ELEMENTS MATTER:
NEW RELATIONALITIES IN COLONIAL MODERNITY

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ABSTRACT:
This contribution takes into focus elements as scenes of thought in order to contest our colonial, anthropocentric and extractivist modernity: fires of burning fossil fuels, waves of the open sea, shores as the landscape of islands, clouds in the sky and beyond. We suggest that these motifs bear the possibility to examine the problems of our present as well as to develop other, differing and new relationalities.

KEYWORDS:
Racialanthropocene, elements, fossilfuels, oceanic, shores, clouds, newrelationalities

How can we find new ways to think and perform what Françoise Vergès has coined the racial Capitalocene?[1]—a term of analysis that takes into account the impact of racial capitalism and colonialism on what otherwise has been defined as the Anthropocene. In order to answer this question, we devote our attention to the *elements* of earth, water, fire, and air as *scenes of thought*: Shores as the landscape of islands, oceanic temporalities, fires of burning fossil fuels, clouds in the sky. In other words, we suggest that each of these elements opens up new aesthetic relations that contest our colonial, anthropocentric, and extractivist modernity. This shared contribution is the result of our ongoing collaboration and exchange as colleagues and friends on artistic forms and aesthetics which deal with the implications and toxic remnants of our colonial modernity. Research on subjects such as matter and different worldings has become of great interest in recent years and indeed, we are also influenced by this current discourse. However, our focus lies in the intersections between that which informs this thinking on a philosophical level and scenic ways to face such questions.

THE CIRCULARITY OF SHORES:
GIVING-ON-AND-WITH THE LANDSCAPE
Leon Gabriel

LANDSCAPE BEYOND THE SCOPE OF HUMANISM:
GRASPING THE EARTH?

"Landscape" as a fundamental category in western aesthetic discourse is a genre that reflects upon experience—notably visual experience—and thus on the sublime. From the 20th century on and mainly due to being challenged by phenomenology, landscape can be understood as a term for relationality that goes beyond the reflecting subject of Enlightenment, very often used in a wider sense than that of the aesthetic genre, and rather as a synonym for surroundings, environment, or setting. Martin Heidegger is one of the central intellectual figures that criticized western modernity and its very own subjectivity that also underlies aesthetics.[2] He proposed this critique famously in his article "The Age of the World Picture"[3] where he showed that the modern subject sets itself as its own ground essentially by its preference for the gaze and the corresponding "scopic knowledge." But whereas such a critique has its validity, Heidegger's counterpoint to the recognizing, categorizing gaze isn't less problematic. He opposes modernity and the dominance of the view with: 1) a problematic naturalized bounding to the ground and 2) a valorization of the hand—of grasping instead of seeing, also as a metaphor for thinking.

For Heidegger, there is a relationality of landscape that speaks "in" the one who is part of it, offering an experience that cannot be secured by a mere description:

> Landscape.—One can "see" it and discover it and describe it and bring it into talk and circulation—in the manner of all newcomers—it becomes something for all the world and from all the world's sighted and gets its all-world face (this is how the title panorama can be understood) or—one belongs to the country, needs not look at it and thinks that he belongs to it by virtue of gawking—he stands in it in silence and as if he did not know it.[4]

It is striking how the philosopher who time and again insisted on the importance of language, of words, of poetics as the purest form of art, dismisses the "talk" about a landscape and explicitly positions himself against "circulation" by spoken language. Despite all the emphasis on the abyss, the openness, and the

suspension (*Entsetzung*), his understanding of language itself is rather that of stable ground.

Accordingly, the main philosophical focus for Heidegger isn't a specific landscape, but what he called a "down-to-earthness [*Bodenständigkeit*]."[5] As developed in a so far rather unknown seminar in 1933/34, the contact with the soil legitimizes specific people to leave and expand their territory and contrastingly delegitimizes nomads. Even worse: Heidegger explicitly demonizes the specific "group" of what he calls "semitic nomads,"[6] i.e. Jews. His commitment to the National Socialist Party and his corresponding political views fueled once more a larger discussion in 2016, when his so-called "Black Notebooks" (*Schwarze Hefte*) were published. Here, Heidegger continued and fortified his antisemitic standpoints after 1945, despite his self-proclaimed "turn" (*Kehre*): Jews are seen as the ones who best master the calculating machinations (*Machenschaften*[7]) of modernity.

Though Heidegger's philosophy of landscape and "dwelling" has been often taken up productively,[8] the inherent linkage of this part of his thought with his highly problematic standpoints has been overlooked. But within this theory, the very idea of the landscape as something not to be perceived, but to be part of, to be grounded in, becomes an identitarian ideology of rootedness. Such a line of thought is emblematic for a position that wants to overcome modernity's discontents—but actually only certain aspects. We must remember that Nazism also proclaimed itself as an anti-modern movement while not actually being external to modernity, but deeply rooted within. Thus, Heidegger proclaims a return to an elementary origin (down-to-earthness), together with the before mentioned valorization of the grasping hand[9] instead of the seeing eye. Other discontents of modernity, particularly its inherent coloniality do not count as core problems for him or—even worse—are being externalized through Othering, particularly via antisemitic tropes. (A strategy that is unfortunately all too well-known nowadays.)

LANDSCAPE IN ARCHIPELAGIC THINKING:
CIRCULARITY OF THE SHORES

Even though Édouard Glissant shares with Heidegger the critique of the way in which western modernity understands subjectivity as well as cognition, and although he reconsiders the importance of landscapes, he does so in a very different way. Glissant's poetics and philosophy of relation are highly influenced by the island of Martinique, the archipelago of the Antilles in general,

and, furthermore, Black *and* Jewish diasporic thought. He openly criticizes the assumption to be able "to grasp" something, because:

> the verb *to grasp* contains the movement of hands that grab their surroundings and bring them back to themselves. A gesture of enclosure if not appropriation. Let our understanding prefer the gesture of giving-on-and-with that opens finally on totality.[10]

The "giving-on-and-with" consists in the possibility, even the "right" to remain opaque:[11] *Transparency* is the ultimate goal in continental or as Glissant calls it in "systemic thinking." Such an assumed neutral coercion derives from the dominance of the scopic regime. *Opacity* instead still plays within the field of the visible, but leaves it to indeterminacy, where the opaque field cannot be reduced to a single interpretation or meaning.

According to Sylvia Wynter, Glissant's writing is marked by the "imperative of a shift from ontogeny to sociogeny, from L'Être to l'étant, and the new frontiers of being and knowing that such a shift opens."[12] His focal point is the creolization of cultures and identities that leads to relations instead of groundings. The new "archipelagic thinking" emerges from the experience of living on islands and especially of the creole language. In a difficult passage Glissant writes:

> Just as Relation is not a pure abstraction to replace the old concept of the universal, it also neither implies nor authorizes any ecumenical detachment. The landscape of your word is the world's landscape. But its frontier is open.[13]

Language shapes the world and is being shaped by it in an always ongoing mutual process. We can see Glissant's understanding of language and with it that of landscapes that differ from the ones Heidegger offers: For both, language is the condition of a being-in-relation, a relational practice. For Heidegger, such a language itself is understood as specific (i.e. Greek and German) and therefor 'rooted' or grounded in origins, even though they might be lost. But for Glissant, this ground of language is itself unstable: due to creolization, languages (in plural!) are always in ongoing movement, opening frontiers and borders.

An important, maybe central element of this movement of language (and landscape) is *circularity* as the experience of the shore:

The edge of the sea thus represents the alternation (but one that is illegible) between order and chaos. The established municipalities do their best to manage this constant movement between threatening excess and dreamy fragility. The movement of the beach, this rhythmic rhetoric of a shore, do not seem to me gratuitous. They weave a circularity that draws me in.[14]

Circularity is the core feature of archipelagic thinking. As part of the shore, it attracts and draws us into its zones of friction and overlapping of two seemingly different areas of land and sea. From here, "circular nomadism" emerges which is in "search for the other."[15] Glissant is hence focusing on the modes of relation that arise from the shores, where "the step [le pas] of the opening itself"[16] takes place by suspending the passage and reassembling indigenous and displaced languages, bodies and identities.[17]

LANDSCAPE DRAMATURGY:
THE HUMILIATIONS OF MANKIND (2019)

The theater production *The Humiliations of Mankind* (*Die Kränkungen der Menschheit*) by Anta Helena Recke from 2019 develops a "landscape dramaturgy"[18] that is a scenic practice of archipelagic thinking. The central theme of the performance considers a critique of the assumption that *white* humanity speaks universally for "humanity as such". This takes place in a scenic situation where at first performers appear behaving like monkeys and then, in a long and complex yet funny dialogue, a group of other performers discusses an image while remaining within a glass cube. We, as spectators, are unable to see the image they describe. Actually, the performers are directly facing us, talking as if we would be the depiction. The whole scene reflects on the western art discourse, on what is considered "modern" and thereby on the seemingly neutral gaze regarding artworks, theater, and "the other." This becomes even more complex if one takes into account that the described, but invisible image is actually the video installation *Two Planets Series: Van Gogh's The Midday Sleep and the Thai farmers* by Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook where groups of farming communities in Thailand discuss canonized European artworks. But even without this information, a central question for the aesthetic apparatus emerges: What does the one who sees relate to the one who is seen?

The conversation between the group evolves further within the performance, but all of a sudden, the situation changes: Something,

possibly the (absent) image itself, seems to threaten the group. The glass cube starts to move around in a circular manner and after a short moment, a huge mass of BIPoC women in colorful dresses come in. If the centralized gaze of theatrical perspective was the hidden protagonist before, now it is circularity that enters the stage. In an ongoing, merely endless movement, the cube and the group form a turning circle.

Of course, this performance doesn't stage shores or draws pictures of shores in a direct, representing manner. But I suggest bringing it into conversation with archipelagic thinking. Out of its linear form that develops a story and that addresses the racialized gaze as well as perspective, a circularity emerges that twists and shifts the linearity, but without surpassing it. This can be understood in Glissant's terms as an experience of the shore: The unstable ground of the linear reading of the play forms a zone of friction with the circular one—exploring relations that are not-yet and not to be reduced to an identitarian source.

It is such an ambivalence between the heritage of western, colonial modernity and its opening, as in Recke's staging that challenges our current thinking. As aesthetic experience, it draws us into its opaqueness—and we should be careful not to grasp it, but to be affected by its giving-on-and-with.

THE LIQUID GRAVE

"What is the word for bringing bodies back from water? From a 'liquid grave'?"[19] asks M. NourbeSe Philip in her lyrical work on the murder of enslaved Africans on board the slave ship *Zong* in 1781.[20] The answer she provides is *ex aqua*.[21] For many artistic and theoretical decolonial approaches in the last years the ocean has become an important figure of thought and a performative mode to tackle the specific temporality of the aftermath of slavery. The liquid relational space of the oceanic inaugurates a process of *ex aqua* as "wake work,"[22] a work of mourning and of defending the memory of those who drowned during the Middle Passage, who disappeared in "the silence of the archive"[23] as well as of those who are currently let to drown in the Mediterranean Sea. In the following I am interested in the oceanic as an aquatic space of multiple expanded temporalities which is haunted by the ghosts of its colonial history, the afterlife of capitalist exploitation and contemporary migration. It is this oceanic temporality which not only throws into crisis linear teleologic and colonial concepts of "human" time in western modernity but which also calls upon us to examine more carefully the way in which the afterlives of slavery open up the potentiality of different aesthetic relations.

"The sea is a special kind of medium for modernism," writes Rosalind Krauss. According to her, the sea is the medium in which modernity finds itself, "because of its perfect isolation, its detachment from the social, its sense of self-enclosure, and, above all, its opening onto a visual plenitude."[24] What decolonial approaches aim for, however, is the hidden "double-consciousness" and traumatic aspects of this very concept of western modernity. In this sense the ocean holds the potentiality as a "counter-culture" to western modernity, as Paul Gilroy has famously argued in his study on the Black Atlantic.[25] In the wake of Gilroy's remarks on the Black Atlantic but in critical distance to it, recent Black feminist writers such as Christina Sharpe, Saidiya Hartman, Alexis Pauline Gumbs, and Habiba Ibrahim have attributed the possibility for otherwise, queer, feminist and, "critical fabulations" to the oceanic and its liquid untimely temporality.[26] In film and performative works by Patricio Guzmán, Steve McQueen, The Otolith Group, Karrabing Film Collective, Selina Thompson, or Amel Alzakout, the oceanic bears the potential to inaugurate an aesthetic mode of representation in which the

afterlife of colonialism materializes in a haunting, insistent way. The specific oceanic temporality allows "the past that is not past" to somehow *re*appear, as Sharpe puts it, but in a way that does not correspond to conventional modes of "presence" and "appearance." No longer just a mere metaphor or a trope for memory, the ocean therefore becomes a liquid stage of (dis)appearance and withdrawal that allows to scrutinize the racial Capitalocene and its contemporary remnants while thereby opening up the potentiality of alternative indigenous, Black, and more-than-human epistemologies.

VERTIGINOUS ASSEMBLAGE:
JOHN AKOMFRAH'S VERTIGO SEA (2015)
An example of an aesthetic mode of this oceanic temporality is John Akomfrah's installation work *Vertigo Sea* (2015), the first part of a trilogy on the entanglement of racial Capitalocene, migration, memory, and climate change.

The three-channel video installation is composed of heterogenous documentary material drawn primarily from the archives of the BBC natural history unit, along with staged footage shot by Akomfrah, weaving together multiple narratives, times, and histories. In this triptych constellation, startling images of aquatic life are juxtaposed with pictures of the shackled human cargo in the hold of a slave ship; gorgeous scenery appears next to the footage of whale hunters standing in the middle of a bloody carcass; beautiful Antarctic landscapes are paired with the photograph of the human remains of a Chilean political prisoner dumped into the sea. Sites of deep-water oil drilling, nuclear-testing fields, and melting, crashing glaciers are shown next to images of refugee boats and accompanied by audio recordings about bodies washed up on the shores of Europe. References to the oceanic iconography of romanticism, quotes from Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, Heathcote William's *Whale Nation* and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* are linked to highly aestheticized tableaux showing the historic figure Olaudah Equiano, former Slave and abolitionist who traveled the seas, explored the Arctic, and lived out his life in England.[27] In Akomfrah's tableaux he is dressed in an 18th century uniform gazing out at the sea in a Caspar David Friedrich-like romantic scene.

In this disparate media aesthetic constellation, we are confronted with a confusing structure of merging, layered, and overlapping fragments. Its simultaneity opposes any linear narrative and draws our attention towards unanticipated, often

uncanny fluid connections between supposedly unrelated topoi: Romantic seafarer iconographies converge with the transatlantic slave trade, oil platforms coincide with sinking refugee boats in the Mediterranean, and 19th century ethnographic film is juxtaposed with passages from Moby Dick. What emerges is a "spatialized relationality"[28]: a scenic-acoustic and spatial mode in which can be experienced what Éduard Glissant calls "poetics of relation," a different mode of being-in-relation to the world which, in this case, also implies to experience relationality as a historic constellation of entangled violence.

HOW TO LOSE DIRECTION:
THE DIZZYING TASK OF DECOLONIZATION

Moreover, this spatialized relationality creates a loss of balance—a sense of vertigo which the installation refers to in its title: *Vertigo Sea*. This vertiginous experience of dizziness, radical loss of control and of disorientation has been theorized as an important aspect of Blackness. Glissant describes the Middle Passage as an "experience of the abyss,"[29] Frank B. Wilderson III characterizes Black subjectivity as "a crossroads where vertigoes meet, the intersection of performative and structural violence"[30] and Achille Mbembe writes of the "vertiginous assemblage that is Blackness and Race."[31] Moreover, vertigo understood as an unsettling disorientation is what Seloua Luste Boulbina defines as the essential task of decolonization as a political concept. Following Frantz Fanon, who had written of decolonization as "a program of absolute upheaval"[32] and of changing the order of the world, she asks: "How—from the North—does one lose direction?" Decolonization may be understood as a desire for change, or as a need for change, she continues, but "nothing about the concept tells us, however, what this change should be. There is no orienting grid to give us directions in advance."[33] With no orienting grid or direction to define what decolonization should be, it becomes clear that an essential aspect of its political task lies in the process of "unlearning"[34] colonialism which is often a "rehearsal of disengagement"[35] as Ariella Azoulay calls it, rather than a masterplan. Decolonization as the task of losing and unlearning "the North" therefore implies vertigo, dizziness and other ways of thinking beyond the stabilizing banister[36] of a well-known Eurocentric orienting grid. If, in Krauss' words as cited above, the sea is the medium in which modernity finds itself, then *Vertigo Sea* uses this very medium to draw attention to modernity's unthought blind spots. In Akomfrah's work it is the ocean and

its specific temporality which holds the possibility for a thinking from the "position of the unthought"[37] of western modernity: the inevitable but long overlooked entanglement of modernity and its violent history of colonialism and extraction, in short, the racial Capitalocene. In the installation's unfolding oceanic temporality, it becomes clear that the Middle Passage, climate change, and today's migration are deeply intertwined.

What emerges from the aesthetic aquatic experience within the installation is thus a deep unsettling of the western technical-civilizational progress narrative and its representations, which raises the question of their colonial exclusions and of new ways of thinking the aquatic space as a fluid archival constellation of memory, violence, and contemporary diaspora.

Moreover, *Vertigo Sea* grapples with yet another unsettling aspect of the oceanic: In and for the sea there is no difference between human and non-human. It rather exceeds these categories altogether, giving way to more-than-human temporalities. In this oceanic archive of future pasts and past futures, time is something which exceeds its anthropocentric notion. The temporal oceanic scale is rather one of *residence time*: for a human body it takes 260 million years to completely disappear from the ocean after its dissolution.[38] Which means that the particles of all the unnamed anonymous bodies somehow remain, they become part of the ecosystem, from time to time "coming to light like seaweed"[39] before disappearing again. *Vertigo Sea* pays tribute to these more-than-human relation and yet prevents itself from romanticizing it. *Ex aqua*: It conjures the ghosts out of this liquid grave and invites them to inhabit and rupture the present. In the vertiginous assemblage the drowned of the Middle Passage encounter the victims of the present Black Mediterranean[40] while reminding us of the concealed violence of white liberal humanism and its implications today.[41]

LUDWIG FEUERBACH'S HUMAN AS SENSUOUS RELATION IN MONIRA AL QADIRI'S BEHIND THE SUN

Stefan Hölscher

"[T]he Christians left out the intermediate process, and placed themselves in immediate connection with the prescient, all-embracing, universal Being; *i.e.,* they immediately identified the individual with the universal Being,"[42] Feuerbach remarks in his *The Essence of Christianity* (1841). In contrast to that, he conceptualizes the human alongside the sensuous relations between more than one human, i.e. as "a part of a being, which needs another part for the making up of the whole of true humanity."[43] In his view, humanity consists of all the partial beings and as their simultaneity and interaction. According to him, human subjectivity has been reified historically by the rise of Christianity and its idea of the self-determined individual. In front of this philosophical constellation, which touches on the problematic of colonial modernity on the scale of subjectivity, my contribution to this compilation deals with the motif of burning oil fields on the one hand, in the film *Lessons of Darkness* by Werner Herzog from 1992, and on the other hand, in the video *Behind the Sun* by Monira Al Qadiri from 2014.

Apocalyptic images of burning oil fields and a sky completely blackened by soot over empty desert landscapes inspired Herzog to create *Lessons of Darkness*, a 50-minute long film. In it, mediated over numerous aerial shots, we look at a landscape that resembles the cratered surface of an alien star, although he aims to evoke both the beginning and end of life on earth. Accompanied by the music of Wagner and the *Book of Revelation* from the bible, his docu-fictional appropriation transforms the fires, which at the end of the Second Gulf War covered large parts of Kuwait, into a scenario being stretched between German romanticism and the Christian story of salvation. Razor-sharp images, mostly shot from a helicopter, give a specific *local* situation the face of an eschatological and *global* event. The German director opts for an overly general view from the sky onto the fires. His work turns the particular political and ecological disaster on the ground into the all-too general universal fall of "man as such."

Backed by the bombastic orchestral sounds of Wagner's music and Christian sacred texts about the apocalypse, Herzog uses the billows of smoke rising from the burning oil fields like a stage fog, transforming the material edited by him into the narrative of genesis, which his audience can then view from an almost divine

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viewpoint. His monumental images are stripped of any situated subjectivity. They claim objectivity for themselves. Yet, *Lessons of Darkness* could hardly be more provincial. Although the film manifests the moral stance of its author, making an allegory for the fall of "man as such" out of an environmental catastrophe, in its aesthetic form it reproduces that which it attempts to criticize in terms of its content: a subjectivity that Dussel attributes to the *solipsistic* consciousness of colonial modernity, its desire for self-determination, and its need to extract resources such as oil for that very purpose.[44]

In response to Herzog's *Lessons of Darkness*, Al Qadiri with her video *Behind the Sun* recounts the events in her country at the time of the Second Gulf War from another, partial rather than general perspective. Her work consists entirely of found footage made by local citizens who drove out into the desert with their VHS cameras to capture the haunting scenes on tape. In contrast to the slick and polished aesthetics of Herzog's film, the 22 VHS amateur recordings Al Qadiri assembles consist of blurred material that therefore precisely unfolds a haptic quality and creates the impression that the viewer can almost *feel* the heat rising from the burning oil. She reappropriates the *sujet* of Herzog´s film but varies its motifs in a decisive way. By doing so, as one could say with Feuerbach, she cares about a decentered subjectivity which does not only belong to her but also to others. While Herzog stages a self-centered universalism that gives itself the appearance of objectivity, the barely ten-minute long image sequence of Al Qadiri's *Behind the Sun* unfolds along 22 differently situated, decentered points of view. Following Mignolo, one might say that by arranging her work that way, she confronts Herzog's *theo-* and *egopolitical* overview with a *geopolitical* embeddedness.[45]

Herzog gazes vertically from top to bottom. She, on the contrary, follows the horizontally entangled sensuous relations, being more than only one and *different* perspectives on the fires. Al Qadiri's small and short exhibition piece *Behind the Sun* can therefore be read as a formal critique of the cinema production by the German director that preceded it. She opposes the latter's Catholicism with—as we might add with both Mignolo and my dear colleague Leon Gabriel[46]—a *pluriversal* approach, which instead of the bible is fed by Arabic poetry and popular culture and instead of the sacred is derived from commonplace relations between human beings. In her video, Herzog's aesthetic solution to a political problem becomes recognizable as part of that very

problem: to assume that the simultaneity and interaction of partial beings can be grasped and sublated in an individual's consciousness in order to guarantee self-determination. Although the German filmmaker certainly does not intend his work that way, he stages a colonial view on a geographical as well as political context that has nothing to do with German Romanticism, Wagner, or the Christian salvation story. Al Qadiri's response to Herzog's film is to show landscapes on fire from the concrete perspectives of those who were at particular places at a particular time, instead of an abstract idea of god or "man as such."

To a certain extent comparable to the one of *Lessons of Darkness*, the soundtrack of *Behind the Sun* deals with religious motifs as well. However, these are taken from neither the bible nor the koran, but, like her visuals, ready-mades in terms of popular found footage. Hers is the original soundtrack of Islamic TV programs in which god is praised by means of the recitation of Arabic nature poems. In them, god does not appear as someone who has created the world willy-nilly and will, at some point, destroy it again in the same willy-nilly way. God is equated here with the beauty of nature, which is shown as the simultaneity and interaction between many partial beings.

The result she achieves with this is more than just an alienation effect in the Brechtian sense, with which she counters Herzog's literally oil-based fantasies of fusion—with the earth, life, and death—stemming from Wagner and the *Book of Revelation*. Furthermore, the distance she places between image and sound makes it possible to encounter more than one subjectivity alone. In her video, a male voice can be heard off-screen, underlined by a pronounced reverb effect. While Herzog constellates apocalyptic motifs from the bible with images of a future end of the world by means of text overlays, thus allowing image and sound to support each other, Al Qadiri contrasts amateurish VHS recordings with *low* poetry. Unlike Herzog, she relies neither on a punishing god nor on the format of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, but on kitsch and on a productive distance between the technical means she employs. Instead of eschatological questions in her work, looking at burning landscapes, we witness the narrative about a nature that many humans ought to receive favorably. While Herzog's film anchors the events on the ground in a subjectivity hovering above things, whose historical genesis Feuerbach tied to the rise of the conscious and self-determined individual, *Behind the Sun* enters into the sensuous relations between more than one human and shows the extent to which many perspectives are entangled by

a fossil fuel called oil. While in *Lessons of Darkness* the simultaneity and interaction of those takes a back seat in relation to a gaze which is both reified and reifying, Al Qadiri focuses her attention on 22 decentered points of view.

While Herzog speaks the majestic text of his film by means of his own auctorial off-screen voice, which is quite distinctive because of its Bavarian accent, in her response to him Al Qadiri uses reverb effects. In her work the camera often is panned from the sun across the sky to smoldering fires, making clear the origination of the images from partial positions. Although the Kuwaiti visual artist, unlike the German director, does not show a single human being in the frames she creates, due to the random nature of the VHS footage, her material nonetheless displays much more than his *corporeal* traces. Towards the end the English subtitles accompanying the Arabic voiceover read: "How strange the story is... / ...of a man who flaunts himself / when he is merely mortal." Then the video ends and the loop in the exhibition space begins anew.

With his inward expedition into Christian subjectivity the German philosopher Feuerbach unintentionally touches on the core problematic of colonial modernity as well:

> Hence the lamentation over sin is found only where the human individual regards himself in his individuality as a perfect, complete being, not needing others for the realisation of the species, of the perfect man; where instead of the consciousness of the species has been substituted the exclusive self-consciousness of the individual; where the individual does not recognise himself as a part of mankind, but identifies himself with the species, and for this reason makes his own sins, limits and weaknesses, the sins, limits, and weaknesses of mankind in general.[47]

Whereas in Herzog's film the burning oil seems to spring from and return to god, Al Qadiri's video ends with the poem reciter's suggestion that it would be bad for "man" if nature existed solely for "his" sake.

In Al Qadiri's work, the sun shrouded in smoke resembles the false idea that human beings were—also in Ferreira da Silva's sense[48]—conscious and self-determined individuals rather than "a part of a being"[49] and therefore fundamentally dependent on others. In contrast to that, Herzog is captured in a solipsistic and solitary panorama. Closer to Feuerbach than the German director,

Al Qadiri points out, with a humorous undertone, that there are always specific but intertwined points of view. An insight into, as we might conclude with Wynter, another *genre* of doing rather than being human as practice.[50] Indeed only another *genre* of the human could stop the fires from burning, since the many fires we are witnessing these days still stem from a subjectivity which prefers its proximity to god over its relation to other subjectivities.

CLOUDY THINKING
Ruth Schmidt

STAGING THE METEREOLOGICAL

In European thinking the sky is a mirror of the mind: Plato thought of the sun as the condition of the possibility of cognition; Descartes' perceptions are transparent and sharply shaped, the Enlightenment is a clearing up that brightens the overcast, cloudy spirit. A clear sky and a clear mind go together.

Clouds in contrast are border cases of cognition and representation that withdraw from human control. And that's no mere metaphor; even in the natural sciences clouds remained for a surprisingly long time a manifestation of sheer contingency, unpredictable, and seemingly lawless. It wasn't until the beginning of the 19th century that a cloud taxonomy was developed, and only in the 1920s that this loose net of designations was condensed into a *grid* that would tame the clouds and measure the earth into a globe.

This grid is part of a fantastic vision that Lewis Fry Richardson proposes in his 1922 book *Weather Prediction by Numerical Process.* It is an analysis of the mathematical possibilities to actually forecast the weather for the first time. Richardson himself was unsuccessful in this task—it took him six weeks to calculate the weather six hours ahead—but at the very end of his book he describes a detailed model to solve this problem. He outlines a place you might call an algorithmic weather theater:

> After so much hard reasoning, may one play with a fantasy? Imagine a large hall like a theatre, except that the circles and galleries go right round through the space usually occupied by the stage. The walls of this chamber are painted to form a map of the globe. The ceiling represents the north polar regions, England is in the gallery, the tropics in the upper circle, Australia on the dress circle and the Antarctic in the pit.[51]

In this huge, dome-shaped room with a projection of the earth's map on the walls like an inverted globe, many thousands of calculators, so-called human computers process the incoming weather data, each one responsible for a certain geographical square. Together they compensate for what an individual isn't capable of—they calculate faster than the wind. What Richardson develops here is nothing less than a spatial computer before the

invention of the electronical one.[52] His weather theater is literally an operative function: it is a stage as *scaena*, as a *scenario* for playing through the ways of the clouds.

But how come you need this actual theatrical arrangement; why aren't some mathematical equations enough? The novelty of Richardson's fantasy is in fact not the assembled human brain power as one could think, but his idea to divide the projected map of the earth into little squares. He observes that the locations of the measuring stations for weather data are historically grown and therefore spread all over the earth "as if they had fallen from a pepper pot."[53] But what if they were distributed due to mathematical requirements instead, following the need to calculate the transformation of weather states at one point and one time and compare it with others? The result of this consideration is a lattice of measuring stations to cover the earth that thereby becomes a grid ball, projected from the navel of the weather theater, a scattered globe that is computable and therefore predictable. To calculate the clouds the world is chopped into little units, discrete points, into *weather pixels*.[54] Under Richardson's gaze, weather prediction becomes a question of resolution—the more weather pixels the more precise the forecast; how high can we resolve the planet? His weather theater is in a way the first digital map of the earth, and inextricably connects digitality, computation, and the clouds in the sky to form the globe as a calculable function of the earth.

THE CLOUD. SIMULATING THE RACIAL CAPITALOCENE

So how high can we actually resolve the planet? Richardson's functional theater got new dimensions and a fantastic design: As part of the "Digital Europe" program by the European Commission in 2021, a large-scale project called *Destination Earth (DestinE)*[55] was about to start. It shall produce until 2030 a fully and all-embracing digital twin of the earth. This digital twin will be available on a cloud-based platform and will consume gigantic amounts of weather, water and land data as well as tremendous amounts of energy. It's a project to face and predict the imminent massive climate changes and their consequences by setting up a gigantic forecast program not only for the weather, but for all living conditions on Earth in a live simulation.

But simulations are not innocent. Beside the question, whether they create through their foresight a future that wouldn't take place this way without this foresight, they come with a violent history. The same first computer that finally processed a timely weather

forecast based on Richardson's scenario was used to simulate nuclear fission reactions in 1945, opening up a new dimension of scenario thinking and play through. Without these computer-based simulations, Operation Trinity, Hiroshima, Nagasaki and a lot of nuclear weapon tests couldn't have followed, leaving their plutonium-containing traces in ice and rock. From some geological perspectives the Anthropocene begins with this possibility to simulate the future on our computers, as the plutonium spike appears as a kind of material effect of computing power.[56] But these simulations also led to hundreds of thousands of mostly indigenous people being killed, contaminated, or exiled, for even in the nuclear traces the racialized dimensions of the Anthropocene are evident, as Kathryn Yusoff has demonstrated.[57]

Destination Earth has not just perfectioned Richardson's dreams about prediction but is also creating the pure form of the globe, if you use this term according to Gayatri Spivak:

> It is not too fanciful to say that, in the gridwork of electronic capital, we achieve something that resembles that abstract ball covered in latitudes and longitudes, cut by virtual lines—once the equator and the tropics, now drawn increasingly by other requirements of Geographical Information Systems. The globe is on our computers. No one lives there.[58]

The virtual grid of capital that covers the world after colonial measurement to form one globe, is—when Spivak writes this in the late 1990s—not yet the overall computational cloud we live under nowadays, but it's already visible: The globe, this grid ball is on our computers as a bond of digitality and racialized capitalism. With *Destination Earth* this globe on our computers has given itself in a literal and uncanny way an image that is not a likeness, not a representation anymore, but a simulation, a game, a computer game, in which we (but who's this we?) are shifting the variables on our computer to foresee the future on our earth, that is formed by this simulation and that—as a powerful symbol of the often invisible racial and capitalistic dimensions of the so-called Anthropocene—simultaneously simulates that all non/humans are allegedly facing the same *destinE*/y when it comes to the deadly consequences of the racial Capitalocene.[59]

CLOUDY THINKING
The weather theater as well as *DestinE* reduces the chaos and unpredictability of the planet, its atmosphere and thick forms of

life to cloud thinking, to "causal pleasure"[60] that makes some of us users of the earth, who play through simulations for a future that shall be calculable. But do we really just have to listen for calculability and its excess? How might we confront this renewed gridding of the planet and its colonial modernity in the digital as well? Does digitality have to go along with a view from above, or is a "digitality from below" not perhaps possible, as many digital-poetic practices, such as those of Stephanie Dinkins, Hito Steyerl, or Morehshin Allahyari, show? Finally, I would like to pick out three terms of cloud thinking and conceive of them somewhat differently, in order to ask whether they instead enable a *cloudy thinking* that allows for contingency, opacity, and failure in the realm of predictability.

Digital: "Digitalis" is the Latin word for "finger"; digitality entails the touch. The touchscreens of our devices, all these interfaces, that we operate with our hands not our eyes talk about this inversion of our daily life. We feel the keyboard, the joystick, all these buttons, controllers, and other manifestations of the digital contact. Could it therefore teach us how to think through touching as ways of experiencing ourselves as intersections, as interfaces, as human, and more-than-human permeated entities, pervaded by touching and being touched?

Pattern: In the computational cloud pattern recognition rules. Everything is sorted by similarity. What steadily occurs together is classified as related; it is recognized as statistical pattern, as correlation and structures the whole field of prediction: in a quantity of present data, patterns are identified, from which a not seldom racist the future is calculated.[61] And yet: can we remember the lions, dragons, and swans, that we recognized in the clouds, lying on our backs on any lawn? Can't we use apophenia,[62] this gift of schizophrenia and computers, to understand that our data, our archives in the cloud are noisy, structured by racial and sexual violence, and that we need radical imagination, a cloudy thinking, to see pattern other than the hegemonic ones?

Ping: A "ping" is the acoustic signal of an echo sounder by which it locates the sea ground. Online the *ping* describes the amount of time that passes between my request to the server and its reply. The ping is the precise latency with which I travel the digital space. The smaller the ping the better the net. The ping is the time of the cloud, the ping is global, the general equivalent in exchange

between me and the server. But what if I enlarge the latency, expand the delay, move slower, de-synchronize and hang behind—is digital dawdling possible? Can I inhabit the limbo between my request to the server and its response, in the buffered ghost state of the ping? Was I dawdling? I went off for a while, it carried me away, I accidentally got into an undercurrent of time, a currency that counts differently or not at all.

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3 Martin Heidegger: "The Age of the World Picture" in: The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays, translated by William Lovitt (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 115-154.

4 Martin Heidegger: "Anmerkungen I-V (Schwarze Hefte 1942–1948)" in: *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 97, ed. by Peter Trawny (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2015), 152. (Translation: L.G.)

5 Martin Heidegger: "Über Wesen und Begriff von Natur, Geschichte und Staat Übung aus dem Wintersemester 1933/34" in: *Heidegger-Jahrbuch 4. Heidegger und der Nationalsozialismus I. Dokumente*, ed. by Alfred Denker/Holger Zaborowski (Freiburg/München: Karl Alber 2009), 53-88, here 81-82.

6 Ibid.

7 See for this term f.e.: Heidegger (2015), 149.

8 F.e.: Tim Ingold: "The Temporality of the Landscape", in: *World Archeology* (Oct. 1993, Vol. 25, No. 2: Conceptions of Time and Ancient Society), 152-174.

9 See: Peter Risthaus: *Onto-Topologie. Zur Entäußerung des unverfügbaren Ortes* (Berlin/Zürich: Diaphanes, 2009), 192.

10 Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 1997), 191-192.

11 Ibid., 144.

12 Sylvia Wynter: "Beyond the World of Man: Glissant and the New Discourse of the Antilles" in: *World Literature Today* (63:4, Autumn 1989), 637-648, here 646.

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15 Ibid., 18.

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