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Twenty years ago, Sarah Franklin, Celia Lury and Jackie Stacey published *Global Nature, Global Culture*, a powerful feminist rejoinder to then hegemonic cultural theories of globalization for which the global meant a triumph of the universal. By envisioning the global as a problematic aspiration rather than as a master achievement, as a discursive condition and a powerfully structured yet non-deterministic process of social change, *Global Nature, Global Culture* took globalization studies from the epistemological abstraction of mainstream social science to a more experimental and pluralistic ground of interventions in the material-semiotic production of a global *imaginary*. If one of the tasks of feminist theory is still to challenge totalizing visions of the social in order to create new and better modes of coexistence, one should once again interrogate how images and image-making shape the global apocalypse “as a fantasy, as a set of practices, and as a context”¹ Gerardo Mosquera’s *Globalscape* provides an occasion to do this first of all by suggesting, through its dramatic opening image, that in recent years hyperbolic fantasies of the global have been exacerbated rather than the opposite by the acceleration of socioenvironmental collapse, out-of-control technoscientific power, and political impotence in the face of the most radical danger. Besides inviting viewers to critically assess the image-driven constitution of apocalyptic globalization, the show configures a space for thinking otherwise. In this companion essay, I reflect on the importance, for any desire to do so, of recent feminist thinking *with*, rather than about images, first of all by acknowledging them as more than human forces with a power of their own. Thus, after revisiting the global imaginary as a political and epistemological context in which to situate *Globalscape*, I follow the steps of feminist philosophers Joanna Zylinska and Claire Colebrook and suggest a sense in which any responsible rethinking of collectivity would involve an imaginative affirmation of *the end of the world*.

Revisiting the global imaginary

As contemporary humans witness ever more spectacular socio-environmental, economic and political disasters across the globe, at least those with plenty of access to the media find comparable opportunities to rekindle the twentieth century's fascination with ecological images of nature and the Earth. As if such images represented today not just a moral imperative to "save the planet" but truly the one remaining chance to inhabit it, humans would rather keep them around despite their troubling cybernetic and biopolitical associations, which were so memorably visualized by Adam Curtis in his documentary series All Watched Over By Machines of Loving Grace. Yet for the same reason, it would perhaps be prudent of them to keep asking why and how, rather than simply disappearing from Western sensibilities in the hyper-industrial twentieth century, the idea of "nature" became technologised, commodified and rebranded, while that of "culture" became renaturalised through the ecological visions of an emerging global imaginary. Such were the thesis and the task of Sarah Franklin, Celia Lury and Jackie Stacey Global Nature, Global Culture, where in a way relevant to our purposes, they also described the role of technical images as conditions of possibility of the global imaginary. As technologically enhanced icons, the blue planet, the foetus and the cell made possible "a different ability to represent, to scale and visualise life as global, planetary and endangered". But what kind of ability was that, and what kind of life was it about?

It wasn't so much a technological ability to better represent pre-existing entities such as the planet, the foetus and the cell, as it was the power of technical images to reframe life through novel perceptions of scale and symbolically interchangeable spheres of biological life, that bolstered the emergence of a universalist, and in this sense global imaginary. Technical imaging—which is to say photography, either analog or digital—was the condition, at once material and symbolic, for imagining the global as "a context which is isomorphic with itself". Upon interrogation, this context turns out to be nothing but an enhanced version of a rather traditional viewing position, namely, that of the self-effacing, disembodied subject of modern science and philosophy—the god's trick or "view from nowhere" perspective so memorably denounced three decades ago by Donna Haraway. From a feminist perspective, the global emerges from an erasure of familiar contexts and traditional horizons, which is to say, of all feminized realms. What the global offers instead, through the visual interchangeability of the isolated foetus container and the planet, are wider imperatives of global systems management that will sustain the planet for future generations; as a sacralised and fetishised image of endangered life, the foetus stands in for the whole of life itself and symbolises the future. The sustainability of life on planet Earth and the viability of the life of the foetus outside the mother's body become the focus for the discursive management of bodily and global risks, threats and catastrophes.

Images of the global, or the global imaginary, are ecological in a biopolitical sense, and in the same sense they are gendered as well as racialized. From this perspective, what is interesting about the microwave image of the universe that frames the Globalscape exhibition is not that it is the most complete representation of the Universe ever achieved. Rather, it is the opportunity to ask questions such as: Can the Planck satellite's microwave image disrupt the dominant gaze that configures us as global subjects; can it interrupt the fantasy of achieving total vision, or a context that is isomorphic with itself? Can it challenge the biopolitical coordinates...

of perception, or does it merely and conveniently reshuffle the archive of biological and reproductive metaphors of the universe as a newborn delivered by the Big Bang, or as the seed or origin of "our" world? These questions are only one way of stating the problematic that *Globalscape* opens up for discussion through a variety of often ironic works which are set up as responses to the large microwave image that frames the exhibition, such as David Tranchina’s self-portraits of the cosmos, or Luis Camnitzer’s *Landscape as Attitude*. Rather than attempting their own representations of the cosmos, such images poke fun at such an idea and ask questions about who sees what and how – not just conceptual or epistemological but also political, ethical and existential. Other artworks in the exhibition offer a variety of hypotheses, performing more or less radical moves in a difficult conversation. Glenda León’s *We are Made of Stars* might be suggesting that the driving force of images themselves is not the self-effacing subject of technological prowess, nor the modern voluntaristic subject of cosmopolitan lifestyles, but rather the body of a woman, the skin as a slice of time itself, which belongs not to humans but to the stars. Many other images, concerned as they are with the violence of representation, suggest that there is no innocent answer to the question of who sees what and how, because the aesthetic register of all denunciations of violence is always implicated somehow in the violence that is being denounced. Hence Roberto Brito’s *Your Steps Were Lost in the Landscape*.

In his curatorial essay, Gerardo Mosquera plainly states that the very attempt to represent totality is an act of extreme hubris, and that hubris is the foundation of the very notion of a landscape. He reminds us that the word 'landscape' comes from the Latin *pagus*, which refers to the physical marking of a property, an owned territory, and suggests that if historically landscape was constituted as 'art' – an object of either knowledge, or the right kind of experience – through the exclusion or othering of something such as Chinese landscape painting, it is ultimately by virtue of such a constitutive mechanism that without Chinese landscape painting "there would be practically no contemporary landscape and therefore this exhibition could not have been organized". In other words, the point is not just art historical and it is not just contemporary: it is a philosophical, ethical and political issue, which is that the modern logic of representation continues to inform contemporary art/theory through the very image of the global. In 'How [the] Inscrutable Chinese Led to Globalized Theory', Rey Chow observed that in deconstruction, perhaps the most radical challenge to representationalism as metaphysics,

…*the silent graphicity of Chinese writing is both inscrutable and very scrutable: though Westerners such as Derrida may not be able to read it, they nonetheless proceed to do so by inscribing in it a new kind of theorizing (speculation), a new kind of intelligibility. The inscrutable Chinese ideogram has led to a new scrutability, a new insight that remains Western and that becomes, thereafter, global*.

Taking a cue from Chow, I would like to go back to the global imaginary and ask how come images themselves do not get lost in the globalscape. Without their ongoing essentialist reduction to passive objects of human vision, manipulation, and consumption, or to mere tools for knowledge as representation, for art, for politics, or for any new kind of theorizing of the human condition, there would be no globalscape, and therefore this exhibition could not have been organized. In this sense, images themselves have taken on the role of "the inscrutable Chinese". But is there another life of images themselves that is not and cannot not be reduced by

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a sexist and racist biopolitical gaze? What, for example, if the microwave image were in fact not a landscape, and what if no image was ever reducible to this or that general aesthetic category or classification? This is just another way of formulating the questions that *Globalscape* asks to the global imaginary, which is to say, to the dominant gaze that configures humanity’s relationship with images—and thereby with themselves—at a time when images and image-making have revealed themselves to be comprehensive matters of life and death.

**An Image Which is Not One**

*iEarth* (2013) is a landscape series by feminist philosopher and media artist Joanna Zylinska, who describes it as a response, at once serious and playful, to the “illusion of telluric unity” that globalization came to stand for in the second half of the twentieth century. Drawing on recent research by Chris Rusil, Zylinska refers to the aesthetic manipulation of the *Earthrise* image taken during the Apollo mission of 1968 as a subjugation of “the nonhuman eye of the space camera to the visual mastery of the human”. Hence the homonymy between the “I” and the “eye” in *iEarth*, “a commentary on our practices of looking at the world but also on our narcissism when engaging with it.” Poking some fun at the monumentalization of nature and the view from nowhere perspective that large-format Earth photography often adopts, Zylinska digitally photographed, processed and turned a children’s diorama kit into a GIF animation. Moreover, the lush green, flitting pixelation of *iEarth* brings to life the unstable construction of the landscape genre, seriously challenging the viewer to situate herself in the ambiguous borders between nature and artifice, between the self and the other. In this way, what *iEarth* performs is an injunction to become actively involved in the process of seeing, whether it is by moving the head, blinking, “or even looking away from the dizziness caused by this pseudo-sublime”.

We can now try to go back to the problem of ecological images of nature and Earth that we began with, to the problem of representation as an insidious logic of appropriation, reduction and violence and, finally, to the apocalyptic dimensions that globalization has reached in the last twenty years. Admittedly, each of these problems merits a much more extensive treatment than they have received in this short piece, which rather circles around their convergence in the question of what it might mean to rethink collectivity with images. In the Western tradition of thought, images have been figured as objects of suspicion, instruments for representational knowledge, and finally, objects of fascination and appropriation. The feminist critique of such a tradition of thought has pointed out that Western humanity’s relationship with images is thoroughly gendered, and has attempted to enable a different relationship with images which has wide ranging implications not only for the material and semiotic organization of the social, but also, potentially, for the existential predicament of contemporary humans in the apocalyptic phase of globalization.

In the current apocalyptic conjuncture it seems vital to think again about the implications of the fact that images achieve their effects not by representing reality, but by affecting, disturbing and powerfully rearranging material archives, frameworks, and contexts of which any “we” is but an unstable function. As one

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of the main drivers of the posthuman paradigm in knowledge production, feminist theory keeps asking the question, in ever more surprising ways, of who gets to count as "we" by virtue of seeing what and how.

Philosopher Claire Colebrook writes, for instance, that “[n]ow, more than ever, feminism is presented with the question of point of view: there has always been a composed “who” or “we” –which makes any question or discipline possible. [...] if the personal is political, then it is also geological…”11. But how best to imagine, and thereby relate to, this geological, or how exactly can the familiar scales of the personal-political be rearticulated with it? What iEarth suggests is that rethinking the self –both the individual “I” and the collective “we” –involves more than a semiotic analysis of geological representations, and also more than a political analysis of how those representations are complicit with ongoing oppressions. While situated semiotic and material analyses remain indispensable, the current human predicament seems to call for a more radical shift of perspective that brings into focus the geological dimensions of everyday life. So, is there another geological life of images themselves, a life that is not and cannot not be reduced through a biopolitical gaze? Is there another perception or mode of relation with images that could bring about another more responsible self?

In her book Nonhuman Photography (2017), Zylinska clears a path through the problem of the intersection of the personal and the geological by positing imaging, and photographic imaging in particular, as a life-giving force: “not as a passive recording of the world but as an active process of shaping it through making cuts in the imagistic flow”12. The imagistic flow refers to a processual, critical vitalist conception of matter –and therefore of the geolog-

ics –from which any "we" emerges through acts of "cutting" with the available bodily and cognitive apparatus, language, memory and technologies. From this perspective, photographs are in fact fossils, that is, cuts of geological time. And from this perspective as well, rethinking collectivity is not fundamentally different from performing those cuts in ever more thoughtful and collaborative ways. Whereas this might sound as a traditional notion of the human giving form to inert matter, Zylinska’s point is, on the contrary, that we humans have always been an effect of cutting technologies, and that therefore we have always been partly nonhuman. It is worth emphasizing that the nonhuman in “us” –an image which is not one –is not for feminist theorists like Zylinska some dead thing that the human must give shape to and thereby transcend. On the contrary, the nonhuman materiality that is a condition for the human to emerge is precisely a temporal force that, once liberated, has the potential of giving life back to a paralyzed “we” –the paralyzed community of “the human”. What Zylinska envisions through nonhuman photography is therefore a new mode of thinking and acting in the world based on a complex understanding of and an active engagement with perception “as unfixed, nonlinear, embodied and mobile”13. From such a nonhuman perspective, rethinking collectivity involves seeing and unseeing the sky in Analía Amaya’s Fleeting Landscape, as well as actively losing a perspective of the whole in Iosif Király’s Reconstructions.

In what Zylinska calls the current “photographic condition”, visualizing technologies have become an environment in which nonhuman agents, such as algorithms, shape and configure perception and experience most often without the intervention of human intentionality, presenting humans with a new opportunity to rethink themselves “as transitory and existing in a series of dynamic relations with other nonhuman entities and processes in the geo-and


biosphere”\textsuperscript{14}. Yet in her view much of current artistic photography merely reproduces humanism by making photographs pass off as representations of what is important to the human eye. This trend seems to have repressed the early history of artistic photography, which included a revolutionary attempt to transform vision through the exploration of nonhuman perspectives. Echoing the Central European avant-gardes, Zylinska asks contemporary humans: “If a liberation of the I/eye is to occur, what forms of subjectivity and perception does it require?”\textsuperscript{15} Nonhuman vision, or Zylinska’s challenge to unthink that we know what we see, is one way of asserting the connection between the personal and the geological, where the geological is affirmed, like materiality and technology, as a creative process that humans temporarily inhabit and work with in singular ways, rather than as a sublime scale that the human in general must pitch himself against. But one may ask, what is the point of celebrating images as a force of life, or of encouraging artists to become nonhuman envisioners with technology, at a time of technically-driven and seemingly irreversible extinction?

Most often, an awareness of extinction takes the form of melancholia, as in Lars von Trier’s film of 2011, which figures (white) humanity as pretty much doomed and impotent against the stars. What is crucial, in Claire Colebrook’s words, for this melancholic, and therefore humanistic, imaging of life, “...is that some remaining witness be there to remember this Earth as the world, not a planet that simply is but a world that appears to itself”\textsuperscript{16}. The remaining witness in the case of Melancholia would be of course “us” mourning consumers of the film, as of so many other sublime images of the Earth not as a planet but as a world: “that which appears and recalls itself”\textsuperscript{17}. What Colebrook suggests to those of us who relate to images in the form of witnessing the world, is that we “abandon the post-apocalyptic terror of being without the world, and instead think the apocalypse as the end of the world”\textsuperscript{18}. But what does this mean, and how is it consistent with Zylinska’s injunction to celebrate the geological as an imagistic flow?

Whereas extinction is not in itself a metaphor, the end of the world refers to the ultimate failure of “humanity” in the modern epistemological and political sense of a representational agent that creates a meaning of itself for itself by means of images. The current awareness of extinction can take the form not of melancholia, but of affirmation of the end of the world with images rather than by means of them. Whereas Zylinska’s non-human vision undertakes such an affirmation in terms of nonhuman vision, Colebrook argues for the creation of images without world. Regarding our posthuman predicament as thinking functions of such images, Colebrook writes

\textit{If I take a fragment from a world, place it in a gallery, and set it apart, it is now in a position, either to be read as a sign of a world that offers itself to be read, or in a far more sublime manner as an image as such, without world, without sense, and without humanity.}\textsuperscript{19}

After the global, which is to say, after the human, there only remains an opening of the "we" to time and the real. Zylinska’s nonhuman vision and Colebrook’s images without world are two philosophical articulations of such an opening, which renovate feminism as a critical –even destructive –imperative in relation with the biopolitical gaze that has configured the globalscape. Writing about the very last pictures in the universe, Zylinska invokes a styrofoam cup as a time machine that could help humans to see not the world the limitations of their worldly horizons and perspectives. Writing about the contemporary aesthetic elevation

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of images, Colebrook argues that only when "art objects appear as lost, no longer recognized, or as mere junk, we are given images without world"\textsuperscript{20}. So much for sophrosyne: a existential acceptance that the planet is not reducible to our world, that life does not coincide with our life, and that such a non-coincidence is the only remaining source of responsible, imaginative joy.

Bibliography


