

Seeing the Anthropocene through Montage:

John Akomfrah's *Vertigo Sea* and Elizabeth Price's *BERLINWAL*

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Abstract

Environmental changes and the age of the Anthropocene demand new ways of seeing. This article contends that montage serves both as form and as argument in representing the Western modern experience of human-nature relations in the supposed Anthropocene. I suggest that montage resists a single narrative of the Anthropocene and allows for modified readings to address race and capital through alternative notions such as the Capitalocene and Black Anthropocenes. Montage in relation to the Anthropocene is exemplified through two contemporary British artists' works, which visualize agencies and legacies of human interventions into fluvial geographies, the sea, and whales: the touring film installation *Vertigo Sea* (2015) by John Akomfrah and the site-specific intervention *BERLINWAL* (Berlin whale) (2018) by Elizabeth Price at the Museum für Naturkunde (natural history museum) in Berlin, Germany. In both works, though differing in medium, montage serves as structure to hold different materialities, multiple spatial and temporal scales, affording integration as well as confrontation. Its multi-focal perception and multiple perspectives challenge ontologies and afford a de-centering of the viewer towards de-exceptionalizing the human.

Key words: Anthropocene, Black Anthropocenes, Capitalocene, landscape, montage, natural history collections, contemporary art, whale

The Anthropocene demands new ways of seeing to reveal human interventions into nature.¹ While the aesthetics of montage have been discussed as a structural principle of form and perception in the experience of European modernity, little attention has so far been paid to contemporary artists working with montage to address the age of the Anthropocene.² Montage, as cultural representation rooted in industrial production and in popular image practices from the nineteenth century onwards, serves both as form and argument set in relation to a viewer.³ Montage is the process in which found materials are taken up together with the artist's own materials in order for these to be integrated or, instead, to be confronted with each other.⁴ The principle is a primary cultural technique of Western modernity and has become a widely recognizable form, notably in the twentieth century.⁵ I suggest that the montage of heterogeneous source materials in visual artworks is particularly apt to point to histories of human interventions and intersections of nature and culture in the Anthropocene. Montage also gives *form* and offers a forum in which to critically explore narratives of the Anthropocene and, in turn, to read anthropogenic implications in what is presented through montage. The principle of montage is to action, to “shock” (per Walter Benjamin) against deceptive cohesion through the aesthetic effect of “rupture” (per Theodor Adorno).⁶ In the context explored in this article, this principle challenges not only Western European modes of seeing human interventions into the environment, but leads towards ways of conceptualizing an “Anthropocene-in-the-making.”⁷

This article exemplifies montage's relation to the Anthropocene through two contemporary British artists's works, which visualize human interventions into fluvial geographies, the sea, and whales: the touring film installation *Vertigo Sea* (2015) by John Akomfrah and the site-specific intervention *BERLINWAL* (Berlin whale) (2018) by Elizabeth Price at the Museum für

¹ Mirzoeff, “Visualizing the Anthropocene.”

² Stierli, *Montage and the Metropolis*.

³ Stierli, *Montage and the Metropolis*, 1.

⁴ Žmegač, “Montage/Collage,” 286.

⁵ Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space*; Stierli, *Montage and the Metropolis*; Winthrop-Young, “Cultural Techniques: Preliminary Remarks.”

⁶ Both quoted in Žmegač, “Montage/Collage,” 287.

⁷ Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*, xiv.

Naturkunde (natural history museum) in Berlin, Germany.⁸ These works rely on two different evolved, historically layered environments, namely environments framed as landscape (Akomfrah) and natural history collections (Price). Despite their difference, both works afford, as visual culture theorist Nicholas Mirzoeff urges, to “begin to imagine a different way to be with what we used to call nature. That will be seeing the Anthropocene.”⁹ How is “seeing” made use of in these two works? As I will show in this article, *Vertigo Sea* corroborates montage in its filmic tradition from the early twentieth century beginnings, *BERLINWAL* complicates and extends the composition principle into a spatial dimension. Both works, however, offer dialectics of spatial juxtapositions as well as temporal sequences of connected human-nonhuman histories. To complete these juxtapositions, I explore how the viewer is conceptualized in the works. Moreover, and again germane to the context of the Anthropocene, the respective works intersect socio-technological and environmental temporalities that, considered together, speak to histories of prospecting and harvesting the sea.

The Anthropocene, as storied narrative originating in the Western sciences, seeks to correlate symptoms of change with its causes to effect political and societal transformation.¹⁰ Following literature and culture historian Gabriele Dürbeck, five narratives can now be distinguished in Anthropocene discourse: the narrative of catastrophe or apocalypse; the judicial narrative; the narrative of the great cultural-societal transformation; the bio-technological narrative with optimism for an eco-modernism in a Good Anthropocene; and the narrative of interdependence.¹¹ In all their differences, these narratives share references, sometimes critical,

⁸ For *Vertigo Sea* John Akomfrah collaborated with Lina Gopaul, David Lawson and Trevor Mathison.

⁹ Mirzoeff, *How to See the World*, 221.

¹⁰ Crutzen, “Geology of Mankind,” 23: “A daunting task lies ahead for scientists and engineers to guide society towards environmentally sustainable management during the era of the Anthropocene. This will require appropriate human behaviour at all scales, and may well involve internationally accepted, large-scale geo-engineering projects, for instance to ‘optimize’ climate.” See also Crutzen and Stoermer, “Have We Entered the ‘Anthropocene?’”

¹¹ For a narrative of catastrophe or apocalypse see Sloterdijk, “The Anthropocene: A Process-State on the Edge of Geohistory?”; for a judicial narrative see Chakrabarty, “Postcolonial Studies and the Challenge of Climate Change”; for cultural-societal transformation narratives see Schwägerl, *The Anthropocene*; Steffen et al. and “The Trajectory of the Anthropocene: The Great Acceleration”; for a bio-technological narrative see “An Ecomodernist Manifesto”; and for the narrative of interdependence see Braidotti, *The Posthuman*.

to the endangerment of the world through humans, a deep-time perspective into past and future, a planetary framework, the dissolution between the categories of nature and culture at the conceptual level of the earth sciences, and finally, the theme of ethical responsibility for and the reduction in environmental destruction, and the threatened survival of human civilization.¹² Since the proposition was made in the early 2000s, the Anthropocene has been put to work for planetary analytics. But the concept has shunned inherent correlates of capital, imperialism and coloniality and has been critiqued as foreclosing political and ethical discussions, particularly in relation to race.¹³ In riposte, specific alternative narratives of global environmental change have emerged, including the Capitalocene and Black Anthropocenes.¹⁴ The Capitalocene argues for an integration of capital, power, and nature in the history of capitalism and against an Euro-centric world-wide appropriation of what environmental historian Jason Moore refers to as "cheap nature."¹⁵ Formulated by geographer Kathryn Yusoff, Black Anthropocenes, in the plural, seek to interject and to articulate multiple events within the historical junctures of 1492 to 1950 in order to counter-act the "racial blindness" of the Anthropocene.¹⁶ The dates are significant and indicative of the tensions within the debates. Jamaican cultural theorist Sylvia Wynter refers to the "1492 event" to connect European arrival in the Americas and the expansion of European capitalism. The early 1950s, however, have since been confirmed by the Anthropocene Working Group as the origin of the new epoch. This epoch is marked by the 'Great Acceleration' of human industrial and consumer activities and by anthropogenic radionuclides associated with nuclear arms testing spread worldwide by Western nation states. The stratigraphers are now seeking an unambiguous record of change in environmental archives as a formal requirement for official recognition of a new geological time unit. The effort to address social and ecological justice remains an ongoing task.

¹² Dürbeck, "Das Anthropozän Erzählen: fünf Narrative."

¹³ Karera, "Blackness and the Pitfalls of Anthropocene Ethics."

¹⁴ Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*.

¹⁵ Moore, "The Rise of Cheap Nature."

¹⁶ Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*, xiii.

Correspondingly, the confrontational and contingent form of montage resists a single consolidated narrative of the Anthropocene. Rather, the cultural technique of montage serves to disrupt the surface to make visible a societal “chaos”.¹⁷ Montage then, in its staging between what is actually and what is seemingly known, can convey the uncertainties on assumptions, attributions, and origins of the Anthropocene. Furthermore, for critical readings of changing, historically-layered environments as presented in the works in question, this paper draws on the alter-cene propositions of the Capitalocene and Black Anthropocenes. Using the structure of montage, *Vertigo Sea* and *BERLINWAL* are works through which the Capitalocene and Black Anthropocenes become legible; and in turn both concepts become useful interpretative lenses for these artworks. To pre-empt: The sea becomes a space of uncertainty and an archive of death in *Vertigo Sea*. Akomfrah not only uses the whale as emblematic for the sea and human violence, but also makes explicit the violence towards enslaved Africans of the Middle Passage and present-day migrants across the Mediterranean. *BERLINWAL*, on the other hand, relates to the fragments of nature archived in the natural history museum. These stratigraphic layers of nature’s remains are presented as integrative to the Museum für Naturkunde where the artwork is located. This concerns both its location (the museum *is* in Berlin) and its institutional logic, as a type of museum founded on Western classificatory systems with the human as its center and its reliance on capital, imperial and colonial infrastructures.¹⁸ Recent interpretations of *Vertigo Sea*, by art historians T. J. Demos and Christine Ross already address aspects of the Anthropocene.¹⁹ Through analyses of migrant images and histories of migration, they interrelate histories of modernity, colonialism, slavery, and environmental destruction. Price’s film installations have been interpreted as visceral and in moments mocking critique of consumer culture, including analyses by art historian Tamara Trodd and by art and design researcher Andrea Thoma.²⁰ My analysis acknowledges these interpretations, but focuses on analyzing these artworks through

¹⁷ Chaos as ‘Durcheinander’ (Bloch 1935/1973), quoted in Žmegač, “Montage/Collage,” 1994.

¹⁸ This is a riff on ‘The Pitt Rivers is in Oxford’, the first sentence of *Knowing Things*, alluding to the relations between location, people and knowledge: Gosden and Larson, *Knowing Things*.

¹⁹ Demos, “Feeding the Ghost”; Ross, “John Akomfrah *Vertigo Sea*.”

²⁰ Thoma, “Vertigo of Presence”; Trodd, “WELCOME! Elizabeth Price and the Life of Objects.”

their compositional principle. Importantly, I go beyond the level of images in situating the works. Artworks evidence how the material world shape human minds, bodies and cultures.²¹ I seek to advance understandings of contemporary aesthetic practices that ecologize, as it were, material worlds and shared experiences towards empathy and responsibility, through the sensorium and processes of mind available to us, as humans.

Aspects of Montage from shock to strange: inventing “cacophony” and “ghostly fantasies”

Artists, filmmakers, writers and designers have used montage as a structural principle in the first third of the twentieth century to engage with the fragmentariness of modernity, and to represent notably metropolitan life, typified within a human-built environment.²² But in the course of the century, also artists representing rural environments and edge-lands, in which the transition from urban to rural is negotiated, have emerged.²³ Accordingly, I explore montage in its application to urban as well as non-urban environments and social, scientific, human to nonhuman interactions within. Anthropologist Hugh Raffles’s research for *In Amazonia* is especially suggestive concerning how environments in transformation lend themselves to be regarded as montages.²⁴ He describes the nature of the Amazon region as dynamic and heterogeneous, formed again and again from presences that are cultural, historical, biological, geographical, political, physical, aesthetic, and social. Such nature, he writes, “calls for a natural history, an articulation of natures and histories that work across and against spatial and temporal scale to bring people, places, and the nonhuman into ‘our space’ of the present.”²⁵

Montage convenes heterogeneous elements made from different presences. Most importantly, montage works with shocks of cognizance, also related to defamiliarization, in creating sharp

²¹ LeCain, “Against the Anthropocene. A Neo-Materialist Perspective.”

²² Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space*.

²³ See for example the work *Prevalence of Rituals: Tidings* (1965), part of *Projections* by African-American artist Romare Bearden (1911–1988) or Sammy Baloji, *Essay on Urban Planning* (2013) in the context of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

²⁴ Raffles, *In Amazonia*.

²⁵ Raffles, *In Amazonia*, 7.

contrasts between the things assembled. The method can be explicit in its juxtapositions of areas of experience and knowledge that are not normally adjacent, thereby bringing disparate elements into closeness. *Vertigo Sea* continues an artistic approach Akomfrah and his collaborators developed earlier on. He describes montage: “We would bring a certain cacophony to bear, to get things to clash a little bit, and force the meanings out of the clashes, rather than trying to dissolve them.”²⁶ Through a demonstrative shock or rupture, montage can make strange and unfamiliar, evoking ghosts and fantasies. Also, Price had previously worked with montage in several works, such as *At the House of Mr X* (2007). This work marks Price’s move from “post-conceptual artist to an inventor of ghostly fantasies” working with a montage of film, graphics and text.²⁷ In their evocative allusions both artworks evoke ghosts and hauntings.

Montage’s capacity to summon can be qualified by different purposes. Philosopher Jacques Rancière in *The Future of the Image* distinguishes dialectical and symbolic montage. Dialectical montage creates clashes and conflict by “assimilating heterogeneous elements and combining incompatible things.”²⁸ It presents the “strangeness of the familiar” by using distance and collision to reveal “the secret of a world – that is, the other world whose writ runs behind its anodyne or glorious appearances.”²⁹ Symbolic montage also relates heterogeneous elements. Yet it assembles unrelated elements not with the logic of the clash, but instead “to establish a familiarity, an occasional analogy, attesting to a more fundamental relationship of co-belonging, a shared world where heterogeneous elements are caught up in the same essential fabric.”³⁰ Both dialectical and symbolic aspects of montage can be used within the same artwork. In this space of clashes and in the construction of a continuum of co-presence a history ripe with contradictions become legible. Conversely, contemporary visual conceptualizations also respond to a different, more recent spirit of modernity, to the “essential fabric.” The narrative of

²⁶ First used in the work *The Unfinished Conversation* on late cultural theorist Stuart Hall. Demos, “Unspeakable Moments,” 60.

²⁷ O’Neill, “Mad Love.” 5.

²⁸ Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, 56.

²⁹ Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, 57.

³⁰ Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, 57.

interdependence, as one Anthropocene narrative based on connectionist, rather than separate categories between humans and the natural world, is prominent here. Making strange and unfamiliar can then lead to questioning hitherto perceived hierarchies. Cultural theorist Donna Haraway talks of naturecultures and co-becoming to engage with the current situation, to reimagine and to pursue human-nature relations, in which the human is not an exceptional species.³¹

Both artworks discussed here explore the ontological unruliness of the world, by articulating transitions between nature and culture, making use of dialectical as well as symbolic montage techniques. “Weird, byzantine, shiny, viscous stuff” (Price) is interrelated to suggest re-configurations as much as to recognize human agency.³² Equally, Akomfrah proposes the unfamiliar and uncanny between the subjective, the historical and political to go beyond the literalism of historical causality.³³ The aesthetics of the transitions between the elements of montage contribute to describing the interrelations between histories, between nature and culture, or between habitat and the objectified remains of species. As discussed above, in montage the effect of the “shock” has been considered paradigmatic since the early twentieth century. Similar to Rancière, literature historian Viktor Žmegač characterizes the process to achieve this effect as *demonstrative* (open, irritating). A distinction is made to earlier and other processes of montage, referred to as *integrative* or concealed.³⁴ In integrative montage fragmentary elements can appear authentic and support an illusion. They may align in creating similarities in mood or are similar in their sensations or thoughts. Integration can work through quotations, as in *Vertigo Sea*, in which multiple authors are cited, and through analogies, such as in the variations in the motif of migration. In contrast to such poetics that fudge the edges of its construction to shape an integrated (though heterogeneous) work, demonstrative montage specifically shows where one element starts and another one ends, how an element might function on its own, how it is

³¹ Haraway, “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene.”

³² O’Neill, “Mad Love,” 5.

³³ Demos, “Unspeakable Moments,” 60.

³⁴ Žmegač, “Montage/Collage,” 1994, 287.

attached to another element, or how these elements combine and function together.³⁵ In demonstrative montage apparent cohesion and surface are disrupted, the rupture is recognized and its aesthetic effect is exploited and put to use.

However, the application of montage can also differ in its purpose and the unconscious relations evoked: sharp political criticism could equally flip into the language of political propaganda or consumption. These differing trajectories can be observed in the languages of commercial advertising versus explicit political messaging in photomontages, collages, or exhibition design.³⁶ Therefore, montage propositions and the recipient's critical work to gain insights into relations starts here: with a recognition of classification of events.³⁷ Moreover, in relation to the viewer, montage is work-centric. Its meaning is produced through the recipient's own experience of the work. At the core of the work, and contingent on it, is the viewer who synthesizes or rejects the correlations suggested in the work and contributes to these suggestions in their own mind or body. At the same time, suggested new interrelations provide productive frameworks for the reading of the Anthropocene, or indeed its alternative propositions, in which disciplinary areas of expertise, knowledge and experience can be placed into proximities to interrogate histories. To be clear: this paper is not a reception theory paper nor based on evaluative audience research. Instead, I make inferences from the content and juxtapositions presented in the works in relation to what is presented under the Anthropocene as well as from my experience and insight as a curator of contemporary art.

As composition principle montage provisionally connects heterogeneous materials from different origins and from different temporal and spatial contexts to create arguments. It thus provides an epistemic structure (what and how to know) for the viewer. The work can thereby offer dynamic

³⁵ Klotz describes this principle as based on technology and not on nature, as referenced in Žmegač, 287.

³⁶ Stierli, *Montage and the Metropolis*. 119–125 for changing uses and meaning of montage at the example of the career trajectory of exhibition and graphic designs Herbert Bayer and the political potential of montage for totalitarian regimes. See also art historian Michael White's analysis of George Grosz's late photomontage as elusive and ambiguous to avoid explicit political messages: White, "Mustering Memory."

³⁷ Žmegač, "Montage/Collage," 1994.

interactions with the observer to associate meanings and to challenge ontologies (separations, categorizations). In its composition, moreover, the technique offers multiple points of view that offer shifts in perspective (aerial, submerged, linear, flat, close-up) to destabilize European conventions to frame landscape and to reflect a world in flux. The viewer constitutes a critical connection to knowing about the world (aquatic, geological, built) – a world in which we (sic) are submerged and which we (sic) seek to represent.³⁸ Consequentially, I suggest that both *BERLNWAL* and *Vertigo Sea* embed the viewer to evoke critical and empathetic effects. Yet, embedding *anthropos*, meaning the interventionist human central to the term Anthropocene, is here not an analogy to the centrality of the human in the Anthropocene. I argue that the artists create another different complexity by conceptually de-centering the viewer in relation to the nonhuman world.

Montage in *Vertigo Sea* and *BERLINWAL*

Vertigo Sea (2015) by Ghana-born filmmaker John Akomfrah (b. 1957) is a mesmerizing 48 minutes, three-screen film installation (figs 1 and 2). The “Oblique Tales on the Aquatic Sublime,” as its opening section title states, speaks to the viewer of the simultaneous beauty and terror of the sea, the sublime. The work presents violence, colonial and social injustices within still unfolding histories of slavery, migration and environmental transformation. The work’s narration relates conflicting experiences and histories of the sea: the sea is a placid location for swaying kelp forests in raking sunlight reaching down below the water surface, it is a killing field for enslaved humans of the transatlantic slave trade and a grave site for present-day migrants across the Mediterranean. The sea is the bloodied and relentless hunting ground for whales in the world’s oceans, a seemingly unbounded place entangled with the histories of humans and nonhumans.

³⁸ Latour, “Circulating Reference.”

Akomfrah is a founding member of the Black Audio Film Collective, his cine-essay style evolved out of working for TV, gallery and cinema spaces.³⁹ He now often creates multi-screen film and video installations, using archival materials together with natural history documentary footage and structured sound to create montages. Their narrative structures – reliant on history, memory, imagination – function simultaneously to delve into personal and collective memories. The experience of migration and post-colonialism are core themes of Akomfrah’s works.⁴⁰ *Vertigo Sea* is part of a trilogy on the natural world. The trilogy’s second project, *Purple* (2017), is described as “on the (be)coming of the Anthropocene”⁴¹ and was shown in the Curve at the Barbican, London in 2017. The third part *Four Nocturnes* (2019)⁴² focuses on Africa’s declining elephant populations and surveys landscapes of African cultural heritage. *Vertigo Sea* brings together photographic and film archive materials and BBC’s Natural History Unit programs found footage (stripped off its original soundtrack)⁴³ and readings from various literary, news, and philosophical sources, including writing by slaver-turned-abolitionist John Newton (1725–1807) and quotes from Herman Melville *Moby-Dick*, Friedrich Nietzsche *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Heathcote Williams, *Whale Nation*, and Virginia Woolf *To the Lighthouse*. Through an abundance of media images *Vertigo Sea* presents the sea as an archive of histories. Spatialized sequences of fleeting images, moving in different tempi while interrelating with the spoken narrative and a specially composed ambient soundtrack create haunted and ghostly moments of after-images and after-thoughts.⁴⁴ Some images are shown at high tempo, creating moments of breathlessness, then they are contrasted and amplified by short sequences of slow-motion footage, such as a crocodile attacking a group of gnus in a style of natural history documentary footage. As in previous works, Akomfrah adopted a strategy to “sequester” images, words, and sounds, creating a complex montage. Here these expressions are associated

³⁹ Glessing, “John Akomfrah,” 38–39.

⁴⁰ Banning, “Tomorrow or the End of Time.”

⁴¹ Smoking Dogs, <https://www.smokingdogsfilms.com/projects/exhibition/vertigo-sea/>

⁴² The previous title was *The Elephant in the Room*.

⁴³ Nilsson refers to inclusion of materials such as *The Blue Planet* (2001), *Planet Earth* (2006), and *Frozen Planet* (2011). See Nilsson, “Capitalocene, Clichés, and Critical Re-Enchantment.”

⁴⁴ Soundtrack specially composed by Tандis Jenhudson.

with the vertiginous seas and linger in the mind of the viewer as the tide of images and words ebbs in and away and which, in the trilogy, intersect, as suggested by the artist himself, readings of the Anthropocene.⁴⁵

To structure the overwhelming experience of the materials, *Vertigo Sea* is loosely organized in sections separated by eight intertitles and with motifs (whales, hunting, migration, slavery). The motifs work through images, words, sounds and voiceover. Whales as a key motif encompasses a spectrum from aerial imagery of a whale with its young swimming the sea – a human-controlled camera perspective haunting the whale in its journey across the world’s ocean - via spoken word extracts from Williams’s poem *Whale Nation* (1988) on the majesty of the whale and human disturbance of the sea, to Melville’s novel *Moby-Dick* (1851), in which the whale rises from the ocean depths in its effort to live. Human violence towards the whale is made explicit by contrasting film sequences of the back of a whale seen from above, and of a whale with its young with a captured whale being sliced open by a white man (fig. 3). Together these sequences present a specific economic and media history of human-nonhuman species relations through their intersecting cultural and ecological temporalities. The exemplary role of this history is partly reinforced through the inclusion of different habitats from across the globe throughout the work: the Arctic, deserts, mountains, forests. But it is the sea to which the imagery always returns, anchoring the story, by conveying a sense of interlinked ecosystems across the planet and at the same time alluding to similar stories elsewhere, raised but not necessarily answered in *Vertigo Sea*, but picked up across the trilogy.

Racial and cultural categories as critically interjected in the conception of Black Anthropocenes come to the fore in Akomfrah’s work. “The way of killing men and beasts is the same,” *Vertigo Sea*’s final intertitle purports, making a statement deeply uncomfortable not only for white

⁴⁵ Akomfrah borrows the phrase ‘sequester or appropriate layers’ from Bonaventure Ndikung. See Downey, “Vital Materialism.”

European gallery viewers.⁴⁶ The statement invites multiple interpretations. One reading, however, is sequestered and condensed: the racial typing of Black people to a biological status inferior to white people and their equation with nonhumans, a typing which has underpinned racial colonialism and the evolution of European modern science to the present day. The section summons images of whales drowning in clouds of their own blood and of slaves in shackles within the darkness of a ship on the Atlantic crossing.⁴⁷ This synthesis is allusive yet pushed further into a different suggestion. The sea becomes a racialized site, not only for transit, but for transformation and emancipation. Akomfrah includes staged depictions of black (but not solely) individuals, one of which is Olaudah Equiano (1745–1797). Equiano was a writer, abolitionist and explorer in the Arctic. Enslaved in West Africa at the age of 11 and trafficked to Jamaica, he bought his freedom in 1766 and became a bestselling author in Europe and North America. In his writing “the ship and the sea become emblematic of ... all that works to enslave” but through the ship and the sea, Equiano rewrites his “structural relationship to slavery.”⁴⁸ Through sequences of allure and repulsion in *Vertigo Sea*, the viewer’s potentially critical synthesis can work across human-whale entanglements, slavery, and racial categorization through a range of suggested emotions of allure and repulsion.

Whereas *Vertigo Sea* is a compelling viewing, drawing the visitor in through enveloping sequences of images, jarring with moments of chilling cruelty and creating “shocks”, *BERLINWAL* is reticently seductive – and seductively reticent – in its imagery and proposition to the viewer. *BERLINWAL* was conceived within a thematic and methodology typical for Elizabeth Price (b. 1966, UK) who studies utilitarian objects, clothing, technological apparatus, and product design. In her practice, artefacts act out social occurrences and are bound into techno-science histories. The work’s title alludes both to cetacean specimens in the municipal collection and to the city divided. *BERLINWAL* was made with and for the Museum für

⁴⁶ Quote from *Vertigo Sea* transcript; available at <https://akomfrah.site.seattleartmuseum.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/33/2020/09/Vertigo-Sea-Transcript.pdf>

⁴⁷ Demos, “Feeding the Ghost.”

⁴⁸ Brown, “Olaudah Equiano and the Sailor’s Telegraph.”

Naturkunde in Berlin (fig. 4).⁴⁹ Price's project integrates existing museum architecture with elements created by the artist to entice the viewer to imagine the deep time strata of the river Spree in Berlin from its earliest formations to the Cold War. The narrative relates the times of the deposits laid down about two to three hundred thousand years ago, which settled at the same time as the first anatomically modern human species developed, to the human historic time period of the political history that followed the Second World War until about 1989.

BERLINWAL combined four parts, some mobile and made by the artist, some integral parts of the museum: a wall painting in deepest green of a sharp and precise abstracted form emulating the shape of a diving whale, sited between the existing curtained windows and the vertical glass door that is closed to the public; the view from this museum gallery window-cum-door onto an outdoor space, enclosed by museum buildings, now bureaucratically referred to as Courtyard 3; a group of individual, minimalist, colored metal seats within the gallery, which the user could move around and which thereby invited negotiations of sociability or distancing; and a concertina booklet with an illustrated story to take away, intended as a gift by the artist (figs 5–7). The short, illustrated text written by the artist and printed in a specially designed publication inspired by archive labels found in the museum, not only highlights a space, but sets it into geological and socio-technological historical context.⁵⁰ The text imagines a human leg, an elastic limb of heightened feeling, embedded vertically in the strata below the museum. Price's intervention integrated these various elements through montage including framing (the view onto the courtyard), imagining and sensing (the leg) and materiality (the concertina publication, the metal stools). The viewer could move within the intervention, but it was the textual narrative that provided a rationale for the different elements.

⁴⁹ Commissioned as part of the *Art/Nature: Artistic Interventions at the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin* program (2014–2018) to develop new modes of criticality in the museum's practices and engagements with its public: Hermannstädter, "Introduction. Artistic Interventions at the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin."

⁵⁰ The publication is a collaboration with design studio Kellenberger–White as well as other aspects of the installation.

Price used motifs which made the montage cohere across its diverse elements: whales, strata, temperature, flow, changing shapes. In the story the narrator imagines whales from the arctic seas together with the fluvial sediments of the ancient river and the swamplands in Berlin from about 10,000 years ago.⁵¹ In the late nineteenth century, the remains of whales were transferred through the agencies of whalers, traders, and natural scientists from the species's natural marine habitat into Berlin's newly built natural history museum. In the narrative the varied strata below Courtyard 3 and the museum are used to chart evolutionary processes. Particular attention is given to the changing shapes of limbs (human thigh, the fluke of whale), and the circulation of warmth within mammalian bodies, such as the capillary network in the whale's tail that tempers warm blood flowing from the heart with cool blood coming from the skin. The story speaks of the historic display of whale remains in the Museum of Natural History, which opened at Invalidenstrasse in 1889, built on Berlin's geological strata:

“Various species were represented including a large bowhead whale, shown with beards of baleen – long bristles used to sift krill from the seawater – fragments of which are now buried in the final layers of sediment”⁵²

The work not only intertwined geological matters, engineered, and labored by humans, with mammalian evolution. It also, like *Vertigo Sea*, drew out the evolving, and in moments seemingly contradictory, presence of the whale in European human culture: emblematic as leviathan, as an icon of environmentalism, and as economically exploited species. Human economic, socio-metabolic transformation of a nonhuman species, a capitalist narrative of the Anthropocene, is exemplified in the unequal relationship between whale and human. Whales literally lit up the nineteenth century, their fat having been a common fuel for oil lamps, whilst their baleens were adapted to modify human body shape in the form of corsets, collar

⁵¹ ‘Berl’, the Slavic word for swamp, is considered the origin of the word ‘Berlin’.

⁵² Elizabeth Price, *BERLINWAL* (2018). Quote from the text, which was part of the artwork.

strips, hat peaks or shoe arches. The exploitation of whales for energy and the cultural modification of human bodies typifies how nature is economic resource and capital of European modernity. As a counterpoint to the species's exploitation at industrial scale, Western environmental discourses became increasingly concerned with species extinction from the early twentieth century on, then later with the destruction of marine habitats, ocean pollution and ocean acidification. Through a historic framework of European modernity *BERLINWAL* integrates geo-, techno- and biospheres in an evolutionary development with technical infrastructures of shipping, railways, roads, and buildings. It is a progression with a catastrophic ending.

The impetus of Price's work is to narrate how humans are profoundly transforming and socio-metabolizing an environment, by seamlessly describing the flows of materials and energy between the life world of the whale and the whale itself, the land and water of the swamps, and Berlin's society. In *BERLINWAL* she does so through referring to a specific geological space that is at the same time a site of a natural history archive. She also does so through focusing on a specific species and its ultimate consumption through fire, thereby combining Anthropocene narratives of eco-destruction and transformative energy. Courtyard 3 at the time of the making of *BERLINWAL* was a behind-the-scenes space, in which everyday activities of the museum could be observed: service staff parking their cars, objects being carried across (fig. 5). From 1935 until 1945 however, this space hosted the Whale Hall. One of the hall's spectacular display pieces was a whale skeleton, mounted onto a metal frame (fig. 8). "The [whale] skeleton was also partially remodeled using taxidermy techniques to create the appearance of body mass, flesh and skin."⁵³ The Hall was destroyed 10 years later in the Second World War Allied fire storm of 3 February 1945. In Price's work, the object remains in their consumed-by-fire state are reproduced as a silvery negative photograph taken in the aftermath of the bombing, "the big, battered bowhead still, amidst the ruin, floating more convincingly now there is no sign of life"

⁵³ *BERLINWAL*

(fig. 9).⁵⁴ In analogy to the transformations of plants in the herbarium, as discussed by Cornish, Driver and Nesbitt, Price emphasized the perpetually shapeshifting forms of specimens, object and archive collections.⁵⁵ She drew attention to the “flux of objects, coming and going over time – the collection’s changeling ontological status.”⁵⁶

Montage works with visuals, texts, sounds, materials as constituent elements. These elements originate from different sources and embody their own history and knowledge. The material object can be such a constituent element and is a way of knowing not only cultural history, but it is also germane to the natural sciences.⁵⁷ The natural history museum in Berlin holds about thirty million objects – a, like most natural history collections, bewildering gathering of objects, encompassing geological, paleontological, petrological, mineralogical, and zoological specimens brought into close proximity within the walls of the museum. What is the status of these objects in the Anthropocene? To complicate a material culture approach, Price did work with the material presence of objects, but by withholding the objects from view. The artist’s visit to the depot, seeing the charred whale bones there became constitutive to an event of discovery. Inspired by this event Price spun together geological and social histories into the fantastical journey in which the whale as Anthropocene object is catastrophically transformed and figures solely in imprinted reproduction for the viewer to infer its history. Price created a ghostly presence.

Transformation as a narrative of the Anthropocene plays out in *BERLINWAL* primarily through paying detailed attention to sensing energy resources and to engineering their extraction. The courtyard, now exposed to the open air, incorporates below its surface a relatively recently installed geothermal heat pump to warm and to cool the museum. The text in the accompanying booklet draws a deep timeline from the geological strata below the museum’s building, then pivots into human-made changes that created the

⁵⁴ *BERLINWAL*

⁵⁵ Driver, Nesbitt, and Cornish, eds., *Mobile Museums*, 6.

⁵⁶ Porter quoted by Driver, Nesbitt, and Cornish, 6–7.

⁵⁷ Mitman, Armiero, and Emmett, eds., *Future Remains*.

“present tarmac” and the “drilling of sixteen ground source heat wells in 2016” to the binaries of weather “hot and cold” and the “heat of the groundwater” that maintains “the climate: the heating and cooling systems of the Natural History Museum. You can probably feel it.”⁵⁸ The story’s tone of voice invites the reader-viewer to sense strata and time. The vertical is used as compositional device, fictitious though it might be, to delve into the strata. The reader is instructed to imagine a human leg, an elastic limb of heightened feeling, to be embedded vertically in the strata. Alongside the leg, the reader is to “Imagine a hose,”⁵⁹ 90 cm long, but then increased 100-fold, to be used as measurement and through which to pass liquid sodium chloride solution to experience humidity and temperature (fig.6). *BERLINWAL* evoked embodied experiences and associative imagery relating to the shapes of mammalian bodies, and sending an imagined leg, or a hose of hosiery, or a sock or a legging on a journey into the moist sediments below the surface. Price’s suggested similarities create relations between objects, a human limb, and geological sediments. Together they evoke familiarity between the imagined leg (also relatable to the viewer’s real leg), and other mammalian body shapes, hose and hosiery, dress and accessory products made of whale baleen and bones to shape the human body, “their own cultured profiles,” together with the warmth and cold of the geothermal pump and the blood flow within the whale. *BERLINWAL* narrates: “Baleen was common in the dress and grooming products of the period, used particularly in those that modified body shape.” In 2009 Price said about her technique:

“I reorganise objects by recognising contingent properties that might link them. I find a materialist premise for a departure into fantasy, so that both social history and fiction are employed in knowing the past ... But at the same time, ...it’s clear that fantasy is a way to form desire, and desire is a political force.”⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Price, *BERLINWAL*

⁵⁹ *BERLINWAL*

⁶⁰ O’Neill, “Mad Love,” 3.

An integration of inner sensations evoked in the viewer is contrasted with the authorial voice, almost demonstrative, but definitely knowing and in the grasp of a long history. The artist adopts a fantastical approach to integrate these analogies in drawing attention to mammalian bodies (museum visitors and whales) that are caught up in the same fabric, fostering a co-belonging. She intermingled dryness and wetness of habitats and materials. While the remains of whales were exhibited removed from their watery life habitat, the human leg and its accompanying hose were associated with liquid, providing contrast to the dryness of the mammal's display. Equally, Price draws out an accelerationist drive towards waste and destruction in human patterns of commodity consumption.⁶¹ Through human consumption she considers relationality between species. She retrieves human investment of energy and emotion into commodities and suggests object uses that are "more free-floating, unfixated and unpredictable" to aspire to a life beyond one's own, beyond existing subject-object relations to re-consider a shared world.⁶²

In quite different ways, Price and Akomfrah use European conventions of seeing the natural world. Price's work was situated within the boundaries of a museum site where remains of nature are displayed, categorized and studied. Whereas Akomfrah explores the sea through the sublime and its sensation of being unbounded and overwhelming. Price locates the work within the tradition of natural sciences studies originating in European science. Akomfrah situates the work in a European tradition of framing and experiencing landscape. In *Vertigo Sea* Akomfrah integrates not only found film footage, but also films panoramas of nature seen from the shore in a tradition of the sublime, a way of seeing and feeling formulated at the time of industrialization in Europe. The sublime, as initially formulated by Edmund Burke in 1757, evokes strong emotions in the viewer through the simultaneity of terror and beauty, vastness, and loudness. Sounds echo visuals: ethereal whale songs are interrupted by blasts of harpoon cannons and shots of hunting rifles. Some of the mesmerizing and awe-inspiring images of the magnificent sea are in dialectical contrast with images of violence, supported by a mournful soundtrack causing a

⁶¹ Trodd, "WELCOME! Elizabeth Price and the Life of Objects," 587.

⁶² Trodd, "WELCOME! Elizabeth Price and the Life of Objects," 588.

pensive slowness, almost a tense fatigue, emulating the exhaustion of the sea. Extractive capitalism and the prospecting of the seas is made manifest as instrument of Western industrialization through historic slave trade and the whaling industry. Such montaging of images “from the forced movements of the enslaved to the forced movements of the migrant and the refugee ... and drownings in the Mediterranean Sea” formulates an epistemic structure that gives shape to a historic continuum of black diaspora lives and the violations of lives.⁶³ Equally, the Anthropocene, or better the critiques it has provoked, notably the concept’s lack of reflection on world-making as human-centric and, and its lack of differential responsibilities, as implied in imperialism, capitalism, racism, and their effects on vulnerabilities, then draw attention to “the other world [that runs] behind its anodyne or glorious appearances” (Rancière). As such the Capitalocene as an alter-cene evokes the devastating transformation of nature through human exploitation by “relying on slave labor and other forms of exploited, alienated, and usually spatially transported labor.”⁶⁴ Similarly, in relation to nonhuman species and capitalist exploitation, the Capitalocene speaks to greed and violence and urges for custodianship of marine environments to counter capitalist destruction. The natural history museum’s historic acquisition of the bowhead whale in *BERLINWAL* took place at a time when the world’s largest cetaceans were progressively destroyed.⁶⁵ During the late nineteenth and the first third of the twentieth century, whales, their habits, migration patterns and development became a subject for scientific research and were displayed in natural history museums to embody the wickedness of commercial rapaciousness and to call for humanity’s custodianship of nature, while still relying on the whaling industry.⁶⁶ Built around these motifs of capitalism, both artworks imbricate economic and social systems in human environment-making and the relations of capital, power and nature. In this history energy sources have enabled global conquests and appropriation of people and nature from the sixteenth century onwards. In Western European modernity these economic, capitalist relations are built on exclusions of indigenous peoples, enslaved peoples,

⁶³ Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 21.

⁶⁴ Haraway, “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene,” 160.

⁶⁵ Arends, “Courtyard 3: A Sensuous and Fantastical Journey,” 176.

⁶⁶ Burnett, *The Sounding of the Whale*.

almost all women, many white people (Jews, Irish).⁶⁷ Together these form “a historically situated complex of metabolisms and assemblages.”⁶⁸ *Vertigo Sea* and *BERLINWAL* speak of historic capture, ownership, and subjugation of black lives as much as present-day migration and displacement, *BERLINWAL* of human relations to geology, as expressed in the infrastructural transformation from swamplands into Berlin’s urban fabric.

The Anthropocene, as proposed in the environmental sciences in 2000, emphasizes rather than challenges the very economics of nature, anthropocentrism, and mechanisms of exclusion.⁶⁹ In the works’s specific context here, this is an Anthropocene whose origins are written into the Columbian exchange from the late fifteenth century onwards. Debating these works of art made within European contexts then, does afford to highlight both the causes and continuing consequences of human-nature relations in and imposed through European modernity. This modified Anthropocene, as put forward by global change scientists Simon Lewis and Mark Maslin, refers to colonialism and global trade through the exchange, which made people, plant, and animal species mobile for transatlantic trade.⁷⁰ This origin lies in the tactics of empire and European world-building through circulation, racialization, forced migration and enslavement, in which the natural sciences co-operated. Reading the Anthropocene through such origin and history and the natural sciences then makes legible the encoding of categories that produce subjects and property, material worlds and extractions, and which move across “territory, relation, and flesh,” so Yusoff.⁷¹ How are these transformations relayed to the viewer?

Montage and Space

The two artworks were respectively displayed and contextualized within gallery and museum settings that encouraged specific ways of seeing and of synthesizing information. *BERLINWAL*,

⁶⁷ Moore, “The Rise of Cheap Nature.”

⁶⁸ Haraway, et al., 2015: 21 quoted in Moore.

⁶⁹ Crutzen and Stoermer, “Have We Entered the ‘Anthropocene’?”

⁷⁰ Lewis and Maslin, “Defining the Anthropocene.”

⁷¹ Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*. 4.

specific to the city of Berlin, literally offered a window onto the changing ontologies of the world. *Vertigo Sea*, conceived for *All the Worlds Futures* exhibition, was curated by Okwui Enwezor for the 2015 Venice Biennale, and has since toured to different contemporary art gallery venues initially in the UK.⁷² Together these various spaces present a plurality of museum histories and typologies of presentations. They are discursively determined sites as fields of knowledge.⁷³ Indeed, Akomfrah claims, “I try to be receptive to all the spaces”⁷⁴, adapting the siting and interpretation to the respective venues. For example, when *Vertigo Sea* was displayed at Turner Contemporary in Margate on the British East Coast, the work was shown concurrently with the exhibition *JMW Turner: Adventures in Colours* (2016–2017). Here a deliberate juxtaposition between the contemporary film installation and the works by nineteenth-century British sea painter Turner was created. Turner’s painting *The Deluge* (1805) was hung near the installation space for *Vertigo Sea* and acted as a conceptual and visual bridge, which made the works “play off each other in surprising and illuminating ways.”⁷⁵ Price on the other hand created interactions with the museum as a display site as well as an institution from the inception of the work. Applying integrative montage as analytical strategy goes further than the art theoretical criteria of site-specific intervention.⁷⁶ Natural history museum displays present illusions of assembled habitats and species through, among other, dioramas and taxidermy. Price’s intervention was however a subtle process with heightened attention to absence, transformation, and loss.⁷⁷ Price did not create an optical illusion of a space, but gestures at the space itself framed by a window. This framing suggests that integrative montage can work in

⁷² Project curator Mandy Fowler worked with David Lawson from Smoking Dogs to select UK touring venues. The tour of *Vertigo Sea* was financially supported by Arts Council England’s Strategic Touring Fund. The five venues across England and Scotland (2016–2018) in chronological order were: Arnolfini, Bristol, The Exchange, Penzance; Turner Contemporary, Margate; The Whitworth, Manchester; Talbot Rice Gallery, Edinburgh. At The Exchange in Penzance (Cornwall), the emphasis in the accompanying public programme was more on ecological awareness of the oceans. The Whitworth in Manchester particularly picked up on the theme of migration in its programming around the work.

⁷³ Kwon, “One Place after Another,” 100–101.

⁷⁴ John Akomfrah, Video Interview Accompanying *Vertigo Sea* Exhibition. Bildmuseet, Umeå, 2015, <https://vimeo.com/143731977>.

⁷⁵ Oldham, “Akomfrah and Turner Make for a Potent Mix in Margate.”

⁷⁶ Kwon, “One Place after Another.”

⁷⁷ Bal, “Telling, Showing, Showing Off.”

support of a non-interventionist ethics to counter human interventions within the environment. Moreover, with regards to institutional practices, montage then can be conceptually expanded as “epistemic montage” evoking a topography of different forms and diverse fields of knowledge and culture.⁷⁸ This is where contemporary montage differs from its early twentieth century application and where it becomes useful to the politics of ecology and the current environmental predicament. Documentary archive materials, natural history museum collections and curatorial knowledge are such epistemic fields that afford a long-term view onto how the natural world is known in European modernity. Such collections have been created to serve as archives of nature: materials transformed from the field (observation and documentation) via the lab (experiment and analysis) to museum collection and archive (storage, naming) through to a “photo-philosophical montage” for a referencing system across materials.⁷⁹ In these contexts, montage combines archives and historic collections, together with a range of expertise as well as the spaces of the museum or exhibition venue themselves to lend texture and tension to accessing environmental histories.

The viewer’s role is constitutive to montage. How can the observer synthesize meanings to see the Anthropocene? Akomfrah’s and Price’s artworks encourage the viewer to either see together with the figure of the observer placed within the work itself (*Vertigo Sea*), or to become the imaginary and mobile protagonist of the work in order to see (*BERLINWAL*). In taking-part in the realization of dependencies, a de-centering in the unfolding of joint human–nonhuman histories can take place. The observer is a central trope within Akomfrah’s work. *Vertigo Sea* presents various protagonists in types of clothing dating from the eighteenth to the early twentieth century, looking at the “aquatic sublime” seen from the liminal space of the shore (fig. 10).⁸⁰ These protagonists, including the freed African slave and abolitionist Equiano, are, sometimes fleetingly, shown in profile. The re-enacted Equiano is a figure to identify with, whereas others appear generic. But mostly, these pensive onlookers are shown as *Rückenfigur*

⁷⁸ Mahony, “Picturing the Future-Conditional.”

⁷⁹ Latour, “Circulating Reference,” 24.

⁸⁰ Smoking Dogs, <https://www.smokingdogsfilms.com/projects/exhibition/vertigo-sea/>

(figure seen from behind) similar to those observers of the natural world as in paintings by the nineteenth century Romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich (1774–1840), including *Monk by the Sea* (1808/1810). By analogy the viewer is invited to identify with the observer within the landscape, emulating that very perspective in looking out from the shore. From the space of the present however, the shore appears a “wreck zone.”⁸¹

The viewer is with the wreckage of those who came before the now, the disappearances, the migrants, and the slaves of the Middle Passage. In *BERLINWAL* the whale is the waste of Western capitalist consumer culture and military warfare. Its remains are laid into the hands of the viewer themselves. Within the fold of the exhibition publication’s dark green wrapper, Price reveals a shimmering still life of ecological catastrophe: the incinerated whale, simultaneously seductive and repulsive. In *Vertigo Sea*, the recipient is perceptually not able to see all the work’s moving images at the same time because of the simultaneous activities on the triple projection and the viewing surface that extends beyond the human field of vision. The figure of the observer within the work lends some stability to the otherwise multi-focal perspectives. Akomfrah combines European traditions of seeing the sublime with montage, thereby organizing looking at the landscape through both fixed views and de-centered fragmentation. He thereby spurs the fractures between established perceptual orders and denaturalizes the landscape format. Montage splinters, but also reassembles.⁸² Focusing on the figure of Equiano within the landscape, then also leads to undermining the sublime, a white sublime as critic Paul Gilroy has pointed out. Burke’s sublime associates darkness with the “‘blackness’ of a black woman’s skin.”⁸³ Gilroy counters Burke’s association and the persistent racism it contains, by calling not only to redress the aesthetics of modernity, but also towards constructing a new canon of Western art – a project that continues. While Akomfrah favors the landscape format, cut by moments of vertiginous immersions, Price contravened by offering a vertical framing.

⁸¹ Neimanis, “Whitechapel Gallery Big Ideas: Talk with Astrida Neimanis.”

⁸² Suhr and Willersley, eds., *Transcultural Montage*.

⁸³ Gilroy, “Art of Darkness.”

Moreover, the viewer in *BERINWAL* is asked to take part as attentive reader and observer, flipping between the spaces of the museum architecture and that of the text.

Moreover, the viewer in *BERINWAL* is asked to take part as attentive reader and observer, flipping between the spaces of the museum architecture and that of the text. The text is at the same didactic explanatory in tone and demanding towards the viewer by requesting their actions there and then (imagine a hose, poke your toe into the ground).

The authorial voice thereby implicitly positions the viewer as consumer-participant in the necropolitics of the museum, in which once living organisms are represented in suspended animation away from their former habitat.

How the viewer is implied with their personal expertise, history, and memory, and how the viewer is spatially situated thus affords to bring the intersections of human–nonhuman histories to the viewer’s attention. In that respect a (quasi anti-)anthropocenic implication of montage is to position the viewer, so that they can see themselves as de-centered and de-exceptionalized in a shared world. With it comes a politics of discomfort that ensues and destabilizes the viewer. To recall Rancière, a visual mode not caught up in a choice between depictions of violence and sublime abstractions is what might be necessary for the viewer to actively engage⁸⁴ What I have offered here however is not only a more complex field of choices, but also choices beyond the image. As such it is not just seeing but sensing the Anthropocene through montage.

Conclusion

BERLINWAL and *Vertigo Sea* offer different ways of seeing the natural world. One does so via a staged and mediated experience using film imagery and sound, the other through a situated spatial experience within a natural history museum. Montage and its compositional principle of assembling fragments that are made to speak to each other, functions in reference to the Anthropocene, its critiques, alter-cenes, and origins. While *Vertigo Sea* relates to a narrative of Black Anthropocenes, both works are underpinned by readings through the Capitalocene. Joint

⁸⁴ Thoma, “Vertigo of Presence,” 188; in reference to Rancière and a discussion by Georges Didi-Huberman in Didi-Huberman, *Remontages du Temps Subi: L’Oeil de l’Histoire*.

motifs in both works were interpreted and extrapolated through disjunctive narratives of the Anthropocene, which become mutually informing and simultaneous narratives. Such simultaneity also contravenes an obsession with a single narrative and a single origin, which might appear as, yet another, Euro-centric perspective and way of thinking, indicative of a form of epistemological reductionism.⁸⁵ At the same time the artworks's layering and juxtapositions realized causality and correlation towards joint human-nonhuman histories and co-belonging. Furthermore, thinking with montage can be extended as epistemic to critically interpret artworks that engage with socio-historical contexts of environmental change. Finally, montage has characteristic techniques that can spatially situate the viewer and affirm their own expertise and sensations. Montage as epistemic structure can thus engage the viewer to take part and to synthesize meanings of Anthropocene narratives.

Biography

Bergit Arends is a curator of contemporary art and academic in the arts and humanities. Bergit creates and studies interdisciplinary curatorial and artistic processes. She has published on the politics of natural sciences collections and critical engagements by artists in 'Unequal Earth' (*NaturKultur* 2021), *The Botanical City* (2020), *Botanical Drift* (2018), *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews* (2018), and on decolonizing natural history museums (*Art in Science Museums* 2019). Bergit is British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow at The Courtauld Institute of Art, where she teaches on tidalectic modernism. Her publication *Photography, Ecology, Historical Change in the Anthropocene: Activating Archives* (Routledge) is forthcoming in 2024.

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⁸⁵ Gandy, "An Arkansas Parable for the Anthropocene."

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