

Federico Luisetti

Neoliberal Natures and non-Anthropocenic Art

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Zusammenfassung

This volume maps some of the territories where points of resistance can be located and where art's resistant potential becomes relevant once again.

"NO Rhetoric(s): Versions and Subversions of Resistance in Contemporary Global Art" focuses on a neuralgic issue which was intensely debated during the last three decades, but has rarely become a topic of its own. It offers an updated way which art presents itself as an agent of resistance, whether in a mere rhetorical stance or as an effective critical strategy. In the face of general discourse of revolt and insurrection that is highly fashionable today, it is necessary to ask whether the gesture of 'negation' still yields an emancipatory potential. Struggling between NO rhetoric and NO to rhetoric, the artistic and the political field permanently interfere with each other; sometimes they merely overlap, while at other moments they strongly insist on demarcating themselves. Nonetheless it remains to be seen more precisely of what their respective critical forces and agonality consist. In this sense, the book contributes to a deeper understanding of the different logics of resistance at play between art and the political, as expressed by Jacques Rancière in his distinction between "the politics of the becoming-life of art and the politics of the resistant form."

This volume provides a diverse array of voices and essays from the academic and artistic field that present theoretical approaches as well as study cases. By juxtaposing them, it encompasses both the complexity and diversity of artistic practices within a global instituting framework that seems to capitalize on different political streams. The reader will find contributions on sexual dissidence, ecology and the Anthropocene, geopolitics of the digital age and institutional critique. The authors, artists and scholars from different disciplines share their desire to shed some light on how art approaches these urgent issues.

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Schlagworte

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NO RHETORIC(S)

VERSIONS AND SUBVERSIONS OF RESISTANCE
IN CONTEMPORARY GLOBAL ART



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Environmental historians have traced the steps that, from the imperial ecologies of the British Empire to the Cold War and Space Age, have led to the contemporary conceptualization and governance of the global environmental, making it visible, both politically and scientifically.¹ It is a history that includes the penetration of ecosystemic thinking in the social sciences and humanities, with different waves of cybernetics, neo-Malthusianism, and environmental management shaping the lexicon of socio-ecological interactions. While the postcolonial rural world was exposed to the green revolution,² and the agrarian question of the Third World gave rise to subaltern studies and liberation ecologies,³ systems ecologies and managerial approaches from the Global North theorized a transcendental environment, a techno-natural Gaia, a cybernetic Earth system with self-regulating and adaptive properties.⁴ Whereas political ecologies explored the dark side of development and de-ontologized the environment, the convergence of a naturalization of the economy and economicization of the environment—as we find in the neoliberal discourse of resilience and complex

1 Peder Anker, *Imperial Ecology: Environmental Order in the British Empire, 1895–1945* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001); Sabine Hohler, *Spaceship Earth in the Environmental Age, 1960–1990* (London, New York: Routledge, 2016); Perrin Selcer, *The Postwar Origins of the Global Environment: How the United Nations Built Spaceship Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

2 Raj Patel, “The Long Green Revolution,” *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 40, no. 1 (January 1, 2013): p. 1–63.

3 Richard Peet and Michael Watts, eds., *Liberation Ecologies: Environment, Development and Social Movements* (London: Psychology Press, 2004).

4 James Lovelock, *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

adaptive systems⁵—has produced a geo-economic thought grounded in the notion of sustainable development and its regulative idea, Natural Capital.⁶

The Second Copernican Revolution

It is in this context, away from the struggles of the environmentalism of the poor and environmental justice movements,⁷ that Earth system scientists associated with the International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme introduced the “second Copernican revolution” of the Anthropocene, a novel regime of knowledge and visibility of planetary environmental change.⁸ Rooted in computer simulation models and remote-sensing technologies, the Earth system emerged as the distinctive cognitive object of the Anthropocene, a scientific construction but also a policy goal. Through a mixture of geocratic hubris and cross-disciplinary experimentalism, the Anthropocene thesis presents this Earth system as a “geology of mankind,”⁹ an epoch in which humans have become geophysical agents causing planetary disturbances and, in the process of altering the biosphere, have also discovered their “species being”: the Anthropos of the Anthropocene is a global civilization that has finally realized itself to be a species among other species, an historical subject exposed to the threat of extinction, awakened

5 Jeremy Walker and Melinda Cooper, “Genealogies of Resilience: From Systems Ecology to the Political Economy of Crisis Adaptation,” *Security Dialogue* 42, no. 2 (April 2011): p. 143–160.

6 Thomas Prugh and Robert Costanza, *Natural Capital and Human Economic Survival* (Solomons, MD: International Society for Ecological Economics, 1995).

7 Joan Martinez-Alier, *The Environmentalism of the Poor: A Study of Ecological Conflicts and Valuation* (Northampton, Mass.: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2002). See also: <https://ejatlas.org> (accessed July 13, 2022).

8 Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, “‘Earth System’ Analysis and the Second Copernican Revolution,” *Nature* 402, no. 6761 supplement (December 2, 1999): p. 19–23.

9 Paul Crutzen, “Geology of Mankind: The Anthropocene,” *Nature* 415, no. 23 (January 3, 2002).

to its episodic destiny in natural history. After an initial acritical reception in the humanities and social sciences, echoed also by influential intellectuals such as Dipesh Chakrabarti and Bruno Latour,¹⁰ the Anthropocene has been questioned for a variety of good reasons: it is an anthropocentric epic and a petro-industrial sublime, an aestheticization of disaster and a Western civilizational tale, a mystifying history of the global environment and an arrogant legitimization of planetary management, an obfuscation of class, gender, economic and power relations and a reductionist techno-scientific thesis.¹¹

And yet, despite all criticisms, the Anthropocene has captured the imagination of researchers in a vast range of disciplines, taking on its own cultural life and becoming a ubiquitous term, which seems also to stimulate ontological and epistemological questions, confounding the biopolitical distinction of Life and Nonlife.¹² Stretched and multiplied into an array of critical variants—among the most appealing: Donna Haraway's Chthulucene, Jason Moore's Capitalocene, and Bernard Stiegler's Neganthropocene¹³—the Anthropocene is now an atmosphere, an adjective connotating everything from cooking and sex to feminism and religion.¹⁴

10 Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 2 (January 2009): p. 197–222; Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime* (Oxford: Polity Press, 2017).

11 Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, *The Shock of the Anthropocene: The Earth, History, and Us* (London, Brooklyn: Verso, 2016); Thomas J. Demos, *Against the Anthropocene: Visual Culture and Environment Today* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2019); Federico Luisetti, "Decolonizing Gaia. Or, Why the Savages Shall Fear Bruno Latour's Political Animism," *Azimuth* 9 (2017).

12 Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *Geontologies: A Requiem to Late Liberalism* (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 2016).

13 Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 2016); Jason Moore, Elmar Altvater and Eileen Crist, *Anthropocene or Capitalocene?* (Oakland: PM Press, 2016); Bernard Stiegler, *The Neganthropocene* (London: Open Humanities Press, 2018).

14 Celia Deane-Drummond et al., eds., *Religion in the Anthropocene* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2018); Richard A. Grusin, ed., *Anthropocene Feminism*, 21st Century Studies (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017); Reinhold Leinfelder et al., eds., *Eating Anthropocene* (Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer, 2016).

Extinction Police

The paradigmatic status achieved by Anthropocenic discourses coincides with the neoliberal construction of global nature as the scenario of environmental risk, which demands a general reorientation of thought and social practices toward the future. But what future?

The Anthropocene describes itself as an origin story, a biospheric crisis initiated by the Industrial Revolution, the Great Acceleration or other planetary events such as the colonization of the Americas.¹⁵ In reality, it is an extinction-driven narrative: how can the human species survive throughout the time scale of natural history despite its self-harming tendencies? If the Anthropos does not respect the “boundaries” and “carrying capacities” of planet Earth (I am speaking the language of the Anthropocenologists), under what conditions will it trigger a devastating phase transition that, as already happened with the five mass extinctions of other species, will ultimately end humanity’s “safe operating space” and annihilate its comfortable ecological niche? The Anthropos of the Anthropocene is at war with nature, initially as a destructive force and now as global police that investigates the present from the standpoint of speculative futures, imposing the principle of populations, resources and ecosystemic order and security, the true meaning of sustainability.

Giorgio Agamben has observed the “indistinction between violence and law” that characterizes the mutation of war into police, and of politics into administration.¹⁶ But his analyses have attributed too quickly this forensic delirium to the European theologico-political configurations of sovereignty. If the sovereign is now a cop, and the state of nature of Thomas

15 Simon L. Lewis and Mark A. Maslin, “Defining the Anthropocene,” *Nature* 519, no. 7542 (March 2015): p. 171–180.

16 Giorgio Agamben, “The Sovereign Police,” in *The Politics of Everyday Fear*, ed. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 62.

Hobbes a permanent warfare, this depends less on a philosophical dialectic of law and exception and more on a complete redefinition of the global environment in the age of neoliberalism, systems analysis and scenario methodologies.

With its deep temporality, global span and modelled Earth consistency, the Anthropocene is the stage on which the alternative futures of global environmental analyses perform their exercises of simulation and policing of driving forces at a multi-scale level.¹⁷ Using global storylines that include assumptions about future variables and uncertainties, data to be aggregated, and relations to be modelled, “stakeholders” explicitly develop scenarios with “the ultimate goal of influencing public policy making.”¹⁸ Without the speculative crime scene of the Anthropocene, both inquiry and strategy-driven scenarios—modelling water resources, emissions and populations dynamics, climate change, land and energy use—would not be able to assess, anticipate and pre-empt undesirable pathways. The Earth would not be patrolled by its global police.

Michel Foucault’s intuition that a technique of policing in the *Ancient Régime* was responsible for the emergence of biopower may help us visualize the forensic turn of neoliberal ecological governmentality. Policing in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe was an art of knowing, developing and balancing the forces of the state, the cornerstone of the statistical identification of dynamic factors in populations, natural resources, and economic circulation.¹⁹ The Earth system detected, analyzed, and securitized by the speculative methods of geopower is a theory and practice of manipulation

17 Peter H. Verburg et al., “Methods and Approaches to Modelling the Anthropocene,” *Global Environmental Change* 39 (July 2016): p. 328–340.

18 Joseph Alcamo, ed., *Environmental Futures: The Practice of Environmental Scenario Analysis*, 1st ed., Developments in Integrated Environmental Assessment, vol. 2 (Amsterdam, Boston: Elsevier, 2008), p. 15.

19 Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–1978*, ed. Michel Sellenart, trans. Graham Burchell (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2009), p. 411.

of planetary forces and criminalization of potential risks and threats.

With scenario futures and socio-ecological forensics, the biopolitical government of the longevity, health and productivity of state-defined populations takes a step further. Another form of naturalness and vitality demands an assemblage of administrative knowledge and technologies. The peculiar life style of the planet and its metabolic cycles, the well-being and efficiency of its ecosystems, the security in the interaction and distribution of human and non-human species, this is what concerns geopower.²⁰ How to make sure that growth and expansion of economic forces do not compromise the ecological order of the Anthropocene? Human extinction is to the monitoring and nourishment of this planetary bio-geo-chemical quasi-life what death was to Foucauldian biopower: a limit-concept. Geopower makes live and optimizes the energy patterns of ecosystems, regulates species reproduction and energy flows. The sixth mass extinction is here with us in the virtual form of a final risk, anticipated day after day by the small crimes of malfunctioning and maladaptation.²¹

We should not believe that the Anthropocene is an emancipatory cautionary tale, an apocalyptic political theology, or a geohistorical nihilism. This state of nature is not a counter-discourse. The supreme Anthropocenic crime, human extinction, is a future to which the planet is condemned not to be exposed. This extinctionist pathos legitimizes permanent surveillance, the detection of premonitory deviances and infractions. Mass extinction is speculative because its crime scene keeps growing

20 Timothy W. Luke, "On Environmentality: Geo-Power and Eco-Knowledge in the Discourses of Contemporary Environmentalism," *Cultural Critique*, no. 31 (1995): p. 57–81; Federico Luisetti, "Geopower: On the States of Nature of Late Capitalism," *European Journal of Social Theory* 22, no. 3 (October 21, 2018): p. 342–363.

21 Cameron Harrington, "The Ends of the World: International Relations and the Anthropocene," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 44, no. 3 (June 2016): p. 478–498.

and expanding, dematerializing together with the infinite postponement of a permanently deferred and deterred crime, which nonetheless produces tangible security effects. *In the state of nature of the Anthropocene, extinction rebellion and extinction pre-emption go hand in hand.*

A Neoliberal State of Nature

The foreclosure of human extinction imposes the translation of nature into an Anthropocenic naturalness. Ecologies must serve geopolitics's environing;²² healthy ecosystems and biodiversity must provide services for asymmetric economic activities, renewable resources must offer so called "clean" energy for capitalist valorization, an optimal climate must enhance risk management and increase military dominance in the Arctic.²³ Meteopower and energopower, climate regulation and energy politics capitalize on geopolitics's intimacy with non-life by redirecting unruly geophysical and physicochemical processes towards the benefit and indefinite survival of dominant geosocial strata of the human species.²⁴

The forensics of the Anthropocene is at work also in the realm of extraction: as political geologists have shown, the subterranean geopolitics of fossil fuels rely on the speculative appraisal of energy resources and securitization of vertical spaces. Massive investments in shale gas and other conventional and unconventional fossil fuels depend on the "futures in the present" of modelled subsoil volumes and invisible

22 Sverker Sörlin and Nina Wormbs, "Environing Technologies: A Theory of Making Environment," *History and Technology* 34, no. 2 (April 3, 2018): p. 101–125.

23 Simon Dalby, "The Geopolitics of Climate Change," *Political Geography* 37 (November 1, 2013): p. 38–47.

24 Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018).

sedimentary layers.²⁵ The regulative principle of extinction, and the accompanying speculative forensics, hold together the climate and biodiversity policies of the Anthropocene and determine geopower's naturalness in relation to capitalist infrastructures. The Anthropocenic state of nature and its neo-liberal ecologies rewrite autonomous natures into relational environments.²⁶

The visual arts are not immune to the penetration of this paradigm, which has abandoned the constraints of Earth system sciences and has become a "texture," a conceptual and aesthetic sensibility including all things sensuous and fluid, granular and volatile, radiant and muddy, from Lucretius's atoms to Jacques Lacan's real.²⁷ A key feature of the German institutional Anthropocene initiative led by the Berlin Haus der Kulturen der Welt, "The Anthropocene Project," was the 2014 manifesto exhibition curated by Anselm Franke. At its center, visitors encountered Adam Avikainen's *Criminal Scene Investigation Department of Natural Resources*.²⁸ Through a giant skin painting, cosmological scenario narrative, and visual archive of investigative traces, Avikainen mimics the Anthropocene's surveillance apparatus: his art doubles the Anthropocene's speculative methods, translating them into a geo-aesthetic experience of loss and mutation: "For the painter and author Adam Avikainen, all of nature becomes a crime scene ... with the artist as a 'medium' and detective, and with painting as praxis."²⁹

25 Kärge Kama and Magdalena Kuchler, "Geo-Metrics and Geo-Politics: Controversies in Estimating European Shale Gas Resources," in *Political Geology: Active Stratigraphies and the Making of Life*, ed. Adam Bobette and Amy Donovan (Cambridge: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), p. 112.

26 Erich Hörl and James Burton, *General Ecology: The New Ecological Paradigm* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).

27 Katrin Klingan et al., *Textures of the Anthropocene: Grain Vapor Ray* (Berlin, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2014).

28 Adam Avikainen, *Criminal Scene Investigation Department of Natural Resources* (Berlin: Haus der Kulturen der Welt, 2014).

29 https://www.hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/2014/adam_avikainen_csi_department_of_natural_resources/start_adam_avikainen.php (accessed July 13, 2022).

Avikainen's work exemplifies the forensic logic of the "The Anthropocene Project." The Haus der Kulturen der Welt stages "hearings" for the "trial" of all the players of the Anthropocene: things, emotions, theories, sounds, animals, the entire world becomes the subject of the proceedings.³⁰ In its policing drift, "The Anthropocene Project" collects "the evidence" of global nature misconduct, tracing aesthetic deviances in all natural and social domains, from geology to music. It also trains its police corps at the Berlin Anthropocene Campus, indoctrinating scientists, artists and "players from the cultural sector, all of whom will be future mediators of a new knowledge," and will infiltrate the cultural scene, international institutions and laboratories, preparing "material for the hearings" of the aesthetic and political crimes of global nature.³¹

Counter-Natures

While the grand narrative of Earth biosphere's stewardship was emerging, in the Sixties and Seventies radical artists discovered counter-natures that escaped the premises of neoliberal environing and ecosystem thinking. Just a few examples: Robert Smithson challenged the equilibrium and systemic presuppositions of living-planet ecologies, practicing an art of entropy and sedimentation;³² Ana Mendieta engaged natural elements and cycles through ritualistic practices, creating ephemeral traces and quasi-human figures, as in her Santería-inspired *Siluetas Series*;³³ and Giuseppe Penone explored modes of contacts with trees and water, rocks and soil, the uncanny incommensurabil-

30 Klingan et al., *Textures of the Anthropocene*, p. 75.

31 Ibid, p. 78.

32 Robert Smithson, *The Collected Writings* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1996), p. 110–113.

33 Mary Jane Jacob, "Ashé in the Art of Ana Mendieta," in *Santería Aesthetics in Contemporary Latin American Art*, ed. Arturo Lindsey (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), p. 190.

ity of affects and actions, the divergences of human and nonhuman actions, the crises of separation and desymbolization.³⁴

In a genealogy of artistic resistance to Anthropocenic visualization, Marcel Duchamp's *Étant donnés* should be given a privileged position. Conceived and assembled in New York during the Cold War, this odd crime scene is a diorama like those we find in natural history museums, but also a counter-scenario, a deconstruction of the conditions of appearance of Spaceship Earth and its natural history. After Duchamp's death in 1968, in accordance with his expressed wish, the Philadelphia Museum of Art received the gift of a major and until then unknown work of art, on which Duchamp had been secretly working in his studio for twenty years: *Étant donnés: 1. La chute d'eau, 2. Le gaz d'éclairage* (Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas).³⁵ Unveiled as a permanent installation in July 1969, this three-dimensional tableau is an enigmatic peep show, a phantasmatic scene in which the naked body of a woman lies among twigs and leaves, only partially visible through two holes in a brick wall. Holding in her hand a little gas lamp burning with an upright flame, the uncanny female figure, with her blonde hair and after-death paleness, rests in an eerie naturalistic environment, surrounded by clouds in a blue sky, a shimmering and endlessly precipitating mechanized waterfall, a dark pond, a scattered fog and a lush and rocky landscape. This stereoscopic vision, at the same time Renaissance phantasmagoria and pulp crime scene, optical chamber and peep show, appears almost traumatically to the startled viewer, as one approaches an old Spanish wooden door, and peers through its two small holes. *Étant donnés* is an allegory of the environmental age, suggesting that the burning of fossil fuels, the billions of gas lamps

34 Federico Luisetti, "Continuerà a Crescere Tranne Che in Quel Punto. Giuseppe Penone Contronatura," in *Controculture All'italiana*, ed. Silvia Contarini (Florence: Franco Cesati, 2019).

35 Marcel Duchamp, *Marcel Duchamp: Étant Donnés*, ed. Michael R. Taylor (New Haven and Philadelphia: Yale University Press/Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2009).

and anthropogenic petrol activities, will murder the Anthropos before humanity can exhaust nature. With his eccentric humor, Duchamp stages a material landscape that has survived its promethean creators.

Étant *donnés*'s immersive simulation depends on its ingenious construction. The work functions as a modelling tool. The beholders actualize the stereoscopic perspective with their complicit spying, revealing the corpse from the very optical and emotional viewpoint of a murdered species, which has become one with nature's inhuman life. By actively peering across the holes of our present, by looking through the old wooden door that is immediately reduced to an incommensurable reality, the spectators of Étant *donnés* fall into nature's post-historical existence. The future environment's gaze at itself coincides with the onlookers' present contemplation of the crime scene.

The unsettling complicity that one experiences when becoming the viewer of Étant *donnés* simultaneously captures and denounces the criminal episteme of the Anthropocene. As the viewer approaches the holes in the wooden door, universality is lost: this is a male gynecoscopic look at nature, a bachelor's fantasy.³⁶ The stripped bare and headless figure of this tableau appears in a radiant post-natural light. The future is absorbed by the suspended visuality of the illusionistic machine. In contrast with the aesthetics of the Anthropocene, in Étant *donnés* the scene of destruction is not aestheticized and mobilized against its victims but intensified in its threatening configuration. We are facing a quasi-event, a topology of non-life, trauma and survival that we can see but not comprehend and reconstruct.

36 Paola Uparella and Carlos A. Jáuregui, "The Vagina and the Eye of Power (Essay on Genitalia and Visual Sovereignty)," *H-ART. Revista de historia, teoría y crítica de arte*, no. 3 (2018): p. 79–114.



Fig. 1: Anaïs Tondeur, *Carbon Black* (2016–2018): Folkestone, June 10, 2017, Carbon Black Level (PM2.5): 1,89 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, Carbon ink print, 100 x 150cm: https://www.gvart.co.uk/s/Carbon-Black_AnaïsTondeur_EN-web.pdf (accessed July 19, 2022).

Incompossible Presents

Contemporary artists who resist the state of nature of the Anthropocene are challenging the colonization of time and socio-ecological relations.³⁷

Anaïs Tondeur's *Carbon Black* (2016–2018) is an investigation of “thresholds of visibility,” a work that embraces and returns the speculative modelling of neoliberal environing.³⁸ Both a poetic meditation and a scientific project, *Carbon Black* unravels “the journey of an ‘anthropic meteor’,” a grain of black carbon that a speculative narrative places “in a fold of the heart” of a birdwatcher’s daughter.³⁹ The story begins in the

37 Nicholas Mirzoeff, “Visualizing the Anthropocene,” *Public Culture* 26, no. 2 (2014): p. 213–232.

38 Anaïs Tondeur, *Carbon Black* (Black carbon prints, 100 x 150 cm, *Cartographies 2016–2018*).

39 All citations taken from https://www.gvart.co.uk/s/Carbon-Black_AnaïsTondeur_EN-web.pdf (accessed July 19, 2022).

northernmost island of Scotland, on the reef of Fair Isle, where sixty islanders suffer from suffocation despite the absence of industries and vehicles, and doctors come to discover the grain of black carbon. Equipped with a camera and breathing masks, Tondeur travels back to the “the point the anthropic meteor was emitted, the exhaust of a ship on the English Channel.” “By means of atmospheric backward trajectory models and European Commission daily analyses of anthropogenic emission of air pollutants,”⁴⁰ Tondeur and her collaborators retrace the itinerary of this toxic particulate matter, documenting at each step of the journey the sky and its “spectral dusts,” through photographs printed with black carbon particles trapped in the masks on the locations of the images, and turned into ink—black carbon being “a collateral form of soot, used for centuries as the primary component of Indian ink.”⁴¹

As in Eyal Weizman’s forensic architecture,⁴² the detection technologies and speculative methods used by state and corporate warfare are redirected against their sources: in this case, the industrial polluters producing the particulate matter, which according to the World Health Organization kills 3.5 million people each year.⁴³ The grains of black carbon “drift in a few days along atmospheric currents and fall several hundred kilometres away from their point of emission [...] From the upper stratosphere to inside of our bodies,” these “particles travel over the globe [...] their invisible, intangible and even inodorous presence” knowing “no limit between inside and outside.”⁴⁴ The polluted prints of *Black Carbon* give consistency to the slow violence of the grains, which are in contrast with the perceptual and political non-presence of these ubiquitous

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 Eyal Weizman, *Forensic Architecture: Violence at the Threshold of Detectability* (New York: Zone Books, 2017).

43 https://www.gvart.co.uk/s/Carbon-Black_AnaïsTondeur_EN-web.pdf (accessed July 19, 2022).

44 Ibid.

biochemical elements. The state of nature of the Anthropocene leads to a dissociative reality disorder, induced by politics of scale and invisibility, technologies of extraction and combustion, aesthetics of production and sustainability.

Amar Kanwar's *The Sovereign Forest* (2011–)⁴⁵ is a mixed media installation immersed in the ecological and political violence of the Indian state of Orissa, a work documenting the community resistance against mining cartels, land acquisition and corruption practices.⁴⁶ A key piece of this installation is the film *The Scene of the Crime* (2011),⁴⁷ which looks at territories that will become industrial sites and are in the process of being acquired by governments and corporations: “every location, every blade of grass, every water source, every tree that is seen in the film is now meant to not exist anymore.”⁴⁸ Instead of a crime scene displaced in the conjectural future of mass extinctions, Kanwar preannounces the brutality of eco-colonization by tracing its multiple connections to the documented history of displacement of indigenous communities, environmental devastations and police repression. We thus join a counter-forensics that fills nature's present with the affective consciousness and haunting presence of ecocides, experiencing an artwork that pre-empts the surveillance episteme of the Anthropocene.

In Zhuang Hui's site-specific *Longitude 109.88, Latitude 31.09* (1995–2008),⁴⁹ microphysics of nature and counter-forensics converge on the ground of the world's largest hydro-electric megaproject, the Three Gorges Dam in China's Hubei Province. One year after the beginning of the construction works, in April

45 Amar Kanwar, *The Sovereign Forest* (Films, projection on handmade books, seeds, books, photograph, 2011).

46 Amar Kanwar, *The Sovereign Forest*, ed. Daniela Zyman (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015).

47 Amar Kanwar, *The Scene of the Crime* (HD, color, sound, 42 min, 2011).

48 <http://amarkanwar.com/the-scene-of-crime-2011/> (accesses July 13, 2022).

49 Guandong Museum of Art: <http://www.gdmoa.org/zhanlan/threeyear/The-fourth/23/en/Artists/23508.html> (accessed July 19, 2022).

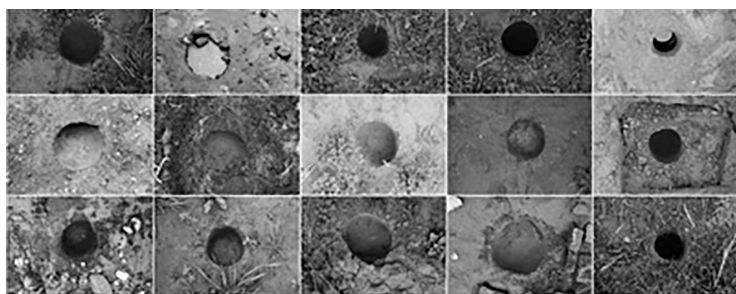


Fig. 2: Zhuang Hui, Longitude 109.88, Latitude 31.09. Black and white photo, video, paper, dimensions variable, 1995, 2008: <http://www.gdmoa.org/zhanlan/threeyear/Thefourth/23/en/Artists/images/pic2rf5b486.jpg> (accessed July 13, 2022).

1995, Zhuang Hui chose three sites along the three gorges and dug over one hundred holes, each a half meter deep.

He “photographed the holes on the earth’s surface, and said little else regarding the project—which, at the time, baffled passersby. Then, in April of 2007 after the dam was completed, Zhuang hired a cameraman to return to the Three Gorges and, guided by a map, to film the locations where the holes were left twelve years before. Just as expected, everything was already gone, and each hole—marking the original banks of the Yangtze River as well as huge stretches of the natural beauty it encompassed—had already been swept under 100 metres of water, never to be seen again.”⁵⁰

Zhuang Hui’s installation gathered for the first time the evidence of one of the largest ecocides of modern times, which since then has attracted several artistic interventions.⁵¹ The scale of the Yangtze River dam is such that it contains almost 40 km³ of water, impacting an area of more than 1,000 km² and flooding more than 600 km² (244 sq mi) of land, thus forcing over a million residents to relocate and wiping out hundreds of cities and villages. According to NASA, the water added to the

50 Ibid.

51 Wu Hung, ed., *Displacement: The Three Gorges Dam and Contemporary Chinese Art* (Chicago: Smart Museum Of Art/The University Of Chicago, 2008).

planet's surface will also increase the length of the day by 0.06 microseconds and shift the pole position by 0.8 inches.

Confronted in 1995 with the soon-to-be-realized catastrophe of this magnitude, Zhuang Hui conceived a work that counterposes the lively natural details of the holes, about to be erased by trillions of gallons of water, to the video-presence of the immense hydro-electric dam as seen in 2007. Zhuang Hui's excavation resonates with the dam's construction; the fragile hole filled with rainwater foreshadows the incommensurable planetary size of the basin that now covers it. By displaying these heterogeneous forms of existence next to each other, reuniting in the space of the installation what twelve years of building work has separated, *Longitude 109.88, Latitude 31.09* challenges the fullness of the river basin with the void of the holes. Zhuang Hui's project rejects any perceptual—and thus political—synthesis of past and present: we are witnessing impossible presents, heres and nows that no development narrative can bring together.

The holes are a mesmerizing theater of mineral and vegetal life, haunting ghosts and investigative documents. And yet, the installation is something else: a mechanism that diffuses the violence of speculative envioning techniques, replacing the futurity of ecosystem thinking with the split presence of autonomous natures. The scenario methodologies of neoliberal governmentality are colonizing the future by turning the present into the past of extinctionist storylines and climates of fear. *Longitude 109.88, Latitude 31.09* occupies instead our perception with lost but immanent presences, exploding the speculative time-space of the Anthropocene.

Pluriverse

The state of nature of the Anthropocene could only arise once the petrolization of the world, war against the poor and naturalization of market relations had been completed, and neoliberal-

ism had abandoned its ideological anti-socialist furore. Beyond the cult of entrepreneurial freedom and violent attacks against centralized planning, characteristic of its initial phase, neoliberalization has constructed speculative objects such as the abstract climate unit of one tonne of carbon dioxide equivalent (1tCO₂e), the pillar of the post-Kyoto Protocol climate regime.⁵² The ecosystems designed by neoliberal environing and the forensic ecologies of the Anthropocene are imprisoned in the infernal loops of modelled objects and real disasters, futurity and pre-emption, risk and fear.

The artists I have discussed show that autonomous natures and counter-forensics can emerge exclusively from marginal and excruciating beings, which cannot be framed within the Anthropocenic state of nature and speculative epistemologies of the Western states of nature. Decolonial art practices are aware of the “structural conflict between the economy and the environment.”⁵³ They know that the convergence of the planetary and the global under the spell of the Anthropocene’s ecologies obfuscates the residues of capitalist accumulation and colonial ecocides, the modes of existence of indigenous Earth beings and counter-natures.⁵⁴

Artists who boycott the cognitive premises of neoliberal environing are interrupting the political project of the globalization of nature, its savage ecology.⁵⁵ Their strategies of resistance are situated in heterogeneous zones of conflict and creation, as in the case of Regina José Galindo’s performance *Piedra* (2013),

52 In the context of global warming, the new frontier of the neoliberal order is carbon colonialism, “CO2lonialism”, the reinvention of environmental injustice through a system of equivalence between forests and fossil fuels, carbon sinks and industrial emissions. See Julia Dehm, “Carbon Colonialism or Climate Justice? Interrogating the International Climate Regime from a TWAIL Perspective,” *Windsor Yearbook of Access to Justice* 33, no. 3 (2016): p. 129–161.

53 Joan Martinez-Alier, *The Environmentalism of the Poor. A Study of Ecological Conflicts and Valuation* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2003).

54 Marisol de la Cadena, *Earth Beings: Ecologies of Practice across Andean Worlds* (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press 2015).

55 Jairus Victor Grove, *Savage Ecology: War and Geopolitics at the End of the World* (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press 2019).

which took place in a street of São Paulo and transformed paramilitary violence into a petrified sacrificial fetish: “My body remains immobile, covered with charcoal. Two volunteers and someone from the audience urinate on the stone-body.”⁵⁶ Whereas the neoliberal state of nature of the Anthropocene is a unified epistemology, an ecological phase of capitalism, the counter-natures nurtured by militant artistic practices allow us to catch a glimpse of the pluriverse.⁵⁷

56 Regina José Galindo, “Desierto - Piedra // Desert – Stone,” *Ecozon@* 8, no. 1 (2017): p. 190.

57 Bernd Reitel, ed., *Constructing the Pluriverse. The Geopolitics of Knowledge* (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press 2018).