The Contemporary Condition

rethinking the sublime

In the Age of the Anthropocene

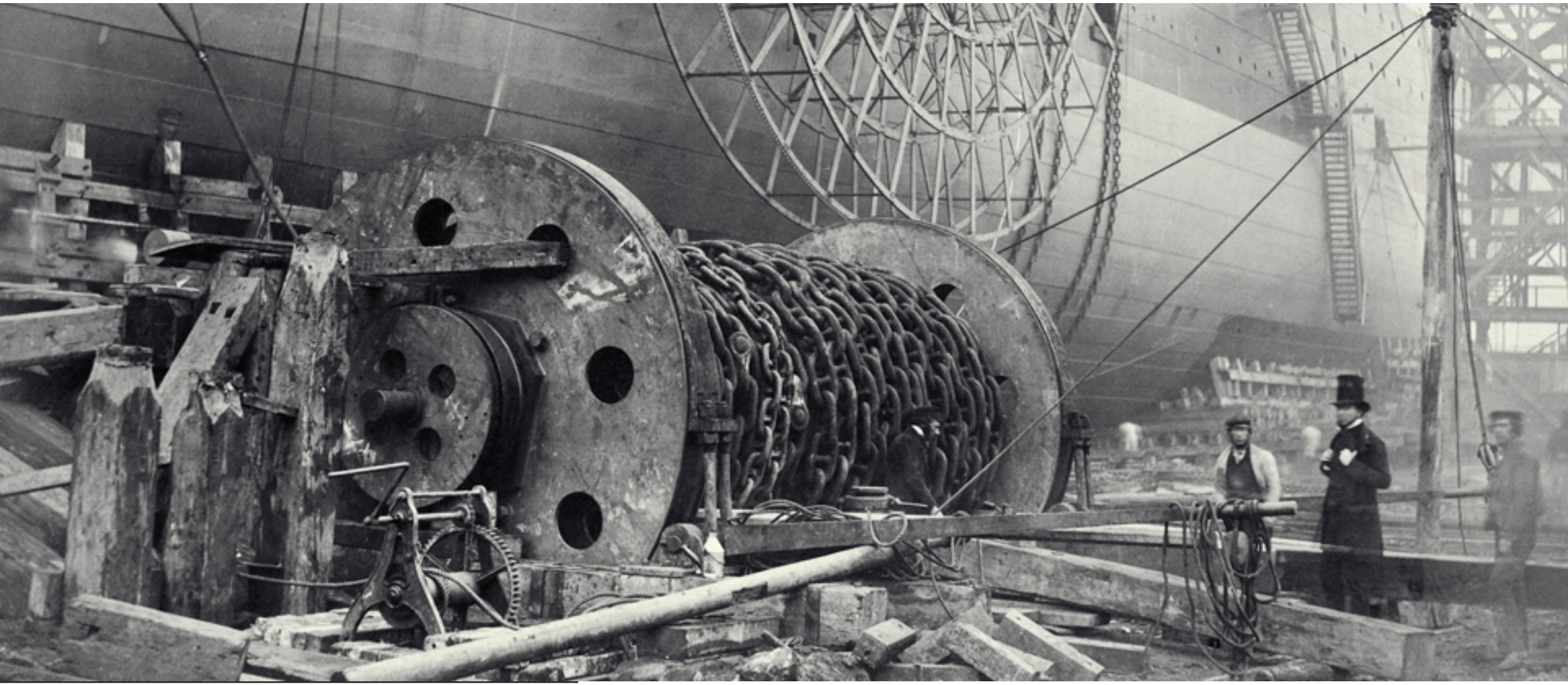
Recap

on **Lecture One**

The Sublime in the Age of the Anthropocene

- Age of the Anthropocene
- The Three Ecologies – Felix Guattari
- The Age of Enlightenment
- The Industrial Revolution
- The Sublime as a **historico-cultural** construct
- Burke and Kant (and Longinus) on the Sublime
- Aesthetics and Ethics
- Romantic, Contemporary, Technological Sublime
- Finitude, Scale, Terror
- **Shock and Awe Exhibition**







Birth of the Modern Age

Grand Narratives Revisited

- Modernism
- The questioning of the certainties of modern science is a part of what **Lyotard** describes as **'incredulity toward metanarratives'.**
- Grand Narratives are authoritative. Establishing their political or cultural views as absolute truths beyond any means of criticism.
- For **Lyotard,** they have a totalizing effect on culture, reducing it to universal codes in favour of **the celebration of difference and understandings** located within particular knowledge regimes.
- In other words you have to believe the metanarrative.

Ideology of Aesthetics

Sublime – Aesthetics influences Ethics

Moral Codes for society shaped by aesthetics

Ideologies (systems of belief)

We've previously discussed the following western ideologies:

- **Capitalist**
- **Marxist**
- **Patriarchal**
- **Feminist**

RECAP: Ideologies

A shared system of values and attitudes.

Ideologies help us to make sense of our reality

The Sublime - Evolving within Historico-cultural Context

The sublime as concept and cultural practice has played a central role in western understanding, **engaging aesthetic, spiritual and ethical values** ranging from the mid seventeenth-century translations of Longinus, to Burkean and Kantian sublimes of the proto-Romantic and Romantic periods, via nineteenth-century concerns with science and theology to recent theoretical writing.

However, there is still much to be investigated **in the spaces between** art, language and nature.

modernism

singularity

modern knowledge rests on its appeal to grand narratives

Essentialism

The Grid

postmodernism

plurality

knowledge is specific to **language-games**

embraces local, plural and heterogeneous knowledges.

Anti-essentialist

Threads within Fabrics

Grids and Threads within Fabrics

between Modernism and Postmodernism

Evolving Narrative Perspectives

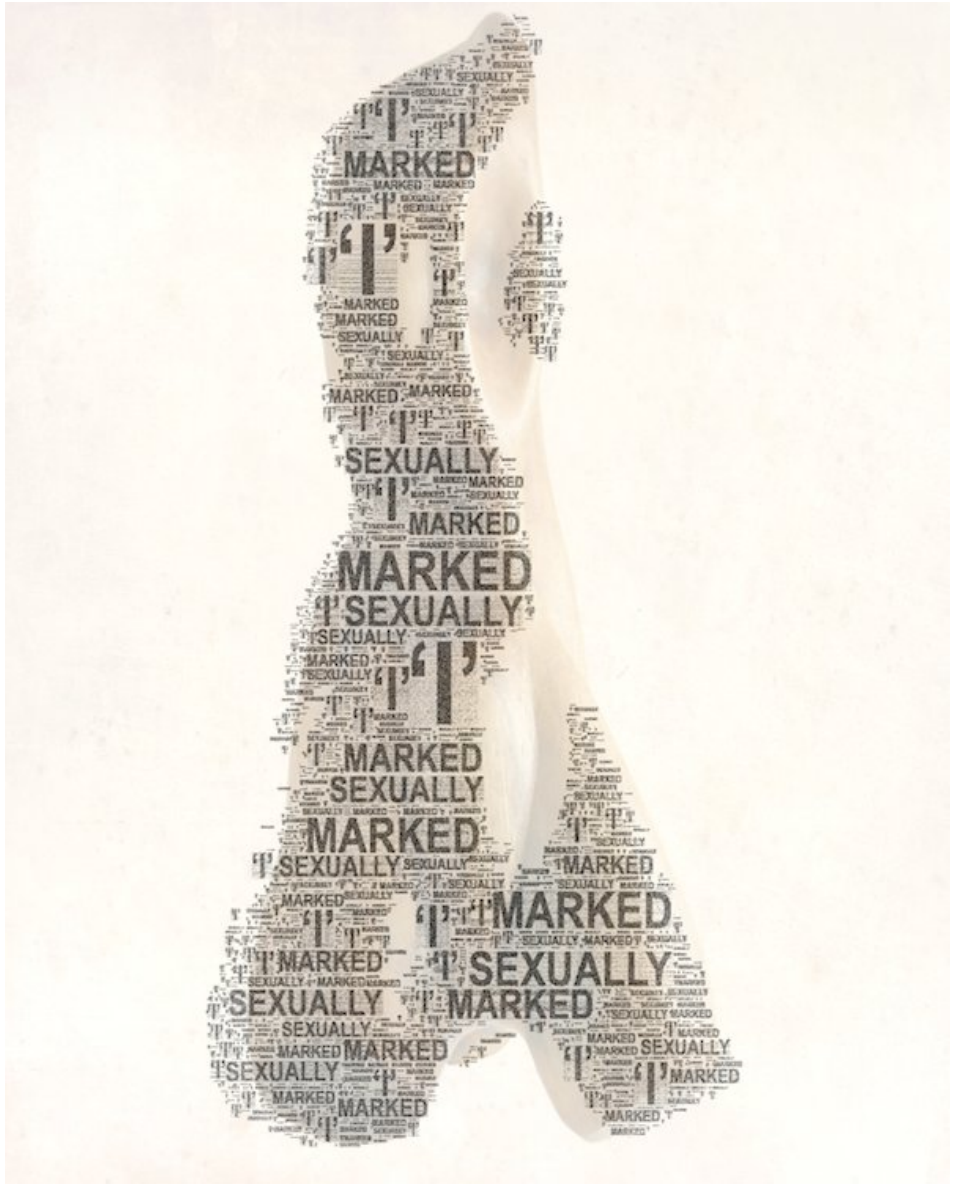
- Feminist method and theories have instead offered a socially concerned alternative to the increasingly mechanized evolution of art about art.
- The 1970's might not have been **pluralistic** at all if woman had not emerged during the decade to introduce **the multicolored threads of female experience into the male fabric of modern art.**



Elsi Giauque

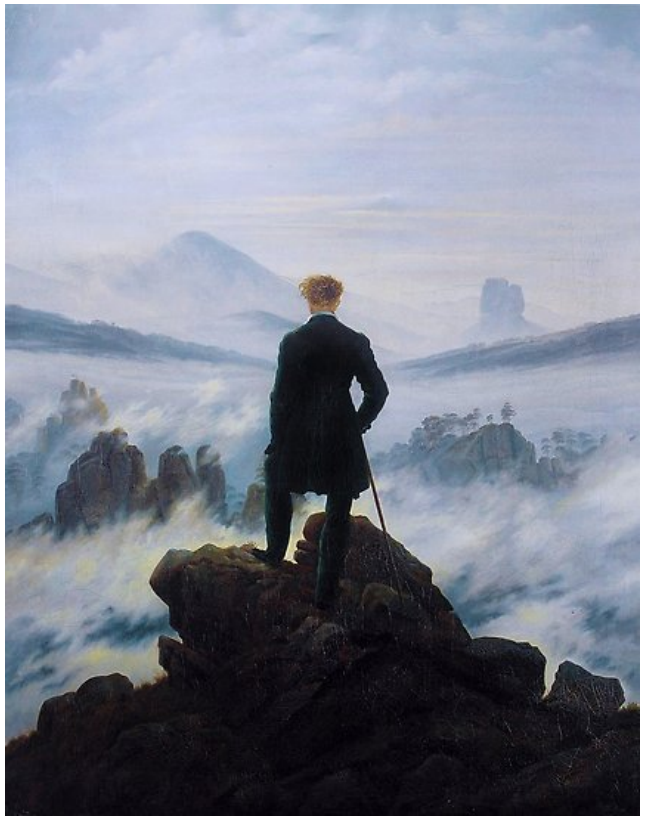
Grammar reflects,
for both men and women,
a valorization of masculinity and
an erasure of femininity.

Luce Irigaray



‘Size matters’

Masculine Sublime



- Burkes – binary of Beauty (Feminine) and Sublime (Masculine).
- In the writings of both **Burke and Kant, the desire to masculinise** the sublime is further suggested.
- by how much size matters, as does scale, in the natural landscapes or phenomena deemed especially conducive to sublimity: soaring peaks, vertiginous cliffs, roaring rivers, massive earthquakes, violent storms.
- **Mary Wollstonecraft** – provides an early feminist response to the Burkean sublime.

Mary Wollstonecraft's

Dislocation of the Masculine Sublime: A Vindication



- Criticism of Burkes style…
- the Feminine Sublime, and the Marginalised *Rhetor* (an orator)
- Rhetorical insurgency – use of language and rhetoric

- **Terry Eagleton** observes in the Aesthetics of Ideology that **"the distinction between the beautiful and the sublime, then, is that between woman and man,"** but rather that **patriarchal assumptions** about the nature of sexual difference are at the source, and provide the thematic value, of Burke's distinction between the sublime and the beautiful.
- unifying structure for both his aesthetic and political ideas.

- **Judith Butler's** argument that while all **language is iterative**, the iteration of given cultural codes by marginalized groups can divert the chain of signification toward greater social equity.

A Feminist response to the Romantic sublime

Countering the Canon

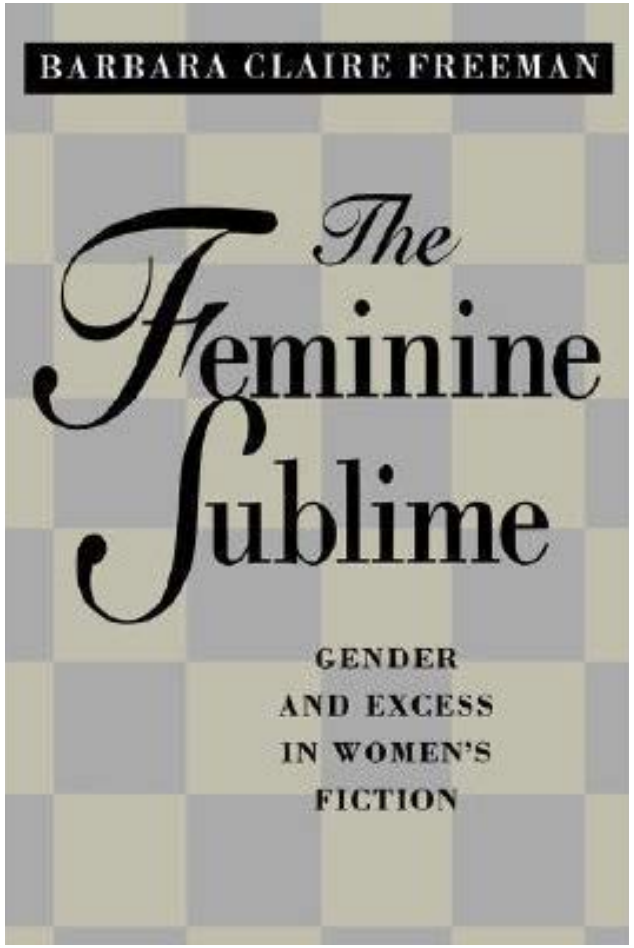
Barbara Freeman

Freeman offers a typical feminist response; discourse and engagement rather than hegemony and brute force.

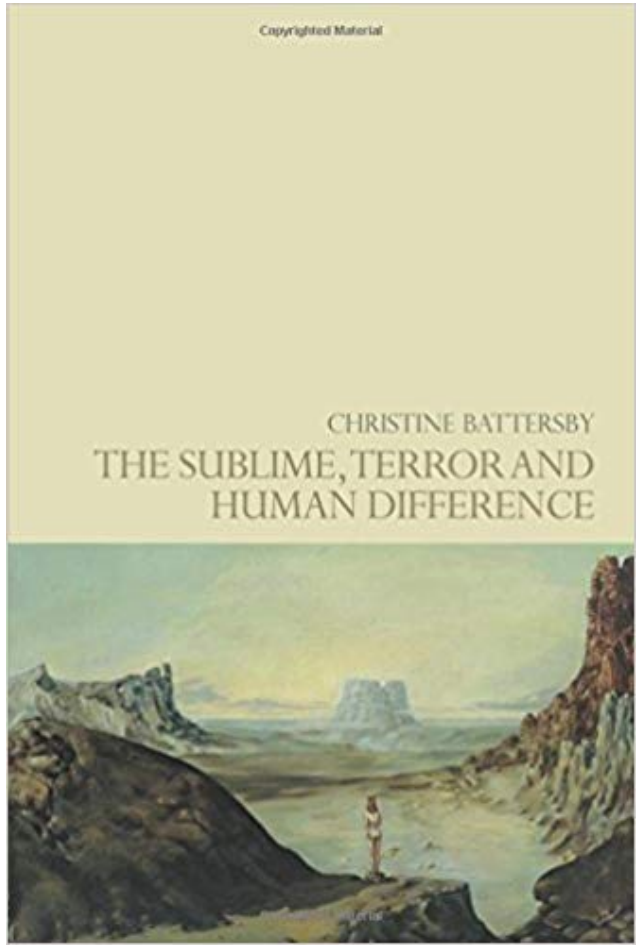
The dominant ideology of patriarchy and phallocentric nature of such the Romantic sublime haunts canonical theories of the sublime

Burkean and Kantian sublimes become “a discourse of domination,” that aims to control excess through highly gendered language.

a period which also sees the height of colonialism, the industrial exploitation of the natural world, and the development of the Victorian, bourgeois, patriarchal ideas of the family and consequent ideas about gender.



Freeman, B.C., 1995. *The feminine sublime: gender and excess in women's fiction*. Univ of California Press.



Battersby, C., 2013. *The sublime, terror and human difference*. Routledge.

Rethinking the **Sublime**

- Between Sense and Reason…
- The Feminine Sublime
- Gendered Sublime - Burke and Kant revisited
- *The End of Man* – But not the End of the World
- Power Structures | Patriarchy | Phallocentric
- Modernism to Postmodernism
- Towards an Ethics for the Anthropocene
- Posthuman Possibilities

Posthumanism

post-*humanism*

The Great Acceleration

Where are we aheading....?



The Posthuman Predicament

Anthropocene Revisited

- anthropocentric v ecocentric
- Custodian approach over nature
- Nature as resource.

what is **posthumanism**?

a new philosophy for the age of the anthropocene?

- post-humanism – after *humanism*…
- de-centering of Man
- convergence of humans and technology
- contrast with **transhumanism**

Posthumanism

Posthuman or post-human is a concept originating in the fields of **science fiction, futurology, contemporary art, and philosophy** that literally means a person or entity that exists in a state beyond being human.



WHAT MAKES US HUMAN?

…towards the posthuman sublime

In the age of the anthropocene

The End of Man

A Feminist Counterapocalypse

Joanna Zylinska



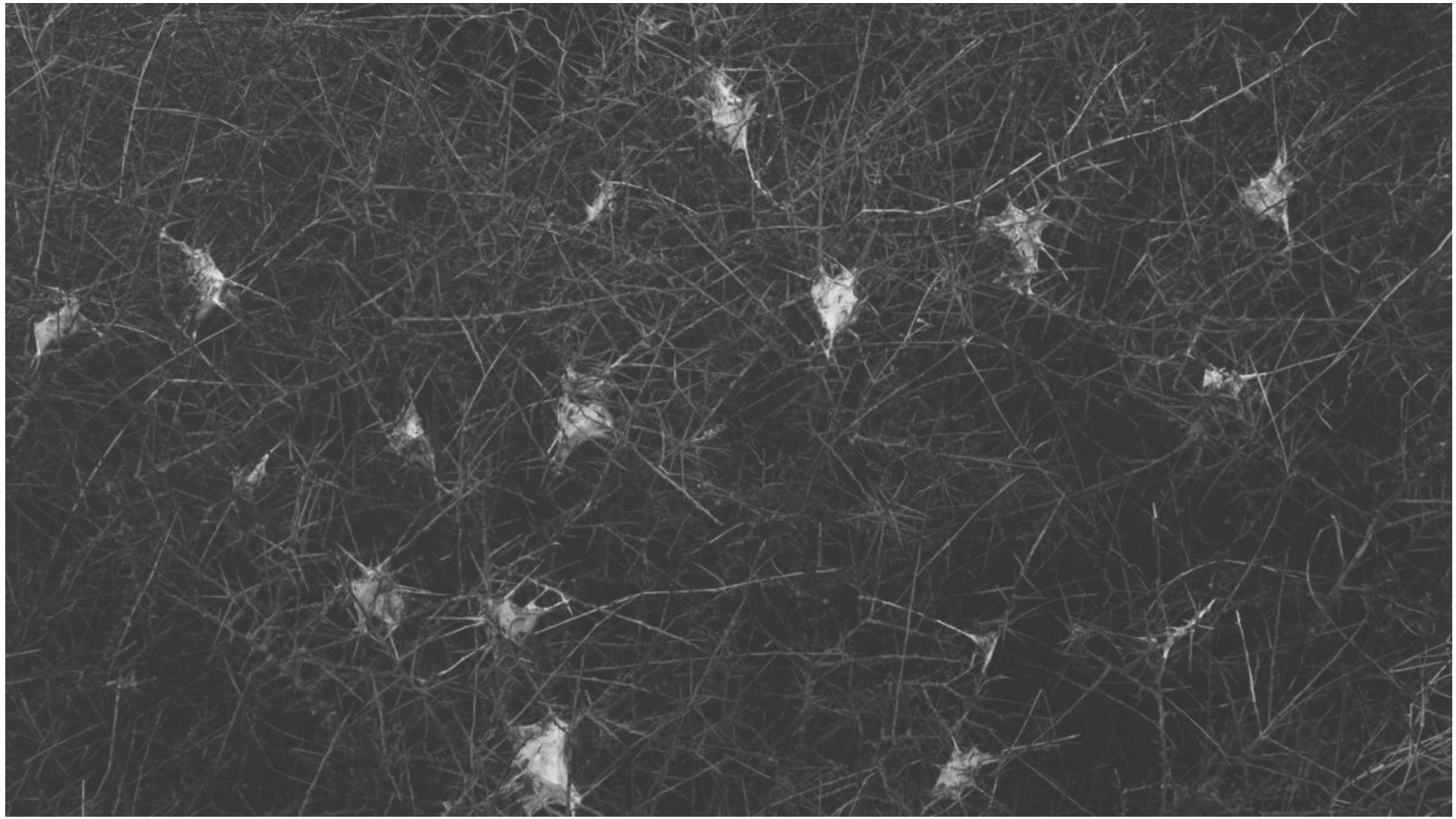


“We need a new way of seeing the Anthropocene”



Minimal Ethics for the Anthropocene

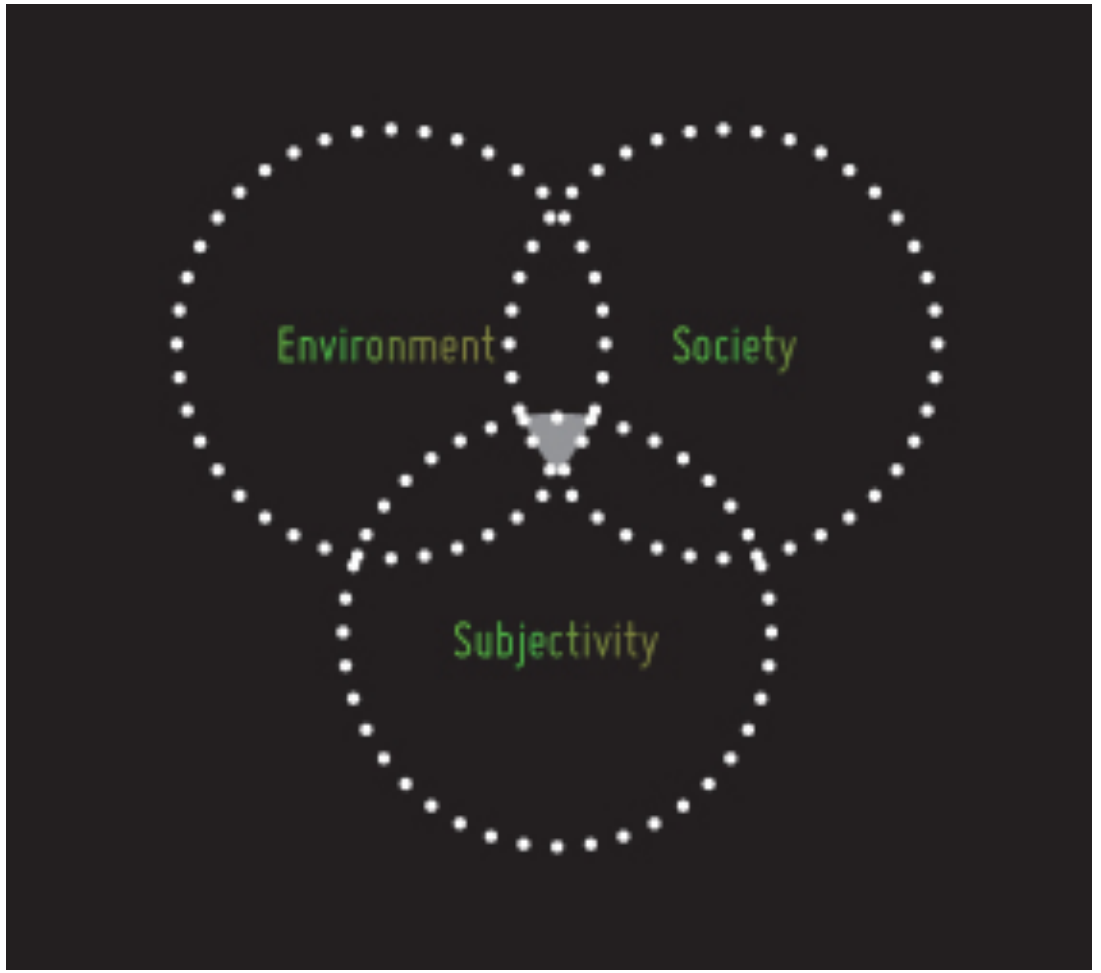
TOWARDS PHOTOGRAPHY WITHOUT MAN?



Capturing the End of the World

EXIT MAN

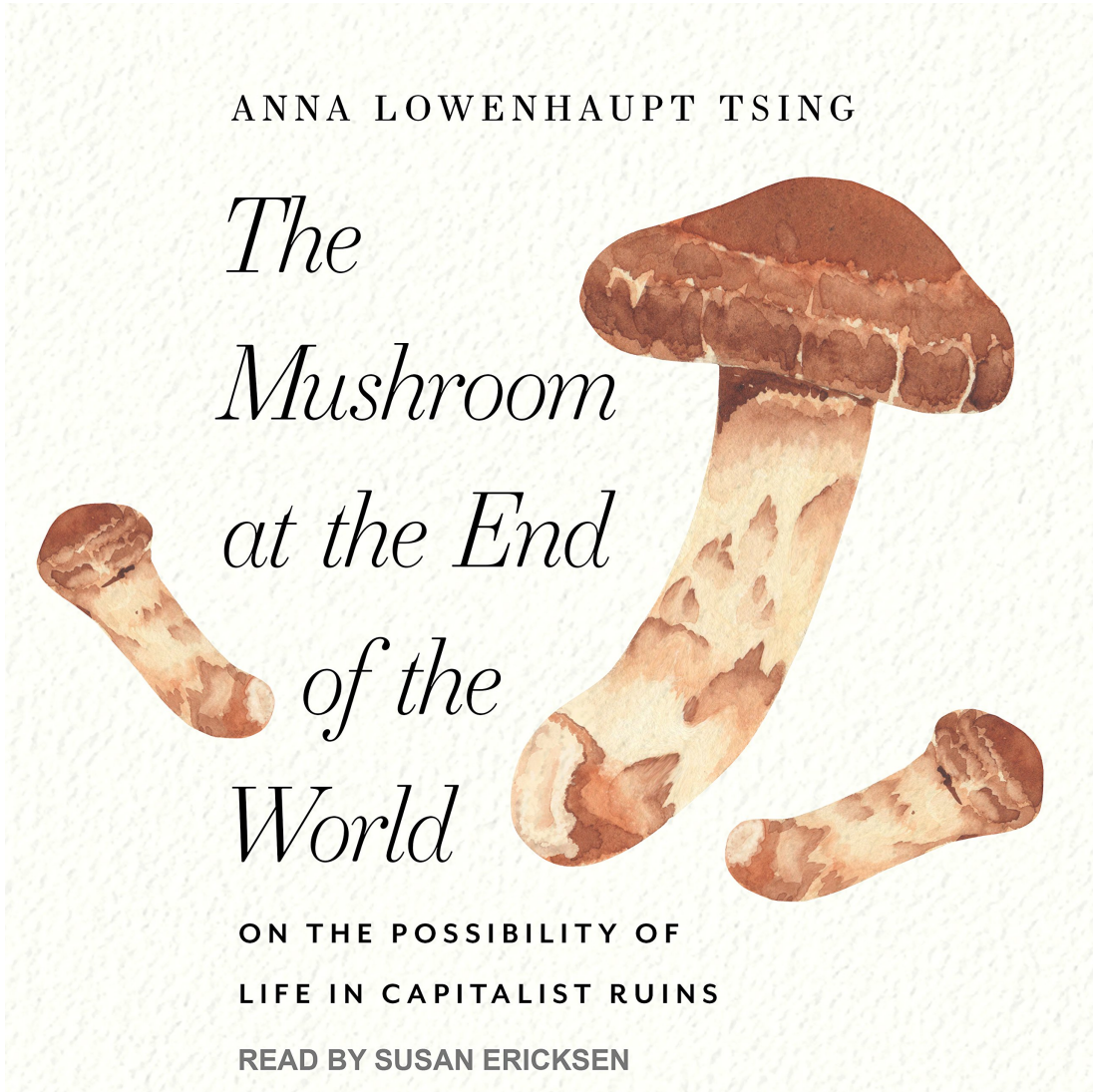




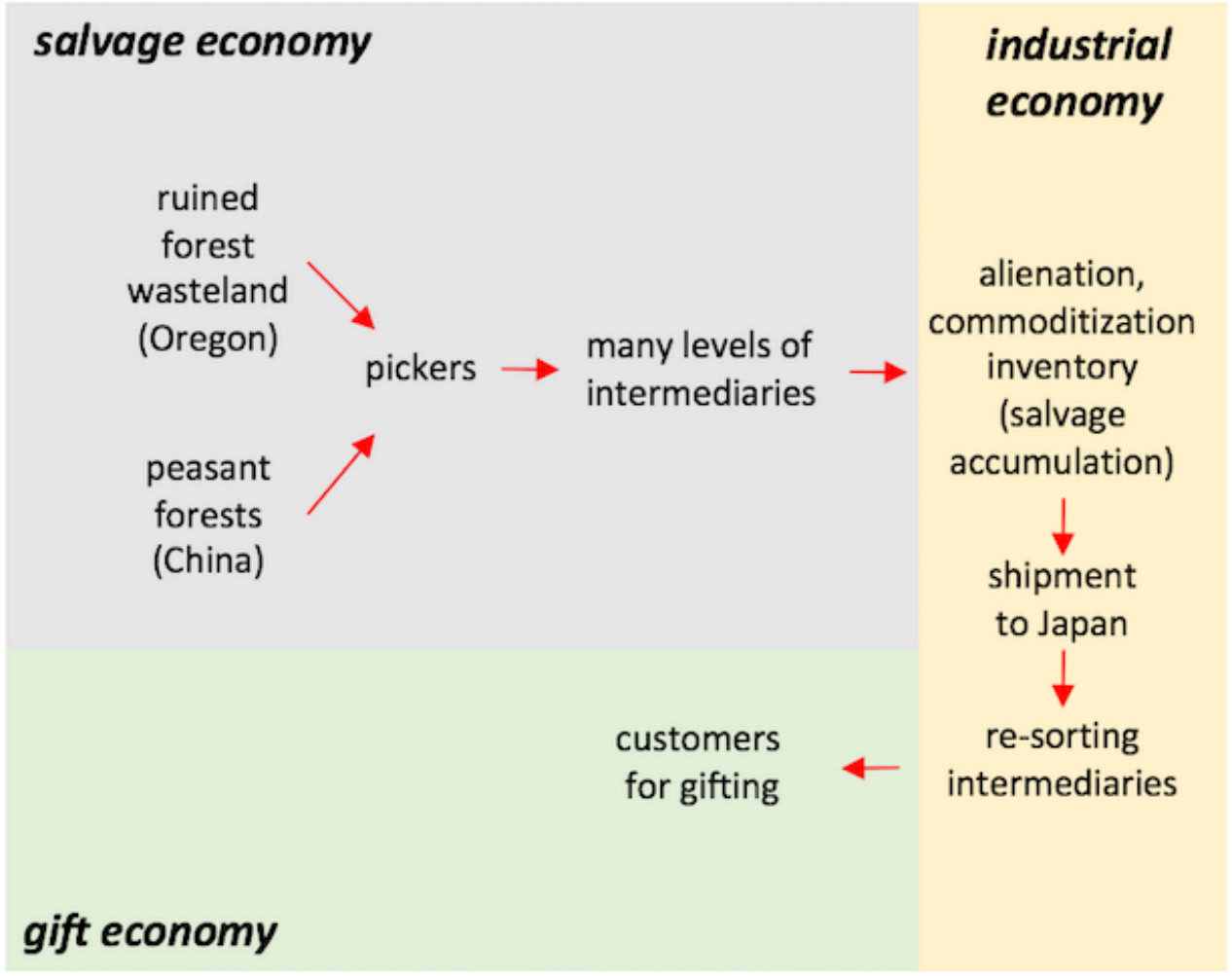
Ecosophical perspective as articulated by Félix Guattari, at the intersection of environmental, social and subjective (mind) domains. The ecosophical concept envisions ‘a reconstruction of social and individual practices’ through both scientific and aesthetic embodiment.

The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist

Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing

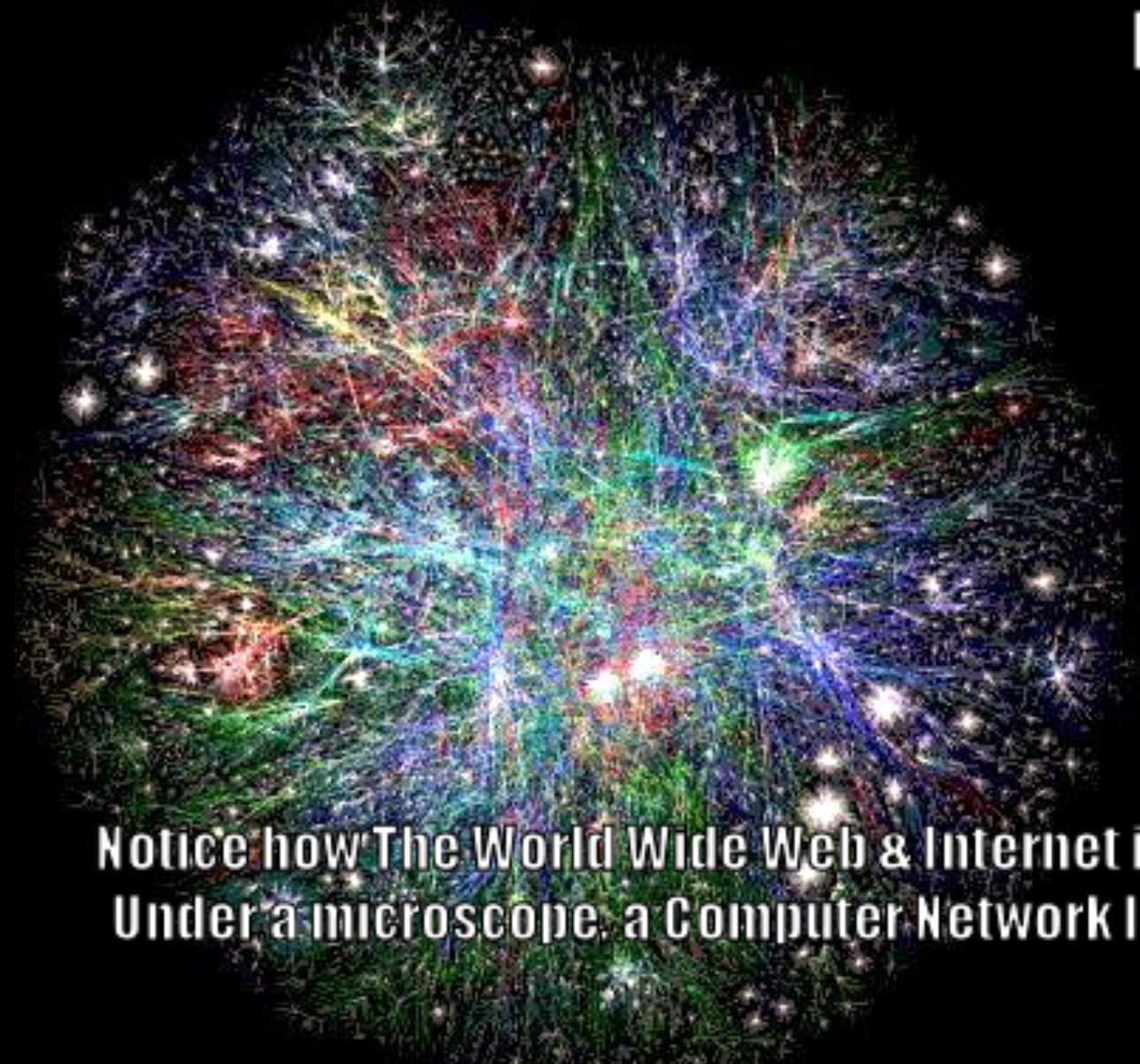


The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist



some key assemblages in the movement of matsutake

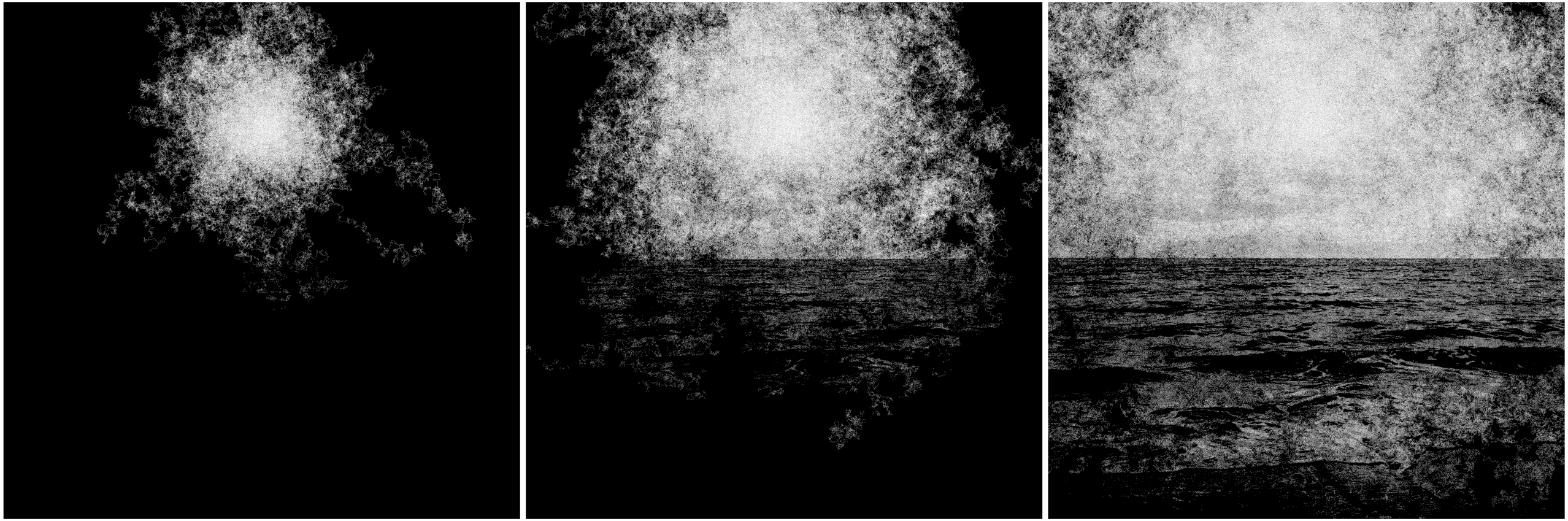
The Internet:



Magic Mushroom Mycelium:



Notice how The World Wide Web & Internet is based on Mushroom Mycelium?
Under a microscope, a Computer Network looks exactly like Fungi Mycelium!



The **SOLAS** Project

THE SOLAS PROJECT

what has photography become in the networked age?”

focus of power is based around **fibre optics** rather than the **optical nerve** in the 21st century…

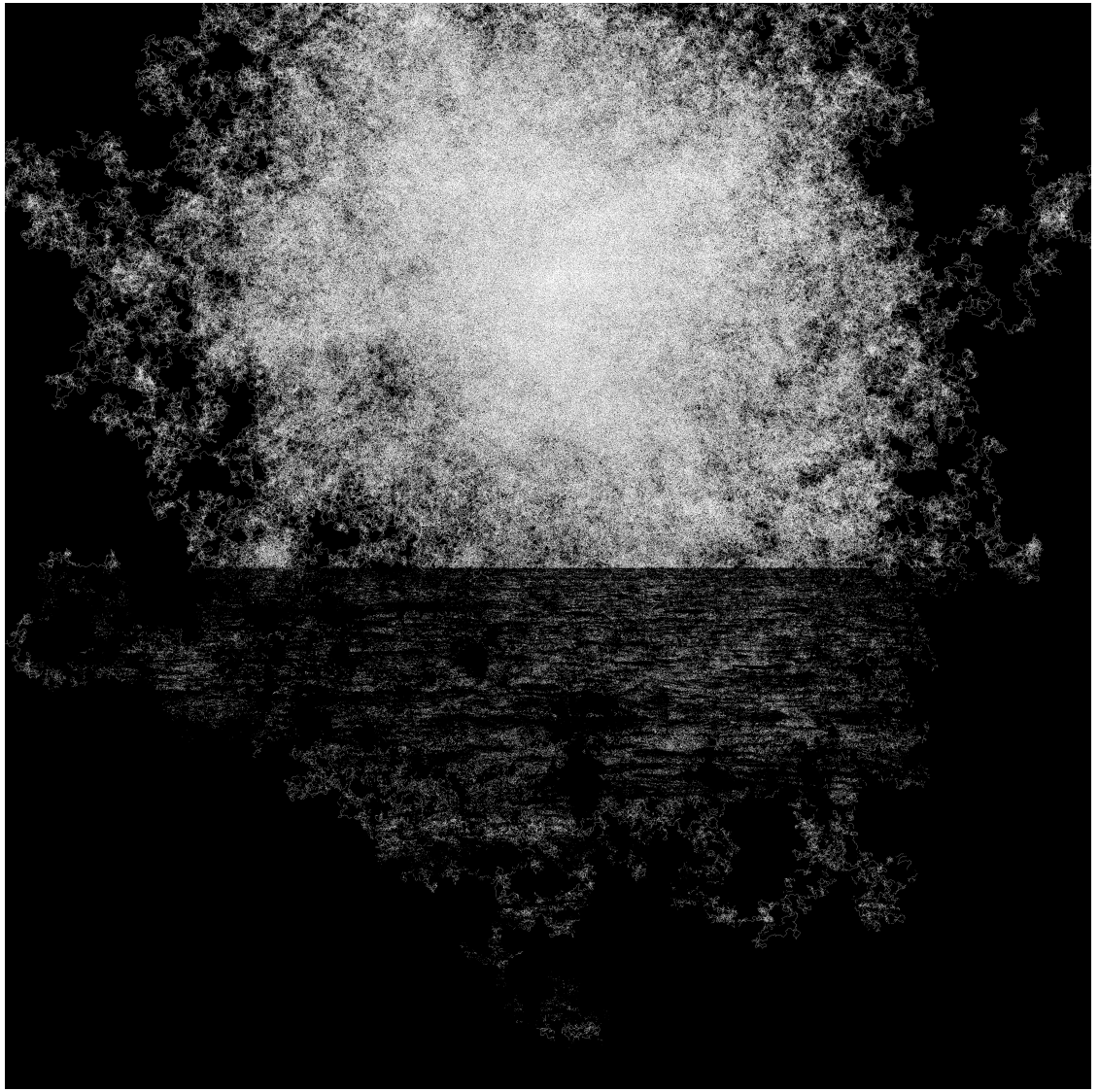
how can **raw data** itself be used to **construct images of the world** through photography?”

photos become ‘food’ (data) generatively eaten by **mycelium** spores encoded in **foraging algorithms**

the digital image in photographic culture – **algorithmic photography** and the **crisis of representation**

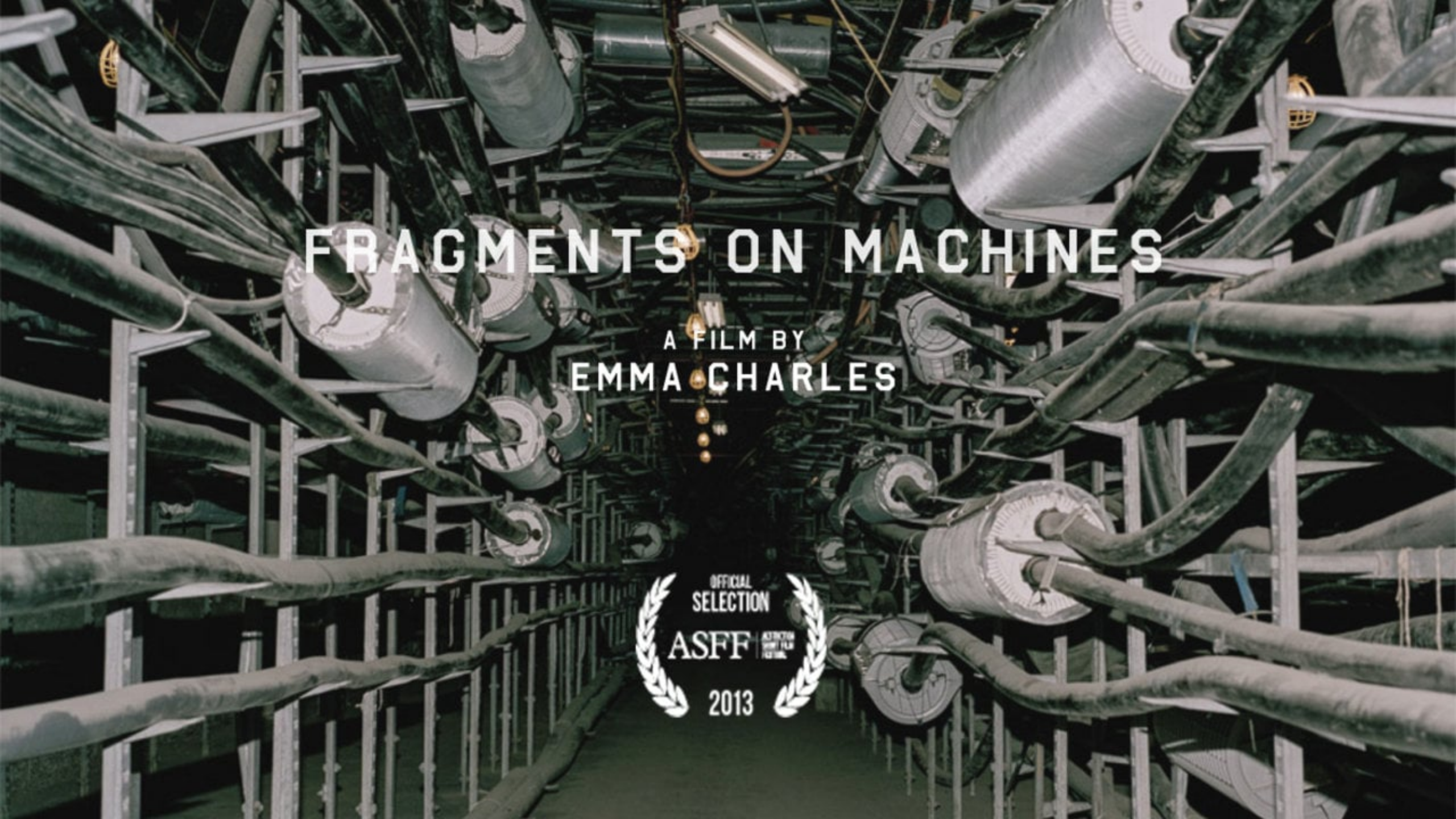
tracing time in in the network ages - media archaeology…interrogating the **archive…big data…**data mining**…deep time…**





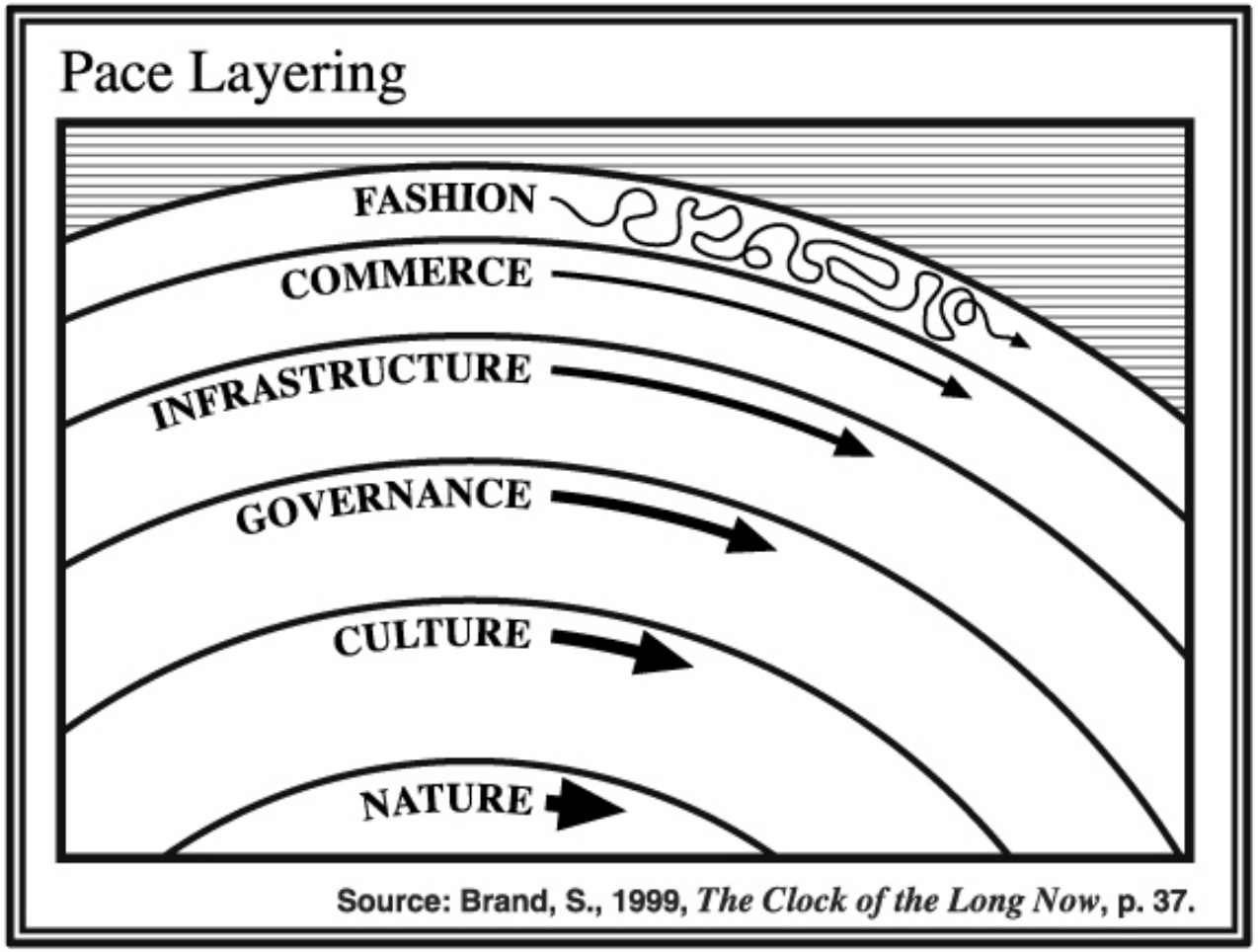

THE SOLAS PROJECT




FRAGMENTS ON MACHINES
A FILM BY
EMMA CHARLES
OFFICIAL
SELECTION
ASFF
2013

A Geology of Media and The Anthrobscene

Jussi Parikka



Deep Time | Deep Mining

Rosa Barba

Installation view of Rosa Barba's exhibition "The Color Out of Space" at MIT's List Center.



Digital Rubbish

A Natural History of Electronics



Gabrys, Jennifer. *Digital rubbish: A natural history of electronics*. University of Michigan Press, 2011.

"Ephemeral Screens: Exchange at the Interface" which examines the computer screens used at the Nasdaq Stock Market as material fossils of economic exchange, the performativity of networks, and related cultural imaginaries.

Dark Ecology

For a Logic of Coexistence

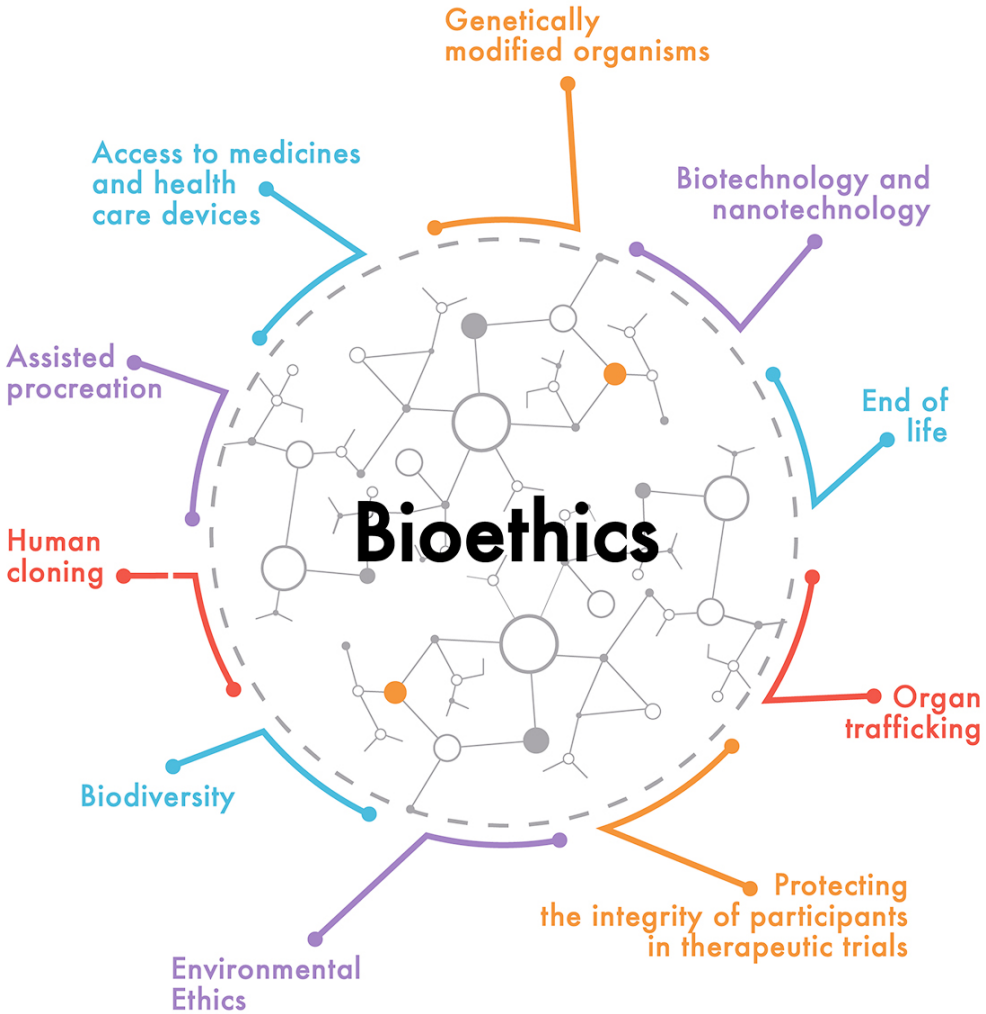
Timothy Morton



dark ecology does not mean heavy or bleak; it is strangely light

Bioethics

How to Live with **Machines**, **Humans**, and **Other Animals**

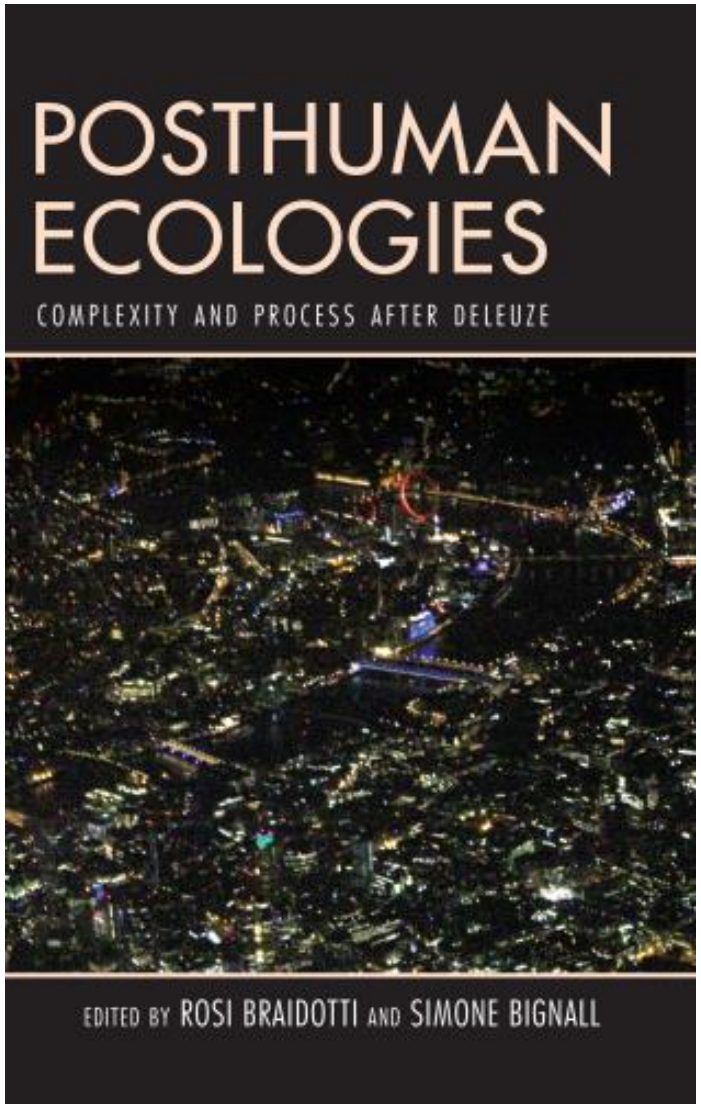


posthuman futures

posthuman capitalism



Posthumanism, or the Cultural Logic of Global Neo-Capitalism?

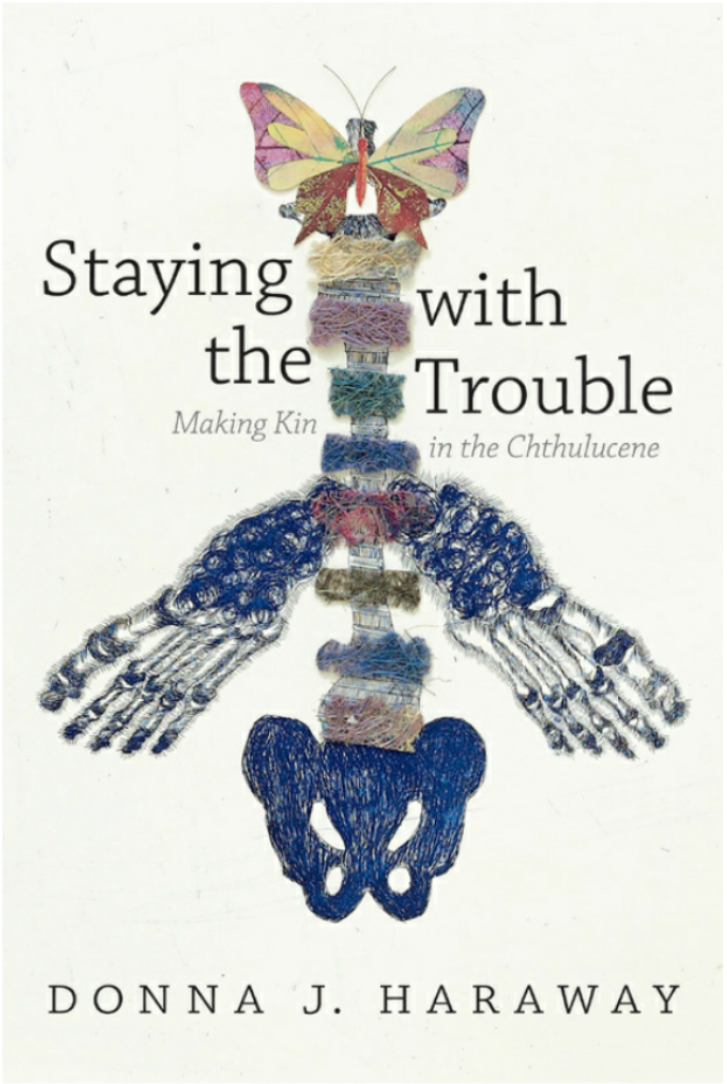


The Posthuman Condition

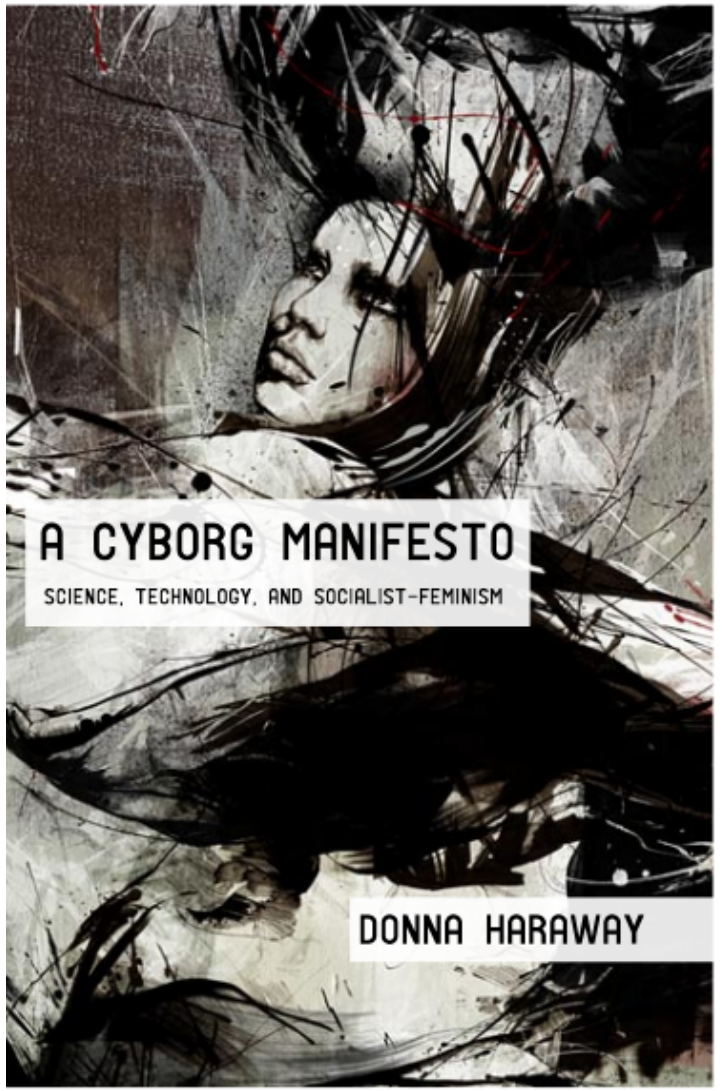


We are in this together – Rosi Braidotti

Donna Haraway



Haraway, D.J., 2016. *Staying with the trouble: Making kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke University Press.

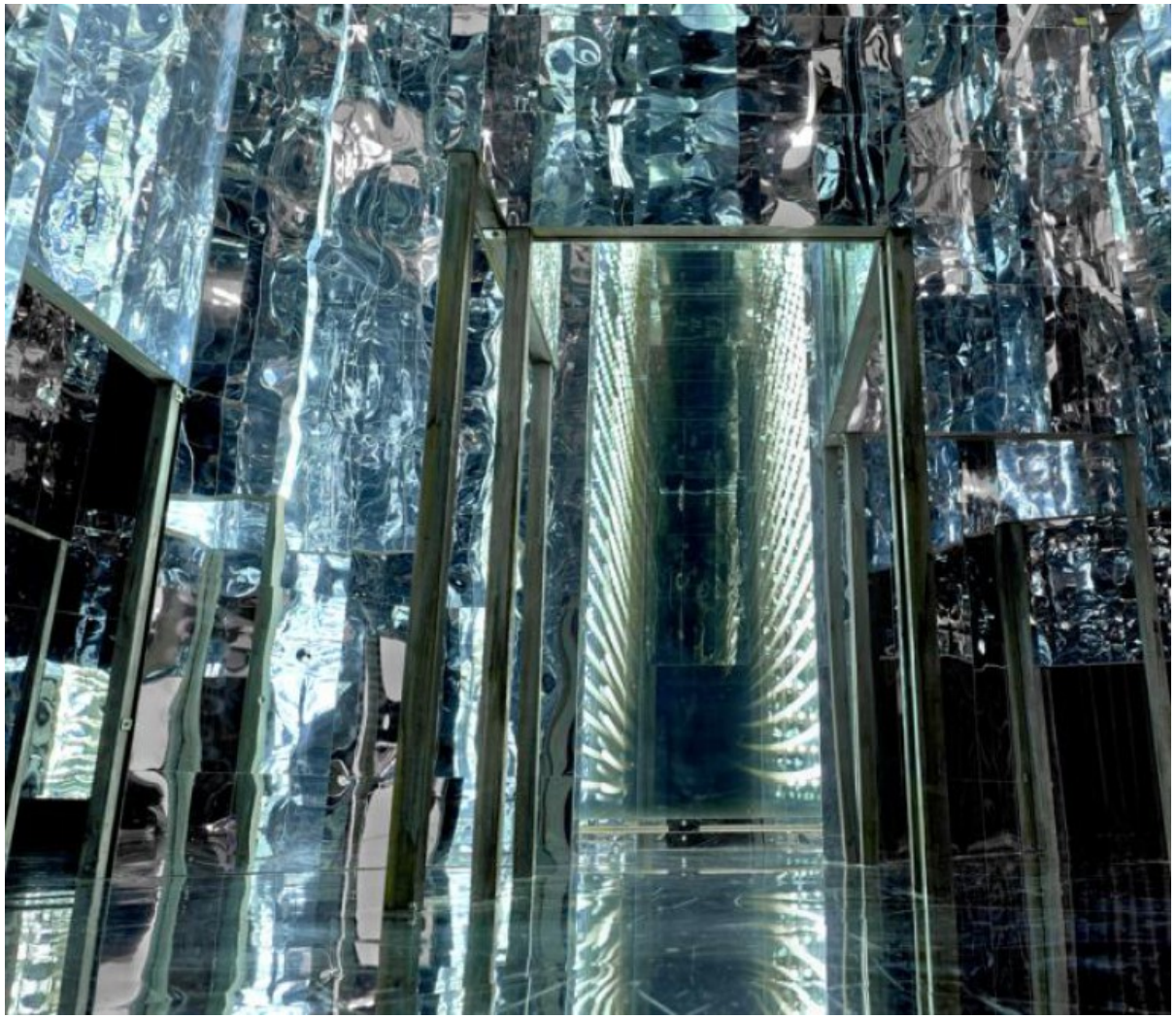


Haraway, D., 1990. A manifesto for cyborgs: Science, technology, and socialist feminism in the 1980s. *Feminism/postmodernism*, pp.190-233.

Lee Bul

WHILE THE FAILED UTOPIAS OF THE PAST WOULD SIMILARLY RETURN TO HAUNT LEE'S PRACTICE, IT WAS INITIALLY HER EVOCATIVE VISIONS OF THE FUTURE THAT MADE HER ONE OF THE MOST PROMINENT NON-WESTERN ARTISTS OF AN ANXIOUS AGE

'My work has always been a representation of a desire to transcend limitations. So the transition has been to move from the body to the broader idea of social structures.'
Lee Bul



Lee Bul, Via Negativa (interior detail), 2012

Lee Bul

WHILE THE FAILED UTOPIAS OF THE PAST WOULD SIMILARLY RETURN TO HAUNT LEE'S PRACTICE, IT WAS INITIALLY HER EVOCATIVE VISIONS OF THE FUTURE THAT MADE HER ONE OF THE MOST PROMINENT NON-WESTERN ARTISTS OF AN ANXIOUS AGE



Untitled, 2014, Crystal, glass and acrylic beads, mirrors, stainless-steel, aluminum and black nickel rods, steel and bronze chains, stainless-steel and aluminum armature 78 37/50″ × 74 4/5″ × 69 3/50″

Lee Bul

Mon Grand Récit translates as ‘my grand narrative’ – a melancholic riff on Jean-François Lyotard’s famous pronouncement that the postmodern era signalled the end of all *grand récit* – the grand or meta- narratives that characterised modernity.

Cyborg creatures share space with infinity mirrors and oppressive …



Lee Bul’s Mon grand récit: Weep into stones … (2005) – ‘dreams of a better future and the ruins of the past’.

Aluna

The Mamas and Younger Brother

The Kogi People, Columbia



A Kogi Indian in a scene from *Aluna*

Sublime. The tremors of the world

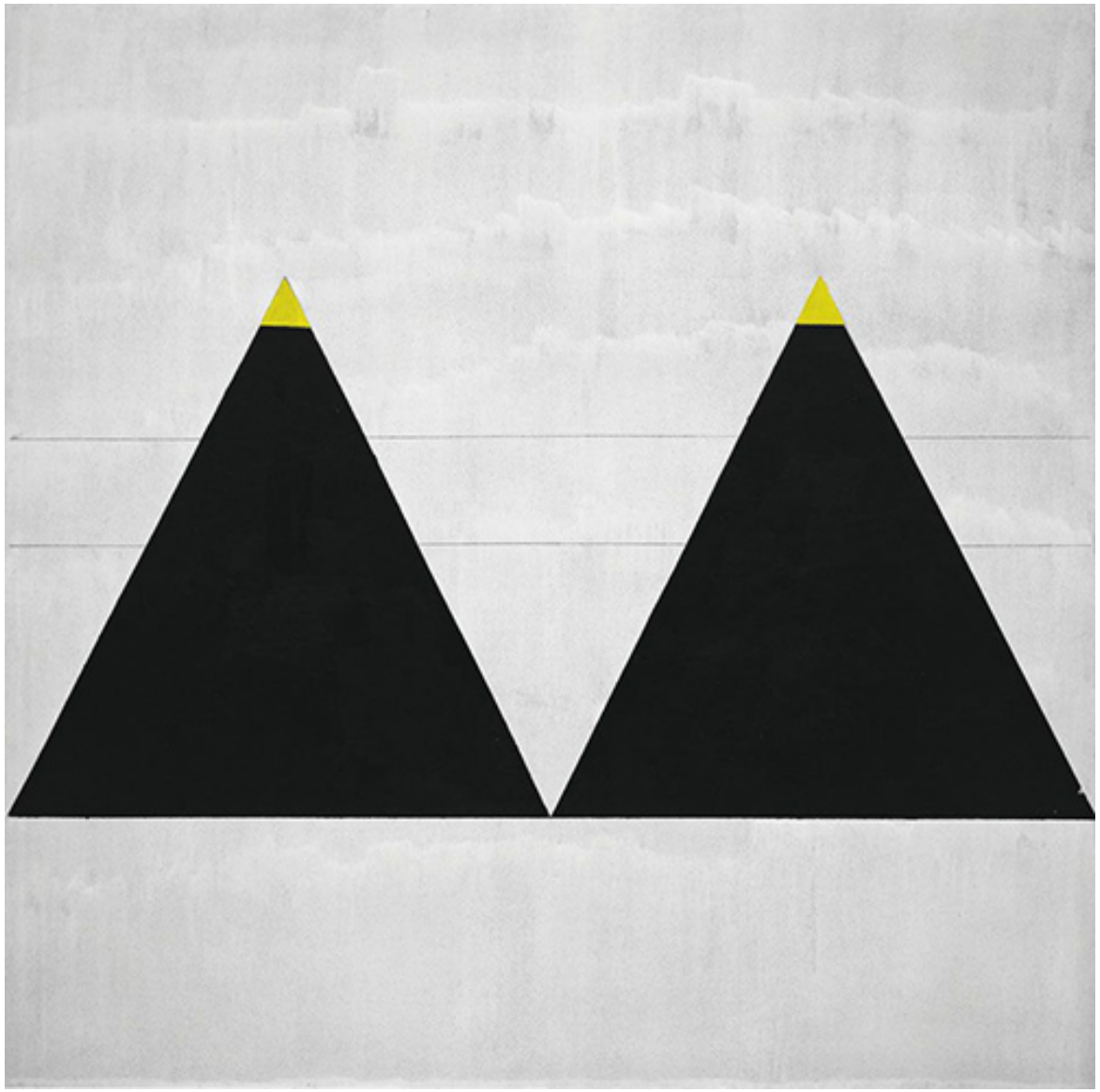
From 11 February to 5 September 2016

The tremors of the world offers a dialogue between ancient and contemporary works. It explores the ambivalent and persisting attraction for the “Nature too far” and catastrophes.



Agnes Martin

paintings of **biomorphic forms and landscapes,** and even sculpture,

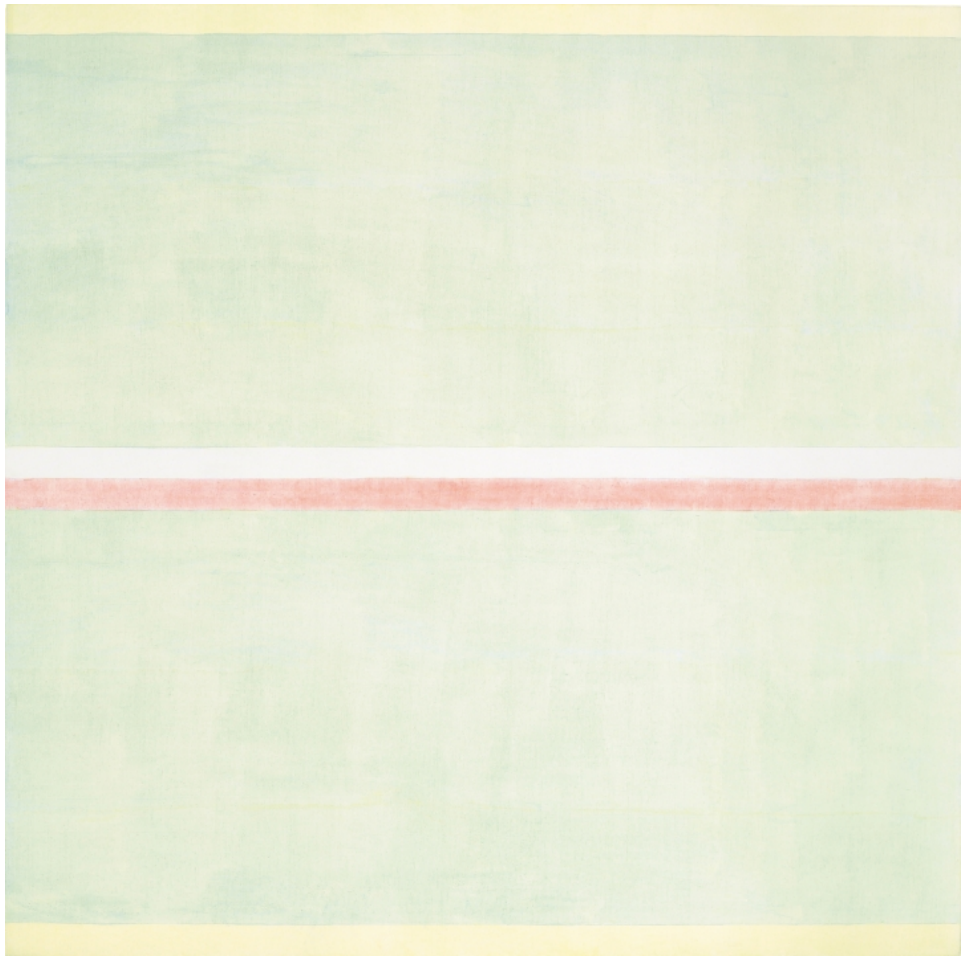


Cornelia Parker

Bullet Drawings

Grids of Modernity



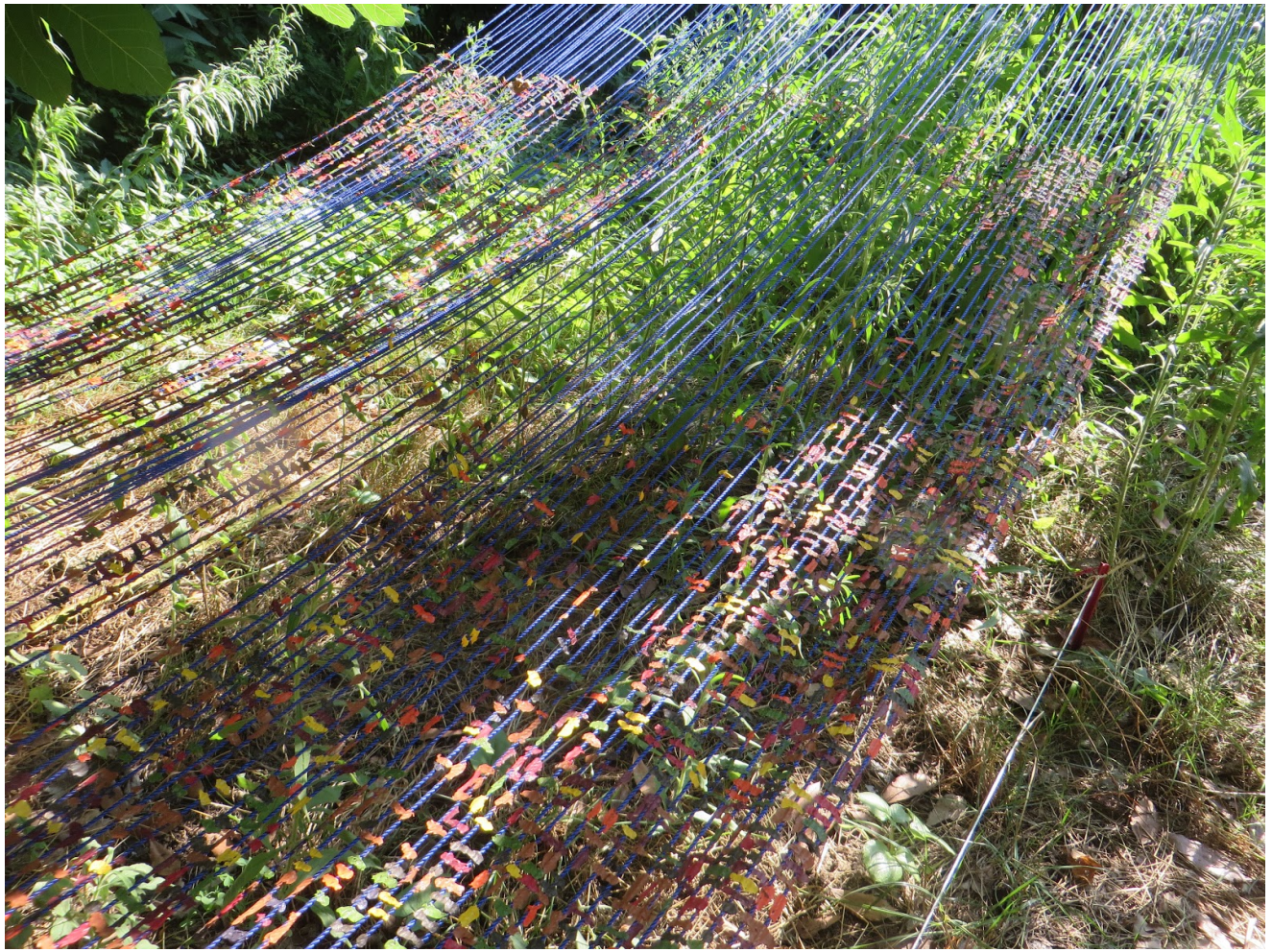


Agnes Martin, “Gratitude” (2001), acrylic and graphite on canvas, 60 x 60 inches, Glimcher Family Collection (© 2016 Agnes Martin/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York)



Sarah Sze

The Last Garden

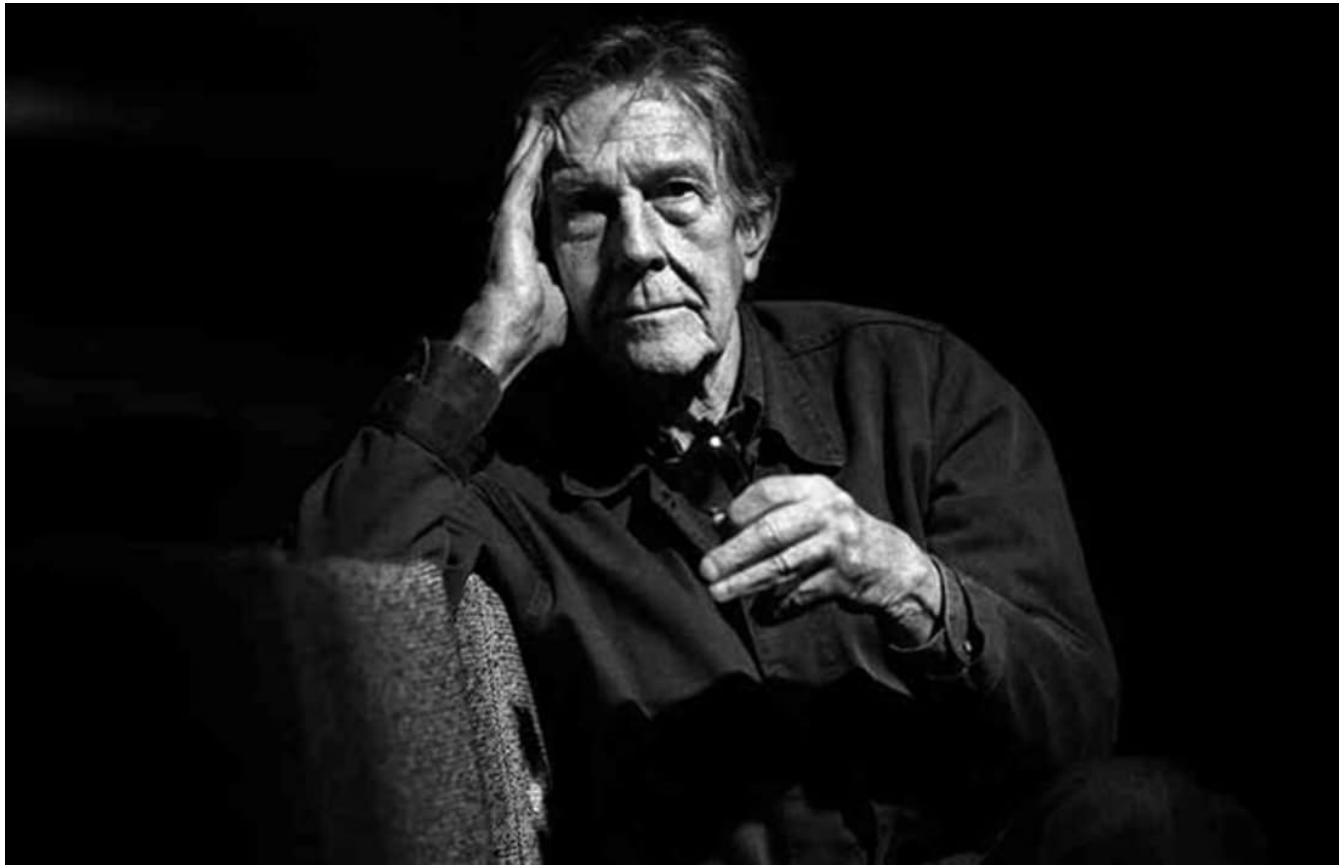


Sarah Sze - The Last Garden. Venice Biennale 2015



4’33”
John Cage
(1952)

‘There is no such thing as an empty space or an empty time…try as we may to make a silence, we cannot.’



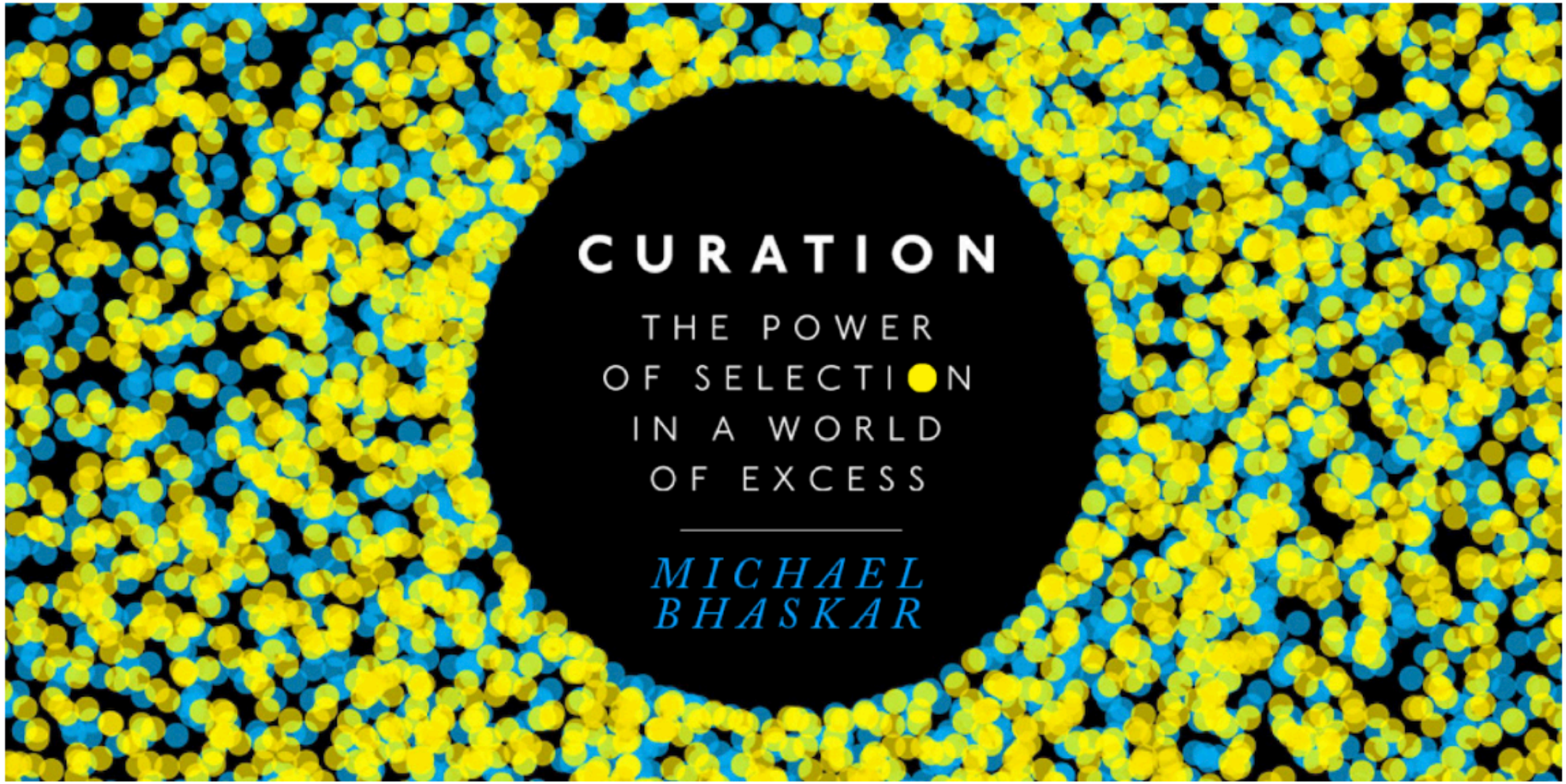
Field Recordings

Hildegard Westerkamp

Acoustic Ecologies



To listen is therefore to touch a stethoscope to the skin of a landscape, to hear what stirs below. David George Haskell

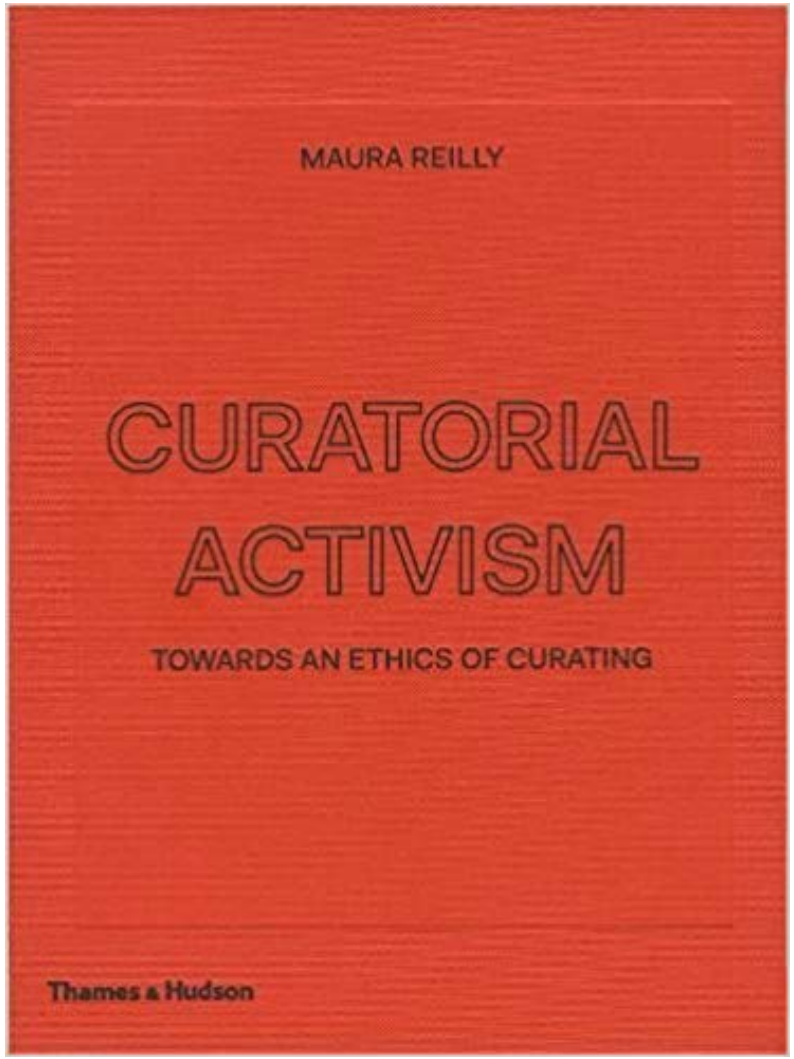


Curation : *n*. using acts of selecting and arranging to add value



hans ulrich obrist





Curatorial Activism

towards an ethics of curation

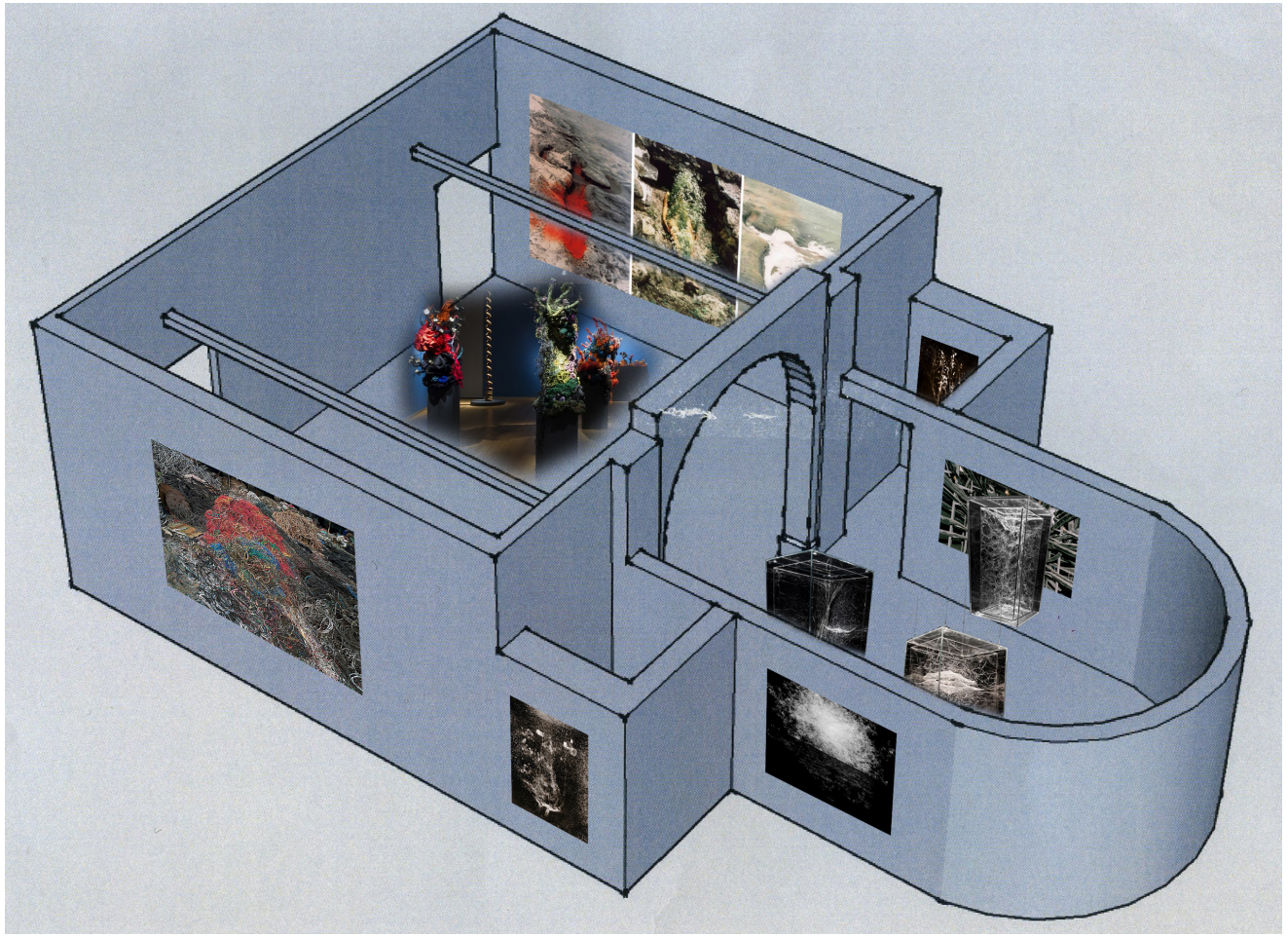
- **RESIST** – masculinism and sexism
- **CONFRONT** – white male privilege and western-centrism
- **CHALLENGE** – heterocentrism and lesbo-homophobia

SYMBIOSIS

A Proposal for an Exhibition around notions of the posthuman sublime In the Age of the Anthropocene

symbiosis

Curating an exhibition around notions of the posthuman sublime In the Age of the Anthropocene



Concept and Ideas for ***symbiosis*** Exhibition

- The Three Ecologies (societal, environment, perceptual)
- Capitalism, Patriarchy, and the Future of Humanity
- The **End of Man** (with a capital 'M') = patriarchal (phallocentric) system
- Interconnections
- Ecosublime - anthropocene
- The Non-Human
- Posthuman Futures
- Cyber technologies
- Planetary wide computation – technological sublime
- biological metaphors

symbiosis

CONCEPT

Exhibition Statement

Symbiosis explores the relationship between nature and society (culture) and the impact of both the scientific and industrial revolution to contemplate a contemporary notion of the posthuman sublime. The allure of the sublime has preoccupied artists and philosophers throughout history from its earliest articulation in **Longinus** right through to the contemporary expressions that have seen the sublime evolve yet fundamentally still point towards the inexpressible yet palpable feeling of what **Kant** described as *negative pleasure.*

The **Symbiosis** exhibition brings notions of the sublime up to date and contemplates the sublime in the **Age of the Anthropocene** where our relationship with nature has evolved as through both scientific and industrial revolutions we have endeavored to become control nature. Whilst nature remains awe-inspiring we have brought about our own versions of terror as the balance of power has shifted where both the **capitalist and technological and feminine sublime** collide and ***decanonise*** the classical **Romantic Sublime**, yet as we bring about irreversible destruction we remain humble and ultimately servants of the natural world that we inhabit. The Shock and Awe exhibition seeks to create a dialogue between the different notions of the sublime so that we may contemplate civilizations destiny in the **Age of the Anthropocene.**

The exhibition brings together voices of philosophers such as **Burke and Kant** to initiate discussion between artists exploring notions of the sublime from the **Romantic Sublime (Caspar D. Friedrich, JW Turner) to the Technological Sublime (9/11 Photographers, Gursky, Burtynsky).**

Capitalism, Patriarchy, and the Future of Humanity

Do you see art as a man's world?

Yes it is a world where **men and women** are continually trying to satisfy the power of men.



Louise Bourgeois

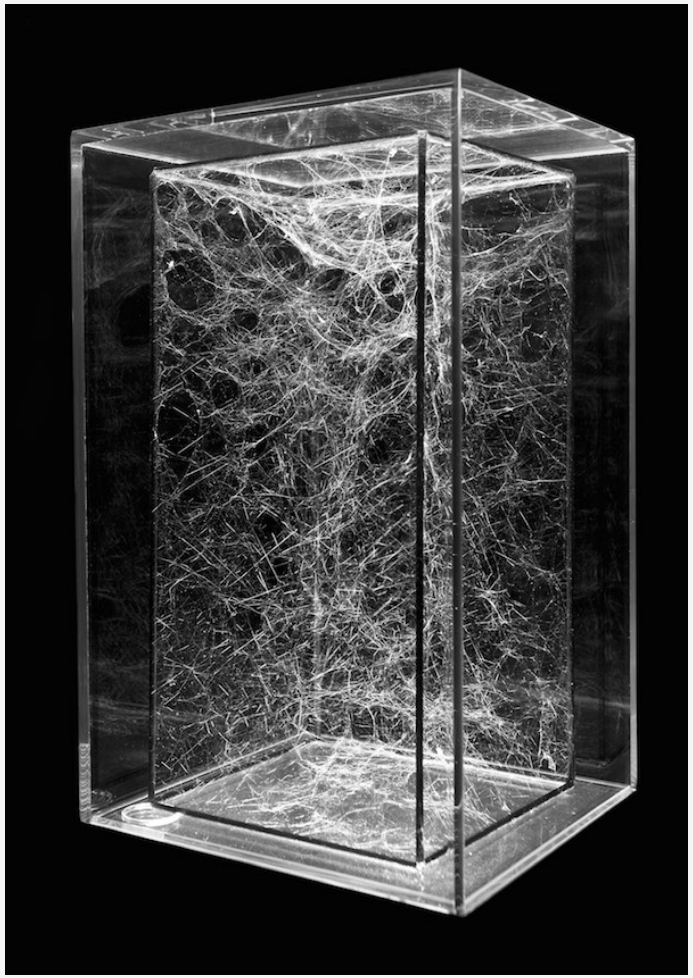
Tomas Saraceno

Hybrid Webs unique architectures originate from inter-specific encounters between unrelated solitary, social and semi-social spider species.



Tomas Saraceno
social webs and captures systems







The Atomic Sublime

“The effects could well be called unprecedented, magnificent, beautiful, stupendous, and terrifying. No man-made phenomenon of such tremendous power had ever occurred before. The lighting effects beggared description.

The whole country was lighted by a searing light with the intensity many times that of the midday sun. It was golden, purple, violet, gray, and blue. It lighted every peak, crevasse and ridge of the nearby mountain range with a clarity and beauty that cannot be described but must be seen to be imagined.”

— Brigadier General Thomas F. Farrell, after witnessing the world's first nuclear test (Trinity) in 1945 (1)







ANAIS TONDEUR

The Chernobyl Herbarium, Fragments of an Exploded Consciousness



- **CHERNOBYL HERBARIUM,** 2011-16
  Location: Exclusion Zone, Chernobyl, Ukraine_ Radiation level: 1.7 Microsieverts per hour 30 rayograms, 24x36 cm, Pigment printing on RAG paper
- On 26 April 1986, at 1h 23 minutes and 44 seconds, a power test at the Chernobyl power station turned into a disaster. The core of the No. 4 reactor explodes, releasing a cloud of radioactive particles into the atmosphere. Thirty-one years after the accident, the 30 km of exclusion zone around the power plant is gradually reopened and reveals opulent vegetation.
- This project is composed of thirty-one rayograms, created by the direct imprint of specimens of a radioactive herbarium on photosensitive plates. These plants were first cultivated in the soil of the exclusion zone by the team of bio-geneticist Martin Hajduch who studies the consequences of radioactivity on the flora in highly irradiated areas, around the plant.
- Material traces of an invisible disaster, these images are captured on the threshold of the visible in the form of rayograms which invite to texts of the philosopher Michael Marder, to think, signify, symbolize, as unthinkable and irrepresentable as it is, the consciousness that this event has fragmented, and perhaps pave the way for a lifestyle more in line with the environment.
- ***"It's a stroke of genius to have miniaturized something so vast and demonic we do not even know yet how to dream all this."***
  Timothy Morton, Rita Shea / Rice University - Author of Realist Magic.
- ***"As Marder says, the Herbarium of Tiller is a constant glow, where plants have the floor to spatially express the radioactivity of the earth."***
  Prudence Gibson - author of The Pharmacy of Plants



Ana Mendieta | Traces and Earth Works

Ana Mendieta



untitled 1978, silueta series



Isla, 1981/1994.
Black and white photograph , 101.6 x 76.2 cm, Estate of Ana Mendieta Collection

Reclaiming the Sublime



Ana Mendieta: The Sublime

If they are representative of the sublime, her works are remarkably different and intersect with **multiple understandings of muted fear in the face of our passing *through* time.**

Without resorting to intense magnification, Mendieta shows not (or not only) the framing of ruin, but the fact that our memory and our bodies might be (and are) misconstrued, misread, erased.

"Crochet Coral and Anemone Garden" with sea slug

by Marianne Midelburg



The Crochet Coral Reef is a woolly celebration of the intersection of higher geometry and feminine handicraft, and a testimony to the disappearing wonders of the marine world.





The Retrograde Sublime

Burtynsky's compositions lead the viewer's eye through a visual maze of color, blending abstraction with the nightmare realities of hi-tech global waste.



Edward Burtynsky, *China Recycling #7, Wire Yard, Wenxi, Zhejiang Province,* 2004. E-waste appears as a mass of colored wires dumped on the ground in rural China. The composition uses color to create a visual pattern pleasing to the eye but disturbing to the soul.

symbiosis

Curating an exhibition around notions of the posthuman sublime In the Age of the Anthropocene

