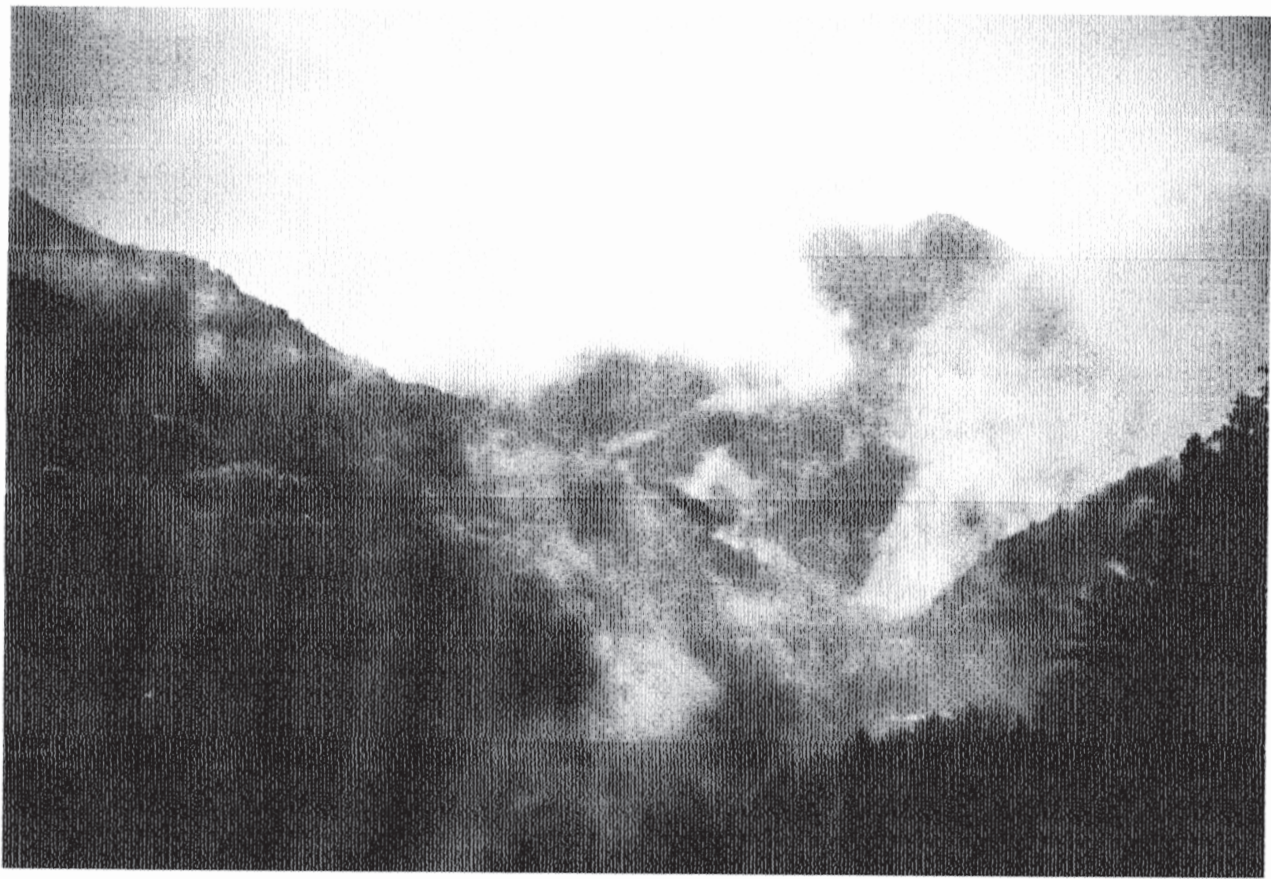
The graveyard where the ancient samurai known as the Heike rest. Next to it is a shrine, creating a sacred space. The flowers that bloom in this place seem to be darker in color than in other places. Perhaps they reflect the will of the people who once prayed here.

Japan's remote areas are experiencing a declining birthrate and an aging population. Schools are disappearing in most villages, making it impossible for people of child-rearing age to live there. Landscapes like these, which are integrated with nature, will no longer be able to be maintained in the near future. Will people be forced to live only in cities?

The seaside continues to face various hardships, including a decline in catches and changes in the types of fish that can be caught, due to the effects of climate change and other factors. By 2025, oysters in the Seto Inland Sea will suffer devastating damage, and oyster farming will be almost completely wiped out. It is predicted that many companies will go bankrupt. Rising water temperatures are said to be the main cause.

Kyushu is visible on the distant horizon. There are no man-made structures on the peninsula, so it is a stateless wilderness. At that moment, someone blew a soap bubble, which was carried by the wind. It was like a spirit floating in this land.





21

The mountains of Shikoku receive a lot of rainfall throughout the year and are always shrouded in thick mist. This valley holds many hidden stories. Photography is like a compass to help me find those stories. Sensitive to the atmosphere and light of the land, I wandered the peaks as if guided.

THE EARTH IS THINKING ALL ALONG...

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- 1 Gary Snyder, *Turtle Island* (New York, NY: New Direction Publishers, 1974).
- 2 Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (1854), ed. C. Day Lewis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960).
- 3 Michiko Ishimure, *Paradise of Sorrow: Our Minamata disease* (苦海浄土—わが水俣病, 1969), trans. L.M. Shue (Ann Arbor, MI: Michigan University Press, 1990).
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- 5 J. Michael Dash, 'Introduction', in Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989), ix-xxv.
- 6 Kōbō Abe, *Inter Ice Age 4* (第四間氷期, 1959), trans. E. Dale Saunders (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979).
- 7 Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989), 106.
- 8 Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, trans. P. Bains and J. Pefanis (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), 82.