

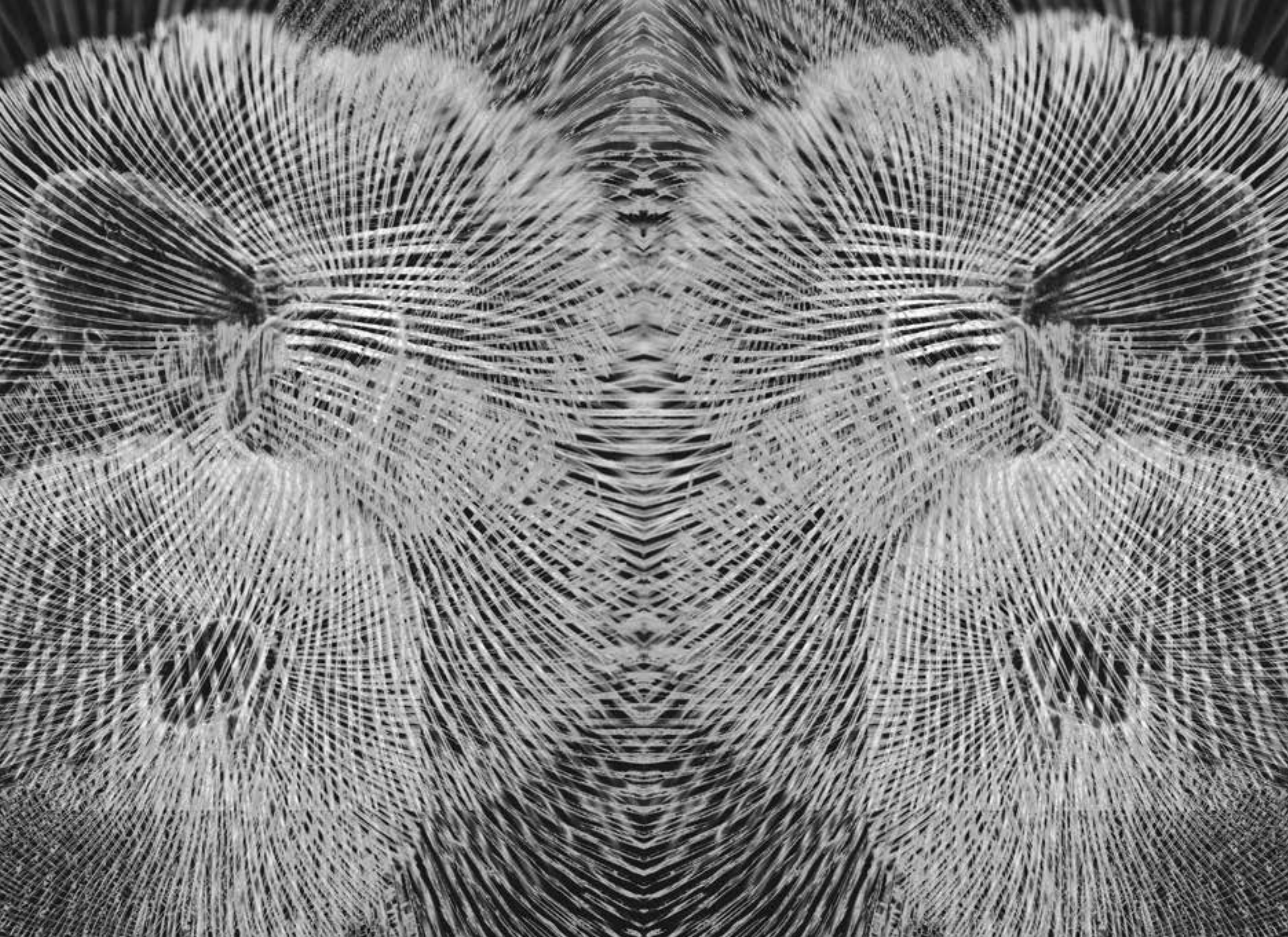
GEEK

● Library for
radioactive afterlife

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Susanne Kriemann

Spector Books



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Ge(ssenwiese)
K(anigsberg)

Library of radioactive afterlife

Ed. Cassandra Edlefsen Lasch

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Looking down, looking up, turning

Cassandra Edlefsen Lasch

— A point of reflection. Surface tensions trailing a fabric between fields. A horizon. —

How far does the surface see/exist? Passed me, to trees, passing clouds. Does it notice (and now exist in) how the grass wilts under step, underfoot; does it penetrate soils and my soles?

We might relate sight and attention. Sight as simultaneous means for siting — locating in space — and citing — locating in connection. Noticing calibrates reflection by locating and grounding sight within a relational image, stepping in and steeping in it. “We might look around to notice this strange new world, and we might stretch our imaginations to grasp its contours.”¹ A wholeness is only conceivable in the fragmentation of a line, in the surface’s interruption. Walking, we look down and find something on our path, at our fingertips; it’s not familiar to us, we look it up, at our fingertips, walking. Our soles turn to ochre.

My vantage gathers in a collection process, piecing, till a whole *entsteht*, exists. *ent-* from, away from, off; *stehen* to stand; *entstehen* to arise, to come into being

Because you exist. EXIST.

Or EXIT. Because you exit.

¹ Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 3.

A question arises of energy transfer. Surely in the formidable radiation at hand — energy in the form of nuclear radiation — but also in other tracings of the body, in impressions of approaching and reading a subject matter, energies are exchanged. Even in the looking. States of seeing — directional and directive — where observing alone alters both seer and seen. *Ge(ssenwiese) K(anigsberg): Library for radioactive afterlife* binds two sites through acts of reflexive composition. Focusing on Kanigsberg (an area where uranium mining once took place) and Gessenwiese (a former waystop in the path of extraction), and their histories as well as their present-day states of contamination (both are current test sites in the process of environmental rehabilitation), the book as artwork juxtaposes the mountain and meadow, extraction and seepage, veins and roots. At its core, it interrelates sighting, siting, and citing — directed observation is inextricable from positioning in space and bound up in correlating contextual influences. One cannot simply look away. Susanne Kriemann focuses her attention, and her camera — and with it the noticing powers of her contributing authors and readers — on a far-reaching topic by turning to source sites, (de)localized and yet familiarized over time. This is a practice. A willed turning to versus a turning away. Turning into.

According to the Observer Effect, the mere act of looking alters that which is viewed. If change is assumed in this directional facet according to physics — observing mechanism interfering with the state of the matter in focus — might it be equally assumed that change is also directed in the reverse, at the observer? The photographic endeavour has long implicated the viewer (and the photographer) in the state and nature of its subject, appreciating a photograph's ever-affective qualities. As if fine-tuning the degree of interference possible and in questioning the capacities of a publication to create a multidimensional image, Kriemann aligns a series of vantages that all view (and therefore, alter) her subject at varying angles and often in affected relation.

Noticing turns

Anthropologist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing's work on "the art of noticing" offers a helpful backdrop for seeing with Kriemann. Within the 2015 publication *The Mushroom at the End of the World* Tsing traces the path of a mushroom through routes of (oft underground) trade, to the roots of forests and families, proposing a working methodology in mapping the near-invisible via an art of noticing. Here, Kriemann similarly trails the invisibility of radioactivity stemming specifically from the mineral pitchblende as means to unearth unseen courses of cross-contamination across worldwide economies and ecologies. Entailing layered research in the midst of her visual arts practice, Kriemann's work compiles interrelated sources in the construction of a readable image of a particular confluence or influence of agencies. While Tsing turns towards the draw of a prized and rare mushroom to tell the story of such impervious flows, the gravity of Kriemann's subject itself permeates into the world at large, micro- and macroscopically, ever extending beyond known means of containment. This too is a physical matter plucked from one organic site of origin and carried into catalytic currents of socio-geographical nature, intermingling agencies of carrier and carried alike.²

Tsing proffers polyphony as means of attuning attentiveness, listening for intertwining melodies as opposed to "one unified coordination of time" or progress.³ She writes, "this kind of noticing is just what is needed to appreciate the multiple temporal rhythms and trajectories of the assemblage."⁴ Mining Tsing's writing, and that of her colleague and fellow scholar Donna Haraway, an interlude follows, which is formed from an assemblage of calls and responses echoing from the libraries of these two figures, each palpably trailing mycelium-like networks of footnoted linkage. The selected quotations are taken as radiating excerpts — their citation fields as bedrock — again new materials that speak of their surroundings in their very embeddedness. These voices turn each other. And we are asked to lean in to this turning. Reflecting the publication's embodiment of chain reactions, Tsing's approach sounds alongside Haraway's, both of which emerge out of (cross-)contaminating encounters.⁵ To notice who is connected to who is connected to what and in what ways matters, makes matter.

² As carriers, humans and animals alike, even words, are vessels in so far as they receive and relay. Their shapes contour and impress upon the contents of this carriage. The will to gather in and carry onwards is a deeprooted cause, to which I would like to call special attention. Within another publication positioned on the cusp of worlds, science fiction novelist Ursula K. Le Guin quotes anthropologist Elizabeth Fisher on her Carrier Bag Theory of human evolution: "The first cultural device was probably a recipient. [...] Many theorizers feel that the earliest cultural inventions must have been a container to hold gathered products and some kind of sling or net carrier." Ursula K. Le Guin, "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction," (1986) in *Dancing at the Edge of the World* (New York: Grove Press, 1989). See also Elizabeth Fisher, in *Women's Creation: Sexual Evolution and the Shaping of Society* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975).

³ Tsing, 23.

⁴ Tsing, 24.

⁵ Tsing specifically cites Haraway's and Marilyn Strathern's methods, respectively, of following the interplay between divergent threads and the interruption of common sense via surprise as fundamental elements of noticing. See cited quotations on the following spread of this publication. Haraway in turn cites the influence of Tsing on her work, etc.

*Nothing is connected to everything;
everything is connected to something.*

*“The brand of holist ecological philosophy that emphasizes that ‘everything is connected to everything,’ will not help us here. Rather, everything is connected to something, which is connected to something else. While we may all ultimately be connected to one another, the specificity and proximity of connections matters — who we are bound up with and in what ways. Life and death happen inside these relationships. And so, we need to understand how particular human communities, as well as those of other living beings, are entangled, and how these entanglements are implicated in the production of both extinctions and their accompanying patterns of amplified death.”
Thom Van Dooren, *Flight Ways: Life at the Edge of Extinction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 60.

*It is in this dilemma that new tools for
noticing seem so important. Indeed, life
on earth seems at stake.*

*As a method, one might think of this as combining insights from Donna Haraway and Marilyn Strathern. Strathern shows us how the startle of surprise interrupts common sense, allowing us to notice different world-making projects within the assemblage. Haraway follows threads to draw our attention to the interplay across divergent projects. By taking these methods together, I trace out assemblages informed by the disconcerting interruptions of one kind of project by others. It may be useful to point out that these scholars are the source points for anthropological thinking, respectively, with ontology (Strathern) and world making (Haraway). See Marilyn Strathern, “The ethnographic effect,” in *Property, substance, and effect* (London: Athlone Press, 1999), 1–28; Donna Haraway, *Companion species manifesto* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003).

*How does a gathering become a ‘hap-
pening,’ that is, greater than a sum of
its parts? One answer is contamination.
We are contaminated by our encounters;
they change who we are as we make way
for others. As contamination changes
world-making projects, mutual worlds —
and new directions — may emerge.*

*Multicellular life was made possible by multiple, mutual contaminations of bacteria. Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan, *What is life?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

*I want to stay with the trouble,
and the only way I know to do that
is in generative joy, terror,
and collective thinking.*

ⁱ Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 173 and note 2.

ⁱⁱ Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 25 and note 10.

ⁱⁱⁱ Tsing continues, “Everyone carries a history of contamination; purity is not an option. One value of keeping precarity in mind is that it makes us remember that changing with circumstances is the stuff of survival.” Tsing, 27 and note 1.

^{iv} Haraway, 173.

Images that trail. A series of historical aerial photographs are presented as a prologue. Opened up beyond the contours of the page, their bleeds disregard the book as container. Together they document how a double-headed figure would site its own horizons.⁶ In 1990, in the wake of the dissolution of the GDR, the (Soviet-run) corporation SDAG Wismut turned to shift its scope as Wismut GmbH (under the ordinances of a unified Germany).⁷ Changing from an SDAG uranium mining enterprise focused on active extraction to a GmbH rehabilitation operation tasked with retroactive restoration of the same landscape, is the change in attention noticeable? The archival images reveal mounds of shifting volumes, the earth's surface moulded by (also shifting) human intentions. Quite possibly the same eyes that fixed on this surface area intent on seeing the invisible made visible, aimed at boring out a quarry, would later fix on making more invisible the invisible, to fix a land in its burial.

Questioning the extrapolation of the image, Kriemann proposes *Ge(ssenweise) K(anigsberg)* be read through and beyond this prologue of Wismut's self-reportage, unanchored by horizon lines. The artist's reuse of such footage and its reorientation, literally turning the takes, gestures to the capturing camera, freeing up the territory from a dictated schema of seeing, perplexing any intentional vantage.⁸ I recall an artist recalling something said by Socrates, that while looking up we think of the future, and looking down we think of the past.⁹ What do we think of when we attempt both (or more) at once? We begin to recognize and read this interface. But why scratch at such dangerous surfaces? Why risk proximity? Precisely because of this locality — Kriemann's own "discovery" of such an example of postcolonial discourse so near to home. Her artwork, images and text in combination, signal the deep-looking that she pursues, the suspicion that arises in the process of scanning rock, tree, meadow, mould with an aim to see in wholly different scales. While not a secret, the nature of it (radiation and postcolonialism alike) easily escapes ill-equipped radars. What to do with the traces in one's backyard? Invisible to the human eye devoid of rendering devices, Kriemann thus turns to means of sequestration to bring these topics into tangible scope.

⁶ Imagine for instance, the ancient Roman god Janus, figured with two heads, one looking to the future, one to the past and representing beginnings, duality, endings, passages, time, thresholds, transitions, etc.

⁷ The images selected for reproduction within this publication stem from 1999/2000 and 2009/2010. Aerial photographs from before 1989 are kept in the Federal Archives. Post 1990, the individual federal states and their high-resolution systems have been in charge of regularly taking aerial landscape photographs. These high-resolution images document the change from a uranium mining region to a post-uranium mining region. All along SDAG Wismut turned GmbH produced internal documentation of each site under its authority.

⁸ Taken as a perceived perspective, "intentional" should be understood in terms of metaphysics where it pertains to a phenomenal representation in the mind. In the capacity of referring to an existent or nonexistent image, such a thought might be seen as a sign or element of consciousness related to expectation. In this context, the subject—this territory—especially viewed from "above" has no true orientation to fulfil "up" or "down" correctness. What might happen to this image when it falls outside expected perspectival cues? For a succinct discussion of such phenomenology, see Annaka Harris, *Conscious: A Brief Guide to the Fundamental Mystery of the Mind* (New York: Harper, 2019).

⁹ Eric Ellingsen, "LINES OF THOUGHT thought that when looking down we are remembering the past and when looking up we are thinking of the future E R U V," in *homecomings* ^{1, 2, 3, etc.}, ed. Cassandra Edlefsen Lasch (Berlin: Archive Books, 2018), 332.

Taking text and image as sequestering, absorptive and resonating mediums, the publication as a whole becomes a place of cumulative image-capture. Free radicals buzzing in and around a meadow in full bloom are soaked into test strips; what is wild and unwieldy is scaled through noted detection. Viewed from the right perspective, it becomes clear that wilding crops up in the aftermath of anthropogenic interference. Riddance makes wakes. But to look down, at one's own position in space, in relation, takes up an understanding of topography as typography, as a way of looking and reading. The "lifeway" is sited on either side of the fence.¹⁰ Borderlands say so much about accumulative (*bios* as well as *zoē*) powers.¹¹ In a 2018 essay Tsing writes of margins, and therein the gravitas of crossing paths:

For most of human history, people noticed the landscape around them. Our ancestors followed the tracks of plants, animals, and fungi — and each of these organisms followed the others, noticing each other, settling ourselves around the landscape as best we could. We ate each other, and we found companionship with each other. All that noticing mattered: we did not idly bring on mass death.¹²

What we might call "trailings" — a hybrid term of process-residual tailings and well-trodden pathways — emerge in the in-between junctures. In such spaces, Kriemann finds photographs as the most necessary moment of noticing, capturing the immediacy yet quintessentially edited (and read as such). The particular site, Gessenwiese, is itself a place of testing contact — stress-testing leaves, diagnosing soils' saturations, evaluating compounds over time under varying conditions.¹³ Whereas photographs are often used to validate facts, illustrating values, how might citation make real the images? An interchange of these relational properties is at play. Sampled leaf becomes average leaf, one observed value subsumed into a calculated knowledge; figures act as extractable facts, integers illustrated by their perceived metrics. Displacement of photograph becomes text; text becomes image.

¹⁰ Tsing writes of "lifeways" within the context of living paths: "Patterns of unintentional coordination develop in assemblages. To notice such patterns means watching the interplay of temporal rhythms and scales in the divergent lifeways that gather. [...] Assemblages cannot hide from capital and the state; they are sites for watching how political economy works." Tsing, 23.

¹¹ Per Agamben's terminology, respectively political and nonpolitical, bare life. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

¹² Anna Tsing, "Phytophthora death march and other heedless slaughter: Why we should ban the industrial nursery trade," in *Deliquescing*, ed. Steve Bishop and Anna Gritz (Berlin: KW Institute for Contemporary Art and Sternberg Press, 2018), 110–115. The essay was originally commissioned by the Bruges Triennial 2018: Liquid City, and first appeared in the exhibition's catalogue.

¹³ Rewilding is taking place at Gessenwiese partly, but most of the field is dedicated to plant-based research regarding questions of how grass reacts when endomycorrhiza mushrooms help its growth, or when the grass roots are not in touch with polluted ground water, or how trees grow under the premises of heavy metal pollution and erosion, etc.

Meandering (from point G to point K)

Picking up sheep shit, collecting matter, the artist follows the volatile other in an elaborated act of companionship. These are tracts known over time to Kriemann. She has been visiting since 2016 when she first teamed up with botanists and geologists from Friedrich Schiller University Jena, asking them to admit her into their fold, on their forays to gather material that would be taken back for study in laboratories according to devised hypotheses on remediation. To look for specific results within an experiment would be considered biased, yet the scope of what one observes must be pictured in advance in as much detail as possible in order to design a set of criteria and conditions to encompass all foreseeable variable factors. Imagined contours are thus prescribed and drawn out. What can be noticed under these directives? How does this very observation transform the landscape in view?

Seeing alongside a botanist can add new layers of reality — walking through plants, noting the Latin names, green undergrowth alters into a species tied to a greater “whole” by way of articulation. Likewise, scanning a landscape in stride with a geologist pointing out formations, one after the other, terms crystalize (or cloud) as lenses, as means of extraction, overlapping rock face with scientific citation. Or with a Geiger counter in hand, or another detection device, a camera, control screens highlight spectra. A harvesting happens, an extrapolation of this “picture” into a continuous real, a readable image. Plants become carriers of trace metals, mutated interiors with common exteriors. Having learned their new elemental makeup, Kriemann can never see these surfaces as before, they morph further into their cyborg potentialities.¹⁴ Contemplating what it is like to be a leaf or a rock or a sheep in this setting,¹⁵ experience of existence is metaphysically (and physiologically) altered by the very things walked among or fed upon. Slag heap sheep eat, and shit, and meat, radioactivity.

¹⁴ See also, Donna Haraway, “Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s,” *Socialist Review* 80 (1985): 65–108.

¹⁵ This is the hard problem of consciousness famously posed by philosopher Thomas Nagel. See Nagel, “What is it like to be a bat?” *The Philosophical Review* 83, no. 4 (October 1974): 435–450.

¹⁶ Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, 33–34.

Looking up K(anigsberg)

A picture of shared responsibility, or culpability, emerges. To turn again to Tsing,

Contaminated diversity implicates survivors in histories of greed, violence, and environmental destruction. [...] Contaminated diversity is not only particular and historical, ever changing, but also relational. It has no self-contained units; its units are encounter-based collaborations.¹⁶

To look up and read the histories around uranium mining in Germany is likewise a reading of myriad motivations and consequences; it cannot be encapsulated (sealed and stored), kept from radiating. Restoration invariably requires further acts of collaboration. Bearing witness to these states radiates degrees of implication. Within Kriemann’s 2014 publication *RAY* author Eva Schmidt wrote of the conundrum faced in facing a world as *individuum*, the sheer limitations. Schmidt links Sartre’s indecision at the sight of a snow-covered meadow to geological forms of (image) sequestration:

For all those who do not wish to view the earth as a depository of raw materials and for those who wish to go beyond Sartre’s *I do not know what I should do* with it, geological stratification is a model for an archive, a museum, a place of memory. We are connected with landscape and geology through archaic and psychoanalytic images of materiality as well as through the production of theory, the history of science, and the images of art, which model our perception of and contact with materiality.¹⁷

To this *I do not know what I should do*, Kriemann answers in kind but in commune. We must take to noticing.

Photographing individual rocks, an inspection of minute surface areas becomes possible. Presented in an array, differences and likenesses can be inferred, mapped out. Kriemann’s endeavour to locate and catalogue a body of transmitting (radiating!) parts highlights the dislocation of museal collections from sites of extraction as well as the carriers that enact this flow. Within this publication her recollection of pitchblende specimens condenses to resemble an imagined hill or landscape as the extracted minerals are reassembled through rigorous notation. The material here is rock and field note, provenance and shelf life, environment and knowledge. Again, what is text, what is image? An unstable accumulation develops page by page through the layers, the printed radiograms seemingly effecting the presentation of the archive itself. Revolving around the counterparts of plant and stone — Gessenwiese and Kanigsberg — shifts in gravities take place between the publication’s main fault lines. While the meadow landscape is harvested and scattered, diluting (and polluting) into the world as image, or leaf, the mountain or mine is pictured in attempts of forging a new solidity, or volume.

¹⁷ Eva Schmidt, “*I do not know what I should do with it* – Appropriation Versus Unavailability,” in Susanne Kriemann, *RAY* (Amsterdam: ROMA publications, 2014). Quoting John-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), 581–582.

¹⁸ And this orientation itself is suspect to relational vantage. What constitutes “up” versus “down” can be considered a human cognitive enterprise. See again Harris, *Conscious*.

Even after closing the publication, knowing vaguely that what I hold might be perceptively radioactive, I turn to my surroundings anew and continue to read. Two simple forms come to mind, or rather one, repeated and inverted, or turned: two triangles, one pointing upwards, another downwards $\Delta\nabla$.¹⁸ I substitute Δ for Kanigsberg, a mountain, and ∇ for Gessenwiese, a meadow. Δ , a delta denotes change within physics formulas, a core of potential, here it might also point to the slow tectonic emergence of the mountain over time, or, more recently, the directional extraction of the mountain's mines, bringing to the surface the minerals once deeply embedded in the bedrock. And Δ aptly marks these materials' volatility, ever-changing as central nodes of emission. In contrast, ∇ might register a meadow or a field as a meeting point, in this case a convergence of multiple metaphysical centrifugal gravities. ∇ nambla or del, in a one-dimensional domain indicates a standard derivative or, if applied to a field, it can denote a gradient or curl (a turning rotation) etc. of the vector field, pointing here to the seepage, the leaking into the earthen surface and its subsequent spreading contamination from the compounded waystation waste heaps that had once been mounded on the site of Gessenwiese. These stand-in symbols could equally be exchanged to relate to the activity of attempted remediation taking place, where soiled radioactive sludge has been, over the years, transported back into the mountain's depths ∇ , and the meadow's flora uptakes the pollutants and a sequestration takes form in a still-active mycelial process of slow dispersion, Δ up, in, and outwards. ∇ also warns of potential sites of collision — yield in the face of that which comes before, the flow itself prioritized. Whereas a Δ halts interaction, notifying of dangers that risk ends. Who is responsible for marking the many sites of man-encountered radiation?

Paired, these two geometric abstractions also recall the colloquial, fast-forwards, rewind, pause and play, $\Delta\nabla$ buttons to conduct realtime and playback at odds. They might even be read as a singular site, $\triangleleft\triangleright$ pulled apart, two halves splitting onto divergent paths. Or, $\triangleright\triangleleft$, two triangles drawn to touch, pointing to the valleys or peaks in a far-off line of sight. As such they are seen too at the crux of the symbol for infinity. When transposed and inscribed within a circle these two notations form the ancient symbol for the Hindu heart chakra, the *Anahata*.¹⁹ Translating from Sanskrit to “unstruck” the symbol is interpreted to mean “sound produced without touching two parts” and at the same time it means “pure” or “clean, stainless” — symbolizing a synergetic interaction of energies interacting without direct physical encounter. The meaning of this symbol is compound; it can be broken down to elemental parts: Δ symbolizes fire, ∇ the element of water, the crossed form $-\Delta-$ and its mountain-like triangle pointing to the realm of air, and $-\nabla-$ points to the earth, together rendering, as *Anahata* suggests, elemental interaction in a realm of total symbiosis. If we were to look at $\Delta\nabla$, Kanigsberg and Gessenwiese, as two such superimposed energetic fields, might we also find means to read layer for layer the material at hand ever in relation? We might attempt a compound reading like this, which reads not only left to right (or vice versa), but upwards and downwards, bringing the reappearing lines into focus in various combinations.

¹⁹ The symbol described is according to the Hindu Yogic, Shakta, and Buddhist Tantric traditions.

What becomes central is the plane, the intersection and exposure of surface areas — the photographic endeavour. How then to render surfaces as sites of spherical emanation? This publication might be seen as an attempt for such a radial approach to photography, perhaps even in its aims of radical sequestration — pages stacking together as layers of a living humus, interjecting impulses made by each contributor as reactive processes, taking away from the sites as well as linking together elements, citing and siting. A mountain of pitchblende reassembled here within, or leaves slipped between pages as bookmarks. The artwork as book as carrier as herbarium as library. Why create a library, a collection, which necessarily denotes a one within many, cause for cross-referencing? Is it an act of cross-exposure, catalytic means for rendering stability through countervailing gestures? Is a library means to finding a communicable grounding within languages of word and image, to somehow ingest the actualities in gestures? The library is a site of continuation, a prospective home for writing and future reading. And this comes down to measures of rhetoric, ways of looking that continue to manifest as ways of still looking. Let us not forget that the library is both a carrier, a vessel for containment and storage, and also a site of mining, a place of pointed extraction. What is it that we look up in the library? How does one stratum lead to another? In what ways does a publication, entitled a library, emerge as a site of observation, where seer and seen radiate through cross-contamination? Looking down, looking up, turning, $\nabla\triangleright\Delta\triangleleft$.

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