

# Call for papers for

## *Transbordeur* *photographie histoire société*

### Issue 8, “Ecological histories of photography. Science, politics, philosophy, materiality”

Often remembered for their emotional impact on viewing publics all over the world, the photographs of the Earth taken by the Apollo 8 and 17 missions in 1968 and 1972 respectively marked a turning point in public awareness of ecological issues. Despite their paradoxical nature in regards to ecology<sup>1</sup>, these images have been appropriated by numerous environmental causes and intellectual currents, informing a new environmental awareness and prompting scientists and the larger public to see life on Earth in a new way. The photographs *Earthrise* and *Blue Marble* were especially instrumental in conveying the vulnerability of planet Earth, now conceived as a living world and according to a holistic view of nature's unity<sup>2</sup>. Today, this role has been taken on by images of environmental destruction conveying the urgency of the climate crisis: forest fires, collapsing arctic ice shelves, emaciated polar bears stranded on drifting ice floats. But the relationship between ecology and photography dates further back than the second half of the twentieth century. In other perspectives, and at other scales, photography has long served as a means of documenting not only specific and reparable ecological damage caused by punctual events, but also major and irreversible environmental changes brought about by anthropic activities. Gathered by activists or institutions, relayed by journalists, medias, environmental associations and countless artists, these images form an integral part of the visual culture of an era which now defines itself in destructive terms: Anthropocene, Capitalocene. Paradoxically, these representational practices have considerable ecological consequences that can be

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Neil M. Maher, *Apollo in the Age of Aquarius*, Cambridge, Massachussets, London, England, Harvard University Press, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Since the work of Denis Cosgrove (1994) “Contested Global Visions: *One-World, Whole-Earth*, and the Apollo Space Photographs”, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 84:2, 270-294 ; Sebastian Grevsmühl, *La Terre vue d'en haut. L'invention de l'environnement global*, éditions du Seuil, Paris, 2014.

tallied in the carbon footprint of the natural resources consumed to create and relay them – consequences that have not gone unnoticed in recent years<sup>3</sup>. From a materialist perspective, the entanglement of photography and ecology has a longer history, dating back to the nineteenth century when the emergence of photography coincided with an exponential demographic growth and the acceleration of destructive industrial and extractive activities. Indeed, the dependence of photographic technologies and industries on fossil fuels and mineral extraction puts the very ontology of photography at stake.

Using a long-term historical perspective, this issue of *Transbordeur* will examine the relationship between photography and ecology as understood in multiple ways: 1) ecology as an interdisciplinary science that emerged in the nineteenth century, seeking a global understanding of the environment 2) ecology as the specific political agenda of different movements that emerged in the second half of the twentieth century, as public concern for environmental causes increased 3) ecology as the object of social and philosophical movements which have brought into question the binary opposition of nature and culture in Western society, and finally 4) the ecological impact of the photographic industry in its dependence on extraction, petrochemical derivatives, and more recently digital technologies.

Since the medium's invention, non-human subjects have been prevalent in photography, from flora and fauna to geological formations, and luminous, climate and atmospheric phenomena. Whether from a naturalistic, artistic, documentary or scientific perspective, photography has been a major actor in the domestication, modification and domination of life and nature by humans. Photography has also served to inscribe the human as an actor within non-human systems and environments. Authors are encouraged to question photography's assumed capacity to capture the relationship between societies and their ecosystems, and to perceive life systems in their totality throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. How have photographic images and practices contrived to render life on Earth intelligible or legible? How have photographic practices shaped and been shaped by major theories of life and life-systems as well as cultural myths of life on Earth since the 1860s? How has photography been conceived as a tool for observation, and scientific or imaginative speculation? What have been the social, political and environmental impacts of photographic images in all their ambiguity, limits, and paradoxes? Authors are encouraged to address questions of observer vantage points, distance and scale – from micrographic to global views – and to explore the challenges involved in representing natural phenomena, time and life systems in motion.

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<sup>3</sup> See for example the recent special issue « Images des conséquences et conséquences des images dans la crise climatique » dirigé par Morgane Hamon, Clément Paradis, Louis Boulet, Taous Dahmani et Célia Honoré, Cahiers de l'ARIP, n. 2, octobre 2020.

We are seeking papers which use a diachronic, comparative approach to examine the form, materiality and social agency of photographic images since the nineteenth century as related to the following themes (combinations of these are entirely possible, especially where uses and practices crossover between these different spheres):

### **Photography and the history of ecology as a scientific discipline. From perceiving details to constructing global views**

During the last three decades of the nineteenth century, ecology emerged as a formally defined science. Ecological sciences arose from an increasing consideration of interaction between living beings and their relationship to their biological environment as well as the search for universally applicable structural patterns within communities of living beings in given environments<sup>4</sup>. From botany to the analysis of ecosystems and later twentieth century concepts such as the living biosphere, ecology has evolved into a global science of the Earth. What has been the role of photography as a practice, a visual device, and analytical tool within this process? Which practices and techniques have been associated with the production and interpretation of images produced to observe life and living environments? Authors are encouraged to consider the different scales of observation involved in ecological sciences, from the individual to the biosphere, from the observation of details to holistic and synoptic visions of the world from the invention of microphotography to the notion of the “macroscope”. What were the perceived advantages of photography compared to other forms of visualization? Finally, what role have photographic campaigns since the nineteenth century played in shaping a geographical understanding of the world as a “terrestrial organism”<sup>5</sup> (Paul Vidal de la Blache)?

### **Photography and the history of environmental awareness, and nature conservation and preservation movements.**

While considerations for the environment and its protection did not originate in the twentieth century, the 1960s and 1970s would witness the birth of specific environmental movements and political parties dedicated to ecological concerns as well as a growing public awareness of an unprecedented scale of industrial destruction. Environmental discourse was indeed already well developed in the beginning of the twentieth century<sup>6</sup>. The acknowledgement of Earth’s vulnerability in regards to human activity seems bound up in the evolution of global knowledge about the environment since the 1860s. What role has photography played in shaping public awareness of environmental issues and in the international fight against pollution and the exploitation

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<sup>4</sup> Jean-Paul Deléage, *Une histoire de l'écologie*, éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1994.

<sup>5</sup> Grevs mühl, 2014, p. 21.

<sup>6</sup> Mathis, Charles-François. « Mobiliser pour l'environnement en Europe et aux États-Unis. Un état des lieux à l'aube du 20<sup>e</sup> siècle », *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, vol. 113, no. 1, 2012, pp. 15-27.

of dwindling natural resources? How have photographs been used to understand the crises caused by the indiscriminate use of nature and excessive consumer societies? What political and moral concepts have been attached to such images? What has been the place of esthetic considerations and emotions in this process? How has photography distanced the observer from nature, the human from the non-human? Authors are encouraged to question the “power” of images from a critical perspective, as well as to apprehend the history of environmental issues from a global perspective, taking into account colonial experiences in the rise of European and North-American environmental critiques.

### **The philosophy of ecology**

Images have also been utilized by intellectual movements related to ecology. This issue also aims to examine how photography has informed the visual culture of different currents within ecophilosophy. For example, which specific photographic practices were developed around deep ecology, the Gaïa theory or by adepts of geoengineering? Similarly, how might views taken from outer space such as “Earthrise” (1968) and “The Blue Marble” (1972), be understood beyond the critique of their roles as “icons of ecological thinking”? How have uses of photography by different intellectual currents evolved since 1968, especially with the development of ecosophy, and notions such as Anthropocene and Pyrocene in the beginning of the twenty-first century?

We also welcome contributions which situate photography within the critique of fossil fuel capitalism as formulated by certain ecophilosophers. Also, from an anthropological perspective, how have photographic images been mobilized in the history of the relationship between societies and their ecosystems? How has photography shaped the definition and the critique of the notion of “nature” and the binary nature/culture opposition? How has photography been used to visually construct the long-term history of nature and its relationship to human ensembles?

### **Photography as a material practice and industry**

Rising public awareness of the climate crisis in recent years has brought to light the significant environmental impact of digital photography. Recent scholarship has also highlighted the inherent chemical nature of the photographic industry, tracing the history of its polluting practices back to the nineteenth century. Industrial manufacturing of photographic plates and celluloid film is not possible without water, gas, vapor or electricity, and is reliant on a significant amount of combustive fossil energy which often goes unnoticed. Photographic film is also composed of all sorts of chemicals, animal collagens, camphor (a raw material at the heart of many colonial exploitations), etc. The materiality of photography highlights the reality of the resources, exchanges and processes that go into its making, a reality which is far from traditional theories of

indexicality. We encourage contributions which examine this problematic aspect of photography's history, as well as the historicisation of public awareness of this issue. Is the consciousness of the pollution generated by photography specific to the twenty-first century and its conception of Anthropocene? Or has there been awareness of the industry's harmful ecological impact at other moments in history since the nineteenth century? How can the invisibility of digital photographic pollution with its new infrastructure of data centers be understood from a historical perspective?

Lastly, we encourage contributions which examine archives, especially new and previously unexamined collections, related to the themes addressed in this issue.

## Direction

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## Calendar

### **September 15, 2022 Abstracts**

January 30, 2023	First version of the articles
February, 2023	Workshop
April 30, 2023	Final version of the articles

## Information

Texts can be submitted in French, English, German or Italian. Abstract should not exceed 600 words. It is accompanied by 6-10 images, a brief bibliography and biographical information.

Prior to publication, a workshop will be held during which authors can discuss their articles and exchange with the issue's editors and editorial committee. The planning process for the workshop and the compilation of articles in the thematic issue requires a tight schedule. Authors must agree to keep to this schedule upon submission of their proposals.

In submitting a manuscript for review, authors agree to the journal's

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