

Photographic fiction as a tool for regenerative sustainability thinking

Regenerative ecological thinking is an emerging paradigm in sustainability studies. What does it mean in the context of photographic art practice? This presentation is an exploratory study about the concept of *regenerative imagining* in seascape based photography.

To regenerate in biological terms means to grow after a loss or a damage. Regenerative thinking and practices is a paradigm shift from human centric approach to systemic, holistic and ecocentric worldview. The roots of regenerative practices are in agriculture, but there is a rising interest in various applications of sustainability thinking and development, for example urban planning and architecture, business, governance, education and tourism (Buckton et al., 2023). Regenerative sustainability approach takes a step further from contemporary sustainability practices. Where sustainability aims to safeguard the resources for future generations, regenerative sustainability is based on a holistic world view and aims for thriving whole living systems (Gibbons, 2020). A regenerative social-ecological system can be defined as those that maintain positive reinforcing cycles of wellbeing within and beyond themselves, especially between humans and wider nature (Buckton et al., 2023). A regenerative ecological perspective seeks to identify potentials within a system that sustain and renew life from within the ecosystem itself (Ditmar & Toivinen, 2024). A regenerative thought is a thought towards the future.

Our world is increasingly shaped by photographs and they frame our understanding of how we can imagine and build our futures (Żylinska, 2017). Vilem Flusser claimed that looking into the mirror of a camera and choosing 'the shot' by releasing the shutter permits us to experience concretely, *how choice functions as a projection into the future* (Flusser (Translation And Introduction By Nancy Ann Roth), 2011). Flusser's choice, a cut in the flow of time, does not only make us aware of the past, present and the future, but also feeds us the world that we inhabit. Our lives are constantly photographed and re-created through photography. In Joanna Zylinska's words, *We also make sense of the world around us through seeing it imaged* (Żylinska, 2017). Photographs are placeholders in a performative sense: they do not merely hold a moment or a place in a frozen state, but the photographic cut can be seen as an active agent that carves out our futures from the past and the present.

Despite the life-generating powers of photographic image and gesture, photographic discourse has long centered on the medium's relation to the past and the futurological dimension has received little attention (Wooldrige, 2021). In the time of a climate crisis and an urgent need to reimagine our lives on this planet, it is essential to re-think photography and its future tense with a regeneratively ecological consciousness.

This presentation reflects on an emergent modality of *regenerative imagining* (Ditmar & Toivinen, 2024) in the context of my own artistic practice. Ditmar and Toivinen build on ecological philosopher Steven Fesmire's notion of ecological imagination to explore art and design practices within university education. They argue that a regeneratively oriented creator or group is ultimately searching for (and elaborating and validating) certain "regenerative potentials." What are these "potentials," and how might they be expressed through an artistic photographic practice?

My work arises from the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve of the Archipelago Sea on the southwestern coast of Finland. It is a pristine seascape that nevertheless suffers from eutrophication and biodiversity loss. The area is also a popular holiday destination, and there is strong interest in expanding its tourism potential despite its fragile ecosystem. I have created a speculative photographic narrative about the coexistence of a sailing women's community and cyanobacteria blooms. The work is done in collaboration with local sailors and marine biologists.

In this presentation, I explore the question of "potential" by constructing a speculative cross-section of two parallel ecosystems: that of cyanobacteria and that of the photographic apparatus and its sailing operator. Using a method of systemic storytelling, I examine how potential emerges through the interaction of these ecosystems. What does potential mean for a photographer, and what might it mean for a microalga? My aim is to unfold the creative *imagi(ni)ng* process with a regenerative ecological intention, in a way that opens new pathways for ecologically conscious photographic practices.

Keywords:

Regenerative sustainability

Artistic practice

Ecocrisis

Future-orientedness

Cyanobacteria

bio:

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