

Conference

AEROVISIONS

Aerial Aesthetics
and the View from Above



Scientific Organization: Emmanuel Alloa, Alessandro De Cesaris, Lilian Kroth, Emanuel Tändler (UniFR, Switzerland)

Speakers: Mia Berneri, Teresa Castro, Rosa Cinelli, Paolo Cirio, Elie Düring, Lilian Kroth, Noemi Quaglini, Jan Völker, Cristina Voigt

aerialspatialrevolution.ch

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Conference AeroVisions

Aerial Aesthetics and the View from Above

The view from above is a mediated perspective in multiple ways. Technologies of the air have become increasingly complex and diverse: airplanes and drones, but also satellites and spacecraft make climate-monitoring devices and observational tools extend our gaze far beyond the limits of our atmosphere. These technologies are not only part of but also fundamentally condition the aesthetics of contemporary aerial visions.

The so-called Aerial Spatial Revolution has undeniably had pivotal political, economic, and social implications. Inextricably linked to these, however, is also a profound transformation of human perception and sensibility. The multi-layered mediations between sensing instruments “revoluting” the Earth generate not only a vast amount of data shaping the aerial view, but also recalibrate how we perceive the planet on and from the ground.

The view from above—an experience that for millennia had been merely imagined, used as a metaphor or as a symbolic device—has finally become possible, and technology now allows us to experiment with unprecedented sensory perspectives. Images of space—and from space—have radically transformed our perception of our place in the cosmos; meanwhile, everyday life in industrialized societies unfolds within environments made possible only through an interaction between the horizontal and the vertical dimensions.

The conference AeroVisions. Aerial Aesthetics and the View from Above will address these themes by fostering an interdisciplinary dialogue at the intersection of philosophy, art history, media theory, and science and technology studies. The event will offer three intensive days of talks, discussions, and exchange among scholars from different generations, traditions, and disciplines.

The conference would like to address some of the following questions:

What does it mean to observe from above?

What is the role of verticality in arts and sciences?

Through which cognitive transformations and media-technical changes can we trace the genesis and development of the relationship between air and land?

To what extent do many of modernity’s artefacts turn out to be ‘aerofacts’?

Speakers

Mia Bennett (University of Washington, USA)

Teresa Castro (Université Sorbonne Nouvelle, France)

Rosa Cinelli (Université Paris VIII, France)

Paolo Cirio (Independent Artist, Italy)

Elie During (Université Paris Nanterre, France)

Lilian Kroth (Université de Fribourg, Switzerland)

Noemi Quagliati (European University Institute, Italy)

Jan Völker (University of Applied Arts Vienna, Austria)

Cristina Voto (University of Turin, Italy)

Moderators

Emmanuel Alloa (Université de Fribourg, Switzerland)

Andrea Borsari (University of Bologna)

Jacopo Bodini (University Jean Moulin Lyon 3)

Rosa Cinelli (Université Paris VIII, France)

Alessandro De Cesaris (Université de Fribourg, Switzerland)

Lisa Henicz (OST, Switzerland)

Claudia Nigrelli (SUPSI, Switzerland)

Lucrezia Pozzi (SUPSI, Switzerland)

Emanuel Tandler (Université de Fribourg, Switzerland)

Matteo Vegetti (SUPSI, Switzerland)

Scientific Organization

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Alessandro De Cesaris (Université de Fribourg, Switzerland)

Lilian Kroth (Université de Fribourg, Switzerland)

Emanuel Tandler (Université de Fribourg, Switzerland)

Tuesday, Sept 1 – Rondò dei Talenti

Time	Speaker	Title / Description	Moderation
14:30	Emmanuel Alloa	Welcome and Introduction	
15:00–16:30	Noemi Quagliati	Fractured Vision: From Bird's-Eye View to Remote Sensing and the Construction of a Totalizing Illusion	Emmanuel Alloa
17:00–18:30	Mia Bennett	Spectrum geographies: The geopolitics of electromagnetic space	Rosa Cinelli
21:00	Giovanni Covone	Altri mondi. Esplorare lo spazio e guardarsi dall'alto <i>Location: Spazio Incontri Fondazione CRC</i>	Antonio Lo Campo

Wednesday, Sept 2 – Rondò dei Talenti

Time	Speaker	Title / Description	Moderation
09:30–11:00	Lilian Kroth	Mirrors or Eyes in the Sky? The Satellite Gaze, Inversion, and Lunar Perspectivism	Alessandro De Cesaris
11:30–13:00	Elie During	The Orbital Condition: Art and Philosophy from High Up	Matteo Vegetti
15:00–16:30	Rosa Cinelli	Aeroforensics: Notes towards an Archaeology of Recognition from Above	Claudia Nigrelli
17:00–18:30	Jan Völker	Sunset. On Terrestrial Reason	Emanuel Tandler
21:00	Matteo Vegetti, Andrea Borsari	Earthscapes. Le conseguenze della visione della Terra dallo spazio. <i>Location: Salone d'onore del Municipio di Cuneo</i>	Claudia Nigrelli

Thursday, Sept 3 – Rondò dei Talenti

Time	Speaker	Title / Description	Moderation
09:30–11:00	Teresa Castro	Seeing the Earth from Above: Apollo and the Paradoxes of the Planetary Gaze	Lisa Henicz
11:30–13:00	Cristina Voto	Operational Skies: Aerial Vision and the Invisibility of Contemporary Warfare	Lucrezia Pozzi
21:00	Paolo Cirio	Art Exposing Climate Crimes	Jacopo Bodini and Emmanuel Alloa

Abstracts and Bios

Mia Bennett

Spectrum geographies: The geopolitics of electromagnetic space

Humans have warmed themselves by the fire since the dawn of time. But since 1800, when British astronomer Sir William Herschel realized that heat was a form of light, or electromagnetic radiation, humans have made increasingly wider and more deliberate use of the electromagnetic spectrum. The discovery of radio waves in the 1860 opened up a radical new medium for people, and particularly governments and militaries, to communicate information. X-rays, night vision, satellite communication, and television broadcasting are just a few of the technologies dependent on the generation of electromagnetic waves – and on controlling access to the electromagnetic spectrum. While the spectrum is invisible to the naked eye, it has become increasingly central to power struggles at a range of scales. Ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and Iran unfold not only on the ground, but through electronic warfare. Outside of conflict zones, some Indigenous Peoples call for “spectrum sovereignty” in an effort to reclaim control over the spectrum from the national government, which typically regulates this invisible domain. Lastly, as activities in orbital space expand, from internet satellite megaconstellations to potentially data centers, demand for spectrum allocation is growing. In 2026, SpaceX purchased spectrum allocation from EchoStar, a beleaguered satellite company, for \$17 billion, illustrating the value of this invisible resource, especially to companies interested in using the spectrum to support Earth-space communications. Since the electromagnetic spectrum transcends traditional concepts of space, a new and more refracted view of geopolitics is necessary to grapple with how struggles for control of different portions of the spectrum are unfolding, how these intersect with terrestrial and orbital geographies, and what these indicate for the future of geopolitical competition.

Mia Bennett is an associate professor in the Department of Geography at the University of Washington. She researches the geopolitics of frontiers, namely the Arctic and orbital space, with a recent focus on critical remote sensing, satellites, and Starlink. Mia has run a blog on the Arctic, Cryopolitics (cryopolitics.com), since 2009, and with Klaus Dodds is author of *Unfrozen: The Fight for the Future of the Arctic* (Yale University Press, 2025).

Teresa Castro

Seeing the Earth from Above: Apollo and the Paradoxes of the Planetary Gaze

As the geographer Denis Cosgrove observed, the Apollo programme’s most enduring cultural legacy was not a new knowledge of the Moon, but a transformed image of the Earth. Yet the iconic images produced by the missions have sustained at least two seemingly contradictory ways of imagining the planet. On the one hand, they reinforced a global, synoptic gaze rooted in the cartographic tradition, rendering the Earth as a distant object and paving the way for contemporary fantasies of planetary escape. On the other, they became powerful symbols of the environmental movement, fostering a renewed awareness of

the Earth’s fragility while exposing the extractivist and colonial logics underpinning space exploration. By revisiting the visual legacy of Apollo, this presentation argues that these images remain central to the conflicting ways in which the Earth is imagined today: as a distant planetary object to be mastered or escaped, and as a fragile assemblage of interconnected worlds demanding new forms of earthly attachment.

Teresa Castro is Associate Professor in Film Studies at the Université Sorbonne Nouvelle. Initially trained as an art historian in Lisbon and London, she was a post-doctoral researcher at the musée du quai Branly, Paris, and at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin. She has extensively worked on aerial imagery and the mapping impulse in visual culture and was associate curator of the exhibition “Vues d’en haut”, held at the Centre Pompidou Metz (2013). Among others, she published *La Pensée cartographique des images. Cinéma et culture visuelle* (2011) and authored more than seventy articles and book chapters. She also works as a film programmer.

Rosa Cinelli

Aeroforensics: Notes towards an Archaeology of Recognition from Above

In Joan Fontcuberta’s account of a scene from André Malraux’s *Sierra de Teruel*, a farmer who knows his land intimately cannot recognise it from an aircraft until the road to Zaragoza provides an orienting landmark. This apparently simple act belongs to a longer aesthetic and media-archaeological trajectory, one that places recognition at the centre of human-machine interaction while revealing it as a deeply aerial practice. Its genealogy runs from military photointerpretation—the trained identification of features in a landscape in order to locate military targets, often performed by women working in intelligence units away from the front lines – to early computational models of artificial perception, such as the perceptron, which can be understood as a “recognising camera”, as well as current machine vision, whose classifications remain dependent on human tagging. Far from being a procedure delegated to fully autonomous machines, recognition emerges as an orientation, comparison, and verification dispositive, that turns traces into targets or evidence. Drawing on Judith Butler’s account of recognisability, the talk will use the term *aeroforensics* to describe the contested field in which recognising a feature also means determining what can count as evidence, which histories remain legible, and whose vulnerability can become politically recognisable.

Rosa Cinelli holds a Ph.D. in Philosophy and Information and Communication Studies jointly awarded by the University of Milan and Université Côte d’Azur. She is associate researcher at Paris 8 University, within the research laboratory “Paragraphe”, as well as within the ASR research project at and the project SCALAE. Her research investigates how images operate as technological devices within epistemic regimes of truth, examining the transformation of visual proof across different media, from forensic photography and trial archives to OSINT practices, aerial imagery, and extended reality media. On these themes she authored and co-authored the chapters “Fake” and “Forensic” in the volume *Il postfotografico* (Einaudi, 2024). In 2019 she earned a diploma in photography from the Riccardo Bauer School in Milan. Since 2025 she is also a correspondent for *Il giornale dell’Arte*, where she writes about contemporary photography.

Elie During

The Orbital Condition: Art and Philosophy from High Up

“Earthrise” images taken from an orbital viewpoint are powerful instruments for producing an “orbital view” of our planetary condition. But the orbital view is as much a view from below as from above, and the “overview effect” is only one aspect of a more general problem. Put briefly, what is at stake is a floating gaze emancipated from the very notion of viewpoint. In this respect, axonometric projection serves as a bridge between the phenomenology of visual experience, the artistic reconfiguration of space in the visual arts, and the popularization of orbital imagery in the history of space exploration. The lecture will explore the mutual relevance of axonometrics and astronautics. This relation has a temporal counterpart that is often neglected: remote viewing under orbital conditions induces a disjunctive feeling of belonging and disconnection. I will argue that this fractured sense of coexistence is an essential component of the orbital situation, and that it connects directly with the experience of zero gravity, which may itself be considered a kind of “gnostic” spiritual exercise—a subdomain of what Blumenberg wittily described as “astronoetics”. Literal suspension in space, however, is not a strict prerequisite. Experimental practices in expanded visibility provide numerous anticipations and transpositions of zero-gravity perception. Axonometry itself is only a paradigm.

Élie During is Associate Professor of Philosophy at University Paris Nanterre. He specializes in contemporary French thought with a focus on the philosophical and wider cultural implications of the concept of simultaneity at the crossroads of science, metaphysics, and the arts. His publications include critical editions of Bergson and Bachelard, studies of time and relativity theory, essays on images and retrofuturism, and a work of fiction inspired by Glenn Gould. He has also co-edited volumes on the metaphysics of realism, on experimentation in contemporary art, and on Deleuze’s conceptual personae. Forthcoming are *L’Image-volume : scènes de la vie augmentée* (Éditions MF, 2026) and a meditation on Bach’s *Art of Fugue* (Vrin, 2027).

Lilian Kroth

Mirrors or Eyes in the Sky? The Satellite Gaze, Inversion, and Lunar Perspectivism

Satellite remote sensing poses a range of epistemological problems with complex yet distinct historical genealogies. This talk develops a specific philosophical history of the satellite gaze by tracing its genealogy beyond whole-Earth imagery and optical vision alone. By problematizing common categories of the satellite gaze’s historiographic framings, it argues that satellite remote sensing should be understood through historically situated forms of imagination and through distinct epistemic techniques organized along the vertical axis. Proposing the concept of lunar perspectivism to grasp the philosophical significance of the satellite gaze as one that revolves around the planet, I will link eighteenth-century debates on moon craters in Kant and earlier analogical thinking about Earth and Moon with contemporary satellite remote sensing. By reading inversion as an epistemic figure, the satellite gaze does not simply reverse, but inverse perspective. The translation between inner and outer space reveals a tension between experimentalism and imagination and between planetary wholeness and layered, fragmented knowledge. In this

way, a *longue durée* account of the satellite gaze appears as a historically and philosophically mediated form of seeing that exceeds the optical and opens onto the conditions under which technical imagery comes into being.

Lilian Kroth is a researcher in philosophies of nature and history of science who studies how the natural world is understood through concepts, scientific instruments, and aesthetic practices. She received her PhD from the University of Cambridge on concepts of the limit in the work of philosopher of science Michel Serres in 2023. She studied philosophy (BA and MA) at the University of Vienna as well as Fine Arts (with a focus on drawing) at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Kroth has been an associated researcher at the University of Groningen and the Centre Marc Bloch in Berlin, and a co-organiser of the interdisciplinary research network “Remote Sensing: Ice, Instruments, Imagination” at Cambridge. She is currently based in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Fribourg, where she leads the project “Seeing like a Satellite” and contributes to the project “Aerial Spatial Revolution” (Swiss National Science Foundation).

Noemi Quagliati

Fractured Vision: From Bird’s-Eye View to Remote Sensing and the Construction of a Totalizing Illusion

The history of the view from above unfolds across three main phases: the imagined bird’s-eye perspective, the experienced and photographed aerial view from aircraft, and unmanned multispectral remote sensing from satellites. It begins with the dream of flying like a bird and culminates in the ambition to monitor and control the Earth from outer space. Along this trajectory, the aerial gaze has oscillated between a tool of domination and an instrument of care, a mechanism for territorial design and an unconventional artistic frame, a superhuman and posthuman aspiration.

Rather than presenting this history as a linear progression toward total visual mastery, this talk foregrounds the concept of rupture—both as historical breaks and as material accidents that disrupt the ideal of a seamless gaze. Clouds serve as a primary emblem of obstructions that challenge the supposedly synoptic nature of the view from above. Other critical ruptures include the physical and cognitive strain on aerial surveyors in extreme climates, the disorienting effects of *Fata Morgana* mirages, the geometric friction of transitioning from oblique to nadir perspectives, the interpretive hurdles of abstract aerial imagery, and the economic and technical barriers of acquiring high-resolution data and training algorithms for object detection from above.

Ultimately, this presentation examines how aerial vision is constructed through specific visual assemblages, focusing on the techniques of mosaic and the false-color composite. This approach reveals the fragmented, material, and mediated character of any claim to a totalizing view. The talk emphasizes that both the aesthetics and operability of the view from above (also known as the gaze from nowhere) rely on more-than-human limitations and entanglements of technology, environment, and bodies. Challenging the myth of the all-seeing eye, I frame remote sensing as an incomplete and mediated form of ‘feeling’, thus enabling an engagement with phenomena while intentionally rejecting the illusion of a complete or absolute grasp of the whole picture.

Noemi Quagliati is a Max Weber Fellow in the Department of History at the European University Institute (EUI) and Principal Investigator of the research cluster Ecologies of Making: Material Culture Beyond the Human at the NICHE Centre for Environmental Humanities in Venice. She earned her PhD in Art History from LMU Munich and the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society. By interweaving environmental humanities, history of science and technology, and visual studies, her research investigates the infrastructures and imagery that enable the view from above in both military and civilian contexts over time. Her scholarship has been featured in journals such as *Transborder*, *Sophia Journal*, *Vulcan*, *AUC Geographica*, and *Lagoonscapes*, as well as in edited volumes including *Storytelling and Environmental History*, *Pasted Topographies*, and *Nomadic Camera*. She is currently finalising her first monograph on landscape and aerial photography in WWI Germany and co-editing the volume *Planetary Waters – A Challenge Between Abstraction and Empathy* (Bloomsbury). Previously, she explored bird-human-technology interactions through her MSCA postdoctoral project *Bird's-Eye Views of the Venetian Lagoon: Planetary Visions and Birdscapes of an Aquatic Ecosystem*. Beyond her academic work, she has contributed to the modernisation of the Deutsches Museum's aviation section by researching early aerial photography.

Jan Völker

Sunset. On Terrestrial Reason

Three phases can be distinguished in the relationship between philosophy and space travel: an early phase, in which outer space is the realm of fantasy and utopia, an unattainable beyond, a space of projections; then a middle phase, in which the nascent space program explores parts of outer space, orbits the Earth, and takes it into view. Finally, a third phase, the beginning of which we are now experiencing, in which the gaze turns away from Earth and its politics and opens up to the space beyond Earth, envisioning new planets as possible homes for future generations. In this turning away from Earth lies a challenge for philosophy: on the one hand, it must examine the roots of thought in Earth; on the other hand, it must begin to conceive of a concept of the world and a concept of politics beyond Earth.

Jan Völker, born in 1976, holds a professorship in philosophy at the University of Applied Arts Vienna. His work focuses on aesthetics, post-Marxist philosophy, and psychoanalysis. He studied philosophy, comparative literature, and cultural studies in Leipzig, Berlin, and Paris. He served as a research assistant at the SFB Aesthetic Experience in the Context of the Dissolution of Artistic Boundaries at the Free University of Berlin and, concurrently, was a member of the Graduate College "Forms of Life and the Know-How of Living." He subsequently worked as a research assistant to Prof. Alexander García Düttmann at the Berlin University of the Arts and served for several years as a visiting lecturer at Bard College in Berlin. From 2018 to 2023, he was also an associate professor of philosophy at the ZRC SAZU Graduate School in Ljubljana, Slovenia. Before coming to Vienna, he served as a visiting professor of philosophy and aesthetics at the Bauhaus University Weimar for several semesters. His latest book is titled *Äußerung des Denkens: Marx-Freud-Kant-Hegel* [The Expression of Thought: Marx, Freud, Kant, Hegel] and was published in 2025 by Turia + Kant in Vienna. *Ein Weltall des Kapitals. Die Überwindung der terrestrischen Vernunft* [A Universe of Capital: Overcoming Terrestrial Reason] was also published in 2025, by Matthes & Seitz in Berlin. Other publications: Alain Badiou

/ Jean-Luc Nancy: *German Philosophy* (ed. 2017), *An Introduction to New Philosophies of the Political* (Laclau, Lefort, Nancy, Rancière, Badiou) (2012, with Uwe Hebekus), *Ästhetik der Lebendigkeit. Kants dritte Kritik* (2011) [Aesthetics of Vitality: Kant's Third Critique].

Cristina Voto

Operational Skies: Aerial Vision and the Invisuality of Contemporary Warfare

The talk reflects on aerial vision as a technical form of mediation in contemporary warfare. Taking Harun Farocki's reflections on operational images as a point of departure, I will examine how images produced from above increasingly participate in processes of detection, targeting, and decision-making. The talk will address the delegation of perception and judgment to technical systems that produce a visual regime that often appears abstract, clean, and distant, while remaining deeply embedded in material infrastructures of violence, asymmetrical visibility, and political responsibility. I will approach this regime through the notion of invisuality: a condition in which images organize action and knowledge while operating before, beyond, or beneath human interpretation. The question is therefore how aerial vision transforms the relation between seeing, knowing, and acting, and how contemporary warfare increasingly depends on images that participate in its operations.

Cristina Voto is Assistant Professor at the University of Turin. She serves on the doctoral board of the Design and Creation program at Universidad de Caldas, Colombia, and of the Art and Techno-Aesthetics program at Universidad Nacional de Tres de Febrero, Argentina. She is also Vice President of the Latin American Federation of Semiotics. She has collaborated with several universities and cultural institutions, including Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, the University of the West of England, Universidad de Buenos Aires, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, the Bienal de la Imagen en Movimiento, and the Festival de la Imagen. Her research explores semiotics at the intersection of philosophy of technology, feminist and queer theory, and digital and AI-based art.



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