

Intra-Action

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Entanglements Within and Beyond Environmental Photography

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Intra-Action – Entanglements Within and Beyond Environmental Photography

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Introduction

December 2016.

I walk up the road that leads straight into the forest. The air is cold and smoke pillars emerge from my mouth. It is easy to breathe and the sun barely makes its way above the trees. There it is. I set up my tripod and place the camera on top, I measure the light and change the settings on the camera, pull the film forward. It is quiet. In, out, in, out, in, out, I breathe in the same pace as the slow wind around me. Click. A metallic and mechanical sound echoes through the scenery. I ponder upon this act of photographing the site, or landscape, or them. It feels uneasy and I get uncomfortable. There it is again, the uncanny feeling of having robbed someone of something. I get obsessed with this thought. How can I move pass this? Is it even possible?

Abstract

This essay is an attempt to approach the genre of both landscape and environmental photography, to turn them inside-out, to dissect and to deconstruct them through ecology, ecofeminism, feminist posthumanism and critical theory regarding the photographic medium. Throughout the essay I will focus on several artists and bodies of works that fall into this broad category of landscape and environmental photography. Throughout the essay we will also visit my own artistic process. The idea is to approach these practices through the theories mentioned above and to reconstruct the ways to approach a landscape, to shift agency and to question the master narrative, which I will look into further on. My starting point is my research question and I will first briefly look into representation within photography and from there move over to artistic practices and throughout the essay implement the different theories mentioned above to contribute to my thesis. I am not sure if I will get any answers to my questions, but I assure you that we will move in some direction through this text and in the end we might have more questions that will lead us further down the path.

Representation within Photography: From Anthropology to Landscapes

How can one, as an artist who works within an environmental photography context and specifically with landscapes, work-with the landscape vs. take-from it? Extract from it? Is it even possible with the photograph being a method and tool used for mapping and a scientific purpose, possibly extracting from whatever is depicted? When it comes to representation within a historical context, photography has always been a significant tool to portray and signify what is coined as *Other*. Photography became a method of naturalistic documentation and a way to define social types that differed.¹ Liz Wells, professor in photographic culture at Plymouth University, and Derrick Price, freelance writer and researcher, writes in the book *Photography – A Critical Introduction* that 'Photography not only developed in the Victorian era but was also implicitly caught up in nineteenth century interest and attitudes. The Victorian invested considerable faith in the power of the camera to record, classify and witness.'² What the photographer brought back from abroad to the western spectator was images of flora and fauna and native people, which were prevailing the views of the people being primitive, bizarre, barbaric or simply picturesque.³ Of course these photographs were also a means of education, for it was thought that the images of the Other was also in a sense an image of people at an earlier stage of development. The person having their photographs taken was also transformed into a mere representation of certain social groups and races, and in that sense robbing the individual of their subjectivity. In her book *Land Matters: Landscape Photography, Culture and Identity*, Wells looks into landscape photography and the different notions regarding landscapes in terms of uses and activism, national romanticism and as a means to construct identity in relation to land. In the introduction she states that

Representation of land as landscape, whether in romantic or in more topographic modes, reflects and reinforces contemporary political, social and environmental attitudes. This is seated within and influences cultural identity, which can be defined as a complex and fluid articulation of the subjective and the collective that draws into play a range of factors such as class, gender, ethnicity, nationality, but is by no means limited to these social formations.⁴

She continues that landscape is a social product that is a result of human intervention to shape or transform natural phenomena which we also are a part of.⁵ The relation the photographers have with the land is of significance. Her standpoint was her own curiosity towards ways in which we live and how we relate to our environment, which is far more long-standing than us. We impact the environment in various

1 Wells, Liz. *Photography – A Critical Introduction*. p. 12

2 Wells, Liz. Thinking About Photography in *Photography A Critical Introduction*. p. 55

3 Price, Derrick. Surveyors and surveyed in *Photography A Critical Introduction*. p. 68

4 Wells, Liz. Introduction in *Land Matters: Landscape Photography, Culture and Identity*. p. 1

5 Ibid. p. 1

ways and in various scales and by doing so, Wells states that we impact on the holistic integrity of localities.⁶ She also looks into how ideas around the specific landscapes affect the maker of the art and states that 'For many artist land is a place of symbol and myth'.⁷ With that notion in mind, how are artists working with photography and within a landscape tradition depicting, or portraying, the location? I intend to look at some examples of artists working with photography and landscape and particularly look at the relation towards the site, the distance that might occur when working camerabased and the possibilities of intertwining and working-with within the cameraless sphere. How can we shift the idea of representation within landscape photography to something that is more intertwined and not separate? To not think of or look at the landscape as Other. To shift agency. The land with all its compounds, the trees, the air, the microbes, ourselves watching it, connecting with it?

I am here and so are they, neither of us has more authority. Our bodies may differ but yet we still are a part of what is omnipresent, the constant flow of needs and wishes, of pain and survival, past, future and present times. How do I interact with you? Become a part of you? Play with you?

I walk across a clearcut not very far from my mother's home. During the past few months, the site has completely shifted, turning from something enclosing and safe to something quite the opposite. The ground is bare, torn to pieces. What remains? I stroll randomly across the lacerated ground, tapping into the energies of the place, breathing calmly. I dig my hands into the warm earth. Fir needles, dirt and bark get stuck underneath my fingernails, tiny branches scratches my hands and wrists. Instinctively I lay down on my stomach. A photograph pops up in my mind. It is a photograph of a man named Miihkali Timoskainen who lays on the ground, also on his stomach, arms and legs stretched out. The caption says: Ilonmantsilainen Miihkali Timoskainen tervehtii maata (Miihkali Timoskainen from Ilonmantsi greets the earth).⁸ As Miihkali, I greet the dismantled earth.

6 Wells, Liz. Introduction in *Land Matters: Landscape Photography, Culture and Identity*. p. 8

7 Ibid. p. 12

8 Harva, Uno. *Maahiset in Suomalaisten Muinaisusko*. p. 288

Co-Worlding, intertwining. I bury the photographic paper in the ground. Debris and matter gets stuck on my clothes. Am I also burying a part of myself? What the ground and the blanket I use not to expose the light sensitive paper create together with the approaching dusk is some kind of limbo. A safe place where time and space seize to exist. I breathe in the scent of the forest ground, it smells fresh and of leaves and other organic matter slowly composting, a smell that gets etched into my conscious. How the dirt and all the other individuals, the mycorrhiza and the moist from the ground, what is left of the roots of the trees who has been cut down, interact with the material is beyond my control. I am no longer the sole maker in this.

Many days later I still find pine needles in my hair.

The colour Blue, the colour of Science. Working – with, taking – from. Photography as a scientific method for mapping, understanding and compartmentalising

We have briefly touched upon nineteenth century ideas and implications regarding the photographic medium and especially in relation to representation. I mentioned that I am going to look into artistic practices that both include and exclude the camera and what this might do to the process in terms of interacting with the actual site, individuals, compounds and so forth. Anna Atkins was an English botanist and photographer, who is famous for to have published the first photo book, *Photographs of British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions*, which was in its entire form three volumes containing 398 images and fourteen pages of text. The book itself was unbound and the pages could therefore be shuffled around, making the images and text more fluid and not pinned down and static. Atkins used the photographic process of cyanotype, a method which gives the images a distinctive blue colour. It is one of the simplest photographic techniques and it contains two chemicals, Potassium ferricyanide and Ferric ammonium citrate mixed with water. Equal parts of the chemicals are combined with the same amount of water, mixed together and then coated on a surface. The light that affects the chemicals is UV-light from the sun, turning the coated surface deep blue.⁹ Being a botanist and given the time period when she was active, Atkins, who lived 1799 to 1871, had perhaps a distance between herself and the subject matter she wanted to depict. A distinctive line drawn between her, the scientist/photographer and the specific specimen/subject. In the book, Atkins portrays samples of algae that grew near her home in Kent. Because of her approach and her standpoint as a botanist, extracting a specimen and studying it in the

⁹ <http://www.alternativephotography.com/cyanotype-classic-process/>

comfort of her lab in her home, one could pose the idea that she draws a line between the ocean (where the algae grow), the algae (the specimen) and herself (the photographer/scientist). This is a quite straight forward approach. What do we see, how do we read and what does already existing knowledge impose on our interpretation of these photographs? The chemicals combined, coating a surface and a plant on top if it with possibly a sheet of glass to press the specimen onto the coated paper. If we approach Atkins cyanotypes from another angle, one could however argue that the cyanotypes are not as divided and separated as they might seem. The deep blue colour created by the potassium ferricyanide creates a link between the paper and the element where the algae grow. In that sense one could argue that although Atkins extracted the algae from its original habitat she has given them a new one, the photograph itself. The cyanotypes could in that sense be read as intertwining between the element, the chemicals and the algae. A non-duality. Different compounds and notions floating together in space and time, intra-acting.¹⁰ The fact that the book itself was unbound also contributes to this reading, the images and the text that can be shuffled around gives the work a sense of fluidity which corresponds to the element of water. Atkins cyanotypes becomes intertwined with the element and the linkage is embodied *within* the photographs.

One contemporary artist who works in the same manner as Atkins is American artist and photographer Dornith Doherty. Her work *Archiving Eden* is about collecting data and learning about specimens, but the starting point is the current ecological crisis. Since 2008, Doherty has collaborated with seed banks all around the world. She describes the work by stating that in the current era of climate change and declining biodiversities, seed banks all over the world play a vital role by collecting seeds, researching their biology and storing them for a later purpose, ensuring the survival of both wild and agricultural species.¹¹ Doherty does not use the same technique as Atkins, but they resemble and the fact is that Doherty uses another old technique for making pictures: X-ray. However unlike Atkins analog prints, Doherty uses contemporary, digital technology to make her images. Her method becomes linked to contemporary ideas regarding the survival of the human race and other species as well, where some people rely on and think that technology will save us and others who pose an idea that we have already been entangled with technology for quite a while.¹² *Archiving Eden* is interesting also in the sense that it combines the organic with the technological, a merge that in itself also becomes some sort of intertwining like Atkins cyanotypes. The difference in the two works lies in the actual performance. In Atkins cyanotypes, you might get a stronger sense and presence of the hand than in Doherty's X-rays. The handwritten text produced with the cyanotype method also contributes to this in Atkins work. Doherty ponders on the method of the X-ray, its possibilities and the inevitable scientific and technological inheritance. The photographic method used makes it possible for us to look deeper into the tissues of the seeds, further and further in, to extend our own vision past what our eyes can see. By photographing the seeds stored within the vaults of the seed banks and then assembling them in collages, Doherty is making images that resemble old school posters. It is almost like she is cataloging and presenting some kind of first aid kit. These are our assets when ecosystems around the globe collapse. The work also investigates

10 The term Intra-Action is coined by Karen Barad and is a complex notion, but to get some understanding of it please read Whitney Starks description at <https://newmaterialism.eu/almanac/i/intra-action.html>

11 <https://www.dornithdoherty.com/archiving-eden>

12 Haraway, Donna. *A Cyborg Manifesto*

the idea of time and life on a macro and micro scale, some seeds are as small as a grain of sand and with the proper storage properties, the seeds should last up to at least 200 years. In that sense, Doherty's work also becomes heavily embodied because of the transience in both the ecosystem, but also in the physicality of the actual seeds and their ability to hibernate for two centuries. A means to freeze time and space. Doherty's images resemble Atkins cyanotypes visually on two parts, the distance is being dissolved because of the photogrammic view but also the distinctive blue colour. Apparently in Doherty's work, the colour blue is supposed to evoke references to the process of cryogenic preservation, which is a method where you freeze tissues, cells, organs and so forth down to -80°C to -196°C. In *Archiving Eden*, the colour blue becomes the colour of a scientific method, but what about Atkins cyanotypes? When it comes to the colour, are these less scientific because of the fact that the colour resembles the element from which the specimens were taken? Or are the two works equally scientific because of their approach? Collecting and compartmentalising for generations and times yet to come. Doherty's *Archiving Eden* resembles the nineteenth century ideas on recording and classifying and, again, maybe, putting us and our interpretation in a direction of notions regarding taking-from, not working-with. However I would suggest that Doherty's work move away from that traditional interpretation of a landscape because of the cameraless method and because of the elimination of layers. Then again, Doherty's *Archiving Eden* is not created with the same method as Atkins, who actually juxtaposed the light sensitive paper with the specimen. With the X-ray, Doherty is somehow still photographing the seeds but the apparatus is another type of camera. It is not the hand held xlr-camera nor the cumbersome large format camera of the late 19th century. Then again the seeds that Doherty is photographing also has their link to the sea and water in particular. As Astrida Neimanis, lecturer in the Department of Gender and Cultural Studies at the University of Sydney, points out in her book *Bodies of Water – Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology*,

Water is evidently both finite *and inexhaustible*; both the same and always becoming different, too. Our planet neither gains nor relinquishes the water it harbours, but only witness its continual reorganisation, redistribution, and relocation. This means that the water that temporally comprises and sustains all of these bodies brings with it a history that is at least 3.9 billion years old and will continue far beyond the span of our own lifetimes...¹³

What Neimanis is describing is located within the notion of deep time, and throughout that spectrum the world has changed and will continue to change. It is interesting what Neimanis essay does to me, I can feel the flow of ancient times running through me. Atkins and Doherty's works cannot be placed within the notion of deep time, however they are both tapping into that constant, omnipresent flow and the notion of water as the same which has been circling around for billions of years which Neimanis is describing above. More than one hundred and fifty years divide these works, and by those years the

13 Neimanis, Astrida. Posthuman Gestationality: Luce Irigaray and Water's Queer Reiterations in *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology*. p. 66 - 67

scientific methods regarding investigating the world around us has changed. In that sense, both Atkins and Doherty's works are extremely linked to the contemporary discourses within the scientific discourses of each century.

We have briefly touched upon photography's role as a scientific method and one could perhaps argue that photography within this framework creates a distance between the depicted, the subject, and the spectator or creator. And if we think of the camera as a scientific apparatus and hence linked to the 19th century ideas (I will look further into this later on in the text), what happens when you abandon it? When working camerabased you operate your body in a specific way, you bend your neck to look into the viewfinder, you turn the wheel to set the focus, you press your index finger against the button that releases the shutter. Click. The mechanical sound echoes through the air. When working cameraless, the body language shifts quite a bit. You move your hands in a different way, the light sensitive surface you use might be placed horizontally in front of you, or somewhere completely different, you might use light, draw with it or just let the photographic material react together with different players or entities. You might engage your own physical being in it's entirety, work-with the photographic material in a tactile sense, co-world with it, like Ewa Stackelberg's photograms from the series *The Woman* from 2005.¹⁴ Another thing that occurs when you abandon the camera is that layers dissolve. There is no lens, which is built up by several other lenses, both concave and convex, there is no shutter that moves when it is being commanded to and there is no aperture that decides how much light is allowed to enter. When working within the cameraless sphere, you dismantle the photographic body, the shell, which is the camera itself. So when it comes to working with landscapes and with camera, is the distance enhanced? What does it do to how we interact and engage with the world we inhabit together with all other creatures. How do we engage with the *other*? The idea of creating distance is of course evident in the fields of anthropology and photography as we have touched upon earlier but how about landscapes? Does this distance-creating, us contra them, apply to that as well? If so, how does it affect how and where we position ourselves in relation to a specific site? Perceive and interact with *them*?

Time passes, seasons change and underneath the earth something is emerging. What is left of the forest is slowly falling into the annual rest. What happens underneath the ground? Are you also sleeping? What happened to the communication? Was it lost when the upper part of your bodies were cut and fell to the ground?

14 <https://ewastackelberg.se/the-woman>

Stories that include, stories that exclude – nonhumans in symbiosis with humans

Henry Fox Talbot claimed photography to be the pencil of nature. A pencil is a means to make notes, investigating and observing the world around you. Pencil = tool. Donna Haraway, professor emerita in the History of Consciousness Department and Feminist Studies at University of California in Santa Cruz, states in her book *Staying with the Trouble* that so much of earth's history has been centred around the invention of tools and weapons. She notes that this is a part of history that has always been valued the most. However, and also pretty obviously, this idea and viewpoint is extremely excluding. Haraway describes this notion as a Man-making, Anthropos, tale which only focus lies in him as a the sole world-maker. All other individuals are props, ground, plot space, or prey.¹⁵ 'They don't matter; their job is to be in the way, to be overcome, to be the road, the conduit, but not the traveler, not the begetter.'¹⁶ As the title suggest, the book is an attempt to understand the current state of affairs, to embrace it and not run away from it. Haraway introduces a classic play to illustrate this interaction in between species and staying with the trouble. She argues that it is of vital importance that we not only interact with other species but that we also need to have a playful approach towards this interaction in order to survive. In relation to the single, one-way aspect of Anthropos as a story teller, Haraway also stresses the urgency to tell and incorporate many alternative stories, to include every single organism and reposition ourselves in order for a future co-survival. Carolyn Merchant is an American ecofeminist philosopher and historian of science and professor in Environmental history, philosophy and ethics at Berkley University in California, who also explore the idea of narrative and the necessity of a deconstruction of the dominant master narrative in her book *Earthcare*. She states that

The narrative is the story told to itself by the dominant society of which we are a part. We internalise narrative as ideology. Ideology is a story told by people in power. Once we identify ideology as a story – powerful and compelling, but still only a story – we realise that by rewriting the story, we can challenge the structures of power. We recognise that all stories can and should be challenged.¹⁷

She argues that the term master narrative is an example of colonising language that looks at the "body of knowledge" from above rather than from below. The master narrative is also a male story, like Haraway is pointing out as well, that are told by male historians of science.¹⁸ Val Plumwood, an Australian philosopher and ecofeminist known for her work on anthropocentrism and who also contributed to the establishment of the trans-discipline ecological humanities, also recognises the master narrative and explores it. She states that the master narrative is more than a conspiracy, that it is a legacy in form of

15 Haraway, Donna J. Tentacular Thinking – Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chtulucene in *Staying With The Trouble – Making Kin in the Chtulucene*. p. 30 – 57 (39)

16 Ibid. p. 39

17 Merchant, Carolyn. Eve – Nature and Narrative in *Earthcare*. p. 54 - 55

18 Ibid. p. 62

culture, rationality, framework of selfhood and relationship which through appropriation of culture has come to shape us all.¹⁹ Astrida Neimanis also dissects this idea by looking at our interconnectedness throughout bodies, space and time through the element of water. She states that 'To rethink embodiment as watery stirs up considerable trouble for dominant Western and humanist understandings of embodiment, where bodies are figured as discrete and coherent individual subjects, and as fundamentally autonomous'.²⁰ She asks herself further on 'what does telling the story of humans in relation to more-than-humans in one way, rather than another mean for how these stories will unfold?'²¹ ²² Margaret McFall-Ngai, an American animal physiologist and biochemist, writes in the essay *Noticing Microbial Worlds – The Postmodern Synthesis in Biology* in the book *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet* that microbes don't just rule the world but they actually make every life form possible and that they have been busy doing so ever since the beginning of evolutionary time.²³ McFall-Ngai states that all species are complex assemblages that are made up of more cells of others than of their "own", she continues that '...indeed we are more microbe than human.'²⁴ This notion shifts the idea of scale and place as well. Millions upon millions of critters intra-acting with each other, floating through space and time. With this idea in mind, our interactions at a specific site becomes something different. By knowing that you and I are a part of the constant flow of the site, we can interact with it on a different level. Try to tap into the energies of the site. Can you feel it? Stick your hands deep into the ground, open up and let it flow through you.

Creating distance in opposition to Working – With: From oil bunkering to nuclear disasters frozen in time

When it comes to landscape photography, does the photographic act create a distinction between the subject and the viewer? If we take the environmental photography field as an example, one artist who works with landscapes and the human made effects on these is Canadian photographer Edward Burtynsky. Burtynsky is a photographer who has devoted his career to photographing the man altered environment and this stems from his passion for being in nature.²⁵ His latest, and possibly the largest, work is the multidisciplinary work *Anthropocene*. The work is a collaboration between Burtynsky, Jennifer Baichwal who is a film director and film photographer Nicholas de Pencier and consists of a book, a documentary, an exhibition and an educational website. The project was launched in 2018. Burtynsky himself states that he has always been 'concerned to show how we affect the Earth in a big

19 Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. p. 190

20 Neimanis, Astrida. Introduction: Figuring Bodies of Water in *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology*. p. 2

21 Ibid. p. 13

22 Another person who has been writing on this topic is English professor Timothy Morton. I highly recommend *Dark Ecology – For a Logic of Future Coexistence and Humankind: Solidarity with Nonhuman People*

23 McFall-Ngai, Margaret. Noticing Microbial Worlds: The Postmodern Synthesis in Biology in *Monsters and the Arts of Living in Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*. M51 - M70

24 Ibid.. p. M52

25 <https://www.edwardburtynsky.com/projects/photographs/anthropocene>

way, the indelible marks left by humankind on the geological face of our planet.²⁶ He says that he continues 'to seek out and photograph large-scale systems that leave lasting marks'.²⁷ In this section I will focus on the photographs from the work *Anthropocene*. Burtynsky is stating that he wants to seek out and photograph the landscapes that has been fundamentally altered by man. Although Burtynsky's photographs offers a critique and pointing to the current problematic state of affairs regarding consumption and the extraction and depletion of nature's resources, I cannot help but think that what is being brought in front of me is an aesthetification of the problem. The method seems to be quite consistent in the work, it differs slightly but most of the time what we can see is aerial views of sites all around the globe. What seems to be important for Burtynsky is the idea that this problematic stretch throughout the planet, but what does it mean to approach these issues with the method he has chosen? Remember Merchant's idea regarding the master narrative and the body of knowledge, to look at it from above rather than from below? In today's society we are quite accustomed to the idea that the world has shrunk due to the possibility of travelling far and near through the sky. Burtynsky himself is from a western context and implement this, by travelling around, and the privilege of being born within that context he is also connecting to the Victorian era when colonisers travelled to the far outskirts of the empire to document both the people there but also the flora and fauna. Now we have found our way back to the idea of representation. Merchant describes how the term of representation imbeds the distancing from nature, which arose during the 16th century through art, the Copernican view from above and the voyeurism which was, or is, inherent in the scientific instruments such as telescope and microscope, and further on the camera and the satellite floating in space.²⁸ Burtynsky himself is a contemporary artist who is deeply dependent on these instruments and like a satellite, flying back and forth through the skies. I want to get back to the aesthetification for a bit. Not only is Burtynsky's photography skills evident in the photographs but there is one particular thing that is interesting. Patterns and geometry emerges from the photographs along with bright colours. Of course the human mind is always looking for patterns for recognition but also as something alluring as in sacred geometry, but how does this affect our reading of Burtynsky's photographs? We know that what is being depicted and conveyed in the photographs is more or less horrific, yet I cannot help but think that the beauty of the photographs is deceiving and that the message might get lost in the reading. Or is it the other way around? The aesthetification could contribute to the idea of the uncanny. There is also another aspect that is interesting in Burtynsky's photographs. The aerial views of the landscapes creates a physical distance between him as an artist and the land itself. What does this mean for how we read and interact with the work? Wells suggests in the book *Land Matters: Landscape Photography, Culture and Identity* that contemporary landscape photography has changed our understanding of the genre. First and foremost this has to do with how landscape imagery always have and still is relating to questions regarding class, nationhood, heritage and identity and how these have been exposed through questioning established ways of seeing and representing land. Secondly she states that the development in landscape aesthetics in some parts of the Western world indicate a widespread and critical evaluation of the relation between land, landscape and photography. Apparently

26 <https://www.edwardburtynsky.com/projects/photographs/anthropocene>

27 Ibid.

28 Mercant, Carolyn. Isis – Science and History in *Earthcare*. p. 62

the politics of place increasingly features as an artistic or curatorial concern. Wells says that in this respect we can think of what she calls post-modern landscape photography as a *grounded aesthetics* which she describes as formal and thematic perceptions which are situated within socio-historical

contexts.²⁹ How interesting. Could Burtynsky's photographs of the Anthropocene be placed within this notion of grounded aesthetics? Perhaps. Wells is talking about a relation towards the land and the socio-historical context that emphasises how we read and approach a landscape. When it comes to Burtynsky's aerial photographs of sites altered by the human hand, I am struggling to reconcile with this. Is Burtynsky really representing the land in the sense as described above by Wells? Sure if we think about the work from one angle we can consider Burtynsky's photographs belonging to this grounded aesthetics. But what happens if we approach the work from another angle. I cannot help but feel that due to his privilege as a middle-aged man from a western context in the northern hemisphere, Burtynsky is, perhaps unwillingly, tapping into the 19th century ideas and norms on how to represent land. Or maybe this is what Burtynsky wants to evoke, by being a part of the privileged few he is using this aesthetification to his advantage. Plumwood writes in her book *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* that 'The structures of self involved in human domination and colonisation are reflected, repeated and confined in the reduction of non-human nature as an instrument.'³⁰ She continues that the master model of egoism and instrumentalism has been immensely influential in shaping the way the human relation to nature has been conceived in the west, that

The dominant traditions of western culture have viewed relationships to plants, rivers, animals, places and ecosystems as entirely instrumental, and defined human relations to others in nature in the same terms as the egoist defines his relation to others – humans stand apart from a nature conceived only as a means to satisfy essentially self-contained human interest.³¹

In the book Plumwood explores various themes that all connect to the idea of anthropocentrism and the mastery of nature from a feminist perspective. It is a complex text where various thematics coincide with each other. I want to stick with her notion of instrumentalism and dualism because I think that those observations are important in this text. Plumwood describes dualism as following:

29 Wells, Liz. Introduction in *Land Matters: Landscape Photography, Culture and Identity*. p. 10

30 Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. p. 142

31 Ibid. p. 147

Dualism is a relation of separation and domination inscribed and naturalised in culture characterised by radical exclusion, distancing opposition between orders constructed as systematically higher and lower, as inferior and superior, as ruler and ruled, which treats the division as part of the natures of being construed not merely as different but as belonging to radically different orders or kinds, and hence as not open to change.³²

This dualism is one of the key players in the master narrative. Typical dualisms include male/female and culture/nature. Through dualism, we look at things and relate to things and earthlings as something opposed to ourselves, something other or lesser than. She continues that a major aim of dualistic construction is to maximise separation between the dualised spheres and to prevent their being seen as continuous or contiguous.³³ The dualising master self does not emphatically recognise others as moral kin, and does not recognise them as centre of desires or needs on their own account.³⁴ This means that if we decide to position ourselves within this framework, we become separated from the rest of the world. By being separated, there might be a possibility that it is easier to embark on something, to excavate, or to exploit. But what happens if we shift this idea and turn it the other way around? What does it do to our responsibilities towards other earthlings? I can feel that Burtynsky's heart may lie in the right place, however there is a paradox. If Burtynsky is seeking to dissolve the dualistic worldview he is still falling into the notion of instrumentalism, he seeks out these places destroyed by human hand (which has been seen as instrumental in themselves) in hope of bringing a horrific truth to the light yet what he is doing is that he track down these places and they in their anguish become an instrument for Burtynsky's own needs. So, if you as a person is born within a western context and being an artist working with landscape, do you automatically tap into what is described above by Plumwood? Is the site that you are depicting becoming an instrument, becoming colonised, where it's only purpose is to serve the maker of the art?

But is there another way of working with sites? How do you come closer, how do you interact and collaborate with *them* rather than use them as an instrument? What happens if we get rid of the apparatus, the camera itself? If we are continuing on taking sites altered by man-made disasters as an example, let us look at two bodies of work which work with the materials from the condemned site. Shimpei Takeda is a Japanese artist who has worked with the nuclear disaster in Fukushima that occurred in early 2011. In the work *Trace – cameraless records of radioactive contamination*, Takeda works with the photographic medium but doesn't photograph the site in a traditional, camerabased sense. By working within the cameraless sphere, Takeda actively interacts with the contaminated site, it's critters and the photographic medium, its vulnerability and tactility. He uses soil that he collects from the condemned site and bind it (them) together with large format sheet film. The interaction between the contaminated soil with the radiation affecting the photographic film occurs for several months in pitch darkness. The result is an abstract universe where light is non existing, or at least light as humans perceive it. Another artist who's

32 Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. p. 47- 48

33 Ibid. p. 49

34 Ibid. p. 53

done a similar work is Lina Selander, a Swedish artist and filmmaker. The work *Lenin's Lamp Glows in the Peasant's Hut* from 2011 focuses on the film as a medium and a tool in constructing a society and the work stems from the nuclear disaster at Chernobyl in former Soviet Union, now Ukraine, in 1986. Selander's work is thus not entirely about a nuclear disaster like Takeda's work, but Selander uses this event as a starting and investigation point. The work itself contains three different parts. A 23 minute long monochrome video, an engraved plaquette in stainless steel and a five meter long vitrine that contains 22 radiographs. When visiting Selanders exhibition *This Misery of Light* at Konsthallen in Gothenburg autumn 2016, the photographs in the glass box grabs my attention. Like Henry Becquerel, Selander lets

radioactive stones from the site forever marked by catastrophe interact with photographic light sensitive papers. Similar to Takeda, Selander also lets the interaction in between these components take several months and what we can see as a result is traces of light which is not visible to the naked human eye. What makes these radiographs so interesting for me is their direct connection to the site and also the disaster in Ukraine. Unlike Burtynsky, Selander's radiographs are not a photograph, a reproduction and classical representation of a site, rather they are something in themselves. It is literally here, on this surface, that this interaction has occurred. The disaster in itself is embodied *within* the photographic medium. Selander's radiographs turn into echoes from a catastrophe that happened over thirty years ago, nevertheless the traces of this enormous human made disaster prevails and reminds us of the fragility in the ecosystems of the landscape but also our own mortality. By juxtaposing the components from the sites, both Takeda and Selander come closer and work-with the site. Karen Barad is a professor of feminist studies, philosophy, and history of consciousness department at the University of California in Santa Cruz and also an expert in theoretical particle physics and quantum field theory. In her essay in the book *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*, she looks into what happens to time when nuclear powers are harnessed and unleashed. She focuses on the nuclear bombings of Nagasaki and Hiroshima during world war two, where apparently the time stopped at 8:15 in the morning of August 6th as the bombs dropped. Barad discusses not only the disasters themselves, the most important aspect is the interconnectedness between matter, space and time. The landscape becomes a place where all of these aspects are deeply entangled with each other. Although these two sites are the main focus regarding location, Barad points out that this event and the aftermath is not static. The hauntings transcend the specific location. Barad points out the problems within the Newtonian nature regarding space, time, mattering and void and that these are undone with quantum physics. She continues

In particular, it undoes the Newtonian assumptions of separability and metaphysical individualism. There are no self-contained individuals running in the void. Matter is not some givenness that preexists its interaction. Matter is always already caught up with nothingness. Bodies, space, time, and the void are not ontologically separate matters.³⁵

35 Barad, Karen. No Small Matter: Mushroom Clouds, Ecologies of Nothingness, and Strange Topologies of Spacetime-mattering in Evolutionary Thinking in Ghosts on a Damaged Planet in *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*. p. 110

Barad is placing a finger on something that is very important in this essay. When working-with a site I would argue that it is of vital importance to reposition ourselves and actually look upon the site/them as something non-dualistic and not separated from us. The trees are not separate from the creatures in the ground, nor is the mycorrhiza separated from the fir needles. However, if we follow Plumwood's ideas we still have to recognise these individuals as individuals of their own, with their own needs and wishes. Although everything is linked together and constantly working together with each other we are still different creatures with our own needs, yet that does not differ us from each other.³⁶

The Void – a Landscape as an entity up for grabs

Like Barad, Wells also takes up the notion of the void in the introduction in the book *Land Matters: Landscape Photography, Culture and Identity*. Because of the thematics of the book, she looks into the word "space" which is also the definition of what is existing in between the determinate, for example distance between identifiable geographical points. She continues that "space" is something that flows around the determinant and quantifiable. This includes the metaphysical unboundedness, the poetic, the interdeterminancy and voidness. She writes that to be void is to be meaningless and to lack designation and that in semiotic terms, void functions relationally through lending meaning to that which surrounds it.³⁷ Wells continues that voidness involves existential incomprehensibility, '... to "touch the void" is to risk the trauma of uncertainty'.³⁸ Barad describes the void in a slightly different way. How the void is also being a colonialist apparatus describing a site or space as "virgin" and the right to claim ownership over this. She continues that this notion, which has been a tool used in the science of colonialism, racism, capitalism, militarism, imperialism, nationalism and scientism, describe the space or places as empty rather than plentiful.³⁹ Plumwood follows down the same path, describing the master's logic of colonisation being the dominant logic of our time. She continues that the explanation of what is happening to the earth and its complement of life is also being found in this problematic, the logic of mastery, now being seared into the biosphere of an entire scarred and wounded planet as well as the sociosphere.⁴⁰ What does this mean in an art context and for an artist working with landscapes within a photography context? Do we also claim these sites by photographing them with an apparatus used as a tool to investigate our surroundings in the same sense as the different sciences as Barad described above?

36 Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. p. 145 and 156

37 Wells, Liz. Introduction in *Land Matters: Landscape Photography, Culture and Identity*. p. 3

38 Ibid, p. 3

39 Barad, Karen. No Small Matter: Mushroom Clouds, Ecologies of Nothingness, and Strange Topologies of Spacetime-mattering in Evolutionary Thinking in Ghosts on a Damaged Planet in *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*. p. G113

40 Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. p. 191

100 hectares of compartmentalising – the photographer CONTRA them

Jaakko Kahilaniemi is a Finnish artist who works with photography as a medium and his practice regards the landscape and our relationship towards it. In his work *100 Hectares of Understanding* which is an ongoing work that started in 2015, he embarks on what you can describe as a journey to map out, compartmentalise, contemplate on and deal with the fact that he has inherited hundred hectares of forest in Finland. Kahilaniemi comes from a family of foresters, and the work is as much about understanding his own past and heritage as his relation towards the forest. The work contains both photographs of the site, of compounds and materials from the site and sculptures. Kahilaniemi's monochrome photographs are traditional in the sense of landscape photography, yet they differ slightly. The photographs are not just images of representation but they also contain dots and lines that have been added afterwards. In the given context of the work, these specific things could be interpreted as entities or individuals, trees, that might have disappeared or has not yet existed. In that sense, Kahilaniemi's work floats throughout time

and space. The present and the past constantly entangled within each other moving throughout space and time. In his artist statement, Kahilaniemi writes that this work is an attempt to understand the hundred hectare area of forest that he owns.⁴¹ Owing. Again, we come back to the notion of language and narrative and therefore a consistent landscape that has been colonised. With the notion of the master narrative, as described above by both Neimanis, Haraway, Merchant and Plumwood, how do we read Kahilaniemi's work? Unlike Atkins, Doherty, Selander and Takeda, Kahilaniemi operates within the camerabased sphere, where he is, I would argue, reinforcing the inheritance of the apparatus, the different layers and distance to the subject by drawing a line between himself and the landscape. Him *CONTRA* them. Or maybe it is the other way around. Him *INTRA* them.

A possible way forward

I have finally come to the end of the text and as I stated in the beginning, I might not get any answers to my research question. As artists working with the land we can actively take part in the theories presented by Haraway, Merchant, Neimanis and Plumwood. We can think about how we approach our subjects, think about our role and their (the sites) role in this play and how the stories we tell will unfold, and recognise our subjects for what they actually are, kin. In both Kahilaniemi's and Burtynsky's work, we can recognise a narrative which is familiar to us both in terms of aesthetics but also in content. It is the master narrative unfolding right before our eyes. Both Burtynsky and Kahilaniemi might work with this aesthetification in order to question the master narrative, but then again I am curious what might happen

41 <https://www.jaakkokahilaniemi.com/100hectares>

if you abandon the apparatus with all its connotations. Does there lie any possibilities within the cameraless sphere? As I pointed out earlier in the text regarding Atkins and Doherty's cameraless works (see page six), although both works are linked to contemporary discourses regarding the survival of ecosystems, they tap into the omnipresence of the element of water. By excluding the camera we resign the connotations and linkages to the history of the apparatus and by doing this we might be able to interact and co-world with whomever we set out to work with. By doing so we are coming closer and actually working-with the site and the entities and critters, collaborating with them, our own kin. However, do we still use them as an instrument rather than collaborating them? Both Takeda and Selander, as Burtynsky, depict horrific man made catastrophes but their approach differs a lot. Takeda himself being Japanese works within his own country and Selander who is Swedish does not travel far away from home either. In both Takeda's *Trace – camera-less records of radioactive contamination* and Selander's radiographs from the work *Lenin's Lamp Glow in the Pheasants Hut* I get a strong feeling of a body, my own body as well, reacting to the images. When layers dissolve we work on completely other premises, it is no longer us, the photographer, who decide exactly how the play shall unfold. By doing this agency is being shifted, a collaboration is being born. And if we listen to what Haraway, Merchant, Neimanis and Plumwood is telling us by dissolving dualities, play and interaction is the only possible way forward. No individual has more or less value, but everything contributes to the flow throughout time and space. With this notion in mind we can come closer and tap into the surroundings and acknowledge our interconnectedness to a place, and not just this particular site but rather the whole of the cosmos.

I walk across a clearcut not very far from my home. During the past few months, this landscape has shifted completely, turning from something enclosing and safe into something quite the opposite. The ground is bare, torn to pieces.

I dig a hole in the dismantled ground, tiny pieces of roots gets stuck underneath my fingernails. Dirt and fir needles attaches themselves to my sweater, my pants, in my hair. I can feel the wind but I can't hear, no branches are there to convey the voice of the wind. I am surrounded by complete darkness. I place a sheet of photographic paper inside the pit, I cover it with dirt, mark the spot with pinecones and stones. It feels like I am burying a part of myself, perhaps for safe keeping, becoming a part of the healing landscape.

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