



HAL
open science

The Sky in Us

Marc Higgin, Anaïs Tondeur

► **To cite this version:**

| Marc Higgin, Anaïs Tondeur. The Sky in Us. Venti journal, 2021, Inhale/Exhale, 2 (1). hal-03657443

HAL Id: hal-03657443

<https://hal.science/hal-03657443v1>

Submitted on 9 Jun 2023

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution - NonCommercial - NoDerivatives 4.0 International License

Marc Higgin (anthropologist) Anaïs Tondeur (visual artist)

The sky in us

Abstract

This is an essay with two voices, an artist and an anthropologist, exploring what the relation between air, breathing, art and ethics might be. The conversation turns around an artwork produced by Anaïs in the context of *ça remue!* in the autumn of 2020: *Le Parlement de Nuages*. This work draws out attention to the sky. Not as an object of contemplation, nor as an element of the landscape, nor as mirror to our earthly lives, but rather the sky as the milieu through which, from one breath to the next, our lives depend.

Each day, for three days, she sent up a weather balloon into the clouds over the Trièves, in the foothills of the Alps in south-east France. The balloon was equipped with a filter for trapping the fine particulate matter carried on the atmospheric flows that day. And on each of these days, she took a photograph of the sky. She then sent the filters to the laboratory of Rita Van Dingenen and Jean-Philippe Putaud at the Joint Research Center (European Commission), where they extracted carbon black particles and later transformed them into ink. An ink for each day, with which to give body to the three corresponding portraits. The luminous depths of the sky become charged with the material signs of the intermingling of human, animal and plant activities that together make up the atmosphere and modify it hour by hour.

Carbon black knows no boundaries. Released into the atmosphere during the (incomplete) combustion of living matter, these tiny particles circle the globe, leaving their trace in its furthest reaches. This cycle, to which human ways of life have been entangled for at least a million years, has been greatly accelerated in the last three hundred years through successive technological revolutions capitalising on fossil fuels and the energy released in their combustion. The exploitation of heavy petroleum products, from coal tar to pneumatic tires, are the greatest contributor of carbon black to the atmosphere. These particles settle on the ice at the poles, causing them to absorb more of the sun's energy, further accelerating their melting. But carbon black also infiltrates the lungs of living animals, passing through into organ and tissue, leaving a trail of destruction in its wake. While hominids have played with fire for two million years, we are slowly becoming aware of the profound consequences of the great acceleration of the last three centuries on the atmosphere, on the climate, and the very conditions of our survival.

But rather than the paralysis of the apocalyptic sublime of climate breakdown, these portraits of skies open up another mode of the sublime, closer to home. Anaïs's protocol - borne of her dialogues with atmospheric scientists - doesn't reduce our atmospheric lifeworld to the mute reality of atoms, it doesn't set the gnostic against the pathic. Instead, it presents our everyday sky back to us, inside out, its material seams visible. Before this Parliament of Clouds, we are brought back to the air, to our breathing, to the quality of this relation. If, as Tonino Griffiero tells us, "[b]reathing is openness, that is, respiratory openness, a perpetual opening to the atmosphere of air"¹, what is respiratory openness in the age of carbon black?

¹ Griffiero, T. (2020). "It Blows Where It Wishes: The Wind as a Quasi-Thingly Atmosphere". *Venti Journal*, 1(1), pp. 31-38

Keywords : ecology, anthropology, contemporary art, atmosphere, carbon black

This is an essay with two voices, an artist and an anthropologist, exploring what the relation between air, breathing, art and ethics might be. The conversation turns around an artwork produced by Anaïs in the context of *ça remue!*² in Grenoble, in the autumn of 2020: *Le Parlement de Nuages*. This work draws out attention to the sky. Not as an object of contemplation, nor as an element of the landscape, nor as mirror to our earthly lives, but rather the sky as the milieu on which, from one breath to the next, our lives depend. If the air is that which on all life depends, human and nonhuman, its very dependability allows us to on with the tasks of living, paying it no mind.

For Anaïs, her practice as an artist is a practice of research, of inquiry. Not in the sense of testing hypotheses through the collection and analysis of data under controlled conditions, nor in the sense of developing theory through conjecture and refutation but, as Tim Ingold argues, of research as a practice of way-finding, of opening a path into the world, in order to “join with its human and non-human inhabitants in the collective task of keeping life going”³. Working in close collaborations with researchers from other disciplines, her projects take the form of speculative fictions or protocols, each with their own specific media: walking, performance, photography, film, installation. Each project sets off on a quest for a new aesthetic, in the sense of a renewal of our modes of perceiving, that become new ways of telling the world and our relation to it. Bernard Stiegler, in one of his last books⁴, draws this intimate connection between thinking - *penser* - in its temporal unfolding, and care - *panser* - as a taking care of what we inherit from the past and carry forward in to the future, so as to sustain our being in the world.

Marc is currently part of an inter-disciplinary project called *Sensibilia*⁵, whose hypothesis is that any understanding the contemporary context - the Anthropocene - must take into account the role of the senses in mediating our understanding of, and responses to, the changes that our living environments are undergoing. In particular, he works on the question of air and atmosphere in Grenoble, France, and how this medium is made manifest through specific practices and technologies, how these transform experience and serve to assemble a politics around which air is made into a matter of concern. It is this shared interest in air, in the sky and our relation to it, that brought our work together.

Le Parlement de Nuages began as a quest to track down, what Anaïs calls, *contemporary meteors*. The term meteor, from ancient Greek *μετά* (meta: by means of) and *ἀεῖρω* (aeiro: to raise, to lift) refers to a varied family of celestial phenomena: clouds, rainbows, hail or comets, dust, auroras and lightning. She ended up trailing meteors of a very particular kind, released in the busy wake of human activities of inhabiting on this earth: particles of carbon black.

Released into the atmosphere during the (incomplete) combustion of living matter, these tiny particles circle the globe, leaving their trace in its furthest reaches. Carbon black knows no boundaries. Kin to its combusted cousins, carbon monoxide and dioxide - the cycling of carbon black is intimately entwined with life on this planet, with fire and the human ways of life that have co-evolved with it. While hominids have played with fire for two million years, we are slowly becoming aware of the profound

² Cycle of artistic and scientific performances *Ça Remue !* Musée Dauphinois, Grenoble, Octobre 2020, organised by Le Laboratoire, with the financial support of Department de L'Isère, Université Grenoble Alpes and Fondation Carasso.

³ Ingold, T. (2018). *Anthropology between art and science: An essay on the meaning of research*. *Field—A Journal of Socially-Engaged Art Criticism*, 11.

⁴ Stiegler, B. (2020). *Qu'appelle-t-on Panser? T2: La leçon de Greta Thunberg*. Éditions Les liens qui libèrent.

⁵ Le projet *Sensibilia* est financé par l'ANR : ANR-20-CE22-0006-01

consequences of the great acceleration in the human use of fire started during the industrial revolution - on the atmosphere, on the climate, and the very conditions of our survival.

As a specie of contemporary meteor, carbon black is the trace, the shadow, our combustion-dependent society. Its story is our story. The abundance of these microscopic particulates in our atmosphere, in our towns, in our lungs, bear witness to humanity's profound entanglement with fire. As the geographer Nigel Clark argues, it is in this relation with fire that humans have re-invented *the social and ourselves as social beings by transforming the way we tap into, enfold and incorporate the planet's geological strata*⁶. This essay weaves this story of humanity's fascination with fire together with the part that goes up in smoke, that is returned to the atmosphere: carbon black. Anais Tondeur's work is a device for perceiving and thinking the atmosphere differently, for bringing our attention to our busy, mostly indifferent transformation of this - our - milieu, and our profound vulnerability - as breathing beings - to it.

To begin, then, with fire. Some interpretations of the geological and fossil record suggest that hominids may have begun to experiment with fire 1.9 million years ago, through the practice of *broadcast burning*, that sought to accelerate natural cycles of wildfire, with far-ranging consequences for floral and faunal regimes the world over⁷. A mediated and amplified form of what biologists call *niche construction*.

Hearths bear the first reliable witness to the developing relationship between hominids and fire, or, to be more precise, to the developing pyro-technology mediating this relationship. The oldest vestiges unearthed, at the archaeological site at Qesim cave in Israel, have been dated to 300 000 years ago, but there is indirect evidence of hearths that date back a million years, to homo Erectus.

In order to be rendered useful, fire needs to be contained. Uncontained, it shows no regard for the careful ordering of materials, things and bodies we call our lives; its hunger does not discriminate between the firewood we collect, the furniture we live with, the clothes we wear, the bodies that we are. Hearths tame fire by confining it within a circumscribed space, making it dependant on us for fuel: it stays alive for as long as it is fed. Contained in this way, fire presents extraordinary transformative power that became central to the evolution of hominids and their/our ways of life. Just think of what the technologies of cooking allowed: smaller digestive system, larger brains, wider palette of comestible foods, more complex forms of social and cultural life. It is impossible to tell the story of homo sapiens without including this constitutional entanglement with fire.

The next step in this very brief history is the oven. Ovens, kilns, forges mark a step-change in developing *pyro-technologies*: by extending the circumscribed space of the hearth into three dimensions. Kilns house fire, allowing control of fuel and air flow resulting in a much fiercer fire, its heat further intensified by the thermal mass of its housing. Through the mediating technology of the kiln, fire becomes much hotter, its metabolic power multiplied. Looking back from the present, the technological possibilities kilns opened are clear: the transformation of otherwise stable earths – clay, sand, stone, metal containing ores – into other, more useful materials – ceramic, glass, plasters, iron, bronze, lead, tin and so on. Kilns and forges have underwritten cascading revolutions in technology and material culture that have shaped ways of life throughout the world⁸.

⁶ Clark, N. 2018. "Earth, Fire, Art: Pyrotechnology and the Crafting of the Social" in (eds) Marres, N., Guggenheim, M., & Wilkie, A. *Inventing the social*. Manchester: Mattering Press.

⁷ Pyne, S. 2001. *Fire: A brief history*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

⁸ Wertime, T. 1973. Pyrotechnology: Man's first industrial uses of fire. *American Scientist* 61(6): 670-682; Clark, N. & K. Yusoff 2014. Combustion and society: A fire-centred history of energy use. *Energy and Society* 31(5): 203-226.

Through the control and containment of pyro-technology, fire became domesticated, the hunger and excess of this non-human energy yoked to the production of human ways of life. But maybe speaking of domestication is off the mark. Rather than fire being brought into an existing domus, fire stands at the origin and heart of the domus, linking ‘the small to the great, the hearth to the volcano, the life of the log to the life of the world’⁹. While much of the literature on the hearth emphasise fire’s capacity to ‘gather in’ familial and communal life¹⁰, a focus on ovens, kilns and forges serves to foreground fire’s centrifugal power; that is, the transformative power that produced the bricks, iron and bronze, the concrete, gold and steel through which different material cultures’ evolving divisions and differentiations were made material.

Interestingly, the earliest kilns unearthed, in the caves of Dolni Vestonice in the Czech Republic, were found to be surrounded with ceramic figurines, of people (women in particular) and animals. It seems they were fed, still wet, into the oven, the intense heat fracturing and exploding them. Rather than the functionality that drives most accounts of technological innovation, these figurines seem to speak, instead, of the curiosity that drove these people to experiment with the not-yet-known possibilities that fire affords of material transmutation and metamorphosis. As Clark and Yusoff argue, in harnessing the metabolic power of fire to transform the material world, *the history of the social deployments of fire seem to exceed determination, they often appear to overflow any discernible sense of direction, purpose or utility. Far from nailing social life to the dictates of necessity, then, fire histories hint intriguingly that human beings may be at their most experimental, playful and flamboyant precisely when they are riffing off the ‘givens’ of geology and geochemistry*¹¹.

The last step: the internal combustion engine, which marks the industrial amplification of ‘our’ relation with fire, and its coupling with a fuel hitherto marginal to human pyro-technologies— fossil fuels. ‘Our’ because the development and evolution of the industrial revolution was patchy, the distribution of its benefits and its blights, its profits and its devastations, has not been, and still is not, evenly or fairly distributed. And similarly, while ‘we’ have slowly become aware of the impact of these successive technical revolutions on the carbon cycle, on global climate and now on the very conditions of our survival, responsibility is not equally shared by all humanity - even if our era has become that of the Anthropocene.

If our relations with fire, mediated by the development of pyro-technologies, have underwritten the extraordinary capacities of humans to transform the material and living world around them, and transform themselves and their communities in the process, they have also transformed the milieus, the environments, in which these activities make their home. Fire brings into intense, flickering light our technologically-mediated practices of inhabiting the world - our cooking pots, our anvils and bellows, our parchment and quills - while also plunging that which surrounds into obscurity. More than the work of backgrounding that which was not directly relevant to the matter at hand - the night lit by the light of the moon and stars - but actively transforming that which became background. If cooking with fire allowed us to extract the nutrition from cereal grains it also coated the insides of our dwellings - caves, tents, huts, houses - with soot, as it did our lungs.

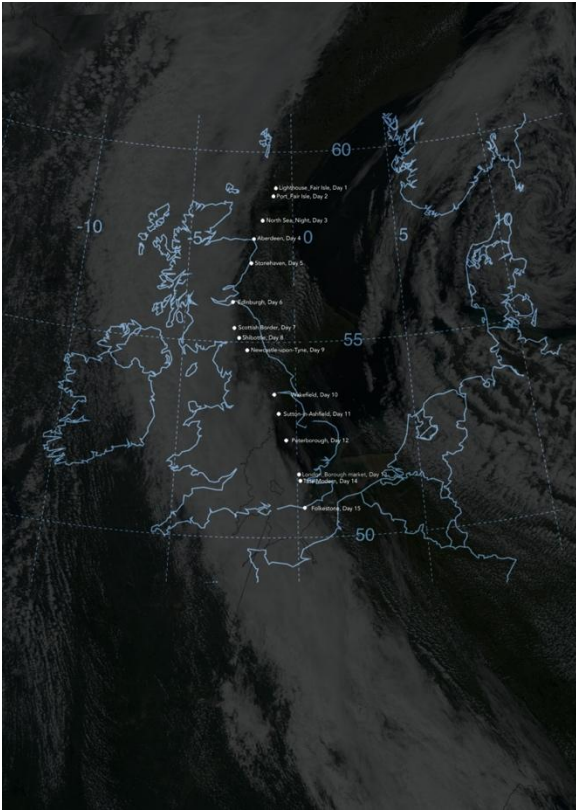
There is always a shadow to the useful work that fire is put to, a shadow that represents our involuntary immersion in a milieu that we are busy transforming, a shadow of which carbon black is emblematic.

⁹ Bachelard, G. (1938/1964). *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*. Boston: Beacon Press.

¹⁰ see for example Anderson, D.G., Wishart, R.P. and Vaté, V. (eds.), (2013). *About the hearth: perspectives on the home, hearth and household in the Circumpolar North*. Berghahn Books, Oxford.

¹¹ Clark, N. & K. Yusoff 2014. Combustion and society: A fire-centred history of energy use. *Energy and Society* 31(5): 203-226.

Developed as part of an artist residency at European Commission Joint Research Center at Ispra, Anaïs engaged on a protocol of investigation on the tracks of these very particles. Her journey started on Fair Isle, one of Europe's remotest island. Yet, she was surprised by the presence of carbon black and thus Anaïs enlisted the laboratory of Rita van Dingenen and Jean-Philippe Putaud to help her track down the path of these particles. Using the atmospheric modelling known as "Hysplit backward trajectory", the team could trace the particle's circulation in the atmospheric currents to determine its probably point of emission, its source. It is the model used to understand the transport, dispersion, and deposition of pollutants and hazardous materials such as particulate matter, radioactive material, wildfire smoke, windblown dust, allergens and volcanic ash in the atmosphere.



Trajectories of the carbon black particles reaching Fair Isle, on May 26th 2017

The model laid the path for Anaïs's 837 miles journey, by foot, boat and bus from the remote Scottish island of Fair Isle to the funnels of ships moored in Folkestone harbour, in the south of England.

She walked through the arctic moorlands of Fair Isle, along the edge of its vertiginous cliffs, home to Puffins, Siberian Passerines, Guillemots, Fulmars; she sailed through the churning waters where the Atlantic and the North Sea meet; she walked through the coalfields of Northumberland, over mountains and hills, pastures and fields, and the border of Scotland and England. She traversed the historical town of Edinburgh, the suburban areas of Nottingham, Leeds, Sutton in Ashfield, London and Borough Market, a few days after the tragedy of the 3rd of June 2017. Eventually, she reached Folkestone harbour. Each day of the expedition, she took a photograph, a portrait of the sky and, breathing through her mask, filtered the carbon black particles present in the air. The mask was fitted with a filter specifically designed to collect fine particulate matter of pm2.5, the size of the carbon black particles.



View of the expedition and particles trapping device, Fair Isle

Less *geo*-graphy than *aero*-graphy, Anais's journey re-traces on land the paths of carbon black through the atmosphere. Drawn up from the chimneys of factories and houses, from the exhausts of cars and lorries, from the erosion of tyre and tarmac, from the smouldering embers of forest fires, these molecules drift along atmospheric currents for days and falling back several hundred kilometers from their point of emission. This journey trouble our common sense, our *local* sense of cause and effect, action and consequence. Why are we so blind, so indifferent, to this atmospheric life of what goes up in smoke?

Let us, for a moment, look to the dawn of our industrial pyro-technical regime. And to Josiah Wedgwood, one of the pioneers of the industrialisation of ceramic manufacture, one of the pioneers of industrialisation itself, in the second half of the 18th century. He combined the intimate knowledge of the ceramic process gained as an apprentice in the family pottery business with a thirst for the emerging 'scientific' techniques and vocabulary he encountered as a member of the Birmingham Lunar Society, provincial cousin to the Royal Society in London. Grappling with the complexity of his business - from the extraction and classification of clays to the differentiation and specialisation of production processes, from the training of apprentices to the design, marketing and sale of bespoke tea sets to the European aristocracy, he tried to measure every aspect of it, including the age-old relationship between the potter and the fire. The process of firing clay is the riskiest and most difficult to control part of the production of ceramics. The 'kiln man' had always been the highest paid workman in the factory because the success of the whole production process hinged on the success of the firing, which, in turn, hinged on his skill and judgement in reading the fire¹².

In a long course of experiments, for the improvement of the manufacture I am engaged in, some of my greatest difficulties and perplexities have arisen from not being able to ascertain the heat to which the experiment-pieces had been exposed. A red, bright red, and white heat, are indeterminate expressions...of too great latitude.... (Wedgwood 1782 in Chang 2004: 121)

Drawing on his practical knowledge, Wedgwood developed a series of standardized porcelain rings that could be measured unfired and fired, the difference (caused by shrinking) could be used as a gauge of the heat attained, replacing the 'indeterminate' – or at least tacit – 'expressions' of heat available to those with enough skill to read the changing qualities of fire. The quantitative scale of temperature would help Wedgwood systematize and calibrate this delicate process of material transformation.

¹² McKendrick, N. 1973. "The role of science in the industrial revolution: A study of Josiah Wedgwood as a scientist and industrial chemist". In M. Teich & R. Young (eds) *Changing perspectives in the history of science: Essays in honour of Joseph Needham*, 274-319. London: Heinemann.

This was one tiny step in the onward march of industrialization, developing in tandem with the thermodynamic theories and experimental traditions of the physical sciences, which brought fire to heel as quantifiable heat, and then heat, in turn, as just another form of 'energy' defined as the ability of a system to do useful work¹³. These advances in measurement, in equipment, in material science, in training and quality control, all fed in Wedgewood's accounts. He was one of the first to adopt 'double-account book-keeping', which enabled him to record and evaluate - in terms of costs - raw materials, fuel, labour and production equipment, and to compare them with revenues. An accounting that made his business, his productive activity and his profit visible during this first efflorescence of globalised capitalism.

But what is returned to the environment as a medium in the course of the industrial process - that is, what goes up in smoke - becomes an externality of this form of accounting; a form of accounting that continues to define the logic by which we come to value our productive activity. The balance sheets of governments and companies formalise this dramaturgy in which the focused play of light, of activity, of knowledge, set against a surrounding obscurity, that our relationship with fire has helped birth. What goes up in smoke mixes with the atmosphere, its shadow is carried away in its incessant circulations, becoming invisible, ignorable, even as settles on the arctic ice, even as it traces an inflammatory path in the body of the child walking on the pavement. The difficulty is that the ramifications of this not so slow transformation of our atmospheric milieu take time to show themselves. They demand a particular attention to become manifest, call upon a politics for them to be made to matter.

Of course, scientists studying the atmosphere, the earth and its ecologies have tried to develop other forms of accounting in which the whole of the carbon cycle is rendered visible not just short line that traces its entry into the economy as a becoming-resource, as a combustible or raw material, and its consumption - by fire or use - and exit as a becoming-externality, alternative forms of accounting in which the evolutions of the carbon cycle are measured and modelled, and in which the ramifications on the atmosphere, on ecosystems, on the territories on which we depend, are mapped, made visible, *made to matter* in Isabelle Stengers terms¹⁴. Governments have timidly tried to impose these externalities as costs, but the problem remains of how to reconcile these different registers of value. One way, which is now being explored in technologies of carbon capture, is to bring atmospheric carbon back into the productive activity, into the books as it were, as a resource. Another path, which is not incompatible, is the one taken by Anaïs, which consists in underlining our constitutional vulnerability to the environment we are transforming, to bring the background to the fore, to show us our shadow.

In late 2020, Anaïs developed a further iteration of her carbon black protocol, this time for the çà remue ! festival in Grenoble. The work was situated in the hills of the Trièves, in South-East of France. In contrast to the previous walking protocol, this time she remained still, sessile like a plant fixed in its environment. In this state of immobility, she attuned her perception to these particles' presence. Although, they measure no more than 2.5 microns in aerodynamic diameter, they enter our bodies, cross the membranes surrounding each of organs, reaching the folds of our brains and the flow of our veins while triggering an increasing number of deaths.

¹³ Wendling, A. 2009. *Karl Marx on technology and alienation*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

¹⁴ Stengers, I. 2011. Comparison as a matter of concern. *Common Knowledge* 17(1): 48-63.

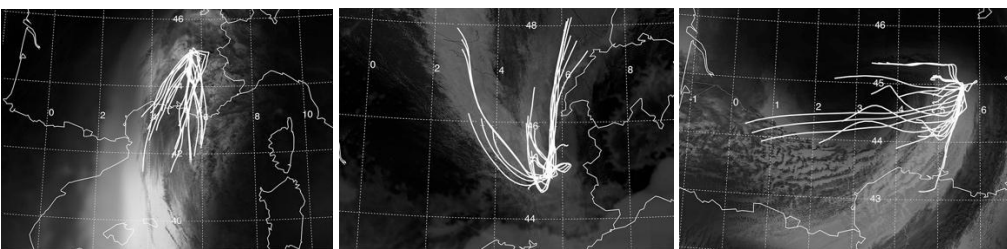


For this performance, she collected the carbon black particles by means of a filter hanging from a weather balloon she sent amongst the clouds. The filters were then sent to the laboratories of physicists Rita van Dingenen and Jean-Philippe Putaud. As they extracted the trapped carbon black by immersing the filters in an ion bath, they made the comparison with soot, which has been used for centuries as the main component of India ink. As both substances share the same origin the idea emerged of producing a carbon black ink.



She developed this printing protocol with a fine art printer, combining the carbon black ink to a pigment-based ink, creating one cartridge per photograph printed in an edition of 5, number estimated according to the volume of ink. The presence of the carbon black seems to fluidify the ink, highlighting the liquid feel of the photographed atmospheric flows, blurring the limit between the modes of representation. These photographs are often interpreted as a kind of painting.

The luminous depths of the photographed sky is thus charged with the material signs of the intermingling of human, animal and plant activities that together make up the atmosphere and modify it hour by hour. Atmospheric carbon black becomes the materiality of the photograph itself. Indeed, the volume of the carbon black present in the ink modifies the shades of blacks and greys of the image, each portrait marking the variations of carbon black particles in the air, their presence fluctuating day to day, even in the mountains of the Trièves, even on the shores of the remotest islands of Scotland.



Trajectories of the carbon black particles reaching the Trièves, 20.09.2020-22.09.2020

The first two portraits, whose palette of greys lead into the darkest tones, were made using ink derived from skies charged with carbon black - $10\mu\text{g}$ and $9\mu\text{g}$ of carbon black particles per meter cubed of air - while the less charged skies of the last day resulted in a much paler portrait.



x3

More than the paralysis of the apocalyptic sublime of climate breakdown, these portraits of skies open up another mode of the sublime, closer to home. Anaïs's protocol - borne of her dialogues with atmospheric scientists - doesn't reduce our *atmospheric lifeworld* to the mute reality of atoms, it doesn't set the gnostic against the pathic. This is important. The collaboration at the heart of Anaïs's practice points to a way beyond either the technological boosterism of geo-engineering, in which the unintentional consequences of technology are solved by more technology, or the technological phobia of those calling for a return to lived experience unmediated by technology, free of the mortifying certainties of scientific reductionism. If the story of our constitutional entanglement with fire has a moral to it, it is that our experience of the world is fundamentally mediated, extended, transformed by our technologies that plug into and harness the earth's elemental intensities - fire but also sun, wind, water, animal, bacteria. In collaboration with physicists, with their equipment and expertise in atmospheric chemistry and meteorology, Anaïs's protocol performs the lightest of gestures, at once tool and instrument effecting the slightest *détournement*, presenting our everyday sky back to us, inside out, its material seams visible. It doesn't reduce our lifeworld to the mute, odourless reality of atoms but draws a momentary bridge within the sensible, a momentarily altered aesthetic, in which our porosity to the world beyond our grasp, beyond the glare of our daily activity, is made tangible, is made present.



Before this Parliament of Clouds, we are brought back to the air, to our breathing, to the quality of this relation, to our inherent vulnerability as atmospheric beings. We have no choice but to breathe. Breathing is both exhalation, our own and that of our technology, our chimneys, our exhausts, our off gassing computers - the unthought, uncounted remainder of our activities of world-making that necessarily transform the milieu into which they join and mingle - and inhalation, in which air becomes manifest as a matter of concern.

We have no choice but to breathe. The atmosphere is our common into which we are thrown, on which we are utterly dependent. As Peter Sloterdijk argues, the First World War marks the moment when war took its target beyond man to the air he breathes, to the air we all breathe¹⁵. Chlorine, phosgene, mustard gas allowed the atmosphere, the medium itself, to be brought in the cross-hairs. But the drifting clouds of yellow gas only weaponised the smogs that drifted over the Meuse, over the roofs of Birmingham and London, over our industrialised cities our countryside, our ecosystems. Air was already the site of collateral damage. Through war, they came into focus.

This brings us back to the field of contemporary art, where the medium has taken on a predominant role, where the notion of representation has dissolved from 'Turner to the Impressionists and then to the artists of the twentieth century," says Daniel Bounie¹⁶. Representation is no longer concerned with what the eye or the body grasps, but it is seized by. Duchamp's ampoule d'*Air de Paris*, i.e. an ampoule that contains the ambient air that we breathe. With *Le Parlement de Nuages*, it is from the medium itself that the photograph emerges. The photographs are made of the particulate matter contained in this air, they body forth the medium, and they make hesitate before drawing our next breath.

According to Luce Irigaray, it is our future task to become awakened to a new ethical constellation in which we will be "making awareness of the breath essential for an embodied ethics of difference in our globalized, ecological age". If, as Tonino Griffero tells us, "[b]reathing is openness, that is, respiratory

¹⁵ Sloterdijk, P. (2009). *Terror from the Air*, translated by A. Patton and S. Corcoran, London: dSemiotext(e)

¹⁶ Bounie, D. (2021). "Un Objet Ironique" in (eds) A. Faure and P. Mouillon. *Dépassements*. Grenoble: Local contemporain,

openness, a perpetual opening to the atmosphere of air”¹⁷, what is respiratory openness in the age of carbon black?

¹⁷ Griffero, T. (2020). “It Blows Where It Wishes: The Wind as a Quasi-Thingly Atmosphere”. *Venti Journal*, 1(1), pp. 31-38