MAIS WRIGHT

Models for Expansion / Elia Bosshard

The prints and sculptures in Models for Expansion by Elia Bosshard suggest *distance* of various kinds—evoking the spatial, temporal and critical distance of artist and viewer from objects, places, events and techniques. Viewers apprehend landscapes and machines from inhuman heights, inspect cross-sections of detached concrete and witness ghostly vehicular impressions—as if dispassionately studying an ancient civilisation no longer present. Grainy digital traces of atmospheric dust, barely visible machines, smooth structural edifices, angular traces of pre-historic storms, primordial seabeds and the Earth's lenticular curve challenge us to consider the vast distances everyday technology enables us to experience and reproduce. But what does it mean to zoom in and out in 2025? What use is there for slippages between the micro and the macro; tensions between the universal and the particular; the co-existence of the immediate and the contemplative *longue durée*?

1. Time

The present has become its own kind of tyranny, as if immediacy is all there is. A multitude of users see conflict in real time, absorb opinions as they're formed and witness multiple social realities produced in increasingly automated, algorithmically organised and accelerated form, all arranged for instantaneous consumption. Peter Osborne has called this state of the contemporary a "disjunctive conjuncture": a messy non-unity of permanent crisis with no post-capitalist horizon.[1] In the present, history (or perhaps what we might now refer to as 'data') is not so much a series of humanistic lessons, but abstract fuel for intensified economic acceleration and technocratic governance. Matteo Pasquinelli calls this machinic present a *dictatorship of the past* in which new events are constrained by a "homogenous space–time view".[2] Networking technology, automated categorisation, infinite scroll, data driven optimisation and ever-intensifying forms of algorithmic extraction exacerbate the present, preventing slower, more contemplative experiences of time.

2. Space

The influence of astronaut William Anders' famous picture *Earth Rise* taken in 1968 aboard the Apollo 8 spacecraft, reveals shifts in the aesthetic efficacy of scale and distance. Among the first images of Earth taken from space, its rapid dissemination created a new kind of humanistic planetary sublime, instrumental in the rise of the environmental movement. Viewers zoomed out to see the Earth from a distance for the first time—the fragility, preciousness and loneliness of the Earth revealed in a single holistic image. In the present, planetary scale perception has been co-opted. Increasingly it is ghoulish techno-capitalists thinking at a distance, making the notion of 'taking a step back' seem absurd. When Katy Perry went to space recently aboard Jeff Bezos' Blue Origin rocket, she was widely derided as a corporate stooge. Likewise, when Elon Musk boyishly fantasises about space exploration, he privately imagines an eternal horizon for capital expansion. Meanwhile Peter Thiel, co-founder of Palantir, has envisaged the launch of privatised space capitalism by a global elite hiding out in New Zealand, unencumbered by states and publics.

3. The Global

Within a certain anglocentric orbit, these figures and the supposed *fait accompli* under which they operate seem to dominate capacities for thinking beyond the immediate. The pre-occupations of the tech elite, the hyper-extractive platforms they preside over, and the public's increasing scepticism of their unprecedented reach (in contrast to the apparent toothlessness of global governance) have corrupted popular notions of the global as shorthand for universal humanism. In their wake, the apprehension of expansive temporal arcs and all-encompassing networks has become so irredeemably dystopian that it might even be *out of fashion*. To imagine tech-enabled futures suggested by the present is to involuntarily conjure tragedy and ambivalence. Excitement or awe at where we might one day arrive, and the contemplative states required for such thinking, seem to have left us along with the post-war consensus, the Bretton Woods system, cold-war era cybernetics and Marshal McLuhan's now quaint notion of the global village.

4. Infrastructure

Keller Easterling's conception of "infrastructure space"[3] might be the closest thing we have to a functioning description of global 'civilisation'. For Easterling, the "operating system of the modern world" includes logistical and transport systems, manufacturing hubs, data processing and storage facilities, undersea cables, power stations, pipelines, shopping malls, raw labour capacity, consumer markets, the entire assemblage of concrete, steel, glass, silicon and Earth constituting built environments; alongside less material regulatory instruments such as special economic zones, high frequency trading, floating currencies, 'development' goals, software and networking protocols and ISO standards. The hyper-object of infrastructure space produces, programs and animates the global economy in real time; a distributed site of power that quite literally creates contexts for living, consuming, communicating and perceiving in today's global economy.

5. Beyond Logistics

As Ned Rossiter writes, infrastructure "makes worlds".[4] But crucially, Rossiter also invites us to reflect on the immanence of infrastructure to life; to ask what might be achieved through and even *after* infrastructure. As Rossiter insists, "there is scope for labour and life beyond the determining force of software and infrastructure". To reach this beyond however might require "the destruction of logistics as we know it." In other words, we need to imagine infrastructure as Bosshard does, without us in it. An extreme example of such a beyond can be found in the conclusion to the 2004 television adaptation of *Battlestar Galactica*, in which the remnants of a fugitive fleet (following a long war with a race of artificial humans known as Cylons) return to Earth, their ancient home recorded in myth. Following a truce with the Cylons, the humans decide to end the cycle of conflict by abandoning all technology. They destroy their fleet, flying it into the sun before commencing a new life in equilibrium with 'nature'. As viewers discover, these events have taken place not in the future, but 150000 years in the past. The final scenes depict modern day New York, suggesting a cycle of technological erasure and development. While in our time, infrastructure space seems beyond our purview and control; in helping us glimpse infrastructure space at its edges Bosshard's work echoes Rossiter, calling us to think in broader temporal arcs and at greater distances so that we might also witness the cyclical waxing and waning of humanity's technical apparatus.

6. Expansion

If Rossiter's 'beyond' is to be in any way desirable, we might have no choice but to sort through changing affective relationships with the global; to re-conceive a planetary sublime as generative and humanistic force; to 'take a step back' and zoom in and out anew. Bosshard's work challenges us to expand in this regard. Can subjects immersed in the lifeworld of contemporary immediacy see the whole? Is it possible to see the Earth again, as Anders did, for the first time? How do we get over the present and reclaim the *longue durée* as a space of opportunity? Bosshard's unfussy mode of distanced, technologically mediated vision (situated in economy class with an oldish iPhone) seems to offer clues as to how we might produce new forms of temporal and spatial representation from within the messy contingency of the contemporary and global infrastructure space.

Thomas Smith, August 2025

1.   Osborne, P. (2013). *Anywhere or not at all: Philosophy of contemporary art*. Verso Books.
2.   Pasquinelli, M., & Joler, V. (2021). The Nooscope manifested: AI as instrument of knowledge extractivism. *AI & society*, *36*(4), 1263-1280.
3.   Easterling, K. (2014). *Extrastatecraft: The power of infrastructure space*. Verso Books.
4.   Rossiter, N. (2016). *Software, infrastructure, labor: A media theory of logistical nightmares*. Routledge.