



Travelling Camera, 2025, 4K video, colour, sound, 6 minutes, 7 seconds (loop)

L'histoire Naturelle De La Photographie: Wolfgang Tillmans and Peter Szendy in Conversation

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Excerpt from dialogue between Wolfgang Tillmans and Peter Szendy on *Travelling Camera*, 2025

PETER SZENDY: I think *Travelling Camera* constantly oscillates between photography and cinema. It keeps taking us into freeze-frame, so it offers these photographic pauses... the pause and the pose.

In a way, photography acts as a kind of punctuation in this movement, in this exploration of what resembles a landscape, basically — or at least that's what it suggests. And, you know, it's interesting that this grey zone between photography and cinema is, in a way, becoming a larger and larger grey zone. I'm thinking, for example, of what's called Live Photos, photographs that document what happens just before the scene you want to capture, and just after. So you get this, um, kind of grey zone between photography and cinema.

That's the first aspect I wanted to emphasise. The second is that, precisely, there's this kind of landscape we're exploring. And the landscape is full of natural artifacts, if I may say so, and industrial artifacts. It evokes a kind of history of media, digital media, but also, you know, quite old media, like postage stamps.

So, all these different ways of producing images, some immediately visible, like the stamps, others just suggested. And even more striking are these fossil-like shells, petals, flowers. And what struck me most, maybe, were the iron or metal rods, rusty and weathered. I was really taken by the fact that you have, um, two ways of producing colour and print. One is the stamp, which is a very specific way of making images. The other is this rust — colour suffusing, impregnating the matter from within.

I just wanted to describe all of this and then hear what you have to say. But I think it leads us already, in a way, into what we decided would be the topic of this conversation, that is to say, "Towards a natural history of photography."

Why? Because photography here is, well, more than photography. It moves towards cinema; it moves beyond what it's supposed to do. And the materiality — the elements, the materials in this landscape — they suggest a long history, from fossils to digital technologies. And this also connects back to photography. If you think about fossils as an imprint, and digital technology as another form of imprint, you get this long arc of image history that's implicit in the video.

WOLFGANG TILLMANS: It's... there are works that come together over a long period of time. And the elements, you know, I've been thinking about them for a long time. But then the actual making — it took, like, one morning, or one day. Just the actual filming.

And what this is, it's, I would say, four very distinct elements. One is an upside-down, opened-up 4K monitor. Like, a first generation 4K television screen, but huge. Like one meter eighty wide. Back then it was the newest, hottest thing in 2014. And now, ten years later, it's just rubbish. But at the time it was the highest-resolution video format you could even imagine. Before that, I was always frustrated with the image quality of video projection. And then suddenly technology took this leap. And this screen became available to me, and then somehow it lost its attraction, its function. I wanted to look inside—and, um, it became this sort of table.

Then there are stamps. I rediscovered them — postage stamps I collected as a boy, when I was, like, ten, eleven, twelve years old. So they're late '70s, very early '80s.

And then there's a sand dollar — that's a particular shell, a very thin creature. I had one from my first trip to California in 1990. And then, you know, 28 years later, 32 years later, I was in Ghana on this African exhibition tour, and I found lots and lots of sand dollars. But they all had these feet, these fingers.

There's also rusted metal from a construction site I was involved in. And, actually, you may have spotted, maybe, an ear inspection device in there too. But somehow, they all found each other in this landscape — or, as you called it, a landscape. It's also maybe a cityscape, possibly.

And there's something ancient in there. Now these sand dollars, they seem to be this global species. And the postage stamp, of course, is a really, what's the word... obsolete, defunct means of communication. And this television screen, well, a screen is also kind of on the way out. So, it's, um, different levels of fluidity, in and out of time.

And the soundtrack, I can't un-think the piece from the soundtrack. But it had a very different origin. There's a gas station near the darkroom I rent a few times a year, to make these non-camera-based photographs. And, you know, when I go there at night to get a beer, they have three flagpoles.

And one very windy day, the flagpole strings were beating against the mast. And I heard this sort of musicality in it, so I recorded it. And then I asked my assistant, Marc Krether, to loop... to find particular loops in there. And that's what we hear. It's this kind of looped banging of a cord against a flagpole.