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ECOLOGY OF ILLUSION ON THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF DIGITAL NARRATIVES, TERRITORIES AND PERCEPTION

Abstract

The article re-examines the “twin-transition” strategy of the European Union through a broader framework associated with artistic practice. To do this, the text offers the idea of “an ecology of illusion” to investigate how illusionist scenography – by means of perceptual disruption and speculative narration – reassesses our ways of seeing and inhabiting the world in the Anthropocene. Using as example *The Terrestrial Trilogy* (by Bruno Latour and Frédérique Aït-Touati), we focus on how site-specific installations, utilizing optical devices, media, and affective manipulations of space can create new ecologies of attention. Drawing on the works of Haraway, Ingold, Bishop, Morton, Gombrich and other thinkers, we ultimately argue that these artistic dispositifs provide important tools to reveal the interdependencies articulated in complex ecological relationships and help to reconfigure aesthetics and perception in relation to humans’ enlarged cosmological sense of responsibility to the environment.

Keywords: Digital Narratives, Ecology, Illusion, Perception, Territories

The “twin transition” promoted by the European Union aims to combine ecological and digital transformation as parallel and interdependent responses to environmental urgency and technological acceleration. Its ambitions are embedded in the Next Generation EU Programme, which seeks to integrate ecological and digital priorities into public, economic, and social policies.

However, this approach tends to neglect significant aspects of perception, space, and culture. The danger is a technocratic framework that flattens local specificities and wipes out the embodied, lived experiences of land and ecosystems. In going forward, reclaiming perception is also reclaiming territory – not as fixed surfaces, but as fluid, inhabited, contested spaces.

Certain artistic practices – particularly those drawing from traditions of illusion, such as anamorphosis, *trompe-l’œil*, and immersive scenography – propose alternatives. These practices mobilize perceptual intelligence, offering critical and sensory engagement with our conditions of inhabitation in the Anthropocene. Rather than merely visualizing data, they challenge the frameworks through which we perceive ecological and technological realities. They echo the need for situated, embodied attention and relational understanding. Rather than a generic injunction, situated names an epistemic position: as Donna Haraway argues, knowledges are always partial and located, and accountability is tied to position and relation¹.

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1 D.J. Haraway, *Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective*, in «Feminist Studies», 14, n. 3, 1988, pp. 575-599.

In this sense, attention is not interior focus but a relational practice cultivated within specific situations – akin to Isabelle Stengers’s call for slow science, which demands obligations to the situations that address us². Vinciane Despret describes these as attentional practices: modes of co-presence and mutual attunement that expand who and what can become perceptible³. In the same direction, Estelle Zhong Mengual invites us to *apprendre à voir* from the point of view of the living, shifting the regime of visibility toward continuities and sensitive correspondences between human and more-than-human worlds⁴. These practices operate not through abstraction but through direct perception – inviting audiences to experience environmental and spatial complexities through disruption, resonance, and imagination. As such, they offer a counterpoint to technocratic abstraction: a politics of perception in Rancière’s sense – namely, a redistribution of what can be seen, said, and felt⁵.

1. *Ecology of Illusion: Conceptual Framework*

This article introduces the notion of an ecology of illusion, which operates along two interlinked trajectories. First, it refers to a long tradition of illusionistic techniques – such as anamorphosis and *trompe-l’œil* – that manipulate visual perception through calculated distortions or perspectival tricks. These artistic strategies do not merely deceive the eye; they disrupt cognitive habits and spatial assumptions by staging the instability of representation itself. Rather than reflecting reality, they produce it through layered constructs of visibility, calling into question the conditions under which perception is formed and stabilized.

Such practices invite viewers into sensory and cognitive engagement, prompting a reflection on how we apprehend space, matter, and the environments we inhabit. Vision is never neutral, but embedded in cultural expectations and modes of seeing that are historically and socially conditioned⁶. In this sense, illusion becomes a critical tool – a perceptual and epistemological technology – that exposes the frameworks of our understanding rather than offering transparent access to the real.

At a time marked by ecological disruption and global instability – what some refer to as the Anthropocene – these perceptual disturbances gain renewed urgency. They become metaphorical and sensorial levers for reconsidering how we inhabit a planet increasingly defined by environmental thresholds and systemic fragility.

Second, the ecology of illusion addresses how artistic representation can generate new forms of awareness and relationality. In the face of accelerating climate breakdown,

2 I. Stengers, *Another Science Is Possible: A Manifesto for Slow Science*, Polity, Cambridge 2018.

3 V. Despret, *What Would Animals Say If We Asked the Right Questions?*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2016.

4 E. Zhong Mengual, *Apprendre à voir : Le point de vue du vivant*, Actes Sud, Arles 2021.

5 J. Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, Verso, London 2009.

6 E.H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, Phaidon Press, London 1960.

resource depletion, and biodiversity loss, there is a need to rethink our relations with the living world not through information alone, but through a radical reshaping of attention. Contemporary artistic practices – across scenography, virtual or augmented reality, and immersive installation – already shape our shared imaginaries in unprecedented ways, enabled by technological mediation and transdisciplinary invention. Such practices do not merely illustrate ecological issues but recompose the frameworks through which we perceive and relate to them.

They thus activate forms of speculative narrative and sensory attention that challenge dominant representations and make visible phenomena typically abstract or inaccessible, such as planetary shifts, environmental degradation, or the territorial effects of geopolitical extraction⁷. These perceptual dispositifs interrupt normalized regimes of representation, offering instead a grounded, embodied reorientation towards the world – one situated not in distant overview but in the scale of bodily experience.

This reconfiguration of perception is not a passive optical illusion but a critical ecology of vision. It reframes the perceptual field as an object of inquiry and adjustment. Rather than appealing to immersion as an end in itself, the dispositif repositions the spectator's role from reception to co-construction – a redistribution of capacities within the act of seeing⁸. The shift in attention is therefore less a “heightened presence” than a change in the conditions of appearance, through which interdependencies and invisibilities become thinkable and perceptible.

Such transformations engage the politics of the sensible as a reconfiguration of the conditions of appearance – of what is made available to see, say and feel⁹. Rather than relying on a rhetoric of disturbance, these operations make the mediations themselves legible (framing, timing, scale, access), thereby implicating the viewer in the allocation of attention and its ethical stakes for spectatorship. The ecology of illusion acts over time on imaginaries and representations, participating in the ongoing construction of what may be perceived, narrated, and inhabited.

Ultimately, these artistic strategies offer new relational modes of ecological coexistence, asking us to revisit not only how we see the world but also how we are in it. The ecology of illusion becomes a conceptual and perceptual practice with the potential to foster critical discourse, shared responsibility, and collective re-imaginings of the territories we cohabit.

2. Point of View / Point of Life: Spatiality and Perception

The ecology of illusion invites us to transition from a dispassionate “point of view” to a more embodied “point of life.” A “point of view” refers to a spatial siting and visual

7 D.J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Duke University Press, Durham 2016.

8 J. Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, cit.

9 J. Rancière, *The Distribution of the Sensible: Aesthetics and Politics*, Continuum, London 2004.

framing; a “point of life” describes an affective, sensory, and ethical condition of being in the world. Perceiving is not neutral – it’s always imagined through a network of environments, narratives, and relations. This onto-epistemological position asks us to think of vision as an ethical, situated activity¹⁰.

This shift also recalls the notion of attachments: our lives are made up of material, emotional, and ecological attachments. To see is to relate and attach to those relations. Perceiving becomes relational: one attends to what sits adjacently and around oneself. Illusionist practices like scale inversion, reflection, or anamorphosis stage some form of entanglement, inviting us to perceive otherwise¹¹.

Objects, whether art or artifice, have a kind of ontological pressure: they operate within relations, and cannot simply be reduced to a relation¹². Likewise, environmental phenomena (like climate change or radioactive waste, some have referred to as hyperobjects) – while shaping our reality – are difficult to grasp¹³. Illusionist devices allow us to feel these forces, albeit more indirectly, through perceptual disorientation. Through a subtle alteration of our spatial perception, they engage audiences to reflect active attachments. This is an envisioning of oneself in ways that come into question the anthropocentric self and consider the boundaries between the human and non-human, and the natural and constructed. Our purpose is to demonstrate that illusion functions as aesthetic and cognitive dispositifs for ecological awareness.

Immersive environments serve as relational appliances that reassign perception through technological and narrative mediation. Emerging from code-based systems and interactive structures, digital narratives reframe temporality, agency, and the spatial experience of performance. Instead of presenting linear or fixed storylines, they often employ algorithms, feedback loops, or responsive interfaces.

In this way, digital media do not merely relay perception; they generate new narrative logics, where attention is delineated in real time and where audience, artwork, and system remain porous. There is no pursuit of clarity, only friction – between close and distant, visible and hidden. They resist simplification, opening space for doubt and reformulation: this amounts to a situated crafting of perception.

This is fostered by what some describe as an “ecology of attention”¹⁴. That is, a form of seeing based on attention, not control, that develops ways of being in uncertainty, responsiveness, and the emergence of meaning through bodily engagement. Here, illusion does not facilitate ways to engage or escape into those other states of being; it enables us to attend to other ways of being by reshaping our default frames.

These perceptual practices collide with an ethics of cohabitation, a call to respond, adapt, and share the same spaces with other lives. Mimetic engagement, walking with

10 B. Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1993.

11 B. Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2005.

12 T. Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2013.

13 G. Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, Zero Books, Alresford 2011.

14 V. Despret, *Habiter en oiseau*, Actes Sud, Arles 2019.

others; tracing and listening – become a way of producing situated knowledge, not reproduction, only resonance¹⁵. In these senses, illusion interrupts not to escape but to activate this relational capacity.

3. *Imitation: Mapping and Understanding the World*

Imitation, or *mimesis*, is not only a fundamental modality for human learning, but also a philosophical and anthropological problem at the heart of representation. From Plato's suspicion of imitation as a degraded copy of truth¹⁶ to Aristotle's valorization of *mimesis* as a natural mode of cognition and catharsis¹⁷, the mimetic impulse has structured Western theories of perception and art. Anthropologist Tim Ingold views imitation not as mechanical reproduction, but as a way of "following the materials" on continue – a process of empathetic attunement to the environment and its affordances¹⁸. René Girard, in contrast, theorizes *mimesis* as a force of desire and conflict, suggesting that we want what others want because we imitate their desire¹⁹. Walter Benjamin and Michael Taussig extend this understanding by pointing to a more sensuous, embodied mimetic faculty – one that enables a relational mode of knowing, prior to language²⁰. More recently, cognitive neuroscientist Vittorio Gallese suggests that mirror neurons provide a neurobiological substrate for embodied simulation, allowing us to feel what others feel, making *mimesis* central to intersubjectivity²¹.

When scenographic dispositifs immerse us in altered spatial or temporal frames, they do not merely illustrate or simulate. They reactivate this multi-layered mimetic capacity: engaging our capacity to rehearse, to become other, and to cohabit perceptual worlds in transformation. Artistic practice encompasses numerous forms intended for participants or spectators to experience otherness, collectivity and territory through repetition, variation and sensation. In these practices, imitation is no longer representational, but generative in the sense that it modifies, updates and reinvents reality rather than reproducing it²².

Illusionist art, which has a history in *mimesis*, mobilizes this capacity not as spectacle, but as a means to elicit critical perception. From painting to scenography, shadow theatre to digital media, illusionist art challenges the boundary between fiction and "the real".

15 T. Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*, Routledge, London 2011.

16 Plato, *Republic*, X.

17 Aristotle, *Poetics*, 4.

18 T. Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*, Routledge, London 2000.

19 R. Girard, *La violence et le sacré*, Grasset, Paris 1972.

20 W. Benjamin, *On the Mimetic Faculty*, in M.W. Jennings, H. Eiland, G. Smith (eds.), *Selected Writings*, vol. 2., 1927-1934, Belknap Press, Cambridge-London, pp. 720-722. M. Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*, Routledge, New York 1993.

21 V. Gallese, C. Sinigaglia, *The Shared Mind: Mirror Neurons and the Interpersonal Self*, MIT Press, Cambridge 2011.

22 C. Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, Verso, London 2012.

Mimesis is a dynamic process between the site of familiarity and the site of estrangement²³. The image – rather than being passive – reveals ruptures and absences that reconfigure the visible²⁴. Objects – including artworks and other forms of technology – have their own agency: they act on and structure our relations while remaining irreducible²⁵. Yet, objects also are complex agencies that help shape our perception and imagination through built environments, which in and of themselves affect perception and imagination²⁶. Illusionist devices reactivate and engage this latent structure into the conscious eye, intentionally directing attention toward interstices, intensities or new configurations of possibility.

Nevertheless, illusion is not a universally embraced construct. In East Asia, absences have equal regard to presence as a means of representing, as is the situated practice of imitating something we look at and being told “no that doesn’t exist”. The thoughtful aesthetic of the gap or *ma* (間) implies it is a meaningful understanding formed of absence and not presence²⁷. Space is constructed just as much by what is left out as it is what is mandated for us to look at, or shown²⁸. These aesthetic values present a cultural situatedness to what our perception is and what visual description or knowledge could come from lingering in some ambiguity and not clarity.

Illusionist works ask us to reconsider what we perceive and how we habitually respond to it. They introduce calibrated instabilities – conceptual or sensory – that reopen our relation to narratives, environments and others. The aim is not to confuse, but to expose how perception is configured and to free up alternatives. Rather than a “co-participatory state”, these dispositifs enable collective attunements, where proximity, gesture and timing redistribute attention across bodies and environments²⁹. What is shared is not one viewpoint, but an evolving choreography of attention.

These devices of the image also grapple with forces that overwhelm our cognition, that are unseen or outside the realm of perception – climate as a system or digital infrastructures that we simply cannot see or sense any longer, for example³⁰. Increasingly through mediation, new presents are made and an embodiment of perception is engaged as a co-production of experience. The dispositif notion aims towards the means for us and our encounter in a conceptualization of an ecology of practices – acknowledging knowledge is not situated in control, but in responsiveness, or “vulner-ability”³¹.

23 E.H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, cit.

24 G. Didi-Huberman, *Devant l'image*, Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris 1990.

25 G. Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, cit.

26 L. Mumford, *Technics and Civilization*, Harcourt Brace, New York 1934.

27 F. Jullien, *The Great Image Has No Form, or On the Nonobject through Painting*, trans. J.M. Todd, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2009.

28 Author's note: *Ma* (間) is a Japanese concept referring to the interval or space between elements. It emphasizes what is omitted as much as what is shown.

29 E. Manning, *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*, MIT Press, Cambridge 2009.

30 J. Birringer, *Performance, Technology and Science*, PAJ Publications, New York 2009.

31 On “vulner-ability”. The hyphen marks vulnerability as an ability: not a deficit, but a relational capacity to be affected and to respond (what Donna Haraway calls “response-ability”). It reframes attention, care, and co-habitation as practices that require exposure to situations and others, rather than control. I. Stengers, *Une autre science est possible!*, La Découverte, Paris 2013.

These forms of perceptual *mimesis* resonate with the logics of digital responsiveness, where interaction becomes a mode of learning and adjustment rather than replication. As the experience begins to dismantle the real, then the possibilities of readjusting our perception have shifted. Illusion provokes ethical engagements: in attentiveness, in care, in an adjustment to cohabitating. Through thresholds and tensions, it makes the invisible be felt; and that in itself will then adjust that which it means in some way to be with others.

4. Case Study: The Terrestrial Trilogy

The Terrestrial Trilogy – Inside, Moving Earths, and Viral – is a scenographic and speculative project developed to rethink modes of representation in the Anthropocene. Combining scientific documents, speculative narration, cartographic strategies, and perceptual devices, it addresses shifts in cosmological, geological, and political frameworks. Each piece invites a reconfiguration of perception by staging disorientation and attention. Illusionist devices – mirrors, anamorphosis, synchronized projections, shifts in scale – interact with scientific visuals and poetic text, building what may be described as a theatre of critical sensibility. Spectators are not passive observers but are activated to reflect on their embeddedness in terrestrial systems.

Since the beginning, I have been responsible for the scenography, lighting, and integration of video systems, designing visual environments from diverse materials – archival images, geological maps, architectural drawings – that reflect how knowledge becomes spatial. The aim was to render the project's conceptual shifts tangible through spatial manipulation and reflective perception.

A particularly radical iteration took place at the Gropius Bau in Berlin during the Down to Earth exhibition (2020), where no electricity could be used. A suspended mirror above a large table enabled visitors to read documents by looking upward – reversing the dominant gaze of classification. This inversion disturbed conventional knowledge hierarchies and demanded a bodily, cognitive adjustment. This scenographic grammar was reinforced through contrasting scales and gestures – from large projections to intimate paper documents handled by visitors. These spatialized oscillations between tactility and abstraction echoed the larger aim: to allow audiences to think through space, perception, and relation. Presented in diverse venues – black boxes, museums, cathedrals, monasteries, lecture halls – each version required a full spatial reconfiguration. This adaptability underpins what I call spatial maieutics: scenography as a form of emergent thought where space, body, and representation co-compose meaning.

Rather than explain ecological phenomena, these installations render invisible forces – tectonic drift, soil transformation, atmospheric thresholds – visibly affective. Through this, audiences are invited to feel the ecological thickness of the world, in line with

the notion of hyperobjects³². The trilogy is also published as a book³³, presenting the dialogues between thought and stage. In an interview, I discussed how scenographic dispositifs act as vectors for affect and critical engagement with knowledge³⁴. These experiments extend research on cartographic fiction and critical spatial imaginaries³⁵, following Frédérique Aït-Touati's inquiry into narrative cartography and the dramaturgy of knowledge. The experiments prioritize how aesthetic apparatuses might enable complexity to materialize and, further, propose new spatiotemporal and attentional relations – between bodies, systems and territories.

In this way, *The Terrestrial Trilogy* not only criticizes representational regimes but shifts attention to what is now known as the critical zone: the thin, fragile layer where life takes place. Here, Gaia is not a mythic entity, but a dynamic, reactive field requiring us to co-compose with her. If illusion can help reimagine our attachments, it is through its power to render visible the space between visibility and absence, between humans and non-humans.

5. Art and the Living: Environment, Culture, Representation

Illusionist performances – understood as sensory and symbolic encounters – interrupt the accepted binaries that classify the living and nature, the biological and the artificial. By presenting and disrupting appearances, and playing along the boundaries of what we are able to see, and able to sense, they expose both our culturally mediated relationship to living beings, and the limit of that mediation. In so doing, this simultaneous orientation calls into question our perception of what we see as “the natural” and “the staged”, providing, again, critical space where representation is an avenue for ethical and political repositioning.

Illusion practices disrupt dominant cultural narratives, exposing the seams that underlie the inheritance of myth we call the living; they displace accepted art histories while making new the visible, sayable and thinkable in the social³⁶. In this sense, representation illustrative of real life is not a mirror, it is a site for possible world-making. Artistic practices become sites to work the evidentiary regimes over again because seeing different will also enable different thinking³⁷. Illusionist techniques work toward making (feel) able the ideological layering and scaffolding of our relationship to the natural³. Every image, illusion or scenographic arrangement carries a responsibility with it in how we

32 T. Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2013.

33 F. Aït-Touati, B. Latour, *Trilogie terrestre: Inside – Moving Earths – Viral*, B42, Paris 2022.

34 C. Déchery, *Il faut trahir le document. Retour sur la trilogie terrestre*, interview with P. Laffont de Lojo, in «thaetre.com», 2022.

35 F. Aït-Touati, A. Arènes, A. Grégoire, *Terra Forma: Manuel de cartographies potentielles*, B42, Paris 2019; F. Aït-Touati, *Fictions of the Cosmos: Science and Literature in the Seventeenth Century*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2011.

36 J. Rancière, *Le Partage du sensible*, La Fabrique, Paris 2000.

37 J. Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, Penguin, London 1972.

are going to coexist with life forms³⁸. The position already suggests an idea of “nature” – that it is never universally shared, but rather historically framed through relational systems and forms of classification³⁹; yet it serves to disrupt the given visibilities, showing our gazes and our imaginings, by creating fractures in the historical narratives of ruling life as living.

These artistic forms build out the plurality of possibilities we have that compose worlds. They ask for new stories of imagining and new speculative fictions to help redirect our systems of planning, affect, and ecologies⁴⁰. Not as documentary illustration, but as performative thinking, illusion becomes a methodology to alter relationships and encounters with living beings, spaces and territories. Visual and sensory narratives engage in a cosmopolitics, not as a singular world, but a multiplicity of plural ontologies existing together⁴¹. These processes that shift boundaries of fiction and reality offer a politics of seeing – where altered conditions of appearance entail altered modes of living. The sensory experience these works offer do not reproduce artificial life, nor do they aestheticize and localize life in spectacular form. These performative modes seek to disrupt ways of perceiving and ways of thinking, to create spaces for new ways of conversing and with the forms that live around and along us⁴². They ask us all to slow down, to doubt and rearrange our attention.

To this end, illusion serves a pedagogy of uncertainty. These events value unstable, incomplete, and at times conflicting feelings and interactions, as a basis for creating “new ways” of cohabiting⁴³. Like certain mushrooms that thrive on ruins, and in relational frictions, these works create the conditions for emergence: thresholds created, through frictions, and tensions in which the living can be remade. Such aesthetics call forth an ethics of relation. Not an ethics that glorifies nature, but an ethics that attends to what lives, suffers, resists, and persists. Illusion strategically introduces instability as a method for examining representational assumptions. By shifting frames, scales or sequences, it renders the constructiveness of representation perceptible and negotiable. This does not romanticize disorder; it clarifies how relations with the living are enacted, not as positions over external objects, but as situated entanglements.

These works then highlight the multiple, unstable, and interdependent relations that are life. They respond not by offering simplification, but with juxtaposition, friction and heightened perception. Such an engagement affirms the necessity of articulating a politics of interdependence⁴⁴ – a deep and complex acknowledgment of the life that is itself formed through a recognition of the vulnerability of forms of life and the ecological relations they construct.

38 D.J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, cit.

39 P. Descola, *Par-delà nature et culture*, Gallimard, Paris 2005.

40 D.J. Haraway, *When Species Meet*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2008.

41 I. Stengers, *Une autre science est possible!*, cit.

42 A.L. Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2015.

43 A. Krenak, *Idées pour retarder la fin du monde*, Éditions Dehors, Bellevaux 2020.

44 Y. Citton, *Pour une écologie de l'attention*, Seuil, Paris 2014.

Such artistic forms do not offer fixed solutions but rather open ecologies of attention. In care, reciprocity, and listening, they provide a shift in the multifunctional aesthetics of ecological action. Ecological action cannot be at its essence management or compensation, but its essence is presence, relation or continuous transformation. Such forms of attention support embodied and situated understandings of ecology and changing dynamics⁴⁵. What representation becomes therefore is no longer passive reflection or instrumental communication; it becomes an act of connection, and a vector for shared transformation. The illusion-based art carries within itself a capacity to engage in the collective invention of new associated ecological narratives: more durable, sensitive, and just.

6. From point of view to point of life

The ecology of illusion articulated in this study describes a perceptual, critical and speculative endeavor to reconceptualize modes of representation today, in the time of the Anthropocene. It situates illusion as a transformative, rather than deceptive, tool, and as a method for transforming the way we see, sense and live in the world. Through illusionist strategies, ranging from anamorphosis to immersive scenography, this ecology functions to destabilize fixed ways of seeing and sensing, invoking what might be termed an ecology of attention, in which perception itself becomes an ethical relation to the ambient environment, to other beings and to space itself⁴⁶. These perceptual approaches do not attempt to represent the world as it is, but rather seek to make visible the invisible tensions of the world, of dynamic relations, and potential for transformation.

Insofar as they activate the body and imagination, illusion can become a tool for displacement: it sheds light on the constructiveness of what we see, and it opens up possibilities for deeper engagement with dominant narratives. This is a mechanism that, as Rancière coined it, participates in what he termed the distribution of the sensible⁴⁷, redistributing what it is possible to see, say, or feel in a given context. This entails practices that open both phenomenological and symbolic terrains, allowing us to recompose relations to both our territories and our technologies.

This critical way of thinking happens to resonate closely with the twin transition promoted by the European Union – a framework that seeks to tie ecological and digital transformation together as two interlinked imperatives. Yet, as we will argue through this research, the dominant models still neglect the spatial, perceptual and cultural dimensions of response. Artistic practices that include illusion, however, create another path: one that places perceptual experience at the center of reimagining the imaginaries upon which ecological and technological futures are built.

By “technology” we mean not only a tool but a medium of reality – insofar as it determines how we see, how we orient ourselves in space, and ultimately, how we relate to

45 V. Despret, *Habiter en oiseau*, cit.

46 E. Zhong Mengual, *Learning to See: The Perspective of the Living*, Actes Sud, Arles 2021.

47 J. Rancière, *The Distribution of the Sensible: Aesthetics and Politics*, cit.

the living. Artful engagements with advanced media, including mirrors, projections, sensors, and digital mapping, can give dimensionality to an abstract complexity of entangled systems and otherwise give rise to new epistemologies⁴⁸. These digital narratives are not mere reflections of the world but participate in its construction through modulation of perception and attentiveness in real time. The scenographic logic of digital narratives produces new epistemologies based on immersivity, relationality, and responsiveness.

Scenography, here conceived as more than stage design but as a living composition of space, light, body, image, sound and matter, becomes a privileged site of potentialities for such exploration. In scenography, the visual comes together with the corporeal, the symbolic with spatiality, and the material with the speculative. It creates space for human and non-human bodies to co-habit, for abstract forces and concrete gestures to offer platforms for inhabiting a space along different lines of co-existence.

Illusionist works respond to this condition by asking us to reconsider what we perceive and how we habitually respond to it. They generate disturbances – whether conceptual (an artist’s position on climate disruption) or sensory (a sudden interruption of our view of Calgary, causing perceptual confusion) – that reengage how we relate to our environments, narratives, and fellow beings. Not to confuse in the sense of masking, but to reveal; to unmake in order to imagine. Rather than a “co-participatory state,” these dispositifs enable collective attunements, where proximity, gesture, and timing redistribute attention across bodies and environments.

These image-based dispositifs also confront forces that overwhelm cognition or evade perception altogether – such as climate as a global system, or the digital infrastructures we can no longer see, sense, or fully grasp. Through mediation, new presents are constructed, and perception becomes an embodied co-production of experience. The notion of dispositif thus points toward an ecology of practices – where knowledge does not reside in control, but in responsiveness, in what we might call “vulnerability”. These forms of perceptual *mimesis* resonate with the logics of digital responsiveness, where interaction becomes a mode of learning and adjustment rather than of replication.

As experience begins to dismantle the real, the possibility of readjusting perception also shifts. Illusion provokes ethical engagement: through attention, care, and the necessity of cohabiting. By operating through thresholds and tensions, it renders the invisible felt – and that, in turn, reshapes what it means to be with others.

Moreover, this ecological understanding of illusion articulates a responsibility to learn from other cosmologies and consider spatial practices that stem from different traditions – practices that address visibility, presence, and world-making through alternative logics. It is not enough to have invented new tools to face planetary crises; we need to cultivate other ways of seeing and sensing – rooted in multiplicity, uncertainty, and shared vulnerability.

Thus, the ecology of illusion opens a critical, poetic, and situated sensibility – one that reframes the conditions of appearance and address, supporting more just, attentive and sustainable forms of co-habitation with other living beings.

48 D.J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, cit.