

Wildness in the Time of Photography: An Itinerary in the Modern Representation of Nature

The aim of the present research is to analyze the change in humans' perception of reality—reshaped by the spread of photography—and highlight the results of recent visual strategies in the field of wildlife conservation and sustainable development.

The project combines a theoretical and visual investigation of the representation of nature during the last century. The starting point will be a comprehensive study of the early twentieth-century debate about the role that photography has played in the modern representation and conception of environment and society. This exchange of views, particularly animated in Europe, includes contributions from intellectuals like E. Mach, L. Moholy-Nagy, E. Bloch, S. Kracauer, and W. Benjamin. Special attention will be given to Ernst Jünger's philosophy and his study of the age of masses and machines through the photographic gaze.

The German author's fascination with the social and cultural effects of photography, almost unknown to the general public, is evident in seven collections of photobooks, several essays, and in his correspondence with New Objectivity photographer Albert Renger-Patzsch. Jünger—who was both a writer and a respected naturalist and entomologist—and Renger-Patzsch—popular for his photographic and almost scientific representation of natural forms—share strong similarities in their portrayal of the mechanical era, in which nature, even if in danger, is seen as the most splendid arcane mystery. Moreover, Jünger's work has influenced recent studies undertaken by intellectuals such as V. Flusser, S. Sontag, and P. Virilio, while the German tradition of New Objectivity photographers has inspired the research taking place at the Düsseldorf School of Photography.

This project further explores selected American contributions to this topic in the fields of literature, science, and photography, which have been particularly innovative in terms of wilderness preservation.

While the main visual documentations analyzed will be photos, it will also be important to examine pre-photographic forms of representation selected from art history in order to better understand the pre-industrial relation between human beings and nature.

This documentation phase, centered on the morphological aspects of reality, will be essential for the development of the second part of the project, which consists of the composition of a photobook focused on the twenty-first-century observer's point of view and the observer's new relationship with nature. This work will follow the example of photobooks like E. Jünger's *Die veränderte Welt. Eine Bilderfibel unserer Zeit*, A. Warburg's *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*, and B. Brecht's *Die Kriegsfibel*. The book will contain mainly photographs, but will also include short essays illustrating selected arguments raised by the pictures. This volume will be a visual survey of the newest forms of technological perception and their implications in the contemporary *Weltanschauung* (worldview) for environmental issues.

I firmly believe this interdisciplinary method will reveal original and positive results—particularly valuable for understanding present-day attitudes—with the purpose of finding a new dimension of freedom that is able to coexist with an inevitable and overwhelming technocracy.