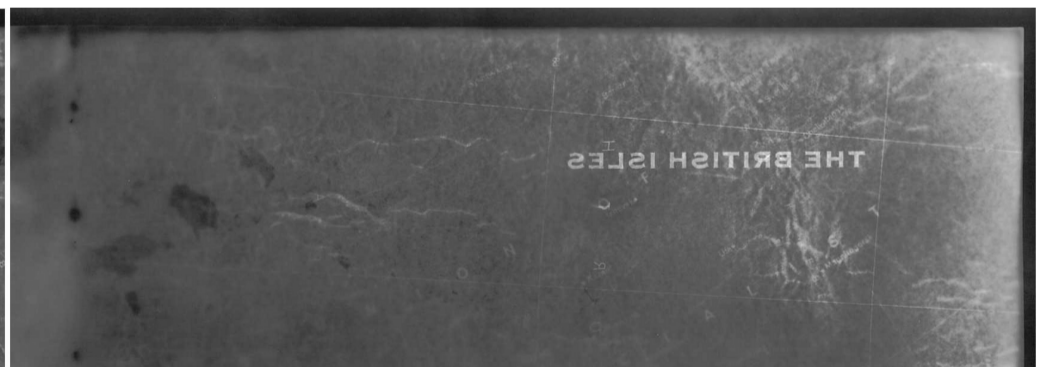
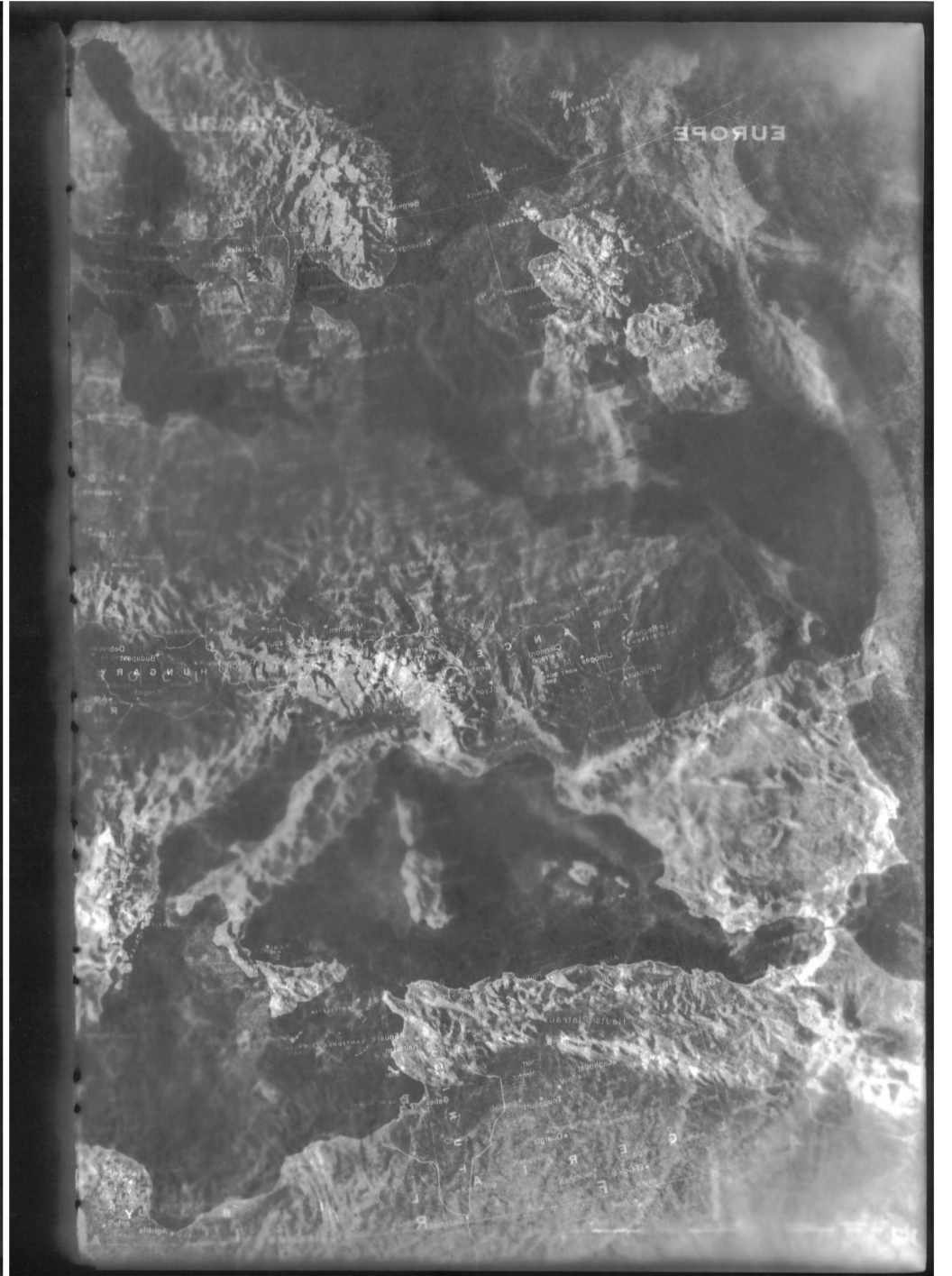
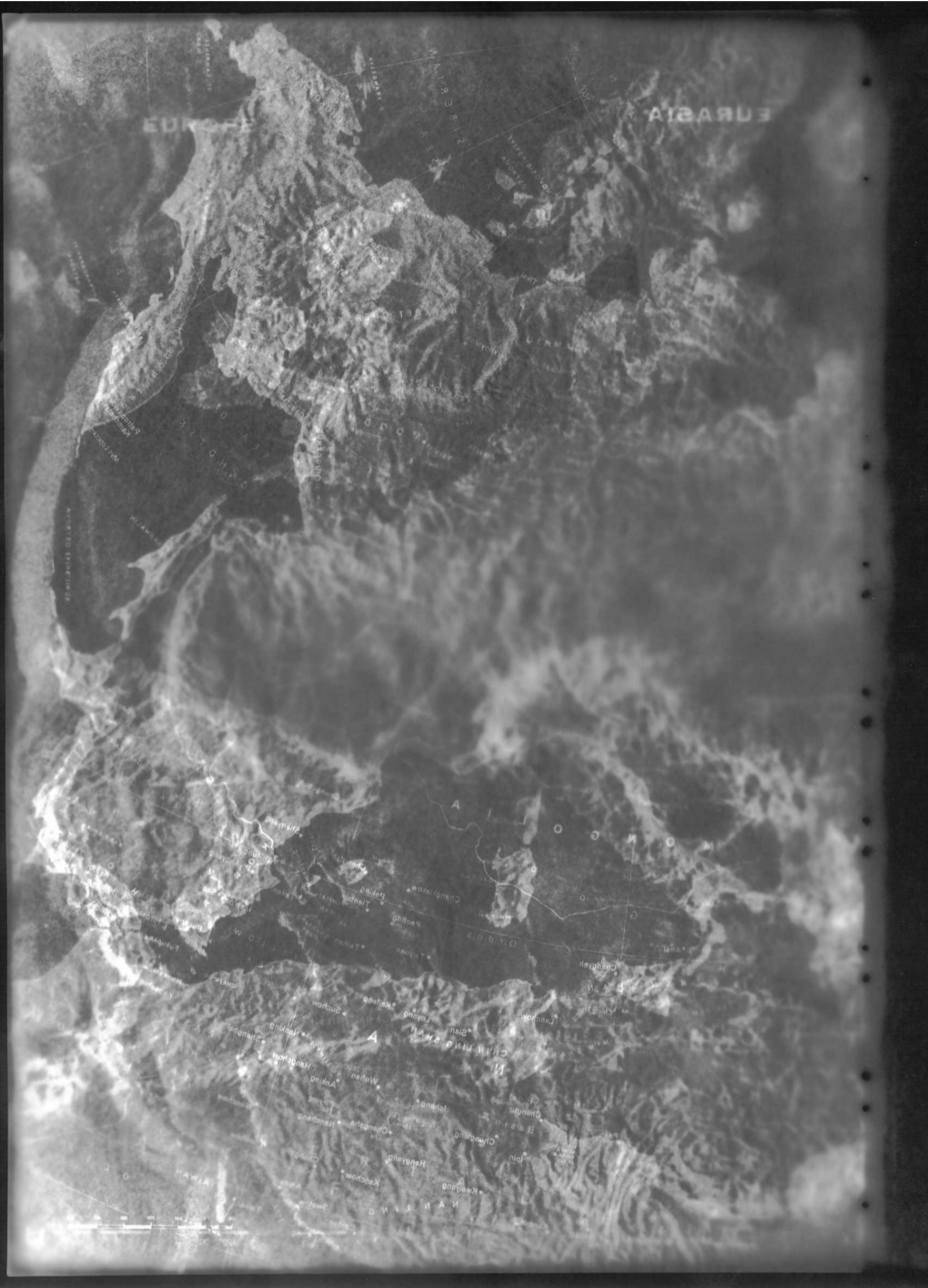
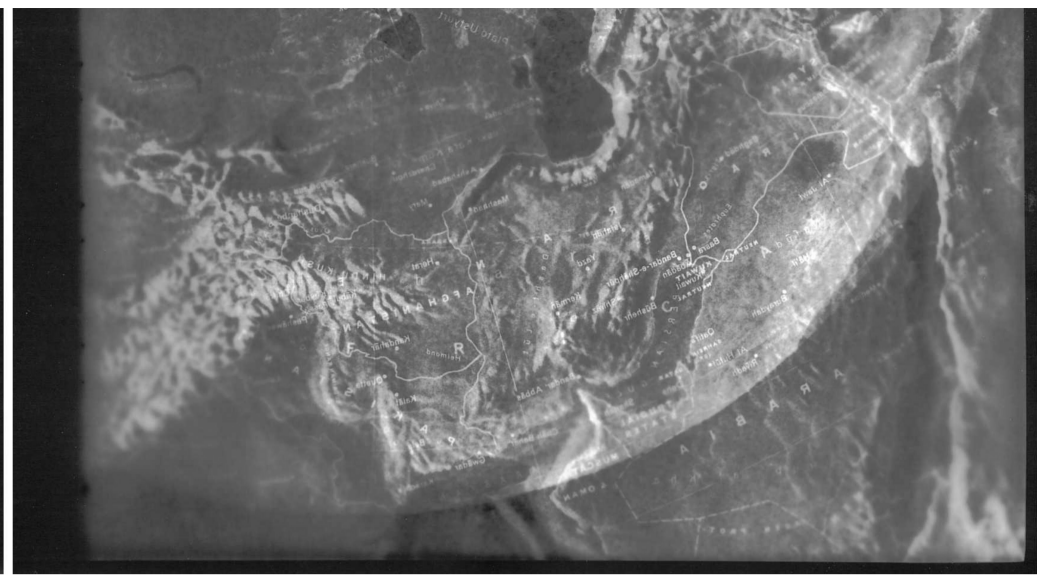
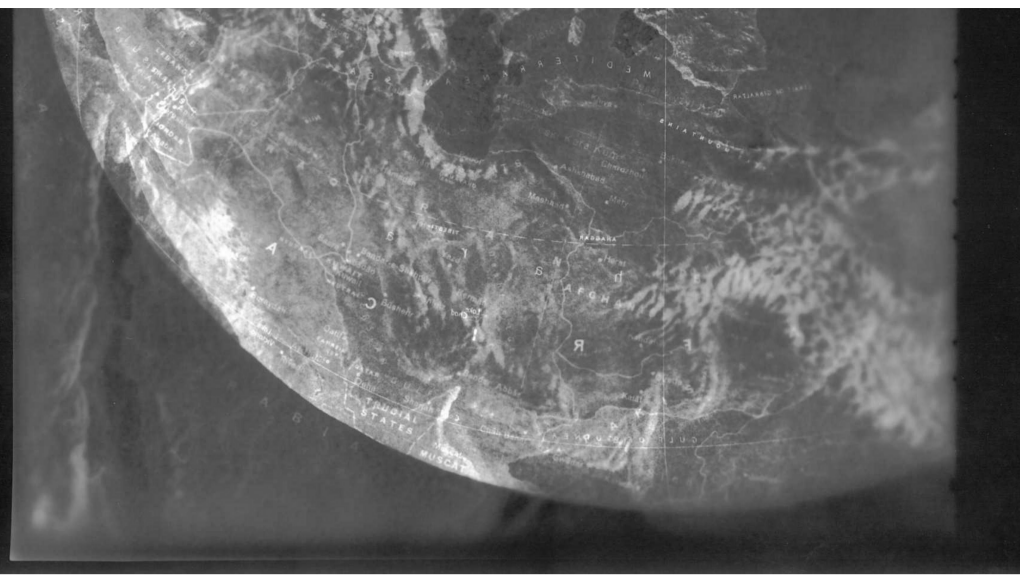


Izabela Pluta, *Spatial misalignments* (Set 1, Sequence 1—3, detail), 2018, silver gelatin photographs, 61 x 40.6 cm. Courtesy the artist, and THIS IS NO FANTASY, Melbourne



IZABELA PLUTA

FIGURES OF
SLIPPAGE
AND
OSCILLATION

29 JUNE
—
15 JULY 2018



IDEAS PLATFORM

The Ideas Platform is supported by Andrew Cameron AM and Cathy Cameron

A lake that was once a field

Naomi Riddle

This place has no wholeness... It has an effect on me of mess, muddle, discontinuity. It's all bits and pieces. I feel this with my body, as well as my mind and eyes. And I find it painful.

Jessica Anderson, *The Impersonators*

ed. 1.2

An imposition of arbitrary borders and boundaries is an imposition of power, a necessary prerequisite for maintaining colonial authorship over the organisation of the globe. The horizontal or vertical straight lines found in the pages of an atlas flatten and conceal any questions of ownership: they negate the histories of occupation and genocide, differences in language and culture, and the possibility of alternative ways of marking out space.

Boris Groys argues that our contemporary moment is defined by 'a return to the territorial'—a furious rejection of the reconfiguration and dismantling of territories that occurred after the fall of the Berlin Wall.³ The utopic ideals of open access, cross cultural exchange and fluidity of movement have been superseded by a protectionist rhetoric that is grounded in the primacy of the nation state. And, as Groys suggests, it is 'primarily attitudes towards immigration [the movement of people across territorial lines] that structures the contemporary political landscape'.⁴

But the so-called policies of 'border protection' are in themselves slippery, reliant on a blurriness between national and international boundaries. Australia's refugee policy requires the acquiescence of other nation states in order to succeed: those seeking asylum in Australia are taken into custody in international waters and then held in prisons that are constructed 'offshore'. This phrase is merely a euphemism for a denial of responsibility, and the care and future of refugees is placed in the hands of foreign governments (even as these governments are beholden to Australian demands). The current US administration's policy along the Mexico border is similarly reliant on denying asylum seekers access to legal points of entry, and then arresting such 'illegal immigrants' just outside these zones. Even the Israeli initiative labelled 'Turning the Desert Green', which saw the planting of millions of non-native trees over the course of the twentieth century, was also a veiled strategy for further incursions into Palestinian territory.⁵

Such slippages, the crossovers between expansion and contraction, can't be adequately charted by the outline of a coast or the imposition of an imaginary partition—they are a territorial in-between, hidden in plain sight.

The story of geology has been
to destroy; has been flux and fire;
has been to create just as it should;
has been difficult for living
creatures; has been exploited
and drilled; contains fossils
as concentrated centres of
petrified time, markers of strange
places, lifted from seas unto
mountains, lifted from low
to high.

Marcella Durand, 'The Story of Geology', *The Brooklyn Rail*

Endnotes

1 Stephen Barber, *Fragments of a European City*, Reaktion Books Ltd, London, 1995, p. 25

2 Mireille Calle-Gruber, 'Hélène Cixous' Imaginary Cities: Oran-Osnabrück-Manhattan – Places of Fascination, Places of Fiction', *New Literary History*, 37.1, 2006, p. 135

3 Boris Groys, 'Trump's America: Playing the Victim', *e-flux journal*, issue #84, September 2017, www.e-flux.com/journal/84/150668/trump-s-america-playing-the-victim

4 Ibid.

5 Naomi Klein, 'Let Them Drown: The Violence of Othering in a Warming World', *London Review of Books*, 38.1, June 2016, pp. 11-12

6 Carolyn Kormann, 'Tangier, the sinking island in the Chesapeake', *The New Yorker*, 8 June 2018, www.newyorker.com/news/dispatch/tangier-the-sinking-island-in-the-chesapeake

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We show our respect and acknowledge the traditional owners of the land, the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present and their descendants.

ed. 1.1

Google Maps doesn't work in Venice. The city's arrangement of tiny laneways and overlapping canals refuses to align itself with the algorithm: the blue marker hesitates, landing first, before hovering, halting and shifting again. A map of Venice is a map that deceives—turning a corner you find yourself faced with water instead of a solid street. Tourists suddenly become stuck, paper map in hand, lacking any visible horizon lines or clear compass points.

It's this feeling of disorientation that exposes the falsity of the coloured lines on a map—they are merely approximations, attempts at placing order on top of a movable surface. To understand the laneways of Venice requires a different kind of mapping: the repetition of feet on pavement, the recognition of the brick pattern of a particular archway, the colour of a door, a handful of visual signals retained in memory.

We come to understand place through the process of personal inscription—with our own demarcated boundaries, our own recurring patterns and routes—and such repetition gives us the illusion of legibility and permanence. But this understanding is only ever 'a sequence of apparitions', a disordered catalogue of locations organised by unstable memories.¹ We misread, misname and misapprehend; we jumble and alter; we tangle up the public landscape with our own private encounters; we return to a place only to find it entirely different. Newness is greeted with suspicion, ruins with relief, because apprehending a place means continually returning to what came before. 'The city... is always more than one', writes Mireille Calle-Gruber, 'stretched between the four points of the compass. And it is always stratified; there is always one under the other, more ancient, more buried, more ruined.'²

That thing we call a place is the intersection of many changing forces passing through, whirling around, mixing, dissolving, and exploding in a fixed location. To write about a place is to acknowledge that phenomena often treated separately—ecology, democracy, culture, storytelling, urban design, individual life histories and collective endeavours—coexist.

Rebecca Solnit, *Encyclopedia of Trouble and Spaciousness*

ed. 1.3

Water does not care for our nation states or our atlases or our memory maps. Water is an element that has no border and recognises none—you may be able to freeze it into a solid mass, but the structure of its outline will immediately dip and disintegrate when exposed to heat. A body of water may be halted by the presence of a land mass, but it will still pound at it with its waves, carving out its mark in any exposed surface, forcing a retreat. Water seeps and invades, it finds the cracks, the hidden points of access, it infiltrates and submerges.

The earth's geological borders are porous and fragile. It is now impossible to look at a map of the landmasses of the world without also being reminded that these geographical fixtures are no longer markers of certainty. The threat of rising sea levels alone will radically disrupt the shape and length of each national boundary: Tangier Island off the coast of Virginia in Chesapeake Bay has lost two thirds of its land since 1850, and, given the pace of the erosion, any updates to its recorded map will almost immediately need to be redrawn.⁶

An atlas becomes an archive of loss: a visual reminder of a human-centric structuring of the world that has also hastened its demise. Its foundations are shifting as the soil erodes and the ice continues to melt. The maps of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are to be relegated to quaint historical artefacts, a series of out-of-date diagrams and markings collected before the climate's tipping point—before a swollen ocean reclaimed the land.

LIST OF WORKS

Izabela Pluta

Spatial misalignments, 2018

silver gelatin photographs, 3 sets of 20 unique prints, 61 x 40.6 cm (each diptych)

Buoy [found at the intersection of the Pacific Ocean and the East China Sea], 2018
latex-based print on polyester, 100 x 100 cm

single-channel audio, 17 tracks played in random sequence

All works courtesy the artist and THIS IS NO FANTASY, Melbourne



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