CC-BY public copyright license

An Author Accepted Manuscript (AAM) of

Speculative Illustration: From Thinking with Images to Speculative Visuality

Tymon Adamczewski

Published in: *Journal of Illustration* - 2024, Vol. 11, pp. 143-164, DOI: 10.1386/jill_00088_1

This research was funded by The National Science Centre (NCN), Poland as part of the OPUS project (grant number: 2021/43/B/HS2/01794)

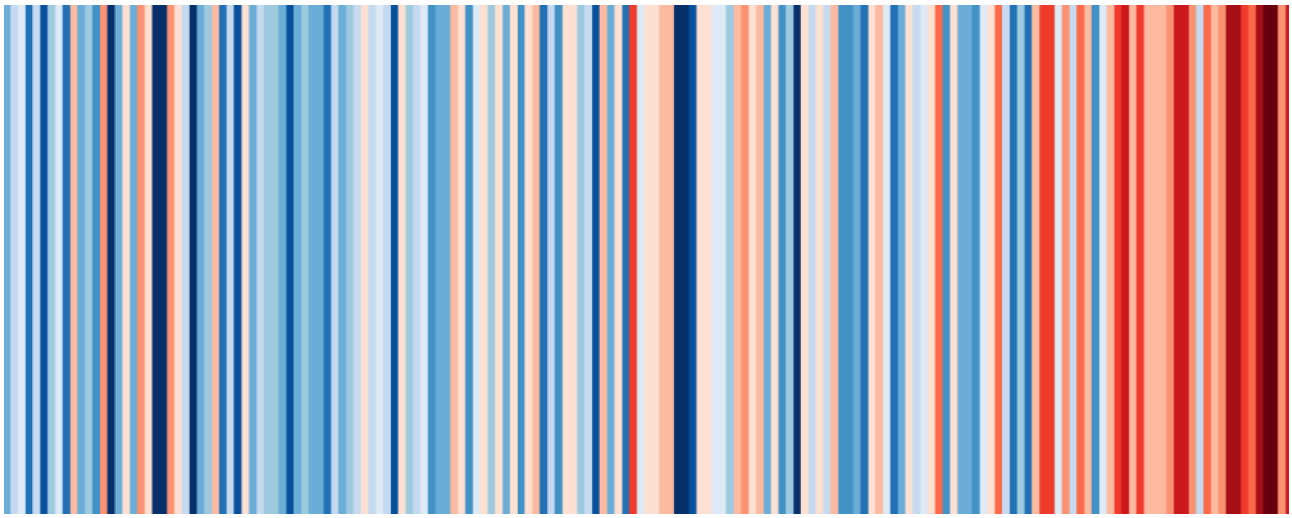


Figure 1: Ed Hawkins, *Warming Stripes,* 2024, digital visualisation, Source: #ShowYourStripes, University of Reading, License: Creative Commons 4.0

No words. No numbers. No graphs. Just a series of vertical, coloured stripes showing the progressive rise in global temperatures in a single striking image

– Ed Hawkins, Professor of Meteorology, University of Reading;
note for the cover image of *The Climate Book*
(Thunberg 2022: 446)

The image, indeed, speaks volumes; the Warming Stripes, as they are called, use colours to represent the rise in global temperatures – starting with shades of blue (beginning in the year 1634) on the left, they lead up to an explosion of an alarming-looking range of reds (for 2021) on the right[i]. They also

document one additional thing: an attempt to represent something that effectively defies representation – the climate crisis. Used as a cover image for *The Climate Book*, a massive, almost 500-page publication curated by the world-famous young Swedish environmental activist Greta Thunberg, the striped image reflects the attempt to deal with a correspondingly broad range of issues associated with the climate. The complexity of this phenomenon is reflected in, both, form and content – a whole host of invited voices (scientists, researchers, authors, writers…) spread over several sections to address the way climate works, "how it affects us", "what we've done about it" so far and "what we must do now"; these and similar questions are registered in an engaging (and eye-opening) set of discussions of topics as varied as air pollution and areosols, microplastics, social transformation, practical utopias or rewilding, while the visual layer of the book employs a broad range of adequately varied visual means to successfully communicate its otherwise disconcerting messages (e.g. why isn't climate change taking center-stage in human communication?!). Evocative of the cover image, the design (colour palette, page backgrounds, typography, etc.) offers a clear and consistent orientation pattern amidst the disparate charts, tables, maps and diagrams displaying changing levels of carbon emissions or alterations in global sea surface temperatures. The latter are further accompanied by lucid infographics, photos and visual works by various artists –all of which, put together, as the back cover has it, meticulously documents a collective effort to tell "the biggest story in the world". The volume certainly handles this ambition very well. Yet, in addition to being a rich source of information and an effective visual platform for instigating necessary actions, it additionally demonstrates how one of the most striking challenges of the Anthropocene is the one it poses to representation.

So, perhaps instead of asking *how* to depict climate change, we should be wondering if it can be represented at all? *The Climate Book* certainly steps up to this challenge and, sure enough, is still forced to tackle the representation of its tricky and paradoxical subject –both local and global at the same time, unexpectedly manifested in all sorts of freak weather phenomena (heatwaves, floodings, failing crops, etc.) that testify to one important thing: the acutely growing awareness that we are no longer in control. Granted that the task of representing such a multidimensional phenomenon is even possible, would it in any way be appropriate, given the unprecedented scale of suffering and extinction caused by human activity? Can we, thus, effectively even consider instigating a change in conceptualizing what Timothy Morton calls a hyperobject –an entity so large that it exceeds the scale of human comprehension and seems elude representation, at best of times living behind something effectively *non-representable*?

What follows attempts to address the challenge this current, wide-ranging and multifaceted planetary crisis poses to representation and to ways of thinking about it. With an awareness of the

state of affairs also consisting of a crisis in imagination (cf. Gosh), the need to seek for new forms of illuminating the present planetary turmoil is particularly dire. It thus makes sense to focus on the role illustration and visual elements play in selected recent theoretical works, especially the ones concerned with the relationship between humans and the environment. Following this path, the article intends to survey the critical terrain of selected texts associated with New Materialisms and Speculative Realism (including Object-Oriented Ontology [OOO]) as both discourses share the aim to subvert –or at least re-think– this relationship at the same time often relying on visual arts, illustration and artistic projects or interventions as important means to make their point.

While such a perspective can be easily associated with the role of images (and visual representations) in cognitive processes responsible for mental and conceptual responses to graphic information, my concern here is less with such neuroscientific aspects and more with the very propensity of images to stimulate thought and to convey complex ideas which subsequently serve as a mode of intellectual inquiry. In other words, although cognitive engagements in visual thinking are important, the perspective adopted here is rather indebted to an interest in multimodal communication[ii] or in regarding images not as working *beyond* language (serving to depict or illustrate something) but precisely in their functioning *as language.* Useful here is Ann M. Royston's proposition to look at *Theory as Artist's Books* (2019) so as to pay attention to what she calls "artistic arguments" –a term which indicates the type of „theory that pushes back against the expectations of the theory or criticism genre, specifically by employing signification that exceeds the semantics of the printed text" (4). Arguably, the manner of employing images in the case of New Materialist discourses cannot be solely reduced "to a series of linear logical propositions"; it rather relies on visual material to construct "arguments as complex assemblages" (ibid.). Such collections of (often visual) elements constitutes one of the strategies of making-with (or what Dona Haraway calls *sympoiesis*) and turns illustration into something more than an addition to verbal messages in texts. This promotes a collective mode of reflection and (meaning-)making which, consequently, allows for *thinking with images.* Even though contemporary theoretical discussions of issues associated with the Anthropocene and the environment willingly make use of such stimulating images, I will argue that this perspective is even further extended in the case of even more intriguing examples of contemporary speculative theory, represented here by Armen Avanesssian and Andreas Töpfer's *Speculative Drawing: 2011-2014* –a collection which includes *creative visualizations* and embraces instances where drawings and illustrations constitute *conceptual metaphors* in their own right.

Situating illustration in ecocriticism

Since the beginning of its life as a term at the onset of the new millennium[iii], Anthropocene has not only promoted interaction between various disciplines but also encouraged an integration of visual and conceptual thinking. In the same vein, it simultaneously testifies to a mutual interdependence and overlap between the material and the immaterial: despite tracing of human impact on the planet references, among others, geology or the 'exact'/ hard sciences, anthropogenic terraformation is equally accompanied an immediately less material form, e.g. of the climate (cf. Bould 2021). Regardless of the format or the actual impact on Earth, the graphic representation and visualization of data registering the changes affects the forms of conceptualizing climate catastrophe, not to mention the reasons why we might be concerned in the first place. This, in turn, can play an immensely important role not only in the way people think about or imagine the problem, but also in terms of the very understanding of notions like human responsibility or agency in coping with the changes affecting all of us.

In this context, visualization adds yet another aspect to the already complex task of representing the seemingly non-representable phenomenon in question. In his intriguingly entitled work, *Against the Anthropocene* (2017), T. J. Demos discusses the role of images and limitations of dominant visual poetics in relation to conceptualizing climate change The challenge here lies not in the fact that we live in a world saturated with media communication and that, by extension, the role of "visual imagery has been central, even integral" to this process; it rather consists in the *effects* of the representations themselves, for the "scientific popularizers rarely evidence awareness of, let alone educate their audience regarding, the use of such images" (Demos 2017: 17). Demos rightly points out that the visual culture of the Anthropocene is dominated by „images with various representational modalities" – charts, maps and diagrams or data visualizations often neighbour the now familiar images „showing cities, global shipping and air transportation routes, pipeline networks, and submarine fiber-optic cable systems, as well as the growth of carbon dioxide pollution over the last few centuries" (Demos 2017: 12). Such images undoubtedly have an important role in conveying the complex narratives of environmental change and visual representations, whether photographs, satellite images, or artistic interpretations, serve as powerful tools to communicate the scale and urgency of human-induced transformations making the abstract concept of the Anthropocene tangible for a wider audience. However, representations like these are likely to enforce a particularly "universalizing discourse" (Demos 2017: 27) which „tends to disavow differentiated responsibility (and the differently located effects) for the geological changes it designates", with agency being distributed seemingly homogeneously to humans in general but without pointing to any specific culprits (Demos 2017: 20). Similarly, employing imagining systems like maps or Google Earth images –offering a God-like point of view– not only gestures towards a scientific or army-based

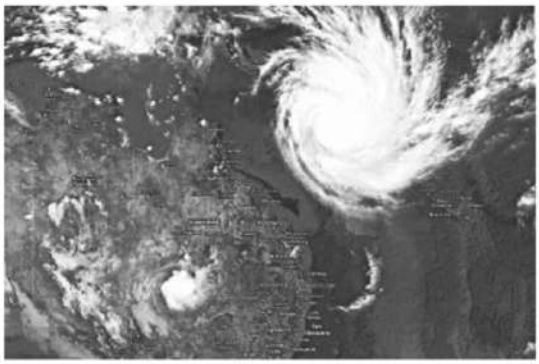
authority, but also encourages to objectify (and thus decontextualize) its subject by granting the "viewers a sense of control over the represented object of their gaze, even if that control is far from reality" (Demos 2017: 27). Such visual strategies are frequently accompanied by excessive aesthetization of climate change –this is particularly visible in images that aim to capture the stark contrasts between natural landscapes and human-altered environments, showcasing phenomena such as deforestation, urbanization, and climate-related events (cf. movies like the *Anthropocene: The Human Epoch* [Biachwal et al. 2018]) –these may well have the effect of neutralizing the dangers and pernicious effects of human activity through a form of aesthetic fetishism. Such images present effects of climate change as objects of beauty, effectively turning them into triggers for an affective response (cf. the case of polar bear trapped on an ice patch), all of which only adds to inducing a feeling of alienation from the surrounding environment which replicates the centrality of human agents in the climate catastrophe.

The impulses behind questioning this biased hierarchy are registered across several intellectual and artistic areas of activity. One such tendency is certainly noticeable in the search for alternative names for the era – capitalocene, plantocene, cthulucene, etc.[iv] –which expresses the discomfort implicit in the dissolution of the sense of responsibility of the *Anthropos;* another can be seen contemporary discourses like New Materialism or Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO) which actively aim to question human privilege through alternative sense-making practices and through seeking new modes of thinking through the relationship between humans and their environment.

Interestingly, these attempts are also registered visually on the level of representations, illustrations and even book design. Demos 'book is a good case in point – on one level it investigates the consequences of the dominant visual poetics of the Anthropocene, but also includes alternatives, e.g. photographic documentation and examples of activism. i.e. a mixture of disparate artistic/activist practices or interventions. Similarly to *The Climate Book*, which also employs a broad spectrum of visual material used to illuminate the Anthropocene, apart from the customary charts and graphs it, too, includes pictures, photos as well as stills from activist movies, videos or other visual documentation of artistic projects, interventions or installations – see e.g. Alejandro Durán's photo series of waste items "washed ashore along the coast of Sian Ka'an, a World Heritage Site and federally protected reserve on the Yucatán Peninsula in Mexico" which effectively documents a "new form of colonization by consumerism" (Thunberg 2024: 229-300).

The visual poetics of such materials is very often connected with a movement away from the customary fetish of aesthetization. Through features like crude image quality, unexpected choice of framing, perspective or a deliberate use of unusual "mise-en-scene" they evoke what might be described as „anti-spectacular" poetics (cf. Demos 2017: 52) – intentionally or not, they echo the

documentary origins of such images, often overlapping with their artivism roots; more importantly, however, in many cases they simply seem to be much less obvious, even bordering on being conceptual, especially in the way their messages encourage a different, more engaged and active type of involvement on the part of the audience. Such is the case, for instance, with *A Manifesto for Living in the Anthropocene* (Gibson et al. 2015) where its easy to see how various traditions of representation and illustration might function together (Fig. 2)



a. Cyclone Yasi. Source: Google maps.



b. Our math root as the basis of all mortality and meaning. Photograph by John Clar.



c. Coal Wheel. Andrew Drummond, 1997-98. Brass, coal, bearings 1600mm diameter x 300mm various. Collection of the artist. Photograph by John Collie.



d. Photograph by Lesley Instone.

Figure 2: Artists: (a) Google maps, (b) John Clar, (c) Andrew Drummond, *Coal Wheel,* 1997-98, Photo: John Collie, (d) Untitled, Lesley Instone; selected illustrations from *Manifesto for Living in the Anthropocene* (Gibbons et al. 2015), Open-access publication available at http://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/25521
License: Creative Commons 4.0

To be sure, both visual forms serve to illustrate, i.e. provide additional visual information for, the texts in the book but in many cases complicate this very role. In this vein, we are likely to find disparate pictures there: Google maps images (Fig. 2a), photographic documentation of murals, as well as landscape photos (Fig. 2b). Yet, what dominates the aesthetic poetics of this project seems to be in line with the trends of anti-spectacularity: most of the images are vexing and conceptual; they seem come from private documentation and/ or are rather unobvious in terms of what they actually

depict; even if they conform to rules of ”pleasing” and functional artistic visuals, they still remain intriguing and rather prod the audiences to thinking *with* the images by addressing various dimensions of the supposed object of admiration –just like in the case of the “Coal Wheel” (Fig. 2c) evoking the pernicious underside of the potential beauty lurking in even the most stylized objects made from fossil fuels.

Unobvious and puzzling, these pictures do serve another purpose. It is precisely owing to their intriguing ordinariness and the fact they do not want to win immediate favour with the audience they effectively position the viewer (and the reader) somewhat differently to graphs, maps and diagrams. If the traditional birds-eye images connote distancing and alienation stemming from the aesthetization of (capital-N) Nature, the anti-spectacular illustration evokes entanglement. As one of the key conceptual postulates of new materialist writing, this process – also reflected in visual strategies –- intends to push humans into acknowledging the interconnectedness and interpenetration of matter, allowing to think beyond the opposition of “us” and “them”. Visual illustrations within this mode correspond to and encourage what Ann L. Tsing describes as „arts of noticing” (cf. Tsing 2015) – a practice of perception and looking which questions the privileged (human) forms of interaction with the environment, paying attention to the fringes or margins (of capitalism). Such, for example, seems to be the message of the photo by Lesley Instone (Fig. 2d), displaying a human shadow and a crack in concrete which visually accompanies an essay on “Walking as a respectful way finding in an uncertain age” (in Gibson et al. 2015: 133-138). New materialist entanglements are intent on cooperation and situatedness –an awareness of one’s relationship to all sorts of (Earth- and more-than-human-) Others; this involves demonstrating interdependencies and interpenetration of human subject and their surroundings, i.e. the environment (also taking place on various, more-than-human scales: from totally external rock, geological, planetary positions to internal ones, with bacteria, microbes and other organisms or forms of matter).

In disparate versions of new materialist writings (visual) art becomes a form of being with the more-than-human. Illustration, on the one hand, serves here as an entry point into extended perception as advocated by Tsing; on the other, recording instances of interaction between types of matter or organisms clearly intends to encourage viewers to notice disparate sense-making processes that taking place all around us at different time speeds (e.g. geological) and different scales (microbiological/ molecular). Thus, the images found in these works are deliberately unobvious, at times echo avant-garde practices and are devoid of capitalist blitz or glamour. They can record seemingly unimportant, mundane or easy-to-overlook things and happenings taking place in what Tsing calls „capitalist ruins”, with images that may not be particularly telling on their own, e.g. a picture of a mushroom peaking out from between tree trunks (2015: xiv) or a photo displaying people’s backs watching what we learn from the caption is gambling (2015: 10); Although captions or the main text manage to

provide more information or a crucial context in a seemingly reportage style (history of matsutake mushroom picking in Yunnan and beyond, up to the edges of capitalism [cf. 2015: 16, 26, 36, 54); also often in a reportage-like style [2015: 136]) many images remain unobvious and depict more-than-human entanglements by highlighting qualities like „unintentional design" of the various more-than-human agents (cf. the category of "Active landscapes [2015: 146-149] and other, including forests [2015: 54] in Lapland [2015: 166] or in Oregon [2015: 193])

One of the intentions here is certainly to promote "greener forms of human culture and more attentive encounters between people-materialities and thing-materialities" (Bennett 2010: x). As a perspective, this in not simply about forms of vitality of matter but also about inter-species collectivity so effectively expressed, both, visually and conceptually, e.g. through the categories like assemblage, i.e. „ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts" (Bennett 2010: 48). While Jane Bennett's book on *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010) contains only a cover image and one abstract picture before the main text, Donna Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chtulucene* (2016) is filled with more than thirty illustrations, many of which evidence various activist practices within the spirit of assemblage and sympoiesis.

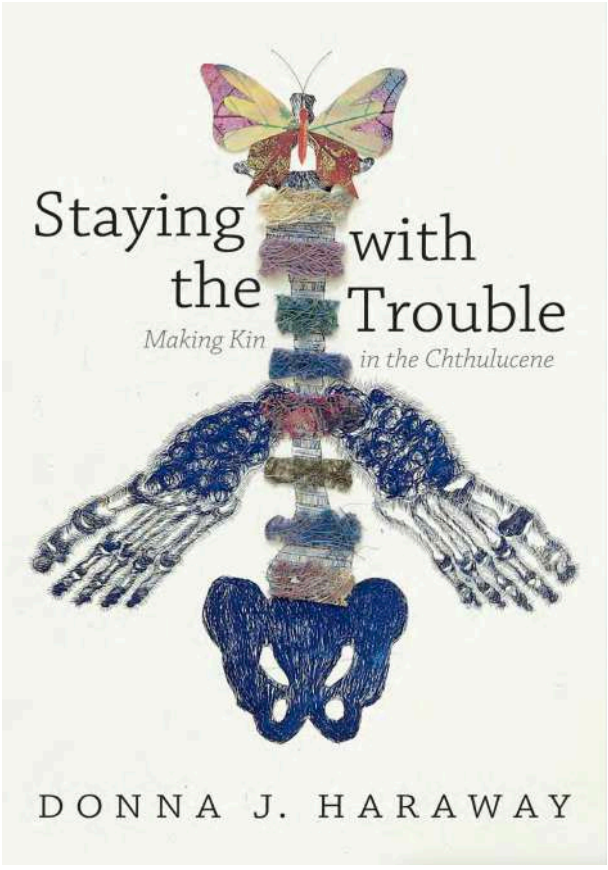


Figure 3: Geraldine Javier, untitled print, cover cover of Donna Haraway's book *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016).

The cover image of Haraway's book illustrates precisely these notions (Fig. 3). By literally grouping various seemingly differing objects together it emphasizes one of the overall messages of the collection of essays –the possibility to think *with* images, and in fact with many other objects or materials. In this respect, Haraway's ideas align with feminist environmental thinkers, like Eileen Crist, among others, by embracing the collective kin-making positions and their creative potential. In contrast to attempts of somehow „solving" the environmental problem (with technology, economy or other forces), the eponymous position of „staying with the trouble" offers a creative approach where visual arts, with strategies like assemblage offer new and generative mixes of joy, terror, and collective thinking (Haraway 2016: 31). The work of both Haraway and Bennett certainly overlaps with feminist perspectives – especially in their aim to refashion the dominance of individualistic, male (gendered) science perspectives; at the same time they are examples celebrating agency of matter and collective knowledge practices leading to the recognition of shared authorship and" a deeper wisdom about the actual state of our damaged planet (Braidotti 2024: xi).

New Materialist visualities are a testament to the fact that although climate change may be seen as a human issue, it is actually so much more, especially when we recognize our interdependencies and involvement with more-than-humans and everything that surrounds us within the environment. Already at this level we can see how contemporary visual communication –also in theoretical texts– changes the role of illustration to one functioning as something more than additional information accompanying the "main" text / messages/ content; drawing on conceptual art and collective practices of art and mining-making, it actively aims to challenge our expectations and encourage forms of thinking with images.

Speculating towards the non-representable

Promoting unexpected forms of thinking about parts of reality human cognition cannot access, the speculative aspect of illustration is already present in Haraway's work (e.g. in the form of literally acknowledging „speculative fabulation", or, on another level, when she speaks about „life lived along lines" (2016: 31-2). Nevertheless, it takes an even more intriguing form in speculative realist and object-oriented works of critics like Timothy Morton and, in particular, in the collection entitled *Speculative Drawing: 2011-2014* by Armen Avanessian and Andreas Töpfer (2014).

Similarly to the new materialists, Morton expresses the awareness of an inter-species affinity, especially in pointing out that "weather is a sensual impression of climate that happens to both humans and the nonhuman entities they concern themselves with: cows, flock berries, tundra, umbrellas, and so on" (Morton 2013: 74). Like Demos, he also recognizes the limitations of graphic and visual representation of data by claiming for instance that "the psychotic intensity of expressionist painting,

poetry, and music […] expresses something about the hyperobject much more effectively than a cool mathematical diagram of phasing flows" (Morton 2013: 76). A good illustration of this power of artistic images are his meditations on the prehistoric paintings in the Chauvet Cave in France. Dated back to thirty thousand years, they make the philosopher aware of the speculative effects images may have on the viewer. Not surprisingly, problems abound " –it is difficult to project one's imagination back as far as this earliest known example of human art, as it also is to project one's imagination forwards to the end of the half-life of plutonium-239 (24,100 years)" (caption for Fig.6 in Morton 2013:59). Yet, although cave paintings, and illustration in general, may encourage thinking about the limits of human capacities for imagining things, it is also possible to consider these objects as elements, or traces, of a hyperobject. Consequently, some of the images included in his book *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (2013) evidence precisely this way of thinking. For example, the work by an Aboriginal artist Yukultji Napangati, *Untitled* (2011) testifies the way in which illustrations (including, pictures, photos, visuals) not only offer fragmentary riddles, a mystery, for the viewer to unearth or make complete, but on some cosmic and quantum level are active ("I find it impossible to leave the painting") and open up "a slice of the Dreamtime, the Aboriginal hyperobject" which constitutes "a map of desert sand hills where a small group of women gathered food and performed rituals" (Morton 2013: 69). The visual preference for illustration material with an emphasis on a speculative potential is best expressed in either seemingly abstract and unobvious works (cf. Tara Donovan's *Untitled (Plastic Cups),* 2006; Chris Wainwright's *Red Ice 3,* 2009) or ones which, even if they include traditional diagrams, complicate data visualization with affective and physical responses (cf. Marine de Haas, *Wellness over time, a Visual Diary of the Cape Farewell Andes Expedition,* 2009), so as to effect a response to visual material. Consider Judy Natal's *Future Perfect: Steam Portrait #28* (2012) – one of a series of visual works illustrating the disturbing intimacy effected by hyperobjects. In an image displaying an individual wearing a brightly coloured orange protective suit, who is partly hidden by a cloud of some sort of vapour, Morton identifies "the uncanny nothingness of the cloud [that] forces the viewer into a disturbing intimacy with the clothed figure" (2013: 96). Like many of images employed in *Hyperobjects,* Natal's Future Perfect series illustrates aspects of the way in which the environment in the Anthropocene disturbs the balances of set ways of thinking about the world (i.e., how it "encroaches on human social, psychic, and philosophical space", Morton 2013: 96).

Like other speculative realists, Morton relies on art and illustration as a discourse which can help us access the hyperobject of climate change and global warming, or at least illuminate parts of these objects. It is only logical that the visual material he uses leads him to recognize that, ultimately, *All Art is Ecological* (2021). Yet, what is particularly interesting is how visual material and images,

even the unintentional ones, can be used to speculate on more-than-human temporalities. This is the case, for instance, with what is known as human atomic shadows from Hiroshima, Japan. Morton considers one particular image reproduced in Yves Klein blue in 1961 depicting a shadow of a human shadow and ladder impressed on a wall:

> A human blocks the wall from being totally bleached by the propagation of heat from the blast. In light of this image one might reverse Foucault's quip (at the end of *The Order of Things*) that the figure of man will vanish like an image drawn in sand on the seashore. Hyperobjects make clear the far more disturbing fact that what is called human continues after the end of the (human) world. Here the human is literally a shadow on a much larger physical structure, a shadow of the conversion of matter to energy. (Morton 2013: 195)

The apocalyptic image of the figure of man disappearing when in touch with natural element visible in the now-canonical work of Michel Foucault is used to show the speculative potential of images as such. The material image of a human shadow serves here as byproduct of the human scientific thinking (splitting of the atom) and as an evidence of the way in which human perception of reality needs to acknowledge a more-than-human temporality ("what is human continues ofter the of the (human) world") which makes the said reality ultimately weird. Recognizing such a weird realism by the theoretical discourses of speculative realism and OOO can be a helpful perspective in coping with "the uncanny intersection of geotrauma and human history" (Morton 2013: 195). One way in which such state of affairs can be navigated is to credit the role of aesthetics as a legitimate means of recording efforts to experiencing the weird reality of hyperobjects – a strategy which abounds in theoretical works within this theoretical field.

If Morton's work evidences a stronger speculative potential than those of new materialists, Avanessian and Töpfer's *Speculative Drawing: 2011- 2014* [2014] goes even further, especially in the design of its theoretical arguments which always calls for an experimental approach to thinking and to the very depictability of ideas (Fig. 4).

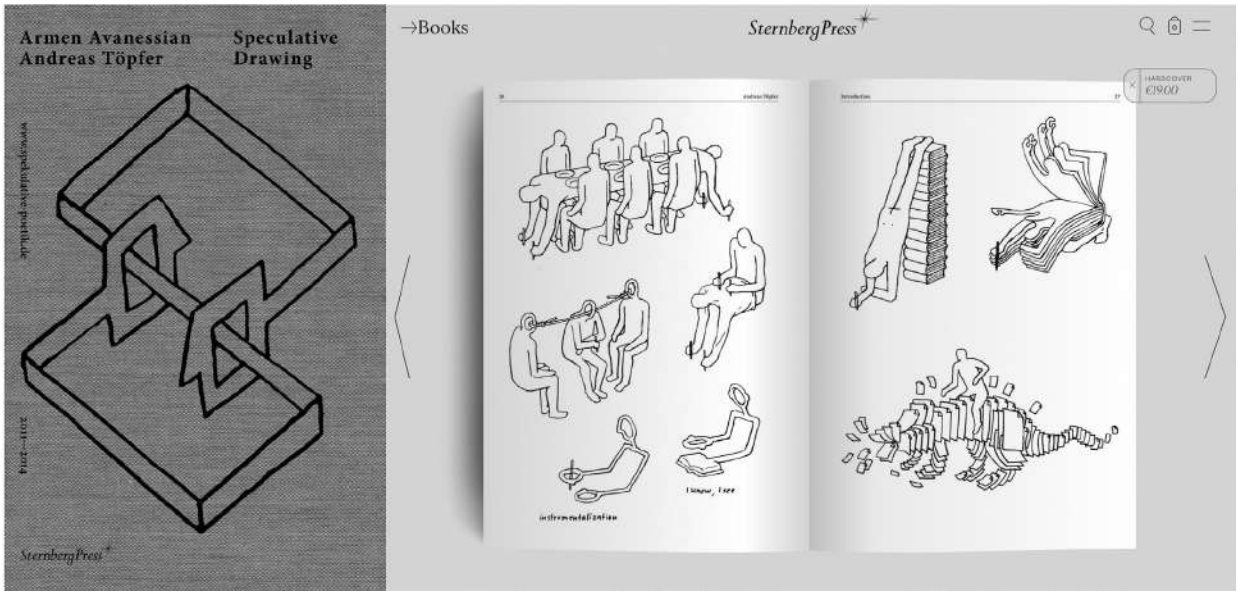


Figure 4: Armen Avanessian, Andreas Töpfer, *Speculative Drawing: 2011-2014* (2014), cover (left), Sternberg Press website for the book (right), Copyright: Sternberg Press.

Speculative realists (e.g. Graham Harman or Quentin Meillassoux) argue that traditional philosophical discourse often relies heavily on linguistic and conceptual tools that may not adequately capture the complexity of the non-human world. As a relatively new mode of thinking speculative realism reaches out beyond the philosophical traditions of correlationism – in which objects can only be though of in relation to human though – and attempts to push thinking into a redrafted understanding of the environment, its objects and our access to them. Drawing, as a form of visual language, seems to allow for articulating ideas in ways that go beyond traditional discursive methods and provide a different mode of engagement with the seemingly non-representable. In the same way in which charts and diagrams are always more than just visualizations of data and representations, drawing as a process (including its material effects) may become a conceptual and critical tool for thinking.

As evidenced in Avanessian and Töpfer's book, the practice of speculative drawing is not only intriguing but also performative, especially because the drawings themselves do more than merely illustrate text, i.e. act as elements subordinate to ideas. Similarly to anti-spectacular images discussed above, they engage the reader in the meaning-making process, while documenting the very processes of thinking itself. More importantly, they do not seek "to build a relationship between a pictorially correct understanding and a correlative conceptual thought. Instead they provide an occasion to think about thinking, a thinking both in concepts and in images, a thinking with one's hands or with one's eyes" (Avanessian, Töpfer 2014: 20). This reading is certainly encouraged by the way in which series of images reproduced here may bear affinity to one another, yet they also exhibit modifications in each consecutive installment of the series (fig. 4, *left*). At the same time, however, they depict weird and improbable combinations, or what new materialists would call unlikely mergers

or risky entanglements, all the while echoing modernist or avant-garde collages, particularly in their redrafting confusing diagrams reminiscent of the visual poetics typical for scientific discourse (fig. 4, *right*). This aspect gestures towards an understanding of visuality as a set of recognizable patterns and strategies, yet one in which the rules, even if broken, do still work and may act as a reminder that the visual aspect of a text (even a non-verbal one) is never neutral. Additionally, the origins of parts of the collection in a performative activity of lecture drawings during which the artist (Töpfer) would anticipate ideas while (or sometimes even before) they were articulated within spoken discourse (cf. 2014: 14-15). Surely, the images provoke us to come up with meanings of our own, particularly in parts of the work where the drawings dominate the page (2014: 26-38). However, as Avanessian states, *Speculative Drawing* should not be seen as providing "a shortcut to the theories in the books" within in the collection (2014: 20), but an offering of what might be described as "a reciprocal othering of image and word" – a quality not to be mistaken with evoking "something that words, thoughts, or language cannot grasp" (2014: 23).

While traditional approach to depictability of ideas in a visual form would insist on enhance argumentation through employing various typo/graphic means, speculative drawing demonstrates something else: the mutual affinity between philosophy, literature and language as *modes* of visual thinking. Consequently, the volume offers discussions of theoretical works (e.g. Nick Land, Robin Macay, Graham Harman, Ian Hamilton Grant or Ray Brassier), fiction (H.P. Lovecraft, Thomas Ligotti or Philip K. Dick) or entangled genres mixing the two, like in the case of Reza Negarestani's *Cyclonopedia* (2008) – all of which are represented through intriguing drawings and are certainly in line with the subversive dimension of speculative thinking. It posits, especially in relation to speculative horror, that "our reality can be best understood though the fantastic and the weird" (Avanessian, Töpfer 2014: 130). The project, thus, demonstrates the processes of searching for a new – perhaps visual – language for theory which deliberately builds on on the the specifically visual initial status of a speculative theory, as "in the original sense of both the Greek *theorein* (to watch, to view) and the Latin *speculari* (to observe)" privilege the ocular perception (Avanessian, Töpfer 2014: 21).

Conclusion

The aim of this article was to provide insights into the intricate interplay between images and the challenges posed by the current planetary crisis. The urgency of finding new ways to navigate this turmoil is recognized as a particularly important problem which, on top of ecological and social dimensions, also needs to address the significance of representation and visual media. Focusing on the role of illustration in recent theoretical work, especially the ones associated with New Materialisms and Speculative Realism, allows to highlight the role it plays in illuminating the

seemingly non-representable affair – the hyperobject of climate change. Within this context, visual arts and artistic interventions can be seen as pivotal tools for discourse transformation. This is so not only because these non-verbal discourses offer a totally different language, but because they stem from an alternate way of thinking. The emergence of an "anti-spectacular" aesthetic, as documented in many instances of new materialist texts, certainly fits into this perspective. It marks a significant departure from conventional visual representation dominated by charts, diagrams and maps – a perspective endemic to the Anthropocene itself which objectifies nature and waters down the responsibility. This theoretical-visual departure certainly recognizes the pressing necessity to visualize climate change but manages to position their viewers differently so as to encourage more attentive and collaborative ways of thinking and functioning (which might hopefully help make different, more sustainable decisions in the future). Armen Avanesssian and Andreas Töpfer's *Speculative Drawing* stands as a testament to this transformative approach, offering a nuanced exploration of drawing as a thinking practice. By weaving together speculative theory and visual poetics, the collection presents a unique opportunity to prompt critical reflection. In doing so, speculative drawings serve as potent tools for challenging prevailing modes of thinking about the relationship between humans and the surrounding world. This blending of art and speculation breaks down the barrier between written and visual communication, opening up new ways of understanding and acting in our world and thus, hopefully, sets the stage for fresh narratives and intriguing ways of thinking that are attuned to our present day (and future) ecological challenges.

References

Avanessian, A., Töpfer, A. (2014), *Speculative Drawing: 2011-2014*, Berlin: Sternberg Press.

Baichwal, J., de Pencier, N., Burtynsky, E. (2018), *Anthropocene: The Human Epoch*, Toronto, Ontario: Mongrel Media.

Bennett, J. (2010), *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things.* Durham: Duke University Press.

Bould, M. (2021), *The Anthropocene Unconscious: Climate Catastrophe Culture*, London: Verso Books.

Braidotti, Rosi (2024), "Foreword: A BEcoming-world of Collective Knowledge Practices", in *Methods and Genealogies ofd New Materialisms*, F. Colman and I. van der Turn (Eds.), Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. xi-xxiii.

Demos, T.J. (2017), *Against the Anthropocene: Visual Culture and Environment Today,* Berlin: Sternberg Press.

Gibson, K., Bird Rose, D., Fincher, R. (Eds.) (2015), *Manifesto for Living in the Anthropocene,* Brooklyn, NY: Punctum Books.

Gosh, Amitav. *The Great Derangement : Climate Change and the Unthinkable.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017.

Haraway, D.J. (2016), *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chtulucene, D*urham: Duke University Press.

Morton, T. (2013) *Hyperobjects. Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World.* University of Minnesota Press.

Morton, T. (2021). *All Art is Ecological,* London: Penguin Books.

Royston, Ann M. (2019), *Material Noise: Reading Theory as Artist's Books*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Thunberg, G. (Ed.), (2024), *The Climate Book*, London: Penguin Books.

Tsing, A. L. (2015), *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Notes—

[i] The image used here represents the Warming Stripes for Poland 1860 - 2010; other options to generate this are possible (e.g. with labes, bars or scale) source: #ShowYourStripes, https://showyourstripes.info/s/europe/poland/all

[ii] I use the term in a general way here to indicate a type of communication in which a text relies on various semiotic codes or systems of communication, often implying the need to use several senses by the audience (a reader, viewer, etc.) to make sense of a given work. For further information of multimodality see, e.g. Alison Gibbons, *Multimodality, Cognition, and Experimental Literature* (New York and London: Routledge, 2012); Carey Jewitt, and Gunther Kress, (eds.), *Multimodal Literacy* (Frankfurt am Main and New York:Peter Lang, 2003); Gunther Kress, *Multimodality: a social semiotic approach to contemporary communication*, (London; Routledge, 2010).

[iii] Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer's influential article "The ‚Anthropocene: A New Epoch in Earth History'" was first published in: *Global Change Newsletter*, 41 (May 2000): 17-18; The journal is now out of print and the text is currently in the public domain, e.g. here https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-82202-6_2

[iv] Compare the terminological wrestling visible in alternatives like capitalocene, plantocene, plastocene, technocene, or anthrobscene; cf. e.g. Haraway, Donna. "Anthorpocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chtulucene: Making Kin", *Environmental Humanities* 2015, Vol. 6, s. 159-165.; Moore, W. Jason.(Ed.). *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*. Oakland: PM Press, 2016. Parikka, Jussi. *The Anthrobscene*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015.