

# Handbook of Research on the Relationship Between Autobiographical Memory and Photography

Mark Bruce Nigel Ingham

*London College of Communication, University of the Arts London, UK*

Nela Milic

*London College of Communication, University of the Arts London, UK*

Vasileios Kantas

*University of West Attica, Greece*

Sara Andersdotter

*University of the Creative Arts, Sweden*

Paul Lowe

*London College of Communication, University of the Arts London, UK*

A volume in the Advances in Media,  
Entertainment, and the Arts (AMEA) Book Series



Published in the United States of America by

IGI Global  
Information Science Reference (an imprint of IGI Global)  
701 E. Chocolate Avenue  
Hershey PA, USA 17033  
Tel: 717-533-8845  
Fax: 717-533-8661  
E-mail: [cust@igi-global.com](mailto:cust@igi-global.com)  
Web site: <http://www.igi-global.com>

Copyright © 2023 by IGI Global. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or distributed in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, without written permission from the publisher. Product or company names used in this set are for identification purposes only. Inclusion of the names of the products or companies does not indicate a claim of ownership by IGI Global of the trademark or registered trademark.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Ingham, Mark, 1960- editor.

Title: Handbook of research on the relationship between autobiographical memory and photography / Mark Ingham, Nela Milic, Vasileios Kantas, Sara Andersdotter, and Paul Lowe, editors.

Description: Hershey, PA : Information Science Reference, [2023] | Includes bibliographical references and index. | Summary: "Autobiographical memory and photography have been inextricably linked since the first photographs appeared during the 19th Century and this book edited and written by world-class scholars who are both theorists and practitioners will add significantly to the debate about how we remember the past and how we do this through, with and by photography and photographs"-- Provided by publisher.

Identifiers: LCCN 2022027501 (print) | LCCN 2022027502 (ebook) | ISBN 9781668453377 (hardcover) | ISBN 9781668453384 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Photography--Psychological aspects. | Autobiographical memory in photographs. | Autobiographical memory.

Classification: LCC TR183 .C665 2023 (print) | LCC TR183 (ebook) | DDC 770--dc23/eng/20220808

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022027501>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022027502>

This book is published in the IGI Global book series Advances in Media, Entertainment, and the Arts (AMEA) (ISSN: 2475-6814; eISSN: 2475-6830)

British Cataloguing in Publication Data

A Cataloguing in Publication record for this book is available from the British Library.

All work contributed to this book is new, previously-unpublished material. The views expressed in this book are those of the authors, but not necessarily of the publisher. Chapters contained in this book include concepts and various forms of artistic expression that may be considered profane, offensive, or vulgar to some readers and cultures. Reader discretion is advised.

For electronic access to this publication, please contact: [eresources@igi-global.com](mailto:eresources@igi-global.com).

## Chapter 23

# Urgent Autobiographies: Lived Experiences of Ecology in Photographic Practice

**Catarina Fontoura**  
*Falmouth University, UK*

### ABSTRACT

*This chapter develops on topics explored in the seminar the author has curated and facilitated for the Global Photographies Network in late 2021 entitled ‘Urgent Stories: Lived Experiences of a Changing planet’, bringing together photography and arts practice, eco-philosophy, science and literature. Whilst the six-day seminar series looked to address the question of ‘What climate collapse asks of us?’, this chapter looks to build a cohesive understanding of how photographic practice can respond to environmental change by focusing on ecological awareness and storytelling in autobiography- and lived experienced-based work. Drawing from the photographic work of seminar participants, the chapter weaves the elements of memory, archive, and relationship between oral storytelling and photographs into this discussion. Consequently, this chapter argues that storytelling based on first person accounts of ecology and change is not only a valuable tool in climate action, but urgent work in shaping heightened ecological consciousness.*

### INTRODUCTION

*‘Human beings did not invent stories. We arrived inside of them.’ Sophie Strand (2021)*

*‘All there is, whilst things perpetually fall apart, is the possibility of acting from where we are.’ Vanessa Machado (Machado de Oliveira, 2021)*

Lineage, ancestry, inherited or past community networks, in other words, human bonds, are an important part of the ecology of the species to which we belong, albeit not a central one. Situating ourselves in our own life stories as well as in larger human stories enables us to consider the processes of life and

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-5337-7.ch023

## ***Urgent Autobiographies***

death that ultimately, we are. Once we can play with the concertina of our individual human stories, and those of our recent ancestors, we start stumbling upon non-human ecologies so deep and so involved in our own autobiographies, as what we call ‘the self’.

Ecological storytelling asks us to consider that we, individual human beings, don’t have one single story, but thousands, sporulating and happening at the same time and through cycles, irreversibly woven into the processes of other living beings, most of the time in ways which can’t be made fully visible. It seems that because they cannot be made fully visible, most human beings I know see no point in engaging with them, in imagining them and playing with them and witnessing them. How can you witness, honour something invisible? That sounds just too *wooo* for most of us. ‘Because science’ someone held on a mug filled with coffee in a zoom conference last year. Either, or, all or nothing. This chapter invites readers, students, creative humans to use their creative practices and brains to activate the power of ‘and’: there is me *and*... what else is there? This exercise locates human bodies in more than human ecologies.

Ecological autobiographies and lineage stories are thus an essential part of the productive collapse of the ways of thinking and living which evidently are producing violent changes in our planet and in our own selves. As Ailton Krenak puts it ‘If people are not attached / bonded to their ancestral memory, with the references that sustain identity, they will become insane, in this insane world we share’ (Krenak, 2020).

One could argue that within all the human lineages currently in existence we can find stories of extractivism, and its close relatives, white supremacy, and the patriarchy. They can be found in a prism of perspectives and experiences, entangled in the lives of our most recent ancestors, as well as in our own. Positioning our autobiographies within these complex violent systems with curiosity allows us to approach the conditions, limits, and the possibilities of our concrete actions towards social and ecological change. This way, in our new autobiographies, we can see ourselves as descents, accomplices, casualties of the abject events of the world *and* simultaneously resourceful and capable of emergent action. We begin perceiving ourselves as profoundly embedded in wide ecologies / social systems *and* individual beings in our own right. As Alexis argues complicity and compromise are a starting point for action (Shotwell, 2016).

This chapter draws upon eco-philosophy and visual studies literature, alongside the autobiographical and photographic work of the participants of the Global Network Photographies online seminar entitled ‘Urgent Stories’, the first iteration of which happened in November 2021 and which I have designed and facilitated.

The participants were invited to read and discuss literature, to share autobiographical stories of ecology and entanglement, to make work drawing from these stories and experiences. They were also invited to reflect upon how the act of remembering, imagining, shaping, and creating autobiographies as embedded beings within deep ecologies and we all found that this has a profound impact in reframing the way we think about our changing environments. Memory takes here an important role, allowing individuals to make sense of past events and re-think them, as complex, multidimensional and subjective lines of narrative which keep those events alive and useful to us in present day. Photographs in family archives and albums, photographic diaries, recorded oral stream of consciousness, interviews with family members and oral storytelling in a virtual space were some of tools used by participants to activate memory in a first instance. These improvised methodologies lead them to the use of photographic practice to fabricate new autobiographies, framed and conceived through a somewhat paradoxical lens of both ecological decentring and of rooting of the self within somatic experience, lineage, territory.

Celia Lury reminds us that ‘vision and self-knowledge have become inextricably and productively intertwined in modern Euro-American societies’ (Lury, 1998), presenting photography as medium as

capable of offering a way into ‘personhood, self-knowledge and truth’. We approached this argument as a clear possibility and as a legacy of colonial processes, which sought to erase other ways of knowing and of configuring autobiography. During the seminar the participants explored the limits of the photographic medium in this context, filling the gaps by witnessing one another’s indigeneity and personal histories through oral storytelling, counteracting those legacies with age-old universal and relational human narrative building ingredients: the hearth and the spoken word.

Above all, the seminar and this chapter begin to approach the complex idea that we can reconfigure and re-imagine our autobiographies so that we become aware of their limitations as ‘culturally prescribed forms of organizing events’ (Fivush & Haden, 2003), and make our autobiographies more useful to us as individuals and communities, as our planet faces unprecedented change. Melting ourselves into the ecological narratives of oceans, farms, peat or chestnut trees ought to have some impact in how we make use of our agency during our lifetime.

Climate activism movements call every person to decentre themselves and show up in this moment, to gather the pieces of a broken world, to do the work of mending. Art is here a crucial worker. Storytelling is, in this time, urgent. Visual artists and photographers have deepened the understanding of change that lies ahead for humans and non-humans alike. Throughout this chapter I will be using terms such as ‘storytelling’, ‘ecology’ and ‘autobiography’ as key concepts to understand the emergent and rich contemporary practice which fearlessly asks painful questions about the moments we are now experiencing. For the reader, it is important that I mention that I hold such concepts both very lightly, in the sense that anything can be a story, and everything is ecology, but also sacredly, as I have come to understand these two concepts as pillars of meaningful human experience and of Arts practice.

In this chapter the word ‘story’ can be seen as spacious and encompassing of many ways of thinking. When using the word story, I may not be referring only to narrative as a clear ‘sequence of events through time, usually linked by some pattern of causality’ but also as ‘interpretation or meaning’ (Nanson, 2005), acknowledging that human brains evolved through thousands of years with mysterious stories. Stories heavily laden with symbols, metaphors, archetypes, non-sensical and inexplicable events or timeframes, imaginary spaces where seemingly impossible things happen, making impossible things all the more possible in the present moment for both the teller and the listener(s). This concept of story acknowledges that stories are powerful; that stories ‘do things’ beyond the conscious mind. In this sense, stories are gifts to be received, they are medicine to be administered (Estés, 2003), and they are alive.

The science of ecology is a synthesizing discipline that brings together various natural sciences to seek understanding of the complex web of connections among the biosphere’s multiplicity of living and non-living components. An awareness of ecology allows artists to celebrate and stand in awe of connection and how it manifests in the world. Leaning into ecology, we aim to unlearn toxic and violent aspects of modernity, hospicing it through the self with humility and resolve (Machado de Oliveira, 2021).

Autobiography as the narrative of the self enters this discussion as a particularly interesting concept as, throughout this chapter, I build upon the eco-philosophical understanding of human beings embedded and enmeshed in ecological networks, helping us configure the self as the world and world as self (Macy, 2007). The ways in which life systems are entangled and interdependent are truly impossible to *fully* comprehend, retrace and map, which allow the mystery of the self to emerge, not as part of the post-modern shattering of the self, a place of fragmented identities, but as a more-than-human blurring of the boundaries of the self through ecological lens shift, giving way to new possibilities of thinking and feeling our way through autobiographies written, spoken or visual.

## ***Urgent Autobiographies***

The writer and poet Sophie Strand makes the case for ecological storytelling which I have used as a guiding compass when thinking about, writing about, and producing photographic autobiographies. She writes: ‘Every story, like every human body is an ecosystem of other stories: the virus that taught us mammals how to develop wombs, the ancient ecological pressures that moulded us into multicellularity, our pulsing microbiome, our fungi-dusted skin, our metabolic reciprocity with every substance we breathe and drink and eat. Every recombinatory miracle of genetics gives birth not to an individual on a hero’s journey but to a biodiversity of competing and converging aliveness’ (Strand, 2021).

Therefore, this chapter is just one of many possible configurations of ideas and work surrounding these concepts, born through conversation and storytelling and it also is a call-out for a more expansive collection of ecological autobiographies in photographic practice.

Here I would also like to acknowledge and testify to the power of intentional learning events and communities, such as the Urgent Stories GNP seminar, and how this group of people helped me seeing myself as a facilitator and creator of spaces for storytelling. I would like to thank each participant for the stories shared orally and visually during the seminar. These stories of ancestry, farming, nuclear waste, packaging, migration, enslavement, community futures, walking, disability, sunsets and more, truly formed a rich web of connections we will draw from in years to come.

Vanessa de Machado writes of the work needed to be done to slowly disinvest from toxic and violent aspects of Modernity. Art, storytelling, and pedagogical work examined in this chapter are a way to respond to that need, by paradoxically decentring the human in human life narratives. At the end, I leave you some reflective and practice prompts used during the seminar, which any creative group of people can take and use in an intentional manner to open discussion and connection.

## **A Mosaic of Voices: Lived Experiences of a Changing Planet**

To argue that Art’s role in climate action is primarily to help communicate science, raise awareness of destructive patterns, or to document events of climate change is reductionist. Lived experiences, autobiographies of a warming world and ecological stories recounted by a global network of story tellers, a ‘mosaic of voices’ (Brown, 2022), across the Global South and Global North and received by a tenfold larger network of deep listeners are some Art’s most important work. Telling and listening of stories is an emergency.

These stories are urgent, and they can have a profound effect in the way we process loss, move through grief, acknowledge deep shifts in ways of thinking, activate change, find hope, and connect with others across generations and into the future. Alongside the creating, telling and listening of new stories, a re-engagement is needed with older living stories. Many indigenous people from around our planet have risen and despite putting themselves in peril<sup>1</sup>, they have shared the power and importance of stories which evolved with our species, over thousands of years to help us remain in reciprocity with our lands and our non-human kin. May we all also listen to these stories, so generously shared with outsiders (Yunkaporta, 2021).

‘What is your urgent story?’ I ask the participants, expecting a delayed response over days, weeks or even years, after we said our hellos over a zoom screen, seeing just enough of each other’s faces to co-regulate, become familiar and stop our hearts from beating fast and our palms from sweating, from meeting new people we can’t smell.

After a couple of days of conversations over our lands and some practice prompts, Sitaara Stodel, from South Africa introduces what she has been thinking about: ‘I have called my sister’ she says, and

we delight in seeing a little handmade book. ‘My sister told me the ocean holds a lot of trauma,’ Sitaara recounts. ‘I am aware that my ancestors have travelled over the ocean, some escaping, some looking forward to a new future and some by force, as slaves. When I hear waves crashing or look at the sea, I don’t just see a body of water. Subconsciously even, I see my lineage’

*Figure 1. Sitaara Stodel, South Africa Based Artist and Global Photographies Network Seminar Participant ‘The Whispers are getting louder’, 2021 (© 2021, used with permission)*



Sitaara’s ease in extending herself in narrative terms, left the group silent. A witnessing kind of spacious, unusual although familiar kind of silence. Her story wasn’t just her story anymore, it was the ocean’s story and the ocean’s story were hers. Rightfully claimed. In her book, composed of found photography collages and text, she is not posing solutions, she doesn’t present alternative ways of thinking or being, or even lays out information about the trauma the ocean holds. She is present with that trauma and facilitates that space for others.

What is the role of Art as humans and non-humans navigate these murky and unsteady waters? Is it to help create solutions? Raise awareness? Document change and impact? I propose that for over 42000 years or more, Art has been doing something else, which is perfectly suited to this critical moment. Allowing humans to ‘sit with the scream’ as Akomolafe shares<sup>2</sup> echoing Ben Okri’s call to listen to the speech, the cries, the howls and the screams (Okri, 1998). To be present with the change and perceiving the world as change. Joanna Macy also wrote: ‘the most radical thing any of us can do is to be fully present in what is happening in the world’ (Macy, 2007).

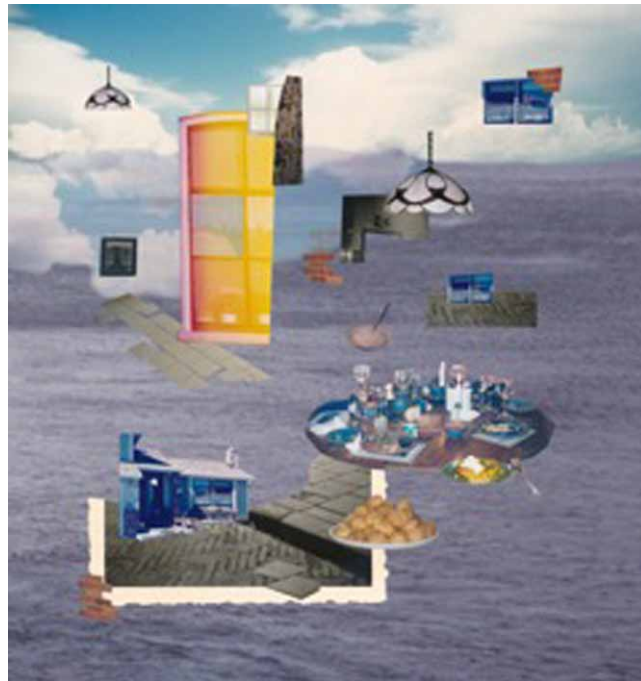
When reflecting upon the process of telling this story she writes: ‘I then stepped back to see what I was trying to tell myself’, here expressing an important thought about ecological stories: that, as storytellers, we are also the recipients of our stories, they hold the same power to us as they do to others.

‘Growing up’ she says ‘we would move house suddenly; I would get sick almost every single time. I had asthma as a child. It felt like I was drowning. I often dream of the sea, too. I am falling into the

## ***Urgent Autobiographies***

water, deep, deep down. I am on the edge of a rock, trying to escape the crashing waves. I am in a house, looking out of the window as water floods the room.’ These dreams, these lineage stories of ocean crossing are part of her autobiography and are now acknowledged in her photographic practice. In ‘*Seaside*’, the collage below, we can see an almost exact description of Stodel’s recurrent dream, re-imagined, conjured to make the invisible, visible.

*Figure 2. Sitaara Stodel, South Africa Based Artist, and Global Photographies Network Seminar Participant ‘Seaside, 2022 (© 2022, used with permission)*



A question which resurfaced during our seminar sounded something like this: ‘What can artwork do to influence - positive - change?’ Notice the difference between this question and ‘What can artists do in the face of climate collapse?’. The former question, rightfully, imbues creative objects and images with a level of agency in the world, ‘they go out and do things’ kind of agency. The underlying fear amongst the participants, which I share from time to time, is that artworks are doing nothing, at best.

As we navigated these questions and fears through conversation and sharing the artworks and photographs which we felt had done something, the group eased into thoughts that change is always happening in networkable links and live connections which, much like dark matter clusters travelling through the universe for billions of years to form human and non-human bodies, are utterly and beautifully impossible to retrace. As Octavia Butler puts it: ‘The only lasting truth is change.’ Can artworks hold the power to address the underlying causes of the symptoms we and our systems – including our own human lives and bodies - are experiencing? Can they germinate change in habitual thinking, working with the plasticity of our own brains? As Sally Gillespie writes: ‘To even begin to deal with the climate crisis we need to engage in the work of changing consciousness. This is particularly true for those of us who have been



educated in the Western belief systems with all their assumptions about how humans are separate and superior to the ‘natural’ world’ (Gillespie, 2019).

Maggie Barret, a UK based USA artist continued the theme of water ecologies in her storytelling to our intimate group: ‘I grew up near Niagara Falls, in Buffalo, New York, where there is a lot of water. [...] Growing up my dad talked a lot about taking short showers. We went on a road trip once in the American West and he talk all about water.’ Barret’s father had served in the Peace Corps in Benin and Burkina Faso as an alternative to service in the Vietnam War, working on irrigation projects. Water was a big part of his autobiography and photography albums of his travels to West Africa seeped into Barret’s own life story and imaginary.

*Figure 3. Maggie Barret, U.S.A Based Artist and Global Photographies Network Seminar Participant ‘Water Begins to Rise’, 202. (© 2021, used with permission)*



‘Waters begin to Rise’ is a collage accompanied by an audio short story, thinking about ‘climate change as colonialism or an outcome of colonialism’ and the reckoning of ancestral stories of white people managing water. In her storytelling, Maggie refers to a lecture we watched as we prepared for our seminar where Angaangaq Angakkorsuag, a member of Kalaallit Nuaat, from Greenland claimed settlers of North America and other parts, white people of European descend, did not possess the skill of managing water.<sup>3</sup> If this was true, as Maggie sensed it was by facing up to her love of hot showers, what was the impact of her father’s interventions in those West African communities, as a white member of a dominant culture where he came from, the territory of the Seneca Nation, member of the Haudenosaunee / Six Nations Confederacy<sup>4</sup> in a place renamed Buffalo, New York. By looking at her father’s life, whilst grieving his death, Maggie intertwines global ecologies of water, colonialism, and climate change, claiming these as her ecologies, her stories. As we have discovered through our conversation and stories told, climate change is not an externality, is not simply a combination of weather patterns ‘is spills onto how we relate to each other, how we dream, eat, and compose lyrics about the world’<sup>5</sup>.

## ***Urgent Autobiographies***

Marcella Villagran, an artist and photographer from Argentina works in collaboration with female performance artists creating spaces of improvisation and sharing wordless stories through the body, sections of which are documented and communicated through moving image and photography. Marcella tells her story of being in a - female- body through mirroring and working with other bodies. Thinking about the ecological boundaries of the body as a processual material, still and always in the making, without a fixed essence. Not even fully human, but a domestic space for non-human universes, 'a nested system for other entities' (Machado, 202, 225).

*Figure 4. Marcela Villagran, Argentinian Artist and Global Photographies Network Seminar Participant 'Jardin Interior', 2018 – ongoing (© 2018 - ongoing, used with permission)*



'In this way of letting myself go, I listen intently to the bodies of the performers, and I speak to them, of my intentions.' Whilst acutely aware of the performer Leila Pereira's emotional and creative state, in *'Jardin Interior'* (Villagran 2018), Villagran takes her on a long woodland walk and is surprised to discover upon arriving at a stream, the performer washing her menstrual blood in unspoken libation as part of her improvised performance. Pouring libation is an intuitive way to connect with what is beyond one-self, with what is past and future, with what is alive and dead. The nutrition, yeasts, cells, and water of this libation are diluted and become invisible before our eyes, whilst still being there, just as they were when Leila's hand first was submerged in the water. Could it be said that part of Leila was now in the stream flowing down to sea? Goodbye Leila.

Vanessa Machado argues that 'experiencing the world and ourselves in it as metabolism gives us one way of recalibrating our existence – away from separability and toward entanglement (...) Metabolic literacies are about intake, process, integration, and output in nested layers.' It all starts in the body, in this photographic work by exposing and processing reproductive metabolic temporal realities of entanglement.

In *'Refugio'* (Villagran, 2019-2020), Villagran uses her constructive energy and both wild and typically household, kitchen Argentinean natural objects, to sculpt bird nests to conjure and enact safety and refuge. 'One sets to find or create refuge when one feels there is something from which one must protect oneself' says Villagran. In this body of work two themes intersect, she says: the refuge each of us seeks in the face of climate collapse and the systems which consider our world as 'place for consumption'. It also acts as the refuge needed as Villagran herself re-visits experiences of living within a female body and the danger that this involves in patriarchal societies. These processes and creations enable Villagran to access and approach her body as refuge, as sanctuary.

*Figure 5. Marcela Villagran, Argentinian Artist and Global Photographies Network Seminar Participant 'Refugio', 2021. (© 2021, used with permission)*



Max Rowe, a retired climate research scientist, developed a relationship with peat bogs growing up in the North Yorkshire Moors, planning local walks with a childhood friend, then being compelled to get know peat further, moving to Scotland and continuing his own parents' hillwalking habits, noticing the 'forces at work' within these landscapes, he says. His work *'Peat, Post and Paths'*, produced in the Island of Harris and Lewis in Scotland, consider parallels and enmeshed relationships between ecological and cultural heritage and that these relationships have stories of their own, which speak of human and more-than-human sites and agencies. He continues: 'For centuries, the subsistence crofters

## ***Urgent Autobiographies***

have relied on peat for fuel. Its cutting, drying, and burning are part of islander's heritage. We can be too quick to condemn this activity as contributing to global warming. The vast tracts of peat thicken a few millimetres each year and as they do so, they capture and store vast quantities of atmospheric carbon dioxide. A quick, back of the envelope, calculation showed me that, even if every household on the island used peat as its primary fuel, the carbon emitted would be very small compared to the amount of carbon captured by the island's peat.'

*Figure 6. Max Rowe, U.K Based Artist and Global Photographies Network Seminar Participant 'Peat, Posts and Paths', 2021. (© 2021, used with permission)*



This body of work is dialogue-based, not only with the land through walking, somatic and sensorial experiences of the peatbog, but also with ancient land stewarding and energy practices. As I write this chapter, the UK is facing an unprecedented energy crisis, which by the end of this year, will have seen energy costs double, leaving millions of people in fuel poverty<sup>6</sup>. As modernity is fuelled by stories of separation, people from land, land from energy, Max Rowe's story of a life-long love affair with peat is a story of connectedness and collectivism which extends to energy, fuel, land, and people. The block of peat and book of the same size and format, make both much more treasure-like than they would be without one another. Interacting with the natural object, the peat block, as precious work, and labour,

creates a curious invitation through which we can engage with Rowe's photobook as precious work and labour. To think of labour and work as purely human activities is a missed opportunity to see whole islands, as Rowe describes, working in sustaining life systems.

*Figure 7. Max Rowe, U.K Based Artist and Global Photographies Network Seminar Participant 'Peat, Posts and Paths', 2021. (© 2021, used with permission)*

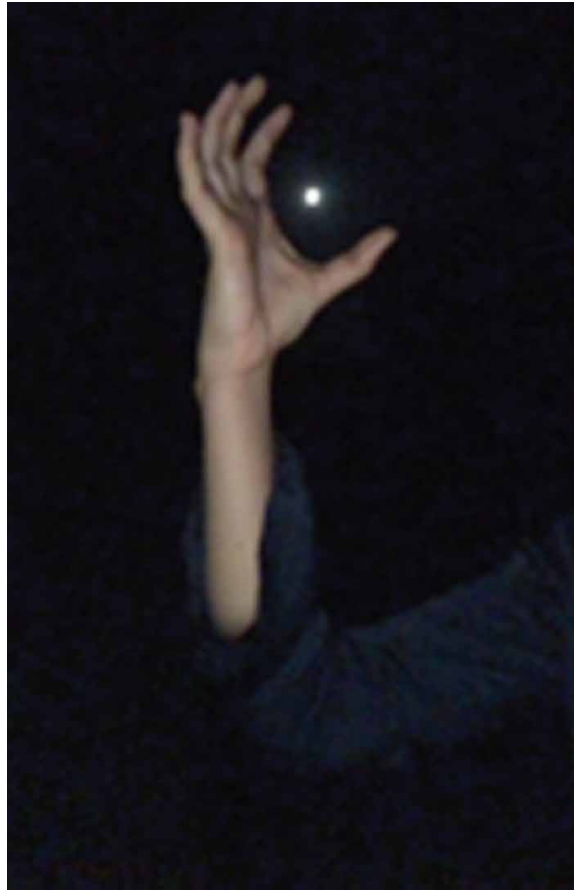


Throughout his book, Rowe's photographs of found man-made and natural objects, give us the palpable sense that any distinctions between the later and former are purely imaginative, in the way they are approached and photographed. The photographic apparatus as a mechanical, physical, and chemical tool to relate to the world, is used here as a hierarchy flattening tool. Peat and Post and Path share an imagined representational platform of coexistence.

Eve Stotesbury is writing to me from a storm hit tent in the Isle of Arran, in the West coast of Scotland. Following the seminar, we found some pleasurable synchronicities about facing West and being aware of the cosmos above us. Stotesbury's writes: 'A sense of questioning reality – our perception of the world and our surroundings / environment is central to my practice.' Between images of the sun, shadows, strange transformations in the world, Stotesbury's practice expands the sense of possibility in the spatial realms we inhabit. Her work challenges our brains to think of physical realities and ecologies as profoundly and dramatically changeable things we like to think as rather fixed: 'We are spatial beings; vision is powerful, and space transcends language'. Here she is introducing vision and the photographic medium as a tool to expand and experience possibility in our surroundings, exploring notions of permanence and impermanence. During one of our sessions, Stotesbury shares with the group the experience of OCD and creative practice, connecting to our sessions always from a roofless space due to a fear of being inside. She explains how her condition has moulded her work, inviting her, sometimes forcefully, to take risks, walking at night, using creativity to help process and love 'sleepless nights and restless energy'.

## ***Urgent Autobiographies***

*Figure 8. Eve Stotesbury, U.K Based Artist and Global Photographies Network Seminar Participant 'Which way now?', 2021. (© 2021, used with permission)*



The two photographs above were taken amidst lockdown, in Menorca Spain, where Stotesbury move to during the pandemic. They were taken after dark, after curfew, walking under the moonlight in an illegal trespassing of pandemic laws, in a tension between the expanse of land and sea and the restrictions of covid19. In the photographs where celestial bodies and human bodies 'meet', Stotesbury is interested in concepts of time, space, and presence on Earth, connecting human scale with 'wider forces and spaces of universe and its cycles'. Swans float in space, like astronomic beings, starlike, dispersed and moving in fractal patters, entangling the story of swans and the story of planetary and astral bodies. 'Entanglement is the story' Eve writes, and I nod.

'Physical work always for me has been the thing that I wanted to do. I have never been compelled to work in any line of work that doesn't have a physical aspect to it. And that is because I have grown up on a farm' says Toby Woolen, who shared stories and his intersections between farming and photographic processes, both requiring his material and physical involvement. 'Farming is not what it was 10 years ago, let alone 50 years ago, when my grandparents were doing it', reflecting on the robotization of farming and image making to 'feed the beast that is capitalism', exploring how capitalism is directly involved in shaping farming and art ecologies. Talking about 'Tiny Paces' (2021), Woolen explores how due to



the materiality of his upbringing, his childhood memories of play and learning are locked into materials, objects, farming instruments, tools, places, and landscapes. This series of photographs approaches these objects and places in a playful way, re-remembering and performing memories of growing up in a working ancestral farm in England, to understand and relate to it somatically, spatially, and ecologically. Woolen says: ‘What do trees smell like? What trees are best to climb? How do you take sap off your hands? What ants bite and which ones don’t? Which flies bite and which ones don’t? Which plants hurt you and which ones don’t? What is the deepest part of the river? Which is the best place to cross the river? I learned all from playing.’

*Figure 9. Eve Stotesbury, U.K Based Artist and Global Photographies Network Seminar Participant ‘Which way now?’, 2021. (© 2021, used with permission)*



This project is about relationships between human, soil, land, instrument, play, childhood, adulthood, hiding and seeking, using photography to explore an artist’s positioning within a farming family, encountering conversion and diversion between the two, from the perspective of a creative person in the middle of a loving relationship to land and farming and the toxic practices of capitalism, aware and entangled in both.

The sharing and listening of life stories, witnessing others create new purposeful and intentional stories is as rich of an activity as any that one can engage with. Although our time together was short, only six days, we got to say and listen to things never uttered before and that is a profound privilege to have had. It is rare that an event involving such number of people, 16 in total, gives more energy that it takes. I know I speak for many of the participants, when I write that this seminar was much needed mulch which will feed and keep us going for a while.

***Urgent Autobiographies***

*Figure 10. Toby Woolen, U.K Based Artist and Global Photographies Network Seminar Participant 'Tiny Paces', 2021*



*Figure 11. Toby Woolen, U.K Based Artist and Global Photographies Network Seminar Participant 'Tiny Paces', 2021. (© 2021, used with permission)*





## CONCLUSION

The readings, references and photographic work explored in this chapter reflect upon worldviews, cosmovisions, histories and stories of humans' relationship with this planet, with their many regional specificities and universal common grounds. It also hopes to bring a realisation and acceptance of the scale and permanence of that change. The curated content invited here points to two pillar concepts - which in themselves have many layers:

The first is a genuine shift in self-perception, from the point of view of European centred culture. This shift has been away from centering 'the human' and seeing humans as the pinnacle of evolution on earth and it asks European derived cultures to give up some of their core beliefs and sees the idea that our species can control the planet as a mere fantasy. At the same time, those of us raised in these Euro-centric traditions, are awakening to our entanglement to the world we have been destroying and taking from, without reciprocity. It is becoming clearer that human beings cannot transcend our reliance and codependence on our environment and other beings. How can Art help us move towards an understanding that the world as alive, humans are directly deriving from and in constant physical exchange with a never static and ever-changing field of entanglements? (Akomolafe, 2021).

The second idea has all to do with Art and asks the question: What does climate collapse ask of us, artists? The critical framework of the climate crisis has opened new fields of enquiry of artists to evaluate, hold accountable and re-think aspects past and current dynamics. But not only that. As Tim Morton sees it, the former realization can be a liberation. If we give up the delusion that we can control everything around us, we might refocus ourselves on the pleasure we take from our environment, other beings, and life itself. By doing so, reconnect with our own criticality, post-humanity, individuality, and creativity, with our past and our future in meaningful and genuine ways.

Adrienne Maree Brown puts forward the concept of emergence, as critical lens shifts in which 'all of us can begin to see the world in life-code – awakening to the sacred systems of life all around us. [...] Emergence emphasizes critical connections over critical mass, building authentic relationships, listening with all the senses of the body and the mind' (Brown, 2022). Not only do we need our individuality as we need to connect our minds to the minds of others in emergence, becoming plural, akin to flocking birds.

## Seminar Reflection and Practice Prompts

Wherever you are beginning this, take a deep breath and notice how you feel in your body, and how the world around you, feels' Take a breath for the past and those who came before you, human and non-human, previous configurations of ancient matter. Take a breath for those who will come after who, your direct and indirect descendants, humans, and non-humans and for how your being will seep into theirs, seamlessly and lovingly. Take a deep breath for the present and those, human and non-human who you are sharing it with<sup>7</sup>.

Now, here is an invitation to craft a response to the following questions, in your head, or you can write it down or make voice notes, you can also create artifacts or images as response to these questions.

- What ecologies are you a part of?
- Who are your ancestors and how can their stories help us understand a warming world?
- Sit somewhere out in your part of the world for a good while and listen.
- What can you hear?

## ***Urgent Autobiographies***

- What stories do you see unfold around you? How do you relate to them?
- How are your story and the non-human stories around you, entangled?
- What is your urgent story?

## **REFERENCES**

- Akomolafe, B. (2020). *We Will Tell Our Stories*. Writings Bayo Akomolafe. Bayoakomolafe.net. <https://www.bayoakomolafe.net/post/we-will-tell-our-stories>
- Akomolafe, B. (2021). *Offerings*. Bayo Akomolafe. <https://www.bayoakomolafe.net/offerings#chapter-2-1-1>
- Akomolafe, B. (2021). What Climate Collapse Asks of Us. *The Emergence Network*. <http://www.emergencenetwork.org/whatclimatecollapseasksofus/>
- Akomolafe, B. (2021). Climate Crisis, Fragmentation and Collective Trauma. *Wisdom of Trauma: Trauma talk series with w/ Bayo Akomolafe, Eriel Tchekwie Deranger, Angaangaq Angakkorsuaq & Dr. Gabor Maté*. <https://www.thewisdomoftrauma.com>
- Brown, A. (2022). *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds* (1st ed.). AK Press.
- Burbridge, B. (2020). *Photography After Capitalism*. Goldsmith's Press.
- Demos, T., Scott, E., & Banerjee, S. (2021). *The Routledge Companion to Contemporary Art, Visual Culture, and Climate Change* (1st ed.). Routledge.
- Estés, C. (2003). *Women who run with the wolves*. Ballantine Books.
- Fivush, R., & Haden, C. A. (2003). *Autobiographical Memory and the Construction of a Narrative Self: Developmental and Cultural Perspectives*. Taylor and Francis Group. doi:10.4324/9781410607478
- Gillespie, S. (2019). *Climate Crisis and Consciousness Re-imagining Our World and Ourselves* (1st ed.). Routledge. doi:10.4324/9780429346811
- Johnson, A., & Wilkinson, K. (2020). *All we can save: Truth, Courage and Solutions for the Climate Crisis*. Penguin Random House.
- Krenak, A. (2020). *Ideas to Postpone the End of the World*. House of Anansi Press.
- Labanut, B. (2021). *When We Cease to Understand the World*. Pushkin Press.
- Lury, C. (1988). *Prosthetic culture: Photography, memory and identity*. Routledge.
- Machado de Oliveira, V. (2021). *Hospicing Modernity: Facing Humanity's Wrongs and the Implications for Social Activism*. North Atlantic Books.
- Macy, J. (2007). *World as Lover, World as Self*. Parallax Press.
- Morton, T. (2018). *Dark Ecology*. Columbia University Press.
- Morton, T. (2021). *All art is ecological* (1st ed.). Penguin.

- Nanson, A. (2005). *Storytelling and ecology* [Pontypridd]. University of Glamorgan Press for the Society for Storytelling.
- Nanson, A. (2021). *Storytelling and ecology: Empathy, Enchantment and Emergence in the Use of Oral Narratives* (1st ed.). Bloomsbury. doi:10.5040/9781350114951
- National Energy Action. (2022). Energy Crisis. NEA. <https://www.nea.org.uk/energy-crisis/>
- Okri, B. (1998). *A Way of Being Free* (1st ed.). Phoenix Paperbacks.
- Shotwell, A. (2016). *Against Purity: Living Ethically in Compromised Times*. Minnesota University Press.
- Strand, S. 2021 *Ecological Storytelling*. Borrowed Time In Conversation. <https://borrowed-time.info/in-conversation-with-sophie-strand/>
- The Haudenosaunee Confederacy. (2022). *Welcome*. Haudenosaunee Confederacy. <https://www.haudenosauneeconfederacy.com/>
- Tsing, A. (2021). *The mushroom at the end of the world* (1st ed.). Princeton University Press.
- Yunkaporta, T. (2021). *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World* (1st ed.). HarperOne.
- Yusoff, K. (2019). *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or none*. Minnesota University Press.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> See for instance the experiences shared in the film ‘The Magnitude of All Things’ by Jennifer Abbott. <https://www.themagnitudeofallthings.com> and this science and non-duality video: [shorturl.at/dmwRY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dmwRY).
- <sup>2</sup> See We Will Tell Our Stories. <https://www.bayoakomolafe.net/post/we-will-tell-our-stories>.
- <sup>3</sup> Climate Crisis, Fragmentation and Collective Trauma, Wisdom of Trauma, Trauma talk series with w/ Bayo Akomolafe, Eriel Tchekwie Deranger, Angaangaq Angakkorsuaq & Dr. Gabor Maté. <https://www.thewisdomoftrauma.com>.
- <sup>4</sup> See The Haudenosaunee Confederacy. <https://www.haudenosauneeconfederacy.com/>
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>6</sup> National Energy Action. <https://www.nea.org.uk/energy-crisis/>
- <sup>7</sup> This is a reworked version of a short written passage in Emergence Strategy, intertwined with prayerful meditations I have heard from wise friends at the ‘Way of the Rose’ groups.