

MARK

EMERGENCE

DORF

ADAM JEPPESEN
(b. 1978, DK)

Graduated in 2002 from Fatamorgana photography art school in Copenhagen. He distinguished himself internationally with the Wake series, which was published by Steidl in 2008. Jeppesen's latest work, The Flatlands Camp Project, was recorded on his journey from the Arctic through North and South America to Antarctica. He has previously exhibited in solo and group exhibitions worldwide. Jeppesen lives and works in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

ANN-CHRISTIN BERTRAND
(b. 1975, DE)

Ann-Christin Bertrand is curator at C/O Berlin and responsible for young, contemporary art positions. She developed the new exhibition format *Thinking about Photography*, is in charge of the *Talents* programme and also works on concepts focusing primarily on questions about the future of the medium, which she discusses in the context of lectures, seminars and jury panels and opens up for debate, most recently in the context of OUTSET/ UNSEEN Exhibition Fund by Foam Amsterdam, at the Aalto University of Arts & Design Helsinki and the Academy of Media Arts Cologne.

THE NATURE OF CAPITALISM

BY KERRY DORAN

Labor pounds and wheedles rocks and soil, plants and animals, extracting the molecular flows out of which our shared life is made and remade. But those molecular flows do not return from whence they came.

– McKenzie Wark, *Molecular Red: Theory for the Anthropocene*

While the manifold projects of capital, empire, and science are busy making Nature with a capital ‘N’[...] the web of life is busy shuffling about the biological and geological conditions of capitalism’s process...This is nature as us, as inside us, as around us. It is nature as a flow of flows. Put simply, humans make environments and environments make humans—and human organization.

– Jason W. Moore, *Capitalism and the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital*

Our desire to comprehend the natural world is tightly bound up in capitalism as an economic system. Scientific inquiry and capitalism both have goals based in codifying, quantifying, and controlling. While the means of these goals are seemingly very different, this relationship is most starkly evinced in the commodity. Returning to the originary source, Marx’s writing on commodity fetishism is precisely demonstrative:

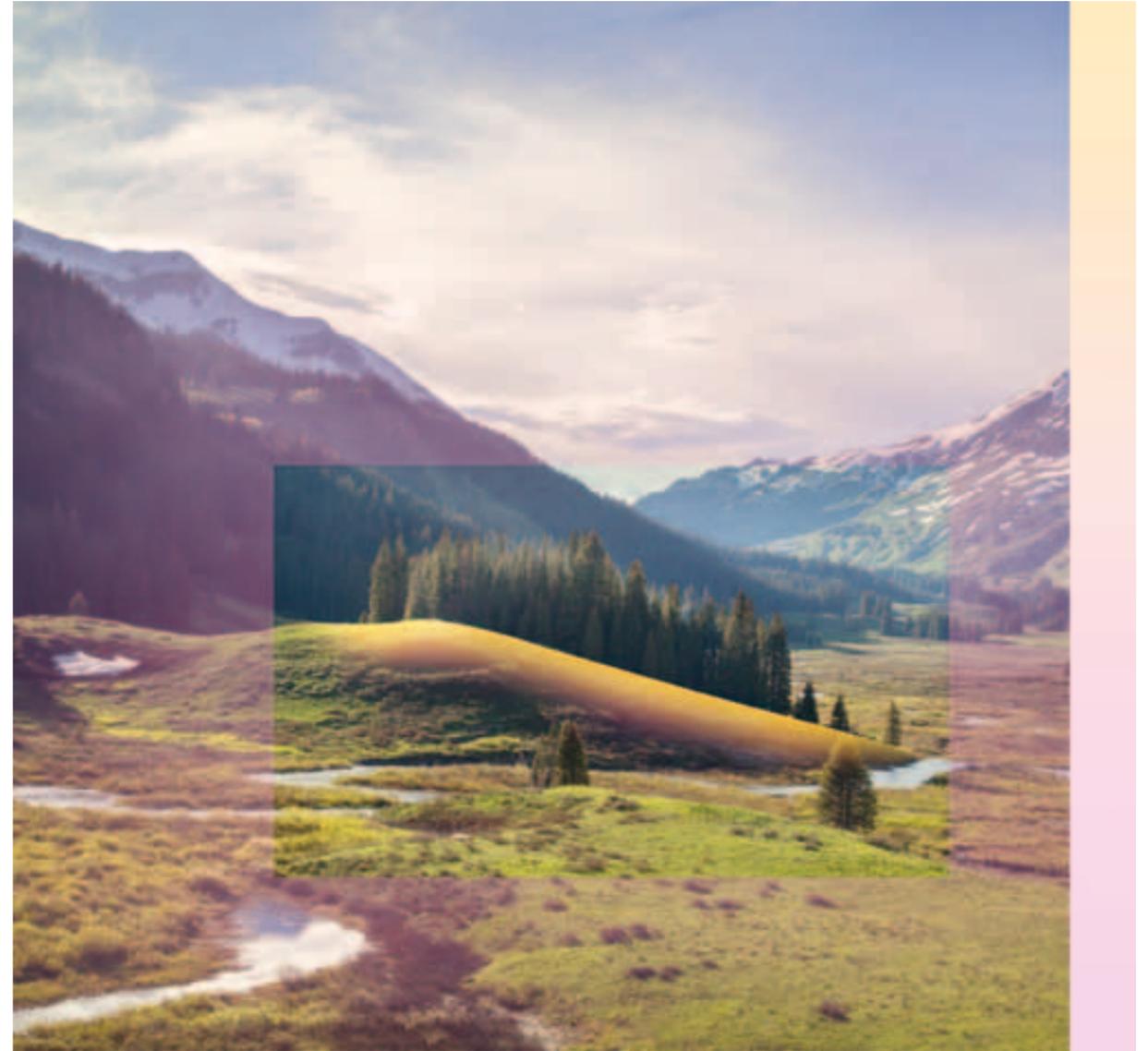
A commodity appears at first sight an extremely obvious, trivial thing. But its analysis brings out that it is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties. So far as it is a use-value, there is nothing mysterious

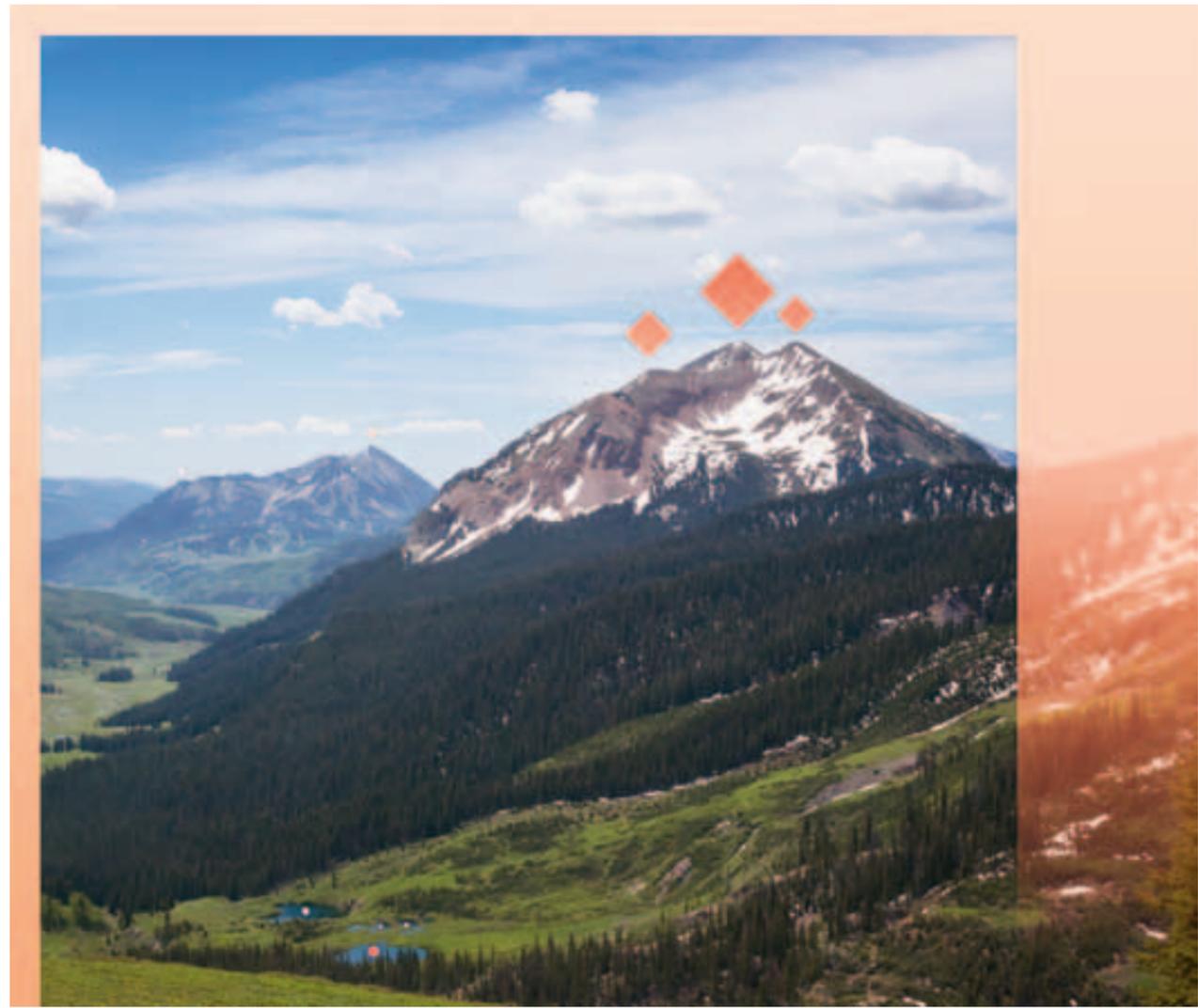
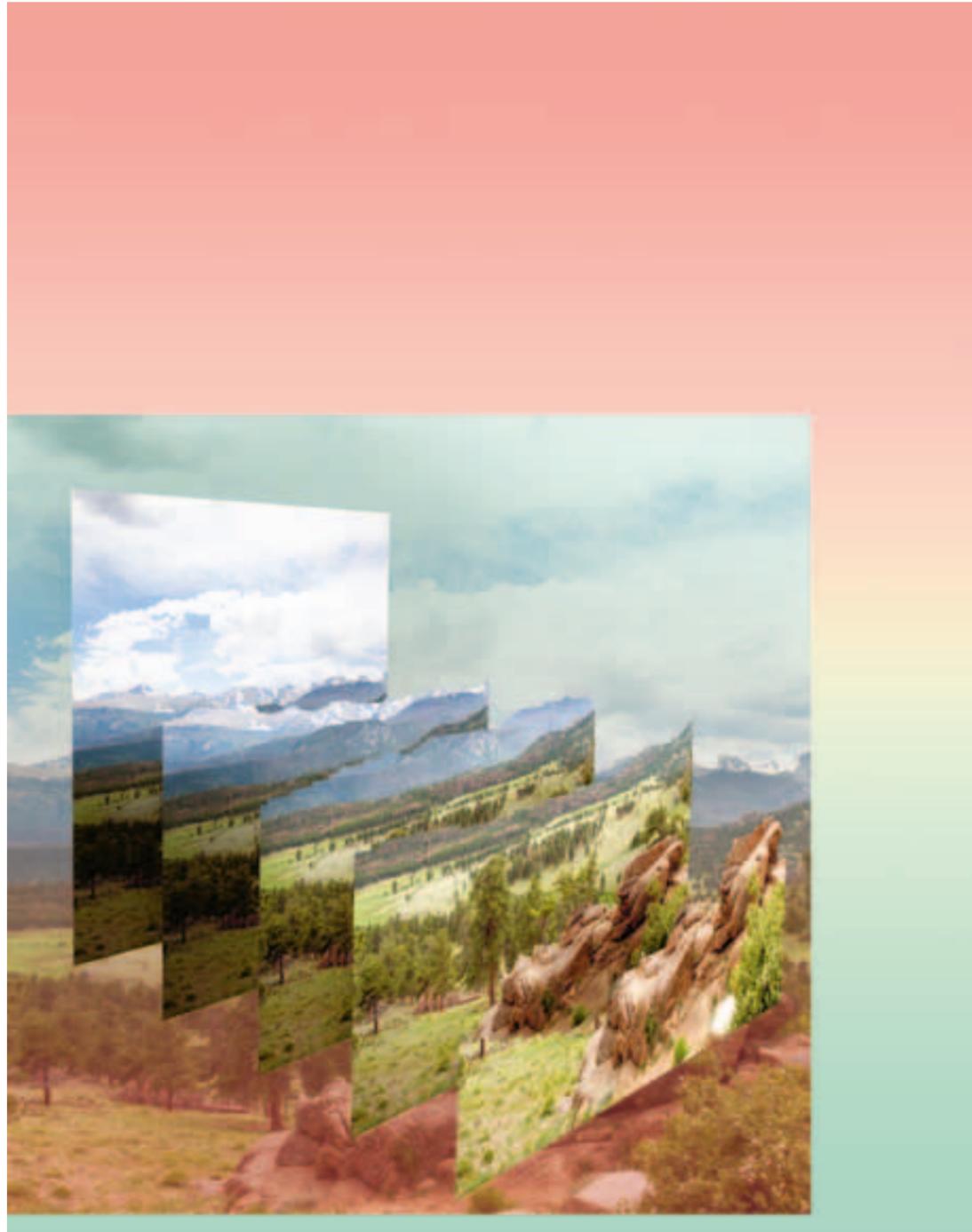
about it, whether we consider it from the point of view that by its properties it satisfies human needs, or that it first takes on these properties as the product of human labour. It is absolutely clear that, by his activity, man changes the forms of the materials of nature in such a way as to make them useful to him.

We make nature useful. We transform its compounds into commodities. But wood is wood regardless of whether or not it becomes a table, as Marx goes on to describe in this passage. By seeing nature as discrete ‘things,’ we have reduced the natural world into parts to be measured, labeled, dissected, probed, questioned, consumed, discarded, and most violently, separated from ourselves. The dualism of nature and society has been called Cartesian by Jason W. Moore, which roots its provenance in the scientific revolution. Descartes’ mind/body separation predicated world-views of the period; given that this is when classical ideas were restored and our conception of modern science was born, we hold onto this separation to this day. One such example is the way scientists work: observation, inductive reasoning, and the scientific method are means to ascertain knowledge about the natural world.

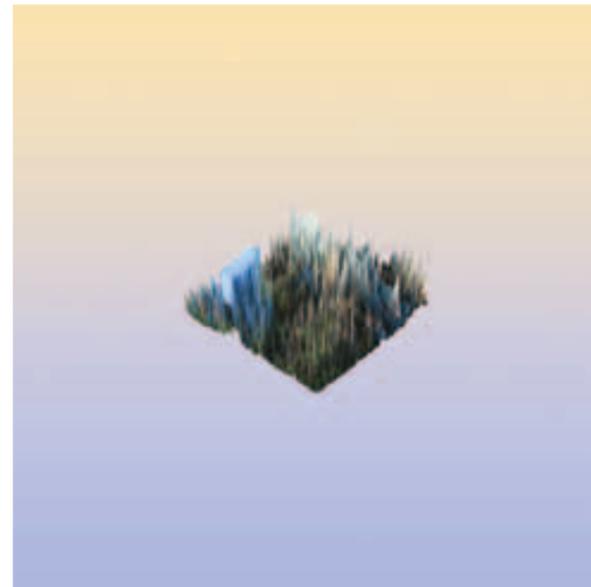
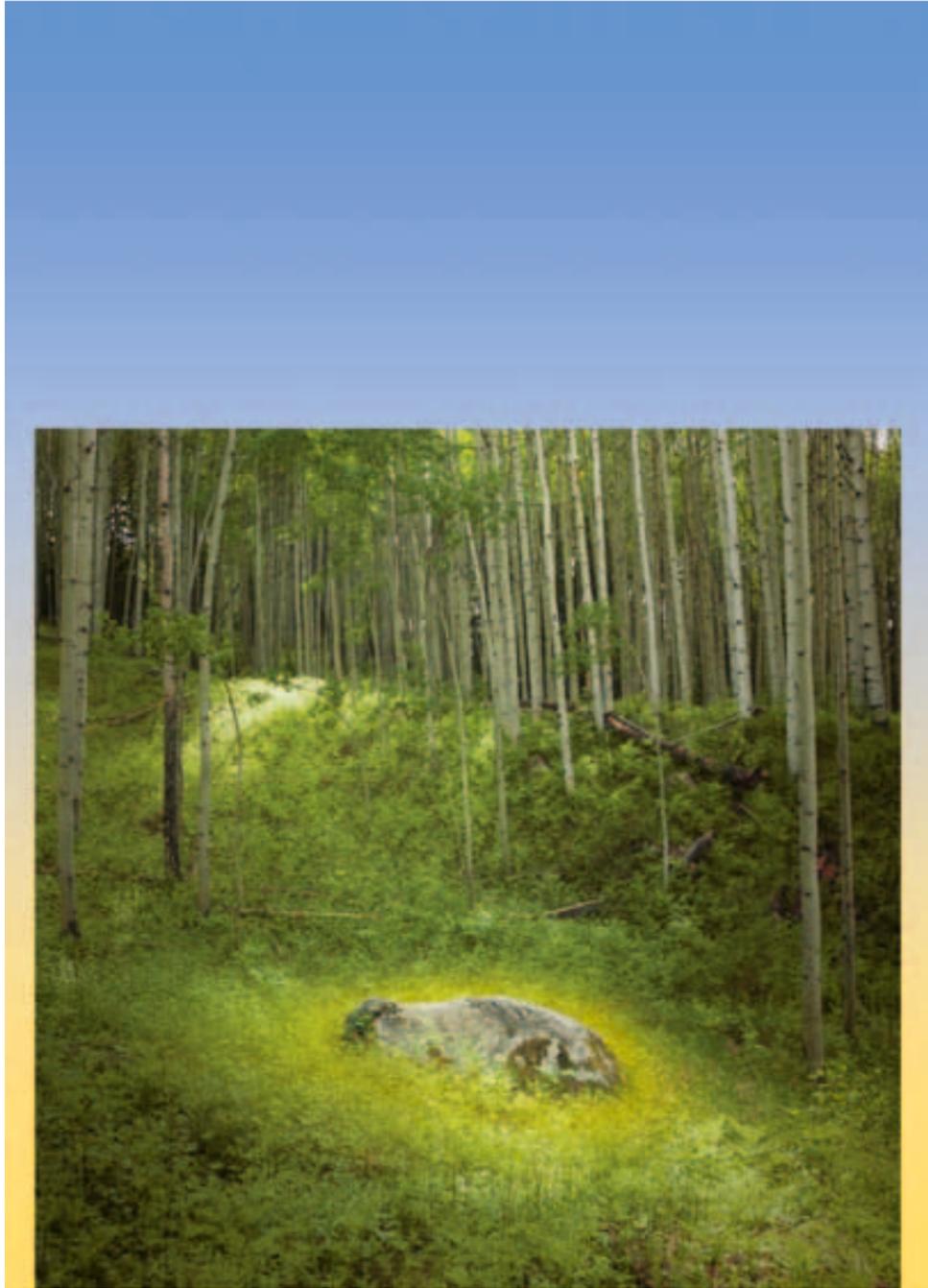
There is a third force based on the same goals as science and capitalism: photography; or, at least a certain kinds of. Taking a photograph is an act of capturing, a kind of control, and a mechanism of transformation. This photograph is both synecdoche and metonymy—separate from its context, cropped,

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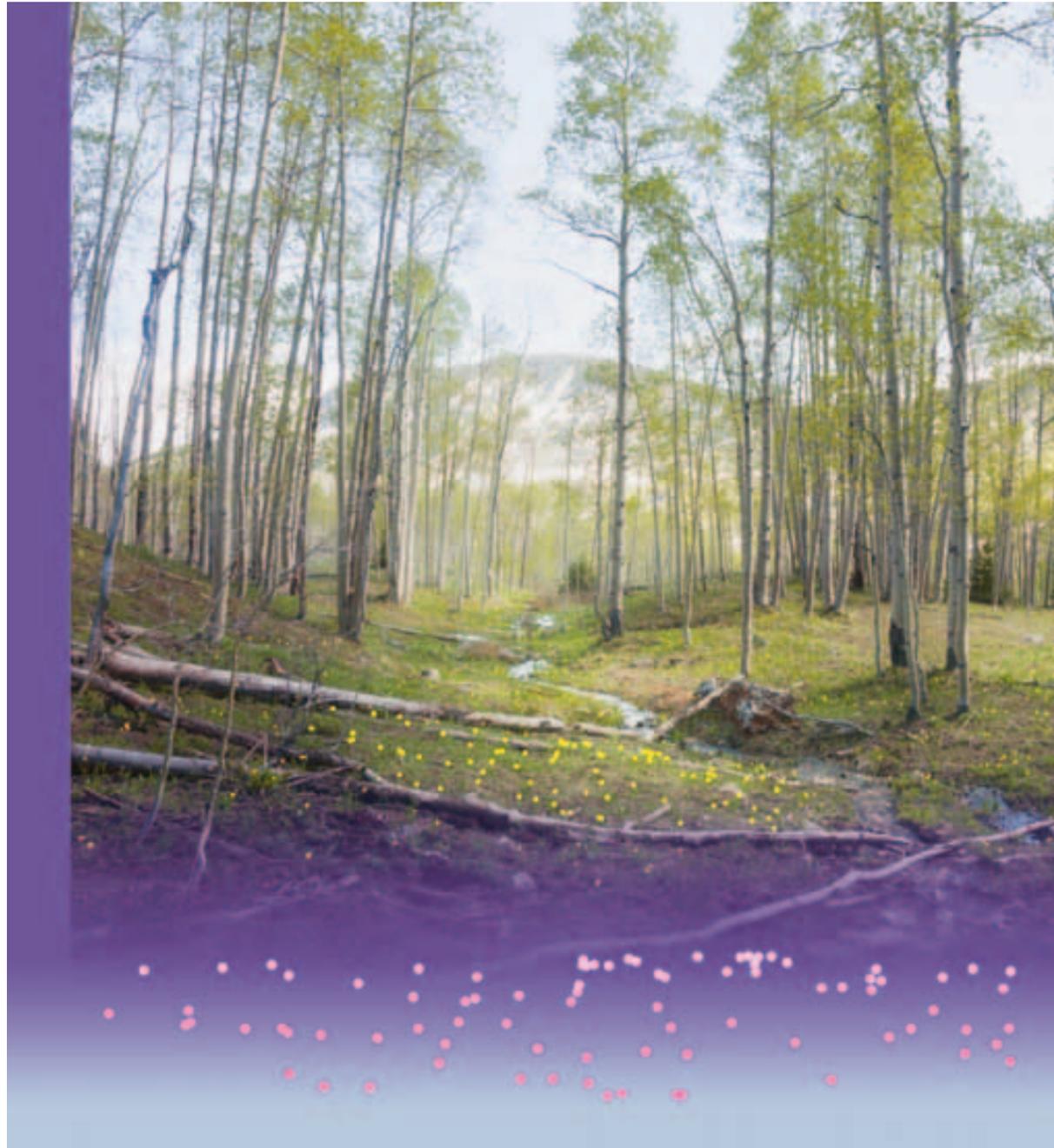












altered. The part stands in for the whole. What's more, all of these actions are dependent on scientific rules: from the apparatus of the camera itself, to analogue or digital process, which transmute information into images. Photographs are the world commodified and '[a] capitalist society requires a culture based on images.' For one month during the summer field season at Rocky Mountain Biological Laboratory, Mark Dorf collected data with field biologists and ecologists studying the effects of climate change in the region. Frequently, his field research was conducted with ecologists studying wildflower populations; they also collected data about wildflower pollinators, like bees and hummingbirds. As average temperature increase each year, snowpack melts earlier in the summer; an intervening drought now leaves the ecosystem without a water supply between the end of winter and the summer rainy season. The wildflowers die too soon, and a chain reaction affecting the ecosystem ensues. All of this has been gleaned through measurement, over time, following standard methods. When this data was first collected nearly a century ago, there was nothing useful about it; and truly, there is never anything useful about the collection of data. Data only yields meaning through interpretation.

This is Dorf's point of departure for his series *Emergence*. Photographing specific research sites or vantage points thereof, Dorf treats each image as a data set. Digital photographs are especially suited to this methodology as light is recorded numerically. Pixels are always arranged in a grid; in *Emergence*, how they are arranged and by what method varies. One such method is an artist-authored code that reorders respective pixels based on hue, saturation, and exposure. Gradients of two or more colors are generated, revealing information about color palettes within each image, imperceptible without the aid of a computer. This is visualized by different means in a suite of four images within the series, where enlarged, geometric data points are illustrative but not representative. That is, they do not indicate exact points

from data collected in the respective field area but are interpretations of that data in and of themselves. A green square in the background of *Emergent #18* indicates what has been designated as an iron fen—a wetland rich in its iron deposits—by the federal government. A protected natural resource, the circles dotted throughout the foreground of the image indicate other areas of contiguous wetlands that are not recognized as iron fens: the iron deposits in each are outside of the range which determines a wetland as such. The delineation is arbitrary, decided upon with the supposition of knowledge but ostensibly without consideration of the connectedness of the ecosystem.

As Dorf and I discussed in a recent interview, objectivity in science is a misconception. Although Dorf's methodology derives from field research, by which data is reconstituted into imagery, the works in *Emergence* demonstrate scientific fallibility. The reconstituted landscapes in the series demonstrate this most saliently, as Dorf reassembles multiple viewpoints of mountains to generate an archetypal image of a mountain. Recognizable, and even passable, as a mountain, Dorf's compositions are complete fabrication derived from hard data. Much of the work in *Emergence* echoes the Cartesian dualism on which modern science is based. We see landscape (nature) and gradient (society) as discrete—abutted or overlaid, but always separate. This is not replication, but dichotomy laid bare. No matter the force—capitalism, science, or photography—each mechanism is a separation of human nature from nature itself. If we are going to name a geological era after ourselves (the most anthropocentric appellation of all), then must reinsert humanity into the processes we have employed to make sense of the world. We are more than 'observers, victims, or lone survivors', to borrow from Jodi Dean. We are a species. Dorf's *Emergence* offers a dismantling of the long-withstanding paradigm that has facilitated the aforementioned systemic separations. Imperatively, such poetics also offers a movement beyond the dualism that lead us into the Capitalocene.

MISHKA

FEEDLOTS

HENNER

MARK DORF
(b. 1988, US)

Mark Dorf graduated from The Savannah College of Art and Design with a B.F.A in Photography and Sculpture. Dorf's work explores the post-analogue experience – society's interactions with the digital world and its relationship to our natural origins. He has exhibited internationally, won several grants among which the Mayer Foundation grant in 2015 and his work is included in the Fidelity Investments Collection, the Deutsche Bank Collection, and the permanent collection of the Savannah College of Art and Design. Emergence has just been published in book form by In the In-Between Editions. Mark lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

KERRY DORAN
(b. 1990, US)

She is a writer, curator, and artist based in New York. She has written for *Rhizome*, Postmasters Gallery, and the Research Forum at the Courtauld Institute of Art, London. Currently, she is researching and archiving David Diao's oeuvre for his upcoming solo exhibition at the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, and contributing writings to the exhibition catalogue.