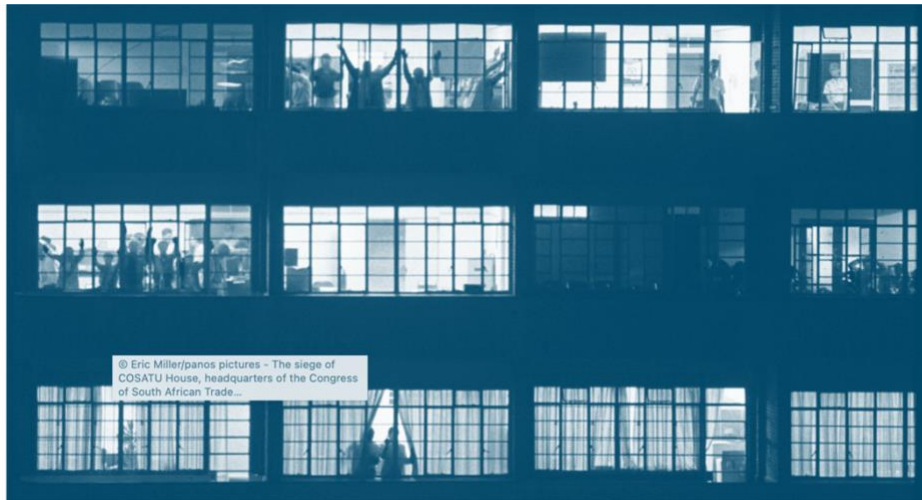


Call for Papers

International Workshop in Visual History & Theory, 16-17 October 2026

Regarder Ensemble/Looking Together



... to reflect on the significance of seeing itself (Mitchell 2002: 231).

'Looking together' is way of approaching visual and other archives, migration histories, and imperial afterlives. Formulated by media anthropologist Zeynep Gürsel, it is an approach that implies method but extends in multiple conceptual directions. It breaks down research distances, interrogates given analytical categories and undermines the boundaries between disciplines and media. From the process of looking together at unknown or forgotten portraits of ancestors which stirs recollection and elicits testimony in Gürsel's work, this activation of plural gazes in a shared milieu unlocks many other possibilities.

Following in the train of previous annual workshops in Visual History and Theory, we are interested in how power accrues in such epistemological boundaries and relationships and what their unmaking might offer. These include the boundaries and hierarchies drawn between the human and more-than-human, between different scales of time, and across the most commonly-named senses of the human: sight, hearing, touch, taste, smell. Our workshop is therefore interested in exploring activation not only of 'the gaze' but of more haptic sensibilities and multi-sensory modes of apprehension.

The concept of 'the gaze' itself in anglophone writing is overdue for critical scrutiny. It is no accident that Tina Camp's recent book title *A Black Gaze* moves away from the singular and monolithic implications of the definite article, *the*. Translated loosely from the French term *le regard*, the gaze in English has become an over-used term whether qualified by colonial, imperial, white, male, female, capitalist or other. In its most reductive usage, the gaze has tended to homogenise and fix ways of thinking about looking and seeing to imply a smooth and even transparent transcription of intention and desire into images and their effects which can be determined and, when problematic, cleanly opposed. It presents as sovereign, and conscious. It might be socially present but indexes individualized modes of looking. All of this shuts out pluralities, angularities, contingencies and the spectralities that Jacques Lacan gestured towards, as well as the unstable zones Shawn Michelle Smith

designated 'at the edge of sight' where Walter Benjamin's optical unconscious also sits suggestively. Moreover the terminological prominence of the gaze tends to isolate vision and foreclose other senses.

In this invitation to *regarder ensemble* – to look together – Keguro Macharia's work on *frottage* as the 'rubbing produced by and as blackness' offers a further generative dimension. *Frottage* is 'a relation of proximity.' Beyond its physical connotations, *frottage* points to conceptual and affective proximities and this 'assembles into one frame multiple histories and geographies' (2019, 4). At a time of heightened xenophobic tension in South Africa, an important component of this workshop is our collaboration with partners in African and diasporic archives of migration and movement. We propose a convergence of conversations around the Bouba Touré collections in Paris with those of the Mayibuye Archive and various photo studios in Cape Town, as well as what workshop participants bring to the gathering. Not only is collaboration 'the condition of photography' (Azoulay et al 2023, 9), but 'Looking together also means bringing different archives together.' It means 'looking at images together with documents, letters sent and received, memoirs, and family stories' (Gürsel 2023, 218).

The rubbing implied in *frottage* leaves traces and 'at best, its traces demonstrate that someone or something has passed through a space and left some kind of evidence.' Such 'records of actions' in turn invoke a geological mode of thought: 'Given the archaeologies of seeing in Africa, to consider the geologies of the image is a way to rethink the prevailing and linear histories of the visible in Africa, where the geologic is grasped more by its holes, its mines, and the lack of one final determining stratum' (Hayes and Minkley 2019, 4).

To break out of any sense of one final determining stratum is one objective of looking together. This includes asking whether we as humans can look together with the more-than-human in adjacent or subjacent ways, and how looking together also traverses different temporalities. The workshop thus proposes an experiment in what we might activate together and where, speaking in futurities, memory that is generated collectively is less likely to be forgotten.

Applications: Workshop participants are invited to consider modes of looking together and activation in relation to images and other media. Please send abstracts (maximum 400 words) to phayes@uwc.ac.za by **17 July 2026**.

Workshop date: 16-17 October 2026

Venue: Iyatsiba Lab, Centre for Humanities Research, University of the Western Cape

Contact: Patricia Hayes, SARChI Chair in Visual History & Theory, phayes@uwc.ac.za

References

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