Call for papers for

Transbordeur
photographie histoire société

issue 6, "The vertical image.
Politics of Aerial Views"

The history of aerial views is closely entangled with the development of aerial means of locomotion which, since the 18th century, have produced new fixed and mobile points of view on the planet. From the first hot-air balloons to contemporary drones, aerial technologies generate an iconography at the crossroads of military, scientific and artistic experimentation, which has long nourished popular culture. The production of these images is abundant, as is the work investigating this part of Western visual culture. Whether in the history of photography or media studies, in art history or geography, in international relations or cultural studies, many researchers and historians have endeavored to describe the technologies and representations of aerial views, both from a historical perspective (Newhall 1969; Siegert 1992; Asendorf 1996; Cosgrove 2001; Virilio 2010; Castro 2011; Dorrian and Pousin 2013; Lampe 2013; Grevsmühl 2014; Kaplan 2017; Nowak 2018; Bousquet 2018) as well as in relation to contemporary technologies (Gregory 2011; Chamayou 2015; Belisle 2020).

Issue 6 of *Transbordeur* wishes to revisit this history of aerial views by shedding light in particular on its historical, epistemological and political dimension. We thus privilege the notion of "vertical image" to the more generic notion of aerial view. The former allows us to refer not only to a specific spatial arrangement, but also to underline the power relations that sustain and model it. The vertical image represents and materializes colonial and imperialist domination or military surveillance; it produces knowledge that forges these relations and makes them possible. Conversely, as part of activist resistance, it provides evidence allowing to expose and denounce the violence and illegality of police work. Thus, we would like to use the vertical image to think about the current context marked both by the massive surveillance of populations due to the COVID-19 pandemic and by the recent international demonstrations in the name of *Black Lives Matter* that protest police violence whose long and murderous history has

been tragically recalled through the assassination of Georges Floyd. The events of the past few months have produced countless vertical images, from thermal imaging surveillance cameras and audio-visual feeds captured by drones to recordings of demonstrators documenting police repression from "below". Issue 6 of *Transbordeur* proposes to reflect on this moment by investigating the politics and histories of these images from a multidisciplinary perspective.

The notion of verticality is productive for the critical analysis of space no longer conceived of in two, but in three dimensions. Eyal Weizman for instance discusses the *Politics of Verticality* that underlie Israel's colonization of the Palestinian territories. For Weizman, the Israeli state does not apprehend its occupation according to cartographic representations of a planar territory, but according to a conception of space encompassing the "underground" (structured by tunnels between occupied territories, or excavated thanks to archaeological projects supposed to provide evidence of a territorial right dating back to biblical times) and the air (via the control of airspace) (Weizman 2002). Lisa Parks' recently published book *Rethinking Media Coverage. Vertical Mediations and the War on Terror* (Parks 2018), closer to our concern about a visual history of verticality, builds upon work begun in the 2010's on drone wars. In her research, Parks conceptualizes the drone as a medium that literally inscribes its trace on earth: the multiple dimensions of vertical space, which she defines as a volume encompassing all "levels" from the ground to orbit, are modified by the circulation of the armed drone. For Parks, U.S. imperialism relies upon vertical hegemony that includes territorial control as well as control of the air or the electromagnetic spectrum. Approaching vertical space as a stratified and dynamic environment, Parks uses the concept of "vertical mediation" to designate audiovisual productions (from television broadcasts to drone images) that materialize or make visible the numerous power issues at stake, be they territorial, military or infrastructural (Parks 2018). The volume *From Above: War, Violence, Verticality* (Adey et alii 2014) is similarly closely linked to the questions addressed by this call. It adopts a historical and interdisciplinary perspective to discuss the visual structuring of vertical spaces as they perpetuate and reinforce different forms of knowledge and domination. The contributions for this volume - covering subjects as broad as aerial cartography in the service of the British Empire's colonial project or the *Transparent Earth* initiative of the US Department of Defense – thus provide an additional frame of reference for thinking about the entanglements of visual history and vertical space.

Taking its starting point in this and similar scholarship, the issue no. 6 of *Transbordeur* seeks contributions that think about the history of aerial views at the crossroads of the history of capitalism, colonialism and imperialism as well as militarization. Without limiting the issue's scope to the examples mentioned below, we invite papers that engage with one or several of the following themes:

- *Dispositifs of the vertical image*
  The vertical image has a material, technical and media history that needs to be contextualized within institutional spaces drawing upon its epistemological and political force. Thus, we are interested in papers that examine the multiplicity of devices producing vertical images. As *Transbordeur* is primarily dedicated to the history of photography in the broadest sense, we invite contributions on photographic practices (e.g., the photographic pigeon, aerial stereoscopy or the serial photograph of an Oskar Messter), without however restricting the call to a sole photographic history of the vertical image. Thus, contributions on aviation films or digital devices such as Google Earth, 3D modeling or augmented reality are also welcome.

- *Logistics of the vertical image*
  The vertical field is organized by more or less visible infrastructures, from satellite dishes to military trenches, which reveal the materiality of the air and the ground. This infrastructural organization of the vertical field is constitutive of the vertical image, even if the latter often erases the traces of its conditions of possibility. We would like to reflect on the "thickness" of the aerial image through contributions that, for example, focus on visual communication technologies such as radar or satellite, or on the role of control rooms in global surveillance systems. We would also welcome proposals that relate to the theme of issue 3 of our journal, namely photography and information technologies, and that analyze the links between vertical images and new informational infrastructure, such as databases and, of course, the Internet and digital networks.

- *Reversals of the vertical image*
  If verticality is primarily apprehended as an organization from the "top" to the "bottom", we are also looking for contributions that propose a reversal of this perspective by placing oneself not in the air, but on the ground. In this way, it is possible to examine the various ground-based camouflage strategies aimed at deceiving the gaze from the air, or to study the history of "sousveillance" as a contesting practice of the vertical visual regime. It is also possible to reflect on the "non-readability" of an aerial view, the deciphering and understanding of which is rarely immediate or naturally given, but requires perceptual and cognitive learning that potentially leaves room for errors. Discussing the vertical image from the "bottom" finally allows to focus on the territories and bodies targeted by the aerial view and to analyze the effects on the targeted populations of a scopic regime intimately linked to colonial, racist and police violence. In this perspective, we also wish to include works analyzing the appropriation of vertical images by artists and activists who, like Hito Steyerl or Forensic Architecture, use them as raw material for their critical artistic investigations.

- *Circulation of the vertical image*
  If the notion of the vertical image leads us to think of the history of views from above at the crossroads of a history of conflicts and conquests, our reflection must not neglect the circulation of images, whose aesthetics and the forms of knowledge they produce have long since irrigated scientific and popular visual culture. We would therefore like to welcome papers that discuss the transfer, circulation or entanglement of military and civilian images, whether from a historical perspective (the history of the photomosaic or the panorama) or a more contemporary one: the development of the consumer drone and its imagery; digital surveillance technologies mobilized by surveillance capitalism (Zuboff 2019) and recent police strategies in the face of mass mobilizations.

- *Theories of the vertical image*
  We wish to investigate the theories and epistemologies of the vertical image through contributions that propose to develop a reflection based on authors and notions from feminist and postcolonial works, political philosophy or more generally media theory, in order to deconstruct the political value of the scopic regime of the aerial view. Donna Haraway for instance refers to the "God Trick" to describe the epistemological *a priori* that identifies the view from above with the omniscient and abstract gaze; she stresses the importance of understanding knowledge as situated, and thus of defining the gaze from above as a gaze attached to a body, a subjectivity, and power relations (Haraway 1988). Other notions, such as the operational image proposed by Harun Farocki, Joanna Zylinska's "non-human" photography or Trevor Paglen's seeing machines, could also contribute to a reflection on the epistemologies of the vertical image and on the relationship between vision and the machine.

We invite submissions from researchers in the humanities and social sciences who can enrich reflection on these issues and on the history and politics of vertical images more broadly.

The publication of issue 6 of the journal *Transbordeur* is preceded by a one-day conference in February 2021, which will bring together the future authors at the University of Lausanne and will allow for an exchange between the participants and the editors.

Direction

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Calendar

September 15, 2020	**Abstracts**
September 30, 2020	Response to authors
January 30, 2021	**First version of the articles**
End of February, 2021	One-day conference at the University of Lausanne
April 30, 2021	**Second version of the articles**
February 2022	Publication

Information

Texts can be submitted in French, English, German or Italian. Abstract should not exceed 600 words. It is accompanied by 6-10 images, a brief bibliography and biographical information.

Please send abstracts to **Claus.Gunti@unil.ch** and **Anne-Katrin.Weber@unil.ch**

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