

Organized at NICOLETTI, London, between 2022–24, *total climate* is a three-part exhibition that explores the complex relationship between colonial history and ecology. The title of this project is borrowed from scholar Cristina Sharpe, who invites us in *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* to perceive racism not only as a set of ideas and actions but as a 'total climate' or weather, i.e a condition that contaminate the entirety of the environment, down to particles and the air we breathe.¹

Curated by artist Gaëlle Choïsne, NICOLETTI's director Camille Houzé and curator and researcher Estelle Marois, *total climate* unfolds in three parts, each delving into distinct facets of this relationship. *Part 1: the infinitesimal and the mobile* (2022) presented artists whose material approaches shed light on the intertwining of history and trauma within the molecular composition of our environment, opening pathways for human/nonhuman reconnection beyond visible barriers. *Part 2: wavelengths* (2023) explored the various ways in which colonial history operates in the formation of 'intellectual climates', underpinning processes of collection, classification, hierarchisation—and exploitation of both people and land. Exhibited artworks spotlighted alternative modes of knowledge-formation, of thinking-feeling *with* (as opposed to *about*), harnessing senses, sensibility, poetry, and beliefs.

When calling for the hybridisation of knowledge, writer and philosopher Édouard Glissant expresses a worldview: 'the world escapes us as comprehension and as concept... it is through the imaginary that one can attempt to grasp it.'² This perspective serves as the foundation for examining the concepts of space and time, which will be the focus of our third chapter (June-July 2024). Grounded in notions of slipperiness and opacity, it disputes prevailing theorisations of the world as an object—as a fixed, bounded, and mappable entity. Informed by the Caribbean, inherently spatial and relational, Glissant's view of the world and identity highlights the interconnectedness of particular places through his concept of the 'common-place'³. Such rhizomatic ideas and 'thought of errantry'⁴ contrast with the notions of territory and root-identity, championed by a thought that erases the particular (and diversity) in favour of universality.

SPACE, MAP, TERRITORY

It was in the name of universality that the metric system was introduced in France after the Revolution. Inch, foot, toise—all references to the king's body—were rejected in favor of a nonhuman, universal standard: the metre. Defined as a segment of a terrestrial meridian in 1791, it was granted a physical standard (*étalon*) in 1889 by the International Bureau of Weights and Measures. Established in 1875 in Saint-Cloud, France, and gathering a number of member states, the Bureau still rules international measurements. Although aspiring to universality, the metric system originates from specific circumstances and institutions. In this sense, the concept of universality paradoxically embodies both particularity and a rejection of other particularities, ultimately rooting and solidifying identity, culture, and space.

Such systems structure power relations, as exemplified by the study of maps, which, as geographer and cartographer J.B Harley observes, 'are never value-free'⁵. Indeed, these systems have been central to the power dynamics entwined with the rise of nation-states and the expansion of cartography since the 16th Century.

¹ C. Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2016

² É. Glissant, 'La relation, imprédictible, et sans morale', *Rue Descartes*, vol. 3, no. 37, 2002, pp. 76-95. <http://www.cairn.info/revue-rue-descartes-2002-3-page-76.html>

³ É. Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. B. Wing, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1997, p. 211

⁴ Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, p. 14

⁵ J. B. Harley, 'Silences and Secrecy: The Hidden Agenda of Cartography in Early Modern Europe', *Imago Mundi*, vol. 40, 1988, p. 57

The Mercator projection, adopted from 1569, distorted landmass sizes as latitude, increased from the equator to the poles. Maps also outlined colonial trading routes, like those of the Dutch East India Company, while concealing others. Though mathematician Alfred Korzybski reminds us that maps are representations, and not the territory itself,⁶ mapmakers' choices and omissions significantly impact terrain and nation-building. The top-down mapping of Israel's borders, for instance,—with the inscription of Hebrew topography after the 1949 Green Line marking, erasure of Palestinian localities following the 1967 territorial expansion, and Google Maps downplaying checkpoints hindering Palestinian movement—reinforces links between ethnicity, nation, and territory.⁷

In opposition to these ideas and conventions, Glissant's concept of place fosters a sense of belonging that extends to the dimensions of the world. The figure of the archipelago, in this sense, allows for unity and dispersion, the here and elsewhere, the poetical and political. It enables contact without fusion, embodying the idea of the Caribbean as a 'sea that diffracts' from essentialist norms. This led Glissant to envision the Whole-world as a utopia—a 'world to be created but which is already here'⁸—whose language transcends spatial and temporal limitations. As such, his geopoetics is a chronopoetics, that is, an articulation of time that takes the *démesure* of the world⁹ as its measurement, undoing linearity and sustaining histories that 'jump about in time'¹⁰ without a fixed origin.

TIME-SPACE COMPRESSION

The imperialist shaping of space has also been a matter of time. Traditional historiography controls the perception and structuring of time, and defines the future accordingly. Based on sequentiality, history is presented as a linear progression: that of the technical mastery of nature, until completion. Within this context, as researcher Rahul Rao summed up, 'different cultures were representative of different stages in world history'. In other words, 'time was mapped onto space: Africa was conceptualised as Europe's past and Europe as everyone's future, furnishing the ideological justification for imperial civilising mission'.¹¹

Control over time-measuring devices also wields significant spatial and political influence. Clocks, akin to maps for space, render time as self-evident, as anthropologist Kevin Birth remarks.¹² Yet, as historian Giordano Nanni noted, 'European territorial expansion has always been closely linked to, and frequently propelled by, the geographic extension of its clocks and calendars'.¹³ For instance, the marine chronometer was invented to determine a ship's precise longitude at sea. Thus, timekeeping devices were crucial to imperial navigation—like the Atlantic slave trade—shaping the colonial map and inscribing time into space.

In the West, local time reckoning was standard until the 19th Century. Individuals would synchronise their clocks or watches with that of their specific location. The advent of railroads required time standardisation to streamline train schedules. This transition led to the establishment of global time zones in 1884, chiefly shaped by European and American influence. Defined by latitudes and longitudes, time zones cemented the space-time interplay, extending to matters of human rights, as with the 1820 Missouri Compromise, segregating zones where slavery was allowed or prohibited along the parallel 36°30' north.

⁶ A. Korzybski, 'Supplement III. A Non-Aristotelian System and Its Necessity for Rigour in Mathematics and Physics', in *Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics*, New York, The International Non-Aristotelian Library Publishing Company, 1933, pp. 747-761

⁷ C. Leuenberger, I. Schnell, 'Why Maps Matter', in *The Politics of Maps: Cartographic Constructions of Israel/Palestine*, New York, Oxford Academic, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190076238.003.0001>

⁸ É. Glissant, *L'Imaginaire des langues. Entretiens avec Lise Gauvin*, Paris, Gallimard, 2010, p. 63

⁹ M. Rosemberg, 'La géopoétique d'Édouard Glissant, une contribution à penser le monde comme Monde', *L'Espace géographique*, vol. 4, no. 45, 2016, pp. 321-334. <https://www.cairn.info/revue-espace-geographique-2016-4-page-321.htm>

¹⁰ É. Glissant, *La Case du commandeur*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1981, p. 123

¹¹ R. Rao, 'One Time, Many Times', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, vol. 47, no. 2, January 2019, pp. 299-308. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0305829818801494>

¹² K. Birth, *Objects of Time: How Things Shape Temporality*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012

¹³ G. Nanni, *The Colonisation of Time: Ritual, Routine and Resistance in the British Empire*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2012, p. 45

Such standardisation collapsed 'capitalist time into natural time in ways that fundamentally shifted humans' experience of, and relationship to, time.'¹⁴ Indeed, premodern or non-Western time-telling methods rely on various natural rhythms, including astronomical, meteorological, and environmental cycles. Neglecting these rhythms in temporal narratives effectively separates and controls human and nonhuman bodies, with serious physical, mental, and social repercussions, as evidenced by the disruption of hormone levels in night-shift workers, which normally align with environmental cues. Yet, some continue to advocate for a single global time zone using Coordinated Universal Time ('universal' corresponding to British time) to align with economic imperatives of ceaseless readiness. Fully detaching time calculations from Earth's rotation would reinforce the sense of peripherality that already disadvantages some regions economically, culturally, and health-wise. As Birth asserts, transcultural continuity erases local models under seemingly universal standards. This chronopolitical hierarchy is evident in the network and terminology of 'slave' clocks synchronised with a 'master' clock.

DIFFRACTING WORLDVIEWS

For the third chapter of *total climate*, we are calling for artistic propositions that create slippages in standardised mapping and timing systems; practices that explore alternative modes of spacing and timing that stem from invisibilised dimensions; and aim at decoupling hegemonic space-times. Whether paintings, sculptures, assemblages, moving images or new media, the artwork presented will be embracing and/or generating tensions within space, time, and everything in-between. In so doing, the exhibition will lead us to discuss the notion of globality; not as in the subjugating totality of globalisation, but as the relational accommodation of particularities and commonalities.

Pushing the expression of diverse worldviews to their full extent, the exhibition will also consider the role of practices that intersect with, or encompass, notions of play and science-fiction, in their capacity to hypothesise on spatial and temporal expansions of our existence into virtual realms. Indeed, mediums such as video games, for instance, are not static works but evolve in response to players' interactions, guided by a set of rules. They shed light on the relation between gameplay, narrative progression, and the player's own temporal experience.¹⁵

In this context, the exhibition will also focus its attention on utopian formulations, including time-travel fictions that serve as a laboratory where temporal topologies are traversed in atypical ways, resulting in chronotopes marked by anachronicity and multiversality. Paradoxes, time loops, changing pasts, and physical access to alternative temporalities should promote a sense of global instability, opening up not yet-determined space-time(s) from where names, categories, beings and things, can be redefined.

Within this framework, liminal hyperspaces and contractions of instant and duration should help (re)envision the nested connection between the infinitely small and the infinitely large. These multiplex perspectives illuminate the divisions of subjectivity, creating impossible topologies that destabilise narrative coherence, instead embracing anomalies, simultaneities and duplications that cast doubt upon our certainties.¹⁶

Blurring the line between the finite and the infinite, beginning and ending, genres akin to science fiction and utopian narratives will help up conjuring concepts such as the 'world's edge', reconsidering the Hegelian end of history in a fresh perspective. As a result, they introduce the potential for novel ways of being that transcend established classifications (like human-nonhuman, or animal-plant-mineral). They bring to the fore and challenge another binary opposition—the distinction between the real and the virtual, whether in speculative or digital contexts. This resonates with philosopher Patricia Ticineto Clough's idea that human subjectivity is intertwined

¹⁴ R. Phillips, 'Counter Clockwise: Unmapping Black Temporalities from Greenwich Mean Timelines', *The Funambulist*, no. 36, 'They Have Clock, We Have Time', 21 June 2021. <https://thefunambulist.net/magazine/they-have-clocks-we-have-time/counter-clockwise-unmapping-black-temporalities-from-greenwich-mean-timelines>

¹⁵ F. A. Igarzábal, *Time and Space in Video Games: A Cognitive-Formalist Approach*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2020

¹⁶ L. A. Kirkland, 'Trans-Temporal Cartographies: Theorizing Variations on Time Travel as a Narrative Device in Star Trek', *Gettysburg College Philosophy and Film Seminar*, Gettysburg College, Pennsylvania, March 2019. https://www.academia.edu/42263322/Trans_Temporal_Cartographies_Theorizing_Variations_on_Time_Travel_as_a_Narrative_Device_in_Star_Trek?source=swp_share

with another form of nonhuman agency, that of computational technologies.¹⁷ Furthermore, these practices give rise to worlds that are both affluent—making visible previously unseen connections and forging new ones—, and immersive—elevating audience engagement to a higher level of sensory and intellectual experience. Flirting with their own vertiginous potential and all-encompassing allure, such practices invite critical examination of the socio-political implications of both existing and emerging worldviews.

Camille Houzé & Estelle Marois

¹⁷ P. Ticineto Clough, 'The Other-Than-Human and the "User Unconscious"', *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, vol. 19, no. 1, Philadelphia, Taylor & Francis, Inc., 2018, pp. 73–80. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15240657.2018.1419683>

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TOTAL CLIMATE, PART 1
THE INFINITESIMAL AND THE MOBILE



Click here for text and essay: <https://nicoletticontemporary.com/2022/06/total-climate-part-1-the-infinitesimal-and-the-mobile/>

Installation view: *total climate part 1: the infinitesimal and the mobile*, group exhibition with Mercedes Azpilicueta, Gaëlle Choisne, Evan Ifekoya, Paul Maheke, Joséfa Ntjam and Daniela Ortiz, curated by Gaëlle Choisne, Camille Houzé and Estelle Marois at NiCOLETTI, London. Photo: Theo Christelis.

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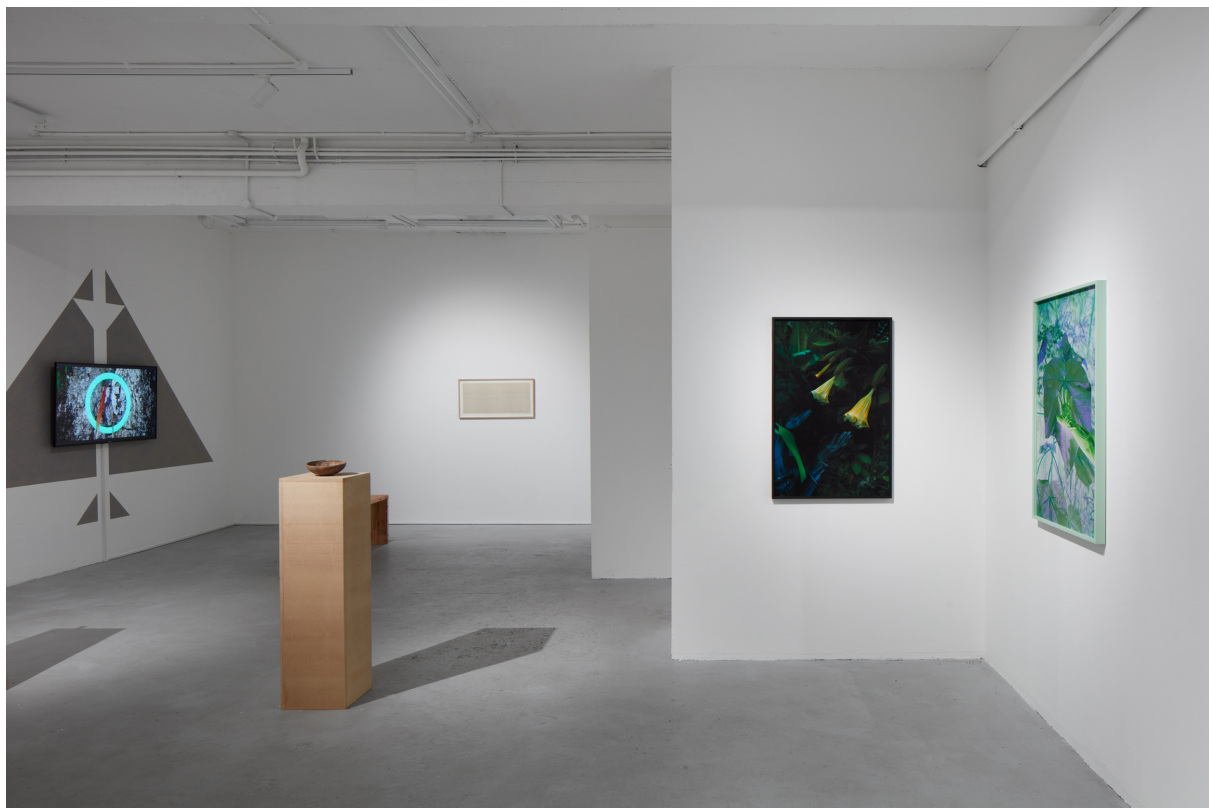
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TOTAL CLIMATE, PART 2 WAVELENGTHS



Click here for text: <https://nicoletticontemporary.com/2023/07/total-climate-part-2-wavelengths/>

Installation view: *total climate part 2: wavelengths*, group exhibition with Ali Cherri, Patricia Dominguez, Hessie, Karrabing Film Collective, and Candice Lin, curated by Gaëlle Choisne, Camille Houzé and Estelle Marois at NICOLETTI, London.

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TOTAL CLIMATE, PART 2
WAVELENGTHS



Installation view: *total climate part 2: wavelengths*, group exhibition with Ali Cherri, Patricia Dominguez, Hesse, Karrabing Film Collective, and Candice Lin, curated by Gaëlle Choisne, Camille Houzé and Estelle Marois at NICOLETTI, London.

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