

Edwina FitzPatrick,
*Biostrata: After Von
Humboldt*, 2019.

Artists kicking back: Brief metaphors for the birds and the bees

Edwina fitzPatrick
University of the Arts London

Context

'Artists kicking back' applies principles from Felix Guattari's *The Three Ecologies* publication (2008) and *New Formations* article (1989) to three specific artists' video works:

- Jordan Baseman's *Fabula* (2020) – mental ecology (human subjectivity in relation to COVID)
- Jaki Irvine's *In A World Like This* (2006) – social ecology (cross-species interaction).
- Edwina fitzPatrick's *Biostrata: After Von Humboldt* (2019) – environmental ecology (in a decolonized post-Enlightenment world).

As time is running out for many species, including humans, it ponders what *The Three Ecologies* might look like today and in the future. It discusses how time-based practices might *rupture*, *disrupt* and re-shape our engagement with difficult subjects such as diminishing biodiversity, climate change, unethical land management, including colonialism and the depletion of natural habitats. Guattari states that events such as the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster and AIDS were nature 'kicking back' (Guattari 1989: 134). Given that we now live in the Anthropocene Age, which is to say that for first time in this planet's history humans are leaving

a permanent geological trace on the planet, the selected video works inevitably engage with Guattari's environmental ecology and human subjectivity. How can artists 'kick back' against these issues? What moving images have the agency to engage with, rather than alienate the increasingly media-savvy viewer? It will also offer potential strategies that moving-image artists might use to create new Environmental Ecologies through re-thinking dominant and habitual disciplinary knowledges about *narrative, duration, repetition, fragmentation and immersion*.

What unifies 'Artists kicking back: Brief metaphors for the birds and the bees' is that all three artworks feature key indicator species of biodiversity at risk – insects and birds – which often elude the human attention. Insect and bird ecologies are deeply intertwined as many birds predate on insects. An example of this is the devastation caused by widespread application of the dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane insecticide (DDT) used widely in industry and agriculture in the United Kingdom until 1986. It not only destroyed insect populations, but caused the birds eating the remaining insects to lay eggs with shells so thin that they failed to hatch (Butterfly Conservation n.d.). The DDT run-off from fields flowed into rivers and eventually seas, caused catastrophic population declines in fish-eating birds such as sea eagles. Birds and insects are also particularly susceptible to declining habitats such as woodland and hedgerows. In terms of insects, honey bee viruses have gained media attention (hence the birds and the bees in the title), but there has been a 76 per cent decline in the United Kingdom's resident and regular migrant butterfly species over the past four decades. This is before we add monocultures and poor land management into the global heating equation. The twenty-first century's signature so far, along with a growing awareness of the Anthropocene, is the exponential rise in disease across all species. This includes ash die back (trees), European Foul Brood (bees), Avian Poxvirus (birds), the latter being spread by insects. There is also the matter of viruses jumping species – Swine Flu, Avian Flu, AIDS, SARS and most recently COVID-19 – due in part to the erosion of this planet's 'wild' habitats.

Guattari was also keenly aware of global inequalities. He writes 'Let us hope that ecological, feminist and anti-racist activity will focus more centrally on new modes of production of subjectivity: that is to say, on modes of knowledge, culture, sensibility, and sociability' (Guattari 1989: 138), so *The Three Ecologies* pre-empt many issues being currently raised by Black Lives Matter and #metoo. It not just about determining how to de-colonize and feminize thinking, but of attempting to imagine what our perceptions and engagement with *The Three Ecologies* might be without the European 'Enlightenment's' framing. Notably how its extractive practices, still sadly entrenched in contemporary thinking, are adding to the environmental crisis. Guattari bemoans human's failure to adapt – 'neither human work or natural habitat can return, even to their state of being a few decades ago, because nature has become inseparable from culture' (Guattari 1989: 135). Arguably, the global pandemic has shortened this time frame to just a few years ago. He states that 'increasingly in future the maintenance of natural equilibria will be dependent on human intervention [...] What is required for the future is much more than a mere defence of nature' (Guattari 1989: 146). Ecologists Erle Ellis and Navin Ramankutty concur: 'The long-held barriers between nature and culture are breaking down. It is no longer us against "Nature". Instead, it is we who decide what nature is and what it will be' (Crutzen and Schwägerl 2011). If nature and culture are indeed articulated, this is an extraordinary opportunity for moving image artists to rethink how they create artworks and reach their audiences. The contested term 'nature' also needs to be considered. For instance, nature and landscape are often perceived to be interchangeable when they are not. Critical writer Timothy Morton argues that nature is 'a transcendental term in a material mask' (Morton 2007: 14) and that the Romantic literary tradition, deeply embedded in *imagining* and *imaging*

our perceptions of ‘nature’, does more harm than good if we are trying to practice twenty-first century ‘deep ecology’ and address the Anthropocene.

In terms of mainstream cultural engagement with climate change, Hollywood’s scenario-building filmic narratives of ecological devastation such as *Silent Running* (1985), *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), *Interstellar* (2014), and *Geostorm* (2017), do not offer nuanced or super-complex perspectives. Whether it is the last earthly forest being ‘tended’ in space (*Silent Running*) or humans leaving the planet as extreme weather causes the last growable crop to fail (*Interstellar*), they revolve around a fight or flight dichotomy. These films are entrenched in extractive land management. Guattari counters the latter, stating: ‘Any social ecological programme will have to aim therefore to shift capitalist societies out of the era of mass media and into a post-media age in which the media will be reappropriated by a multitude of subject groups’ (Guattari 1989: 144) Predicative words! The internet and social media now play diverse societal roles. They can add ‘climategate’ to our lexicon, whilst simultaneously influencing the impact of *Extinction Rebellion* and Greta Thunberg’s *School Strike for Climate*. The post-digital age is one of issues going viral in the Age of Viruses.

‘Artists kicking back’ expands on Guattari’s assertion that:

Like artists and writers, the cartographers of subjectivity should seek, then, with each concrete performance, to develop and innovate, to create new perspectives, without prior recourse to assured theoretical foundations or the authority, school, conservatory, or academy. [...] Work in progress!

(Guattari 1989: 133)

Artists have always resisted Hollywood’s simplistic scenario building. However, I am arguing that given today’s ecological super-complexities, moving images can not only be disposable, but distancing and disempowering. The stop frame satellite imagery of ice caps melting being an example of this. The imperative is to engage with different (post -colonial) forms of *narratives*, for example, through creating *legends* (I will define this shortly). I will argue that artists can *rupture* disciplinary boundaries. Artists carefully consider how footage is sourced and shot, how it is edited and where/how audiences get to experience the work. Jordan Baseman’s *Fabula* was commissioned by the BBC and fitzPatrick’s *Biostrata* was shown at the Royal Geographical Society.

‘Artists kicking back’s’ arguments will be framed by *disruption* and *rupture*. If disruption is an interruption to the regular flow or sequence of something, and rupture is to burst, split or break; can artists, use this tender violence to protect our planet and its occupants? Can they use *repetition* as a gentle reminder of our constant acts of violence to this planet? If we construe COVID-19 as ‘nature kicking back’ then what is to be learnt? Following on from this, what about cross-species dialogues? The Native American scientist and writer Robin Wall Kimmerer reminds us in *Braiding Sweet Grass* (2020) about humans needing to rethink the Three Ecologies through orientating, not mapping them through storytelling. Eco philosopher David Abram concurs. He cites an interview with an Inuit tribes woman, who relates her understanding of the early days of human existence on this planet: ‘Sometimes there were people, and sometimes animals, and there was no difference. All spoke the same language. [...] The human mind had mysterious powers’ (Abram 2017: 87). This embracing of multiplicity (not duality), mystery and the slipperiness between fact and fiction are features of what I am defining as *legend*. The *legend’s* cultural narrative is alien to one where extinction and extraction have come to dominate human’s (alleged) co-existence with all other carbon-based matter. This is perhaps why *rupture* is a tool that artists use.

Mental ecology

Disrupting narratives regarding nature and culture

Jordan's Baseman's work *Fabula* (2020) is an example of Guattari's understanding of human subjectivity. It was commissioned by the BBC's 'Culture in quarantine' programme, which aimed to bring art and culture to a wider audience, using personal interfaces including laptops, tablets and phones. It was promoted using social media as well as BBC's iPlayer streaming channel, which stated '*Fabula* muses on our relationships with ourselves, one another, our environments and the meanings of our dreams while living with Covid-19' (BBC 2020). Its five minutes duration acknowledges our even more fractured attention spans during the pandemic.

Fabula was shot during the first lockdown on 16mm film and 6K digital film. Various shots are lit by an infra-red light, which shifts the images' colour spectrum towards magenta. There are parallels with the 'day for night' cinematic technique, which uses underexposure and blue filters to make daytime footage appear nocturnal. Infra-red light is not visible to the human eye, so perhaps Baseman is alluding to the virus' invisible nature, as well as night-time surveillance. Much of the footage is a toxic magenta River Thames (water is a recurrent theme between two of the artists being discussed) as 'it is both abstract and representational at the same time' (Baseman 2021), which in turn is superimposed with pink clouds.

It starts with footage of a moth which was filmed with an infra-red lamp using time-lapse across the entirety of a day, so this nocturnal creature was shot in daylight hours – another 'day for night' switch. As with many of Baseman's works, *Fabula's* narrative is driven by sound instead of image, the latter operating as a non-representational meditative space, designed to focus our attention on what we are hearing. And what we are often hearing is a carefully edited set of interviews amassed over weeks, sometimes months or years. In this instance two hours were distilled into five minutes. He follows Guattari's citation of Walter Benjamin:

Story-telling [...] does not aim to convey the pure essence of a thing, like information or a report. It sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again. Thus, traces of the story-teller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel.

(Guattari 1989: 147)

– the footage includes Baseman's own hands. Over the five minutes his soundtrack both coheres and disrupts the narrative, layering metaphor after metaphor about (nocturnal) fear, dreams and liquidity, to create a *legend*.

Art critic John Berger states that prior to the Enlightenment, we viewed the world around us as *signs* and *legends* to be read by the eye. In short, the natural world created dialogues with humans. He continues:

The Cartesian revolution overthrew the basis for any such explanation [...] appearances ceased to be double-faced like the words of a dialogue. They became dense and opaque, requiring dissection [...] thus, the reading of appearances became fragmented; they were no longer treated as a signifying whole [...]

(Berger 2016: 117)

...in the way that the Inuit woman cited earlier understood.

Fabula is narrated by Dr Deirdre Barrett, a Harvard Medical School Researcher, who has been exploring how dreams have changed in response to the pandemic.

Her voice, recorded remotely given that she and Baseman were on different sides of the Atlantic, has a strange, almost voice synthesizer quality. She speaks with a slightly detached professional voice, which becomes more animated when she discusses the dream metaphors thrown up by COVID, specifically that of dreaming about bugs. 'Swarms of flying insects like bees or hornets would be coming at some people, armies of cockroaches running toward them, dreams with different masses of wriggling worms. Most people were really being attacked by the bugs' (BBC 2020). In short, the bugs (insects) were presented as a metaphor for COVID. Barrett stresses the word *contamination*, which is telling given that the Anthropocene Age defines humans as the contaminators. COVID has shifted this power dynamic, so now we have also become the *contaminated*.

Insects, including honey bees, have been long been used as metaphors for vulnerable ecosystems, but in mainstream film they are also used to construct narratives of uncertainty – that of humans losing control. Examples of this include killer bees wreaking destruction in Irwin Allens' *The Swarm* (1978) and David Cronenberg's *The Fly* (1986). The latter was cited as a metaphor for AIDS at the time of its release. Guattari states 'We live in a time when it is not only animal species that are disappearing; so too are the words, expressions, and gestures of human solidarity' (Guattari 1989: 135). Frank Miller's *Arachnophobia* (1990) involves a Venezuelan killer spider being imported to America in a coffin. This xenophobic paranoia is echoed in both personal and political responses to COVID, where anything 'other' is seen as threatening. In Baseman's *Fabula* video's voiceover, Barrett references tarantulas crawling in through a letterbox. She notes that the bug attacks are specific to COVID, and links 'getting a bug' to the virus, yet this seems too pat, too literal a narrative explanation of why humans are having insect-ridden dreams. Barrett states in the final few seconds 'it is the tiny things that cumulatively can harm or kill you'. This echoes COVID. By definition, a pandemic operates on an unimaginable scale – it is a what critical writer Timothy Morton defines as a hyperobject. 'Hyperobjects are *phased*: they occupy a high dimensional *phase space* that makes them impossible to see as a whole on a regular three-dimensional human-scale basis [...] we can only see pieces of hyperobjects at a time' (Morton 2013: 70, original emphasis) so scale has its own terror narrative. Baseman keeps the moth as a solitary creature, thereby maintaining its vulnerability.

Returning to *narrative* and *legend* in the hands of an artist 'kicking back', why title the work *Fabula*? In the Russian Formalism school of literary criticism 'fabula' refers to the chronological order in which the events of a story take place: the timeline, in other words. The 'syuzhet' refers to the sequence in which the author chooses to relate those events, which we could describe as the storyline or the plot.

In the film *Citizen Kane*, for example, the fabula is the story of Kane's life, from birth to death. The syuzhet, on the other hand, starts with Kane's death and continues as the story of a journalist investigating Kane's life, is interspersed with a series of flashbacks

(Nicholson 2017)

Fabula can also mean a story about mythical or supernatural beings. In the Romanian language it means a fable or a *legend*. The moth is strangely beautiful and fragile looking, sudden movements (caused by rain at the end of the day long time-lapse exposure) assure you that it is alive, but only just. It is this narrative super-complexity, unusual in an artwork of such short duration, that engages the viewer because the work exploits with both fabula (the soundtrack) and syuzhet (the imagery) in the narrative.

Social ecology

Disrupting immersion and duration: Moving from being viewer to participant

Jaki Irvine's video installation *In a World Like This* (2006) (see Irvine n.d.) uses *immersion* to rupture *narratives* by disrupting the audience's usual points of reference. This work was made prior to the multi-platform streaming era, in which our referent for watching a film or video work was that of either cinema or television. Both imply a passive, seated viewer. In the Chisenhale Gallery's iteration of the installation – it was initially commissioned by, and shown at the Model Niland in Sligo – the gallery is turned into a maze with eight screens dotted through the space, although not all are running simultaneously. The footage is of owls, eagles and kestrels and their human handlers, filmed at Sligo's Raptor Research Centre. The centre was set up in 1999 to research, rescue and protect these birds (often from human actions). In 2003 they initiated their *Eagles Flying* programme in which the birds and their handlers 'perform' in front of a paying audience in order to fund the project. Hence referencing Guattari's social ecology, specifically that of how artists can make us consider the possibilities of cross-species dialogues.

Irvine shot footage of the birds, sometimes in close-up, at other times long shots of them flying between perches, handlers and nearby trees. The installation operates across three zones, which acknowledges the theatre involved with *Eagles Flying*. Zone One operates as a 'backstage' setting with the birds being prepared for the display, Zone Two is the flying event and Zone Three shows footage of the birds at ease on their perches, seemingly post-performance. So, the referent is not cinema or TV, it is theatre, and Irvine creates a theatre within a theatre, which transforms the viewer into an *immersed* participant. So how does this *immersive* experience *disrupt narrative* to create empathy with what Timothy Morton refers to as the 'symbiotic real?' That is to say:

the inseparable connection and participation of humans in the context of the wider ecosphere; it implies a non-hierarchical solidarity of humans with nonhumans, and it stems from the critique of the use of word 'nature' which arbitrarily separates humans from the rest of the living systems surrounding us.

(Cyberbiomes n.d.)

Irvine's title *In a World Like This* highlights the interwoven complexities of biodiversity protection.

The first layer of *narrative rupture* is Irvine's use of 'black' – that is to say the footage is still running but the screen remains dark. Its disruptive qualities heighten the tension of the birds of prey's hypothetical hunt of the audience. In an interview on her website with an undisclosed interviewer, the latter writes:

it seems as if even though an audience is anticipated, something is blocked or withheld [...] they [the birds] move across a screen, from a tree to a perch, but this interruption by black is slightly disorienting or disruptive, so that I find myself having to relocate myself in the space between the screens, on the one hand, while facing towards a blank space for a split second that may or may not be where the bird will land.

(Irvine n.d.)



Jaki Irvine, *In a World Like This*, 2006.

This resonates with Guattari's argument that:

there is a sort of relation of uncertainty between the apprehension of the object and the apprehension of the subject; thus, if we wish to articulate the two, we are forced to make a pseudo narrative detour through the reference systems of myth and ritual.

(Guattari 1989: 132)

As with Baseman, Irvine takes us beyond rituals into the realm fables and *legends*. I will explore how this operates with *In a World Like This*.

To return to the *immersed participant*: the concept of the observer and the observed was introduced by quantum mechanics but is a useful tool for artists. It states that through the very act of watching atomic particles (via an electronic detector), the scientist's experiment affects how these electrons/photons behave. Extended to the symbiotic real, this implies that our gaze changes whatever is around us. However, surely this cannot apply to watching a film or video. In *Zone Two*, akin to the observer and the observed, you *do* feel that you are being hunted as a large bird swoops towards you. Who is the hunter and who is the hunted? This is reinforced by the extreme close ups of the birds' eyes, scanning for movement. So, whilst the 'real life' observer and observed interaction cannot take place, it *feels* as though it is.

Secondly: *disrupted duration*. Both editing of the footage and the maze-like installation reinforce the cross human-raptor dialogue, that is both wonderful and unsettling. This was a conscious decision – Irvine's states 'I wanted to leave space for maybe something between anxiety and desire' (Irvine n.d.). This embodies Guattari's arguments about social ecologies being unpredictable and untamed. There is always an oscillation between entities being drawn together and forced apart again. This artwork opens up the possibilities of cross-species super-complexity well before Morton coining the phrase 'symbiotic real'. I am arguing that she as both an artist and writer is tapping into the concept of dialogic *legend*, both between species and across an immersed participant *over time*, akin to the shared human-animals language mentioned earlier on. It also resonates with (long time collaborators) Gilles Deleuze and Guattari's principle of 'becoming animal'. As art critic Aileen Blaney writes 'surely *In a world like this*, where the boundary between animal and human seems more brittle than ever before [...] the notion [of becoming animal] insinuates itself into Irvine's work in a direct, material fashion' (Blaney 2007, original emphasis).

Environmental ecologies

Disrupting repetition and screen fragmentation

As the Enlightenment's colonial practices were rooted in extraction and translocation, it is no surprise that we do not recognize this extraction whether it is coal, diamonds, human slaves, flora or fauna. I am arguing that to really grapple with Environmental Ecologies, all of 'nature's' historic associations are replaced by the symbiotic real's ethos to shift into post-Enlightenment thinking.

Edwina fitzPatrick's ten-minute long *Biostrata: After Von Humboldt* (2019) (<https://vimeo.com/369291338>) is a large-scale single screen projection. Exhibited at London's Royal Geographic Society (RGS) in 2019, it involves a striated (*fragmented*) screen, of slowly mutating landscapes, often combining six or seven layers, with each location being identified by its longitude and latitude. It is a

video collage – the background sky might be shot in Berlin, the middle-ground insect or bird could hail from Kyoto and the foreground water might be the English Channel. Playing with painterly notions of foreground, middle-ground and background, it merges all seasons, so icy minus four degrees footage coincides with plus 40 degrees in the ‘biostrata’. Humans are only once in shot, but they are repeatedly alluded to through images of wind farms, bridges and trains, and multi-lingual chatter in the ambient audio recording. It is this soundtrack that merges all locations together.

The video’s title references Alexander Von Humboldt (1769–1859) because, despite being a product of the Enlightenment, he was one of the first scientists to recognize climate change and the impact humans were having on Environmental Ecologies. During his international fieldtrips he produced extraordinary comparative studies of rivers, volcanos and mountains, which took the form of striated drawings – a wonderful fusion of art and diagram, thereby bridging the gap identified by Berger’s *legend/dialogic* and *opaque/fragmented* thinking.

Biostrata’s footage pays particular attention to birds and insects specifically because as noted in the introduction, they are key indicators of the health of a location’s biodiversity. As an antidote to Romantic painting or the picturesque tradition, the layered, fragmented footage *disrupts* the viewer’s easy consumption of various landscapes, but also implies the longing for whole – or holistic – interaction with environmental ecology. It is a gentle reminder of the *signifying whole* banished by the Enlightenment. The footage starts with and occasionally returns to a unified single screen. The implication being that a simplistic cause-and-effect approach to environmental ecology is no longer viable, that we need to engage with the super-complexities of cross-species interaction and *The Three Ecologies*.

Then there is the matter of *repetition*. As Guattari states ‘What is generally sought is some quality that runs counter to the “normal order of things: a discordant repetition, information of particular intensity, which summons up other intensities to form new existential configurations”’ (Guattari 1989: 136). As with Baseman’s *Fabula*, *Biostrata* repeatedly returns to images of flowing water. In this instance, water is used as a metaphor. It is the oldest entity on Earth, the spawning ground of the primordial soup from which all carbon-based life emerged. It has been the same water throughout millennia: it simply shape-shifts between being mountain cap snow, precipitation, oceans, melting icebergs, or what we animals drink. Water’s deep-time hints at the incompatibility of human and geological timeframes and is therefore another form of Morton’s hyperobjects – temporal ones with ‘time-stretched to such a vast extent that they become impossible to hold in the mind’ (Morton 2013: 58). *Biostrata*’s ever-mutating, cross-dissolving footage of water ebbing and flowing often implies inundation. Alexandra Harris’ *Weatherland* book discussing artists and English weather it is observed that climate change’s effects, particularly extreme weather and floods, can be read as biblical narratives of punishment, which is why they scare us so much. fitzPatrick also uses *repetition* to a way to gently nudge the viewers’ perceptions – to re-see something. Repetition invites us to use alternative approaches to the Anthropocene: ones not riddled not with guilt that alienate the viewer, but that of one of connection, possibility and agency. One that takes on Guattari’s vectors of global perspective.

The cinematic presentation, alongside *Biostrata*’s ten-minute duration would normally invite seating. However, at the RGS, none was provided. The video was projected onto an opaque part of the gallery window facing onto the street, so the latitude/longitude data was the correct way round if you were outside, but back to front when inside the gallery. The implication is of an Alice in Wonderland reverse world of the Society’s past colonial and extractive engagement with the world (something that today they are very much decolonizing).



Jordan Baseman, *Fabula*,
2020.

Artist kicking back: Work in progress!

Given that we will be engaging with the Anthropocene, pandemic(s) and decolonizing all aspects of culture and the symbiotic real for many years to come, Guattari's 'work in progress' is something of an understatement. Earlier I mentioned that the Anthropocene and disease (within and across species) are twenty-first century signatures, but that is underpinned by five hundred years of colonial guilt, grief and trauma affecting our mental and social ecologies. They are the post-Enlightenment's 'elephants in the room', but where can artists find agency in this? Given that many comparisons have already been made between Baseman's, FitzPatrick's and Irvine's *post-production and presentation* techniques regarding *narrative, duration, repetition, fragmentation and immersion*, I will conclude by focusing on their *production methodologies and principles* as potential strategies for artists wishing to 'kick back'.

Methodology 1. Collaboration: These artists regularly use cross, multi and trans disciplinary collaboration as a core part of their practice. They engage with experts using diverse knowledges and wisdoms to adopt a transversal approach. The latter is a rooted wisdom spanning space and place over time. Interviews are central to their narrative development methodology, which means that they relinquish a certain degree of control of the finished work's *legend*. Baseman's *Fabula* was dependent on what Barrett chose to share during the interviews. Similarly, Irvine's interaction with the Raptor Research Centre determined her level of access to both humans and birds.

Methodology 2. Practising towards uncertainty: Following on from the knowledge/wisdom distinction, climate change expert Kathryn Yusoff asks, 'what knowledge becomes useful to us in a time of abrupt climate change?' (Yusoff 2008: 6) advising that *practicing towards uncertainty* is a vital skill to engage with hyper-objects. As noted in Methodology 1, experimentation, relinquishing elements of control and embracing the unexpected can be powerful tools for artists. Artist/filmmaker Nick Edwards concurs:

If we are to imagine spaces for these times, if we are to see where we are and where we might go, we have to pursue an alternative imagination. An imagination that is prepared to admit that it is lost, an imagination that has stepped into the unknown. Lost is the finished state – everything else in process.

(Dibosa 2012: 86)

All cited artists display a willingness to try lostness through carefully treading a line between accepted narrative legibility and ambiguity in the form of *legend*. This offers the viewer/participant agency to engage with subjects, which might otherwise cause distress.

Methodology 3. Balancing the artist's embodied witness with the audiences' experience: How is the initial imagery produced? When filming the symbiotic real, all three featured artworks reject drone footage that has recently been favoured by artists, TV and the film industry alike, along with satellite imagery. All convey a non-human perspective of diverse natural habitats with very mixed results, because historically those who could oversee the landscape either owned it or were privileged enough to be able access this rare oversight of the world – examples include David Casper Friedrich's mountain-top painting *The Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* (1818) and Jules Verne's novel *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1873). Today, using a GoPro or drone to 'capture' the symbiotic real turns it into a spectacle, despite the filmmaker's often genuine desire to empathize with and share these remote and

extraordinary biodiversities. It is close up, yet far away. This type of footage should be regarded as a *survey* as opposed to a *legend* in the sense that the former offers a disembodied overview of a place, as opposed to the quite literally earthed understanding of a space-place. This filmic spectacle needs to be questioned in favour of diverse shooting methodologies engaging with the principle of the observer and the observed. Baseman, fitzPatrick and Irvine regularly use a static (locked off) tripod-based camera, sometimes recording over many hours. Standing silently as the camera records over duration and observing what unfolds, means that the artist acts as witness. It is a strangely meditative experience, acknowledging the observer and the observed's principle discussed earlier. In turn, this unlocks the possibility of engagement with the symbiotic real.

Methodology 4. Legend and metaphor in relation to agency: Participant, narrative and ambiguity.

Berger's argument about the importance of *legend* as a way of interacting with and making sense of the universe implies a dialogic approach giving the viewers agency. He expands on this:

The one who looks is essential to the meaning found, *and yet can be surpassed by it...* Revelation, when what we see does surpass us, is perhaps less rare than generally assumed. By its nature, revelation does not easily lend itself to verbalisation.

(Berger 2016: 120, original emphasis)

He goes on to point out that revelation is 'a constituent of *the relation between the human capacity to perceive and the coherence of appearances*' (Berger 2016: 120). What lies between thought and expression, and what lies between expression and the viewer's thoughts? As Irvine stated earlier, 'I wanted to leave space for maybe something between anxiety and desire' (Irvine n.d.). This is something that all three artworks achieve – it is speculative realism in every sense of the word.


Methodology 5: Signs and symbols: And finally, all three artists are intrigued by not just storytelling but that of metaphorical *narratives* bound up in *legends*. Climate change and other planetary hyperobjects currently unfolding offer time-based artists a profound challenge. How do they overcome fear? That of their own, their collaborator's and their audiences. Who has agency regarding this? Metaphor and synecdoche (figures of speech that have the possibility to become accessible legends such as *Fabula's* 'bugs') are powerful tools in engaging with potentially alienating subject matter but also have their limitations. Metaphors allow us to think at different levels simultaneously, linking the minute to the infinite, but again they can be problematic. Morton's definitions of hyperobjects imply that humans are not capable of holding these different scenarios simultaneously. This means that well-meaning time-based footage of icebergs melting or polar bears strolling through towns has shifted a metaphor into a cliché, thus rendering these visualizations impotent as agents for change because 'we've seen it all before'. Perhaps the strengths of Baseman's, fitzPatrick's and Irvine's work is that there are more fluid dynamics between narratives and metaphors. Given these uncertain times, metaphors might not last long – they can become quite solidified and grand. Perhaps artists 'kicking back' could image and imagine *brief metaphors* instead.

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CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Dr Edwina fitzPatrick is a UK-based art activist and researcher concerned with mutability and change in the living environment. She employs a range of media, including video. Her practice focuses on how humans have and are affecting the nature, culture and ecology of a place. Edwina's projects aim to reveal the complex, reciprocal and nuanced natures of habitats at both local and global scales. As such, her artworks ponder the impact of moving living matter from one place to another. Edwina completed her AHRC funded practice-based Ph.D. in collaboration with the UK Forestry Commission (now Forestry England) in 2014. She works in research at CCW (Camberwell, Chelsea, Wimbledon Colleges of Art), which is part of the University of the Arts London. For more details about Edwina fitzPatrick, visit www.edwinafitzpatrick.com, www.grizedalearchive.org and www.archiveofthetrees.co.uk. Contact: University of the Arts London, 16 John Islip Street, London, SW1 4JU, UK. E-mail: e.fitzpatrick@arts.ac.uk

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5119-3488>