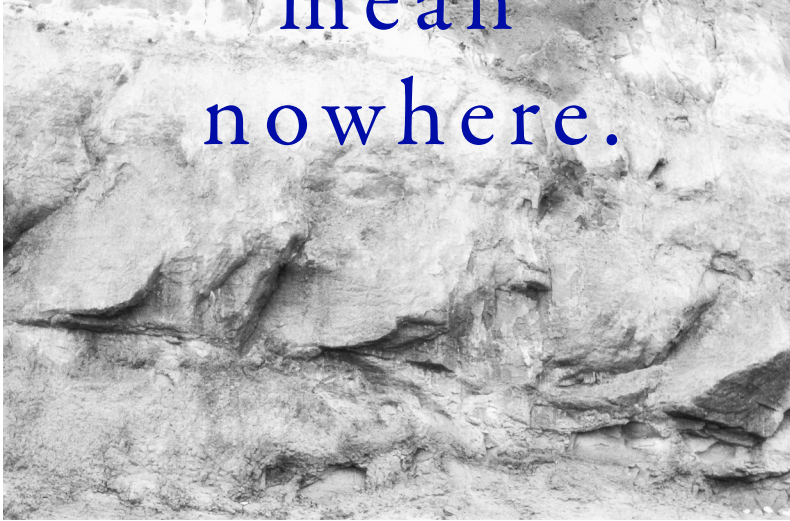


Everywhere can mean nowhere.



Can the Hyperobject be used as a productive framework, which the visual arts can adopt, to engage with the climate crisis and promote ecological change in the contemporary age?

Alfie Barnes

Contents

Introduction Pg. 6-11

Chapter 1: Everywhere leading nowhere Pg. 14 - 27

Chapter 2: Nowhere Pg. 30 - 37

Chapter 3: Inbetween Pg. 42 -47

Conclusion: Where does this leave us? Pg. 50 -55

It's everywhere,
you'll see when you look down
notice

lapping at your feet,
feel it falling from above
soaked through
notice

it rises with the tide,
overtopping defences
carrying the passage of time
notice

it's warmer now,
I think this is spring
blooming in December
and autumn not at all
notice



Figure 1: Barnes, A (2024) (Photograph)

it trickles down your throat,
looking up from your plate
beside the flowers in your vase
notice

passing your bedroom window,
it's the stillness in May
still May in September
notice

it's not passing us by,
we talk in passing
'Warm today!'
I'd not noticed
it's everywhere.

Introduction

“One day: stronger wind than anyone expected. Stronger than ever before in the recording of such. Unnatural says the news. Also the body says it.”

- Jorie Graham, (To)The Last (Be] Human

The first time I noticed, was after I left home.

I had spent eighteen years growing up on the Isle of Wight, a small island off the south coast of England. No bigger than twenty-six miles across, it offers a diverse plethora of landscapes, from pine forests to miles of golden sand beaches and chalk cliffs. As much as I was raised by my parents, I was also raised by this landscape, so it is no wonder that when I stare up at those pine trees, I feel a deep sense of appreciation for having them there - to be held within their shade. After eighteen years on this small island, I moved to London to study, it was here I first felt a disconnect to nature. I was now no longer fifteen minutes away from an untouched landscape, in fact I could barely see what lay in front of me, being surrounded by towering grey pillars and white collared men running for a tube. Returning to the island for the first time since being away, I noticed. That feeling things had shifted. It was November and the trees hadn't exploded into their orange and yellows, or more typical of Oak trees that occupy the island to decay into a whisper of brown. This would be fine, normal – perhaps, if autumn was still months away. But it wasn't. That's when I noticed. The climate here, home, had changed. A feeling of unfamiliarity in an environment I knew so well. The home that I had known, grown up in and longed for had changed. 'Solastalgia - that feeling of being homesick, even when you are home.' (Albrecht, *Earth Emotions* 2019, pg.27- 62) But this isn't just happening on a small island off the south coast of England, that's no bigger than twenty-six miles across. This is happening across seven continents, it's happening globally, but it's also in your garden and on the street that you wander up and down each day. It's also happening on the street you don't wander up and down each day. This problem is everywhere, and you, and I, are entangled so deeply within it, this is the nature of the hyperobject.

The term 'hyperobject' was first used by philosopher Timothy Morton. In the publication 'The Ecological Thought', Morton employed the term hyperobjects to describe objects that are so massively distributed in time and space as to transcend spatiotemporal specificity, such as global warming. "The hyperobject, are the long-term problems posed by the ecological thought. The ecological thought hugely expands our ideas of space and time." (Morton pg135, 2010) Within this, Morton also defines plastic such as Styrofoam as a hyper-object. Furthering this definition through writings in 'All art is ecological', Morton uses the example of a plastic cup to put into perspective the climate crisis as a hyper object. If I, one person, were to use a plastic cup then that is completely quantifiable to the human mind, however if I try and picture eight million or even eight billion people using a plastic cup, then suddenly this scale that I am picturing is completely distorted, and the effects of this plastic cup are extremely adverse. I can fathom what will happen to one cup that I discard, but eight billion other cups? It's not only the mass of this that causes issue, but the temporal scale. Plastic Styrofoam cups take five hundred years to break down, the micro plastic that is left behind from this will remain for further years to come. I can find a way to conceptualise and visualise ten years as empirically I know what that can feel like and look like, it is tangible in some sense, but five hundred years becomes somewhat meaningless. This is where the dark cloud of nihilism comes sweeping in, ideas and concepts become seemingly meaningless, actions in the face of hyper-objects such as climate change become meaningless. The hyperobject ultimately defies human cognition as it interrupts the linear timescale, we are so comfortable with, becoming multidimensional.

In the age of the Anthropocene, the age where human activity is the dominating factor over the environment and the climate, it is more apparent than ever that climate change is one of the most pressing issues that we face as a civilisation, we are living in a time marked by ecological crisis. As I am writing this, Spain is reeling from the aftermath of the worst flooding seen in decades, the city of New York recorded it's driest October on record and this is just weeks after two major hurricanes struck the US. Reports on extreme weather now become the background noise to our lives – replacing the birdsong. As Morton suggests, the hyper-object just becomes more apparent as the Anthropocene age progresses. It becomes the horizon, stretching into places you can't quite reach or access, but it is all you can see. Throughout this publication I will be referring to this messy problem of the hyperobject and arguing that a possible pathway to overcome this is using visual media and art. If the concept of the hyperobject leaves the human cognition in an empty nihilistic fog, than the way to counteract this is to grapple with this object and leave our human fingerprints all over this, to overcome this nihilism with emotion, harnessing the need for art to act as a transformative force, in line with Morton's belief in art's power to challenge current modes of thinking and to engage an ecological consciousness to action. I will be arguing that Art is this tool that we can use to access this, to help us comprehend the scale of this crisis, of the hyperobject.

“A problem of the scale of human-caused global warming defies simplistic thinking, but our brains on art point toward a way forward to transcend our current mode of thinking.” – Leanne Ogasawara on all art is ecological (2021)

The definition of art itself as provided by The Oxford Dictionary is ‘the expression or application of human creative skill and imagination, typically in a visual form such as painting or sculpture, producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power.’ (OED) But I will argue art can exist outside of this, art can cause an emotional response as art is inexplicably human, art is encased in humanness. Stephen Davies (2001) and Thomas Adjan (2012) (2016, quoted in Elemental Collins, Goto), provide an overview to try and define what art might be.: “Defining something that is material consistent, static rather than dynamic with definitive boundaries is relatively easy; art is none of the above.’ Art has the capacity to transform us and our relationship to the world - it is this definition of art that I am interested in discussing further.



Chapter 1: Everywhere leading nowhere

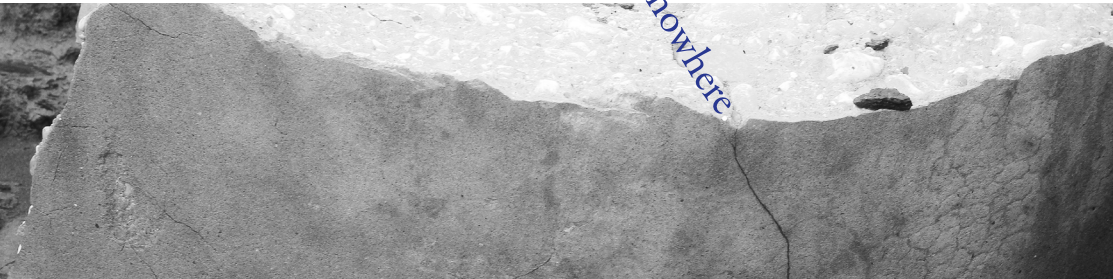


Figure 3: Barnes, A (2024) (Photograph)

As we are aware, the problem of the climate crisis is so difficult to grasp and to engrain into a constructive paradigm because of the sheer scale at which it is happening, as it is a global phenomenon that means for those who only have the globe, that it is happening everywhere – but what does everywhere mean? To think of something happening in every country that is inextricably linked escapes the capacity of the human temporal scale, again we are sucked back into the grips of the hyper object. To draw an extra element of complexity to this, the climate is not warming at an equal rate, different parts of the globe are warming more quickly than others, in fact, the northern hemisphere is warming at a higher rate than the southern hemisphere and the arctic is warming at nearly four times the rate as the rest of the planet (Communications, Earth and the environment, 2022.) Not only does climate change effect our immediate surroundings, it also means that the distribution of severe weather events attributed to this crisis will be dispersed unevenly and it will be developing countries, often that contribute the least to climate change, that will bear the brunt of the severe weather events. “Not everyone with an environmental illness gets well, especially if you are poor and living in a place with contaminated air, soil, and water. If you have the privilege of good health, use some of your new energy to make art to awaken others to this epidemic.” – Beverly Naidus (2016.)

Living during the Anthropocene the main paradigm which dominates western society is anthropocentrism, also known as humancentricism which defines the human species as dominant over ecosystems and the land which in itself creates a separation between nature and human. “Domination of people over the environment” (Bloodhart & Swim, 2010). If we are going to progress in understanding this crisis to break the hyperobject we must challenge this dynamic on a major scale. Visual media can act as a tool to do this. The way we can interact with visuals, photography especially, can be different, it can be used to explicitly show the effects of severe weather associated with climate change, but also become an artwork to demonstrate the metaphysical, highlight the gaps in-between and aid ontological understanding of such a monumental issue. How do we explore something that is happening everywhere? Something that is happening internally just as much as it happens externally.

As humans we are intrinsically linked into the cycles of the earth, as explored by Lucy Jones in *Losing Eden*. (2020, Pg 93 -94.) ‘Literature review published in 2017 found a strong link between insufficiency to sunlight and low Vitamin D.’ *‘We are losing the benefit of natural sounds, then, and natural smells and natural light which has serious consequences for psychological health. Synchronised with solar time, our internal clock allows us to anticipate sunrise and sunset. There is growing research linking circadian rhythm to mental health. Disruption of daily rhythms is strongly associated with mental health problems and low levels of happiness and the likelihood of major depressive and bipolar disorders.’*

This notion of everywhere is vocalised beautifully by Glenn Albrecht, drawing connotations between our environment being a home for us physically but also emotionally, and when this home is being lost, or changes to be unrecognisable, it leads to a feeling of ‘Solastalgia - that feeling of being homesick, even when you are home.’ (Earth Emotions 2019, pg.27- 62) Not only psychologically can we be affected by the climate crisis but physically. When I think of everywhere I think of plastic, how it gets everywhere it shouldn’t. The times I’ve looked up at the trees and seen plastic bags caught and shred to pieces, our human fingerprints left throughout the forest. Plastic also doesn’t biodegrade, instead turns into tiny, smaller bits of plastic, that will physically get everywhere. The plastics get inside of us. The University of Newcastle, Australia; Worldwide Fund for Nature (Lambertini, 2019) found that we ingest five grams of microplastic each week. Which in a year would equate to a heaped dinner’s plates worth. The hyper-object is about as everywhere as you can get, you probably had it for breakfast.



Figure 4
A plate representing the amount of microplastics ingested in one year

To draw a sense of scale of this problem of microplastics, I included an image of a dinner plate containing a heaped amount of this material. The image aids our understanding of scale when discussing the hyperobject. I can empirically show you, ‘this is what a dinner plate of plastic looks like.’ However, something changes when doing the same to something on a vaster scale, for example climate change. I can show an image of an effect of the climate changing but I cannot empirically show you climate change. A Kantian problem is noted by Morton in *Dark Ecology* (2016, Pg,33) “There are things, but when we find them, we only find human flavoured data. We never see the actual raindrop; we have raindrop feelings ,raindrop thoughts raindrop perceptions.” I can begin to show you the climate crisis and its effects, but we can’t access the true nature of the climate crisis directly. Take for example the following figure:

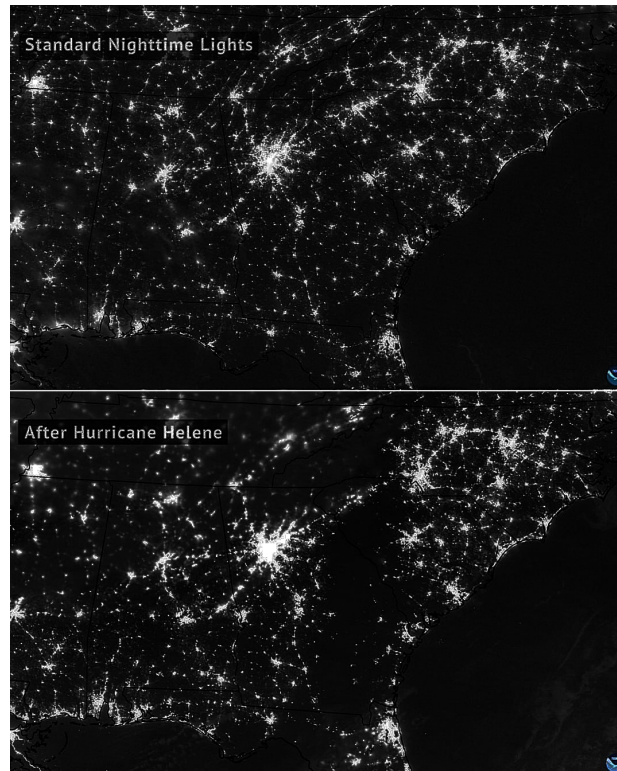


Figure 5

NOAA satellite image of before and after power outtages across the USA in the wake of hurricane Helene. September 28th 2024.

This satellite image was taken by one of NOAA's satellites, intended on monitoring atmospheric conditions over the United States, the satellite collects images daily as a way to track weather conditions. What it captures is the wake of hurricane Helene, a clear path of darkness can be made out from where power cuts have occurred. This image, like *figure 4*, also conveys scale, showing the way the landscape has been altered by a storm. Factually this is what is being captured. There is nothing inherently bad about this image. There isn't a bad quality to the image or text that describes 'what you are seeing is bad.' It is through human interpretation that I can infer a negative quality to this image. The darkness however conceals something more, destruction, the death of people who were caught in its path, this storm killing 230 people as of the 7th October 2024 (ABC News, 2024). It is with this context I can interpret the image as more, create an emotional response and relationship to this. Suddenly a satellite image taken at night of the USA becomes so much more - tragedy, but also juxtaposing normality for so many other people just a few hundred miles away, highlighting the contrasting scale of the hyperobject. The image before the storm hit, conveys human's impact on the landscape, showing just how much of the land is lit up at night and you can trace humans along the roads into cities and towns.

In the path of darkness created by the storm,
at least you would be able to see the stars.

This photograph is an example of how the visual can be used to convey scale, not showing everywhere but due to technological advancements we have more vantage points of viewing the climate crisis - aiding to interpret the breadth of this issue and its effects. From this we are still unable to access the hyperobject itself, we can access the effects of this, within this image we are confronted with what severe weather caused by global warming can do, but we are not accessing global warming itself. Perhaps, we could also interpret this as an artwork. The image is static placed within a boundary of four corners, but its interpretation offers something more mobile, dynamic and emotional - something more human. Art is political, is this image not? This storm was made worse by human action, politicians, and policy directly affecting the formation of this and affecting the response to the storms aftermath. This image released to the public from NASA into the flow of mainstream media could be appropriated by alternative cultures, artists, and moulded into an artwork to then act as a catalyst for ecological conversation on policy and change. This however was not its intention. The image had no intention on persuading you to think about the climate crisis or global warming, it has simply been taken by a satellite and fed back to earth. It is the human, the artist, that can drive you to confront this - A spooky confrontation of the self, as what we are seeing, is the effects of what other humans are doing. I am part of those humans and those effects, whether I choose to see myself reflected up to space in this image, or not.

“*Contemporary visual culture at its best can play a critical role in raising awareness of the impact (climate change) showing the environmental abuse and human costs of fossil fuels everyday operations. Images, the kind circulating in alternative media networks are swaying publics away from the mass medias conventional depolitised perspective.*” (2017) -T.J Demos



Figure 6
Olafur Eliasson Ice Watch Tate Modern (2018)

Olafur Eliasson is an artist whose work is intentional and directly responds to the notion of the hyperobject. Pictured above is from his 'Ice Watch' exhibition that took place at the Tate Modern in 2018. The massive blocks of ice were taken from Nuup Kangerlua fjord in Greenland and placed outside the gallery. This gave opportunity for the public to interact with this and to witness these objects morph and eventually disappear, with the water draining into the Thames below. Looming in the distance behind these huge blocks of ice is Bank and London's financial district, contrasting completely with the purity of the ice melting, - serving as a reminder of the economical drivers pushing the climate crisis further. Eliasson attempted to break the hyper-object by placing melting ice viscerally in front of the audience. The audience becomes a direct witness to the melting ice in Greenland and our senses cannot deny it. Members of the public reported being able to smell the ice. "Ten thousand years ago there was 30 per cent less carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, so the smell of the ice blocks should be the smell of the air from 10,000 years ago." (Eliasson, 2018) By engaging the senses, we become connected to the ice and the past in a very particular way, the scale of what is being lost becomes very clear and the problem is no longer metaphysical but directly in front of us, there is nowhere else to look but to confront what it is we are seeing, the audience trapped within its icy walls.

Audience reaction to this exhibition is what makes this piece stand out, of course it gathered attention from the media, but it caused reaction in people who weren't expecting it, people on a walk or on their commute were suddenly faced with this crisis in a way they probably haven't been before. People who experienced this deemed it was 'beautiful and poignant' Parker, K. (2018) It would seem it has a significant meaning for people to put their ears on the ice and feel that subtle cracking, the crisp noise of the ice as it melts. When researching public reaction to this it was easy to draw these conclusions but deeper within online threads there were questions surrounding the ability to shift public opinion in a wider sense. One tweet reading 'It helped visualize global warming but I'm not sure it's had a measurable impact on public opinion...' Cuau, C. (2022) Exhibitions like this may succeed in helping us visualise such a vast and complex issue but is this enough to draw action? I believe that although it may not be 'the' solution it's a start. The exhibition doesn't tell us anything new explicitly, many of us know that the ice is melting and that is objectively a negative thing. The exhibition gets us to notice something from within ourselves, it creates a connection to the ice, it forces the audience to identify themselves with the ice and its absence, which also identifies 'us' as part of the climate crisis. It's also down to the way we perceive artworks like this, when we see a piece of art that truly moves us or that we resonate with we often declare that we love that piece of work. I believe this is a way to start shifting towards ecological action. As Willow Defebough describes in *Meditations on nature for a world in transition* (2023, pg.83)

"Love is not a subject you often hear discussed in the climate crisis. This is primarily due to being that it is a data-driven approach that has dominated the mainstream environmental movement for decades. And that's imperative to a movement defined by science. But it also might be partly why it has taken so long for the larger public sphere to pay attention to the severity of climate change." - Willow Defebough (2023)

Figure 7 Overleaf: Barnes, A (2024) (Photograph)



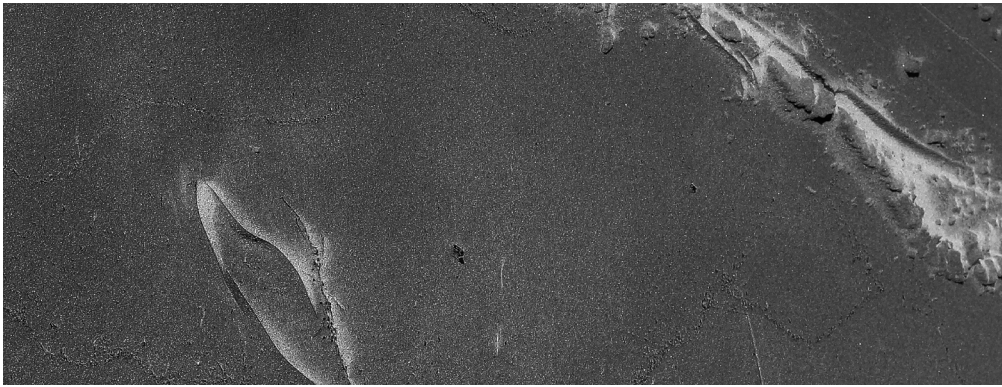


Figure 8 Overleaf: Barnes, A (2024) (Photograph)

No
w h e No w
h e No
w h e re. re. w
re. h e
re.
re.

One of the problems about the climate crisis is that it highlights what is being lost in a way that is difficult to comprehend. Humanity has wiped out 60% of mammals, birds, fish and reptiles since 1970 (WWF Living Planet Report Grooten, M. and Almond, R.E.A, 2018.) and an IMBIE assessment that measures the rate at which ice is lost at the poles, states that between 1992 and 2020, the polar ice sheets lost 7560 billion tonnes of ice – equivalent to an ice cube measuring 20 km each side (Inès N. Otosaka et al, 2023.) These statistics scream urgency and action, something that is not being provided by governmental bodies. The United Nations has concluded that the world is on track to warm roughly 3.1C before the end of the century if nothing changes (UNEP, 2024). These numbers that carry so much weight size and urgency lack in our ability to fathom this loss, or what the absence of this could mean. These statistics that are so vast feed nihilism being so huge they escape imagination, leading to a point of nothing, and making action seem far away. Maybe this is nowhere, just a vast void of nihilism, apathy and inaction, a fog that is cast over everything we can see, a smog perhaps.

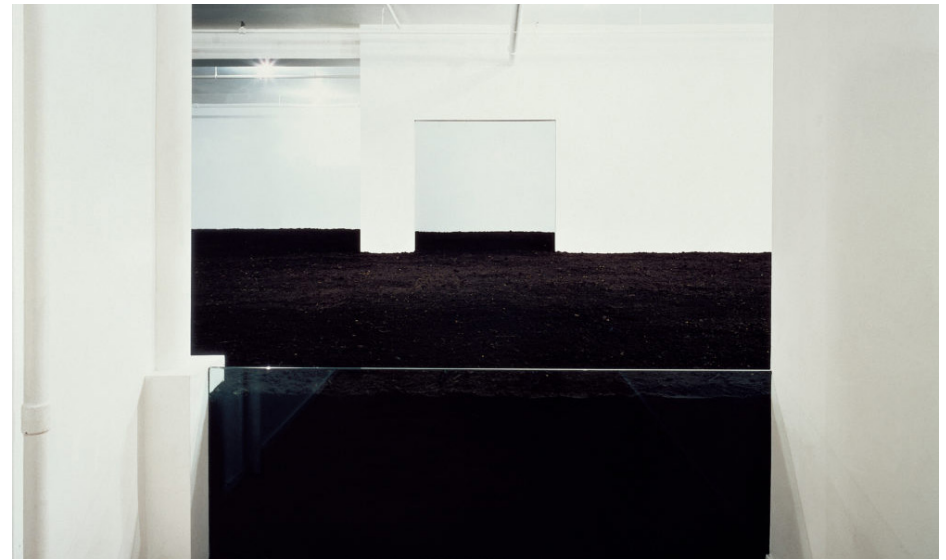


Figure 9
Walter De Maria, The New York Earth Room, 1977

Amongst this smog is the earth room in New York City, here you will find nowhere. Tucked away from the churning streets of the city is a room, a thirty six hundred square foot loft to be precise, filled with one hundred and forty tonnes of dirt. The work was installed by Walter De Maria in 1977, this installation is hidden off of a small street and sometimes sees no visitors a day, others it will get five a month, but the room filled with dirt is here. The dirt has not been changed since it opened in 1977, so the room smells as it did when it opened and the matter appears to be static and unchanged, it looks almost barren against the white walls behind. It appears to be absent of organic matter you might expect to find growing in the soil, this soil however is completely alive with bacteria. These bacteria, an ecosystem amongst another ecosystem in the city, is working at a completely different temporal scale to the rest of New York, most of the time the room is ignored but it sits there regardless.

Images of this installation exist online however no photographs are allowed, when you see the earth room you also become part of this ecosystem, the carbon dioxide you breathe out contributing to the make-up of the atmosphere in the room effecting the bacteria that are alive in the soil. You leave with memory of the soil that sits there, the smell of this and the appearance, and if you were to return it would appear nothing had changed in this vast 'nowhere' room, but everything would have changed.

"The Earth Room is meant to be unchanging; nevertheless, it evolves."
- Bill Dillworth (2017)

Although this room is hidden it is in no way passive, it completely disrupts the conventional use of the gallery space, the 'white cube' showcasing earth. The exhibition itself questions the temporalities of organic matter and anthropocentric land management. The earth is the focus here, but it is not inherently doing anything – why not fill this room with plants? or use the soil to grow something? These are all anthropocentric questions that arise when viewing this installation, the land being used for something, to give it a use, or a function. What if preservation is the function? This room has been maintained with the same soil by the same housekeeper since 1977. There is an importance in this, there is importance in preservation, although the climate crisis involves a great deal of 'new solutions' it also requires preservation to maintain the landscape a certain way, to keep the ice that sits at the poles. **To remember what was once there, to understand the soil, and the land as it was, to preserve a summer's day from 1977.**

Preservation is one way of showing what has changed, what came before the absence. The change of the climate around the world means that the seasons are also changing, there are aspects of seasonality that are being lost. In the UK seasons are becoming less defined, with autumn and winter seemingly blending into one another, snow is less likely to fall in the UK with the frequency of this and duration decreasing, winter becoming warmer and wetter. If the amount of snow days falls to zero in the UK there will be generations that don't know what snow looks or feels like, they wouldn't have empirically experienced this and the scale of what is being lost becomes skewed, you could ask why would it matter that winters are warmer now if that's all I have ever experienced? Areas that have been used to having seasonal definition and change would no longer see this. Cultural aspects would be lost along with ways of using the land at different times of the year.

Preservation and absence are tied together by grief. We grieve what is lost, and preserve to avoid having to grieve what could be lost. Artist Nina Röder draws on this absence and grief within her photography, using the body as a stage to evoke emotion in response to the absence that loss brings. Climate change is creating a new kind of anxiety - 'ecological anxiety' - and this is something that is impossible not to feel when viewing Röder's work.



Figure 10
A little deeper than you thought Nina Röder (2020)

Röder's work draws on the metaphysical aspects of the climate crisis, evoking an 'ecological anxiety' from within us. The framed images of the body atop of the ice jolt us into confronting our connection to that environment and remind us that the human form needs this ice and water to survive – it's part of our body. The body floating in the water looks like a corpse floating face down alluding to something darker, perhaps the death of humans but also the death of glaciers, the body floating like an iceberg adrift in the open ocean. The huge vinyl iceberg acts as a perfect metaphor for the hyper object. The problem is vast and acts as the background of our lives, within this there are smaller details highlighted by frames, no matter where you look, the images and moments are underpinned by the melting ice, the hyper object looming behind them. The work itself produces discomfort, something that is important - change requires us to be uncomfortable to then promote action to move towards being comfortable again.

Röder situates their work within this feeling, plunging the audience down with her. To quote Donna Haraway 'staying with the trouble' (2016) - Not running from this feeling but instead visualising this through photography. Something that is addressed in Röder's work is also the ontological anxiety of the climate crisis as described by Heidegger in *Being and Time* (1927,180) , 'the fact that anxiety is nowhere characterises what anxiety is about, nowhere does not mean nothing. What is threatening cannot come closer from a definite direction in nearness, it's already there and yet nowhere. It is so near that is oppressive and takes away one's breath- and yet it is nowhere.'

The crisis we are facing is not coming from one place or direction, it's approaching from everywhere, it's hard to pinpoint, which makes tackling this even harder. Where do you begin to start to solve a problem if you don't know where it's coming from? What Röder presents does feel threatening, it also feels like it's verbalising this anxiety, something which is often so hard to do through words, sometimes it's necessary to paint or photograph a feeling. Art has always been a way of expressing emotions that are hard to convey with words, during troubling times in history it has been a way of interpreting these moments. If artists are giving form to the ineffable it would be possible to understand what cannot be expressed in another medium, to act we first must feel, to echo previously - to ignite ecological action it would be the artist's responsibility to make the population feel. Surely this, equipped as a tool could be seen as ecological action itself?

Figure 11 Overleaf: Barnes, A (2024) (Photograph)



Chapter 3

Figure 12: Barnes, A (2024) (Photograph)



In-between

As the climate crisis unfolds, we find ourselves living in-between. We are living between extreme weather events. As I write this in early 2025, I find myself reflecting on 2024 being *provisionally 1.5 degrees above average (Madge, 2022.) This threshold being exceeded was not thought to occur for the next seven years. This new year has been rung in with the most catastrophic wildfires in Los Angeles and one of the most impactful disasters to happen in living memory. According to the BBC the Los Angeles wildfires are on track to be among the costliest in US history, with losses already expected to exceed \$135bn (£109.7bn) (Sherman, 2025). Hollywood, known for its art and cinema screens were on everyone else's as they watched the fires rage. I am speaking in the past tense, but as I write currently in January the fires are still burning. The sheer amount of video footage of these fires that exploded out of Los Angeles is hardly surprising, with cameras everywhere, even on homes, the disaster was captured in a way not previously seen. People were evacuating their homes only to watch them burn on their doorbell camera. Houses worth millions and property districts that are some of the most expensive in the world, such as Malibu, completely disappeared.



Figure 13
LA wildfire, captured on a door camera, 2025

The figure above shows what was captured by the door camera, flames can visibly be seen leaping towards the house. This dystopian image perfectly presents the age in which we are living, what the Anthropocene is progressing towards. The wildfires have of course had incessant media coverage, not only because of the scale of the fires, but because it was vastly affecting the wealthy and privileged, amongst the houses that have been burnt down are those of celebrities. This crisis is seeping its way into unexpected areas of media, who thought that one day a doorbell would be an apparatus used to capture climate collapse? Echoing *figure 5*, something similar is represented, like a satellite capturing the aftermath of a hurricane, a doorbell capturing this disaster feels absurd, accidental and is separate to its proposed function. If all art is ecological now, perhaps all door cameras are ecological? Maybe the image itself is unintentionally art, however, could also purposefully serve as an artwork to further highlight the scale of the hyper-object. If I placed this image amongst others, like *Figure 5*, we could curate an exhibition that highlights the accidental capturing of the hyperobject, representing how this is manifesting into different areas of life. Visual media used in this way could directly influence how we interact with art, but also the climate crisis.

Similarly, in *Ice Watch* (2018) Eliasson places the viewer directly in front of, and makes them part of, the hyperobject, a forced confrontation. When we view images of ecological disaster we are being placed right in front of this hyperobject, but the screen enables us to distance ourselves between what we are seeing. We need a stronger confrontation, and what's more confrontational than your own home notifying you of a wildfire's arrival?

To combat the hyperobject through art and enact ecological change, an is/ought problem is revealed. When viewing images of the climate crisis I respond with sentiments such as 'I ought to do something about this.' For example, an image of litter on a pristine beach may evoke feelings of 'I ought to recycle' but there is a gap between those two statements. Can a statement about 'what is' be enough to create logical action about 'what ought'? The climate crisis relies so much on action and the hyperobject relies so much on preventing our ability to act. Perhaps, this can be shaped in a way that is constructive for artists – I produce art, therefore I ought to make something ecological? One problem with Morton's concept of 'All art is ecological; is that this is already happening, it means we can't escape the is/ought problem.

The low-quality aesthetic of *Figure 13* is strikingly like the work of Jon Rafman 'The Nine Eyes of Google Street View.' (2008 – ongoing.) This work gravitates around the documentation of the world through google street view. By producing images on such a massive scale many unexpected things were captured, such as crime scenes, animals escaping from pens and some genuinely bizarre scenes. Rafman then takes these images and turns them into c-type prints in large format to be shown in galleries. The scale of this work itself perhaps falls into the description of the hyperobject, millions of images captured and put into a data base. Rafmans work once again alludes to the problem of scale that the hyperobject presents and helps aid us in comprehending this. By highlighting certain works on this scale, it makes the data (Google Images) more quantifiable and digestible by placing the images in a gallery setting. The images however appear to capture something accidental, most of what is captured are anomalies of the Anthropocene.



Figure 14:
John Rafman, Nine Eyes of Google Image (2021)

Figure 14 depicts what appears to be a sculpture viewed like an artefact leftover from a previous civilisation, with *Figure 15* showing a flock of sheep blocking a road, interrupting the passage of humans through their field. There is something about these images that is somewhat unsettling, perhaps it is the low-quality feel of the imagery that makes it feel artificial, or staged, that creates a spookiness, or perhaps it's because we're being confronted with ourselves, being confronted by human activity that really makes us uncomfortable.



Figure 15:
John Rafman, Nine Eyes of Google Image (2021)

The sheer scale of this work means, in theory, it would be possible to continue this project through the next decade, and to witness a warming world through a screen – but this is happening already. *Figure 13* shows exactly that, being forced to watch a climate catastrophe through a screen, at first, it's a camera with '9 eyes' then a doorbell camera – and as our proximity to screens, and the number of screens increases, is it just a matter of time until it's yourself recording a disaster unfold? The encroaching nature of screens and the seemingly nearing of extreme climatic events reflects Heidegger's anxiety, 'it's already there and yet nowhere. It is so near that is oppressive and takes away one's breath- and yet it is nowhere.' (1927,180) Perhaps future civilisations will find, not physical artefacts such as remains of statues amongst the land, but doorbell cameras beholding the end of ours?



Where does



this leave us?

Figure 17: Barnes, A (2024) (Photograph)

Where does this leave us? Well it doesn't, it starts with us. Art is a way of noticing – this is where change begins. Throughout this publication I have been discussing the messy problem of the hyper-object and how it prevents our understanding of the climate crisis, arguing that a possible pathway to overcome this is using visual media and art. If the hyperobject is vast and complex escaping human temporality, then maybe our approach needs to be as well. As suggested previously, maybe this issue requires us to make something so unhuman, human. It requires us to leave our fingerprints all over this, maybe not to break the hyper object or overcome this completely but making it something tangible; putty for an artist to use. One of the main issues discussed when confronting this problem is apathy, and the need for emotion to overcome this, art can act to communicate emotional responses to the crisis.

In *figure 6* Eliasson interacts with the hyper object in a way that only art can achieve. He creates a confrontation with the physicality of the ice and us, we notice that not only are we losing something on a mass scale, but we are also losing parts of ourselves. He allows us to access the scale of which the hyperobject is happening, this makes it emotional, which means it can be comprehensible. It's almost impossible for this to not evoke an emotional reaction, conveying that apathy is able to be broken down by art. This piece was also a collective experience: families, friends and strangers were able to gather around the ice, the hyperobject, and touch and observe this, forging a connection with us, the ice and each other too. Artist Nina Röder engages with the ineffable nature of emotion, creating visual poetry and imagery to discuss grief absence and loss. These are emotions that are tied to the climate crisis yet are so hard to portray. By using visual media as a language in this way she communicates the importance of grieving to prevent losing more. Noticing this loss is an internal affair, something shifts from within us, perhaps once this is identified more clearly using visual media as a gateway, it can lead to action in the prevention of further ecological losses in the face of destruction.

Although art alone may not be enough to catalyse a full systemic change, it does not mean it cannot be one of the pathways to arrive there. In the contemporary age where we are exposed to more imagery than ever before, it is the job of the artist to make people stop, feel and notice, whether this is through an image, a painting or a song. According to Morton 'all art is ecological' and that may be the case, but this theory is only useful to us if people realise that this is the case, artists are faced with the challenge of making ecological art in a time where all art is ecological. Either we make the art, or the cameras in our doorbells will. If all art is ecological, I ought to make art about the hyperobject.

Home is important. I first noticed the feeling of solastalgia (Earth Emotions 2019, pg.27- 62) when being home after leaving for a long period of time. I have returned many times since, through art, perhaps this is a way of returning home for all of us. If we don't return home through art, maybe the hyperobject will return to us through wildfire, showing up at our doorstep. We view the intensity of destruction from a home centric view until one day home is unrecognisable. There is not one definite solution to the complex and ever-changing nature of the hyperobject, like an art piece that promotes more questions than answers, we can hope to make more art to answer these questions. If the hyperobject creates a cognitive haze, art can be used as a light to shine through the fog of apathy, the solution to this problem is not to break or to even understand it fully, but to move through this. *'Has it ever been more important to give form to what we feel – because otherwise we might stop feeling.'* - Jorie Graham (2023.)

If everywhere can mean nowhere, and nowhere leads to apathy, we must keep creating, if we stop feeling, we stop moving. If we can't escape the hyperobject, at least we can move through it.



Bibliography:

Albrecht, G.A. (2019). *That feeling of being homesick, even when you are home*. Earth Emotions. Cornell University Press.

Bloodhart, B., & Swim, J.K. (2010). Equality, Harmony, and the Environment: An Ecofeminist Approach to Understanding the Role of Cultural Values on the Treatment of Women and Nature. *Ecopsychology*, 2(3), 187–194. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1089/eco.2010.0057>

Chayka, K. (2017). The Unchanging, Ever-Changing Earth Room. [online] The Paris Review. Available at: <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2017/11/02/the-un-changing-ever-changing-earth-room/>. [Accessed 29 Jan. 2025].

Collins, Goto, R. (2016). *Elemental: An arts and ecology reader*. Gaia Project Press.

Graham, J. (2022). [To] The Last [Be] Human. Copper Canyon Press.

Graham, J., & O'Brien, G.G. (2025). Two Poets Consider Family in the Age of Climate Catastrophe. [online] Frieze.com. Available at: <https://www.frieze.com/article/jorie-graham-geoffrey-g-obrien-238> [Accessed 5 Feb. 2025].

Gunseli Yalcinkaya (2018b). Olafur Eliasson installs giant blocks of glacial ice across London. [online] Dezeen. Available at: <https://www.dezeen.com/2018/12/12/ice-watch-olafur-elias-son-installation/>.

Heidegger, M. (1927). *Being and Time*. Translated by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson. Oxford: Blackwell.

Inès N. Otosaka et al. (2023). Mass balance of the Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets from 1992 to 2020. *Earth Syst. Sci. Data*, 15, 1597–1616. <https://doi.org/10.5194/essd-15-1597-2023>.

Jones, L. (2020). *Losing Eden: Why Our Minds Need the Wild*. S.L.: Penguin Books.

Madge, G. (2022). 2025 outlook: In top three warmest years on record. [online] Met Office. Available at: <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/about-us/news-and-media/media-centre/weather-and-climate-news/2024/2025-global-temperature-outlook>.

Morton, T. (2010). *The Ecological Thought*. Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press.

Morton, T. (2016). *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence*. Columbia University Press.

Naidus, B. (2016). *Elemental: An arts and ecology reader*. Gaia Project Press.

Ogasawara, L. (2021). Your Brain on Art: Timothy Morton's All Art is Ecological. [online] 3 Quarks Daily. Available at: <https://3quarksdaily.com/3quarksdaily/2021/09/your-brain-on-art-timothy-mortons-all-art-is-ecological.html> [Accessed 29 Jan. 2025].

Parker, K. (2018). x.com. [online] X (formerly Twitter). Available at: <https://x.com/ray-gunfactory/status/1073333947726159872> [Accessed 13 Dec. 2018].

Palanisami, T. (2019). Plastic ingestion by people could be equating to a credit card a week. [online] The University of Newcastle, Australia. Available at: <https://www.newcastle.edu.au/newsroom/featured/plastic-ingestion-by-people-could-be-equating-to-a-credit-card-a-week>.

Rantanen, M., Karpechko, A.Y., Lipponen, A., Nordling, K., Hyvärinen, O., Ruosteenoja, K., Vihma, T., & Laaksonen, A. (2022). The Arctic has warmed nearly four times faster than the globe since 1979. *Communications Earth & Environment*, [online] 3(1), 1–10. Available at: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s43247-022-00498-3>.

Shapiro, E. (2024). Hurricane Helene live updates: Track path as Florida braces for land-fall. [online] ABC News. Available at: <https://abcnews.go.com/US/live-updates/hurricane-helene/?id=113931821>. [Accessed 29 Jan. 2025].

Sherman, N. (2025). LA wildfire damages set to cost record \$135bn. BBC News. [online] 9 Jan. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c07g73p4805o>.

UNEP (2024). *Emissions Gap Report 2024*. [online] UNEP - UN Environment Programme. Available at: <https://www.unep.org/resources/emissions-gap-report-2024>.

WWF (2019). Revealed: Plastic ingestion by people could be equating to a credit card a week. [online] Panda.org. Available at: https://wwf.panda.org/wwf_news/?348337/Revealed-plastic-ingestion-by-people-could-be-equating-to-a-credit-card-a-week. [Accessed 29 Jan. 2025].

WWF, Grooten, M., & R.E.A, A. (2018). *Living Planet Report 2018*. [online] WWF. Available at: <https://www.wwf.org.uk/updates/living-planet-report-2018>.

www.oed.com. (2005). Art, n.1 meanings, etymology and more | Oxford English Dictionary. [online] Available at: https://www.oed.com/dictionary/art_n1?tab=fact-sheet#38717681 [Accessed 5 Feb. 2025].

Figure List:

Cover image: Barnes, A (2024) (Photograph)

Figure 1: Barnes, A (2024) (Photograph)

Figure 2: Barnes, A (2024) (Photograph)

Figure 3: Barnes, A (2024) (Photograph)

Figure 4: Katakam, A. and Scarr, S. (2021). Year's Worth of Plastic Consumption. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/graphics/ENVIRONMENT-PLASTIC/0100B4TF2MQ/> [Accessed 30 Jan. 2025].

Figure 5: NOAA (2024). Satellite imagery from the Visible Infrared Imaging Radiometer Suite (VIIRS) Day-Night band onboard the NOAA-20 satellite captured the impact of Hurricane Helene. Available at: <https://baynews9.com/fl/tampa/weather/2024/09/30/helene-before-and-after-satellite-images/> [Accessed 30 Jan. 2025].

Figure 6: DEZEEN (2018). Ice Watch Outside Tate Modern 2018. Available at: <https://www.dezeen.com/2018/12/12/ice-watch-olafur-eliasson-installation/> [Accessed 30 Jan. 2025].

Figure 7: Barnes, A (2024) (Photograph)

Figure 8: Barnes, A (2024) (Photograph)

Figure 9: The Estate of Walter De Maria and Cliett, J. (1977). Walter De Maria, The New York Earth Room, 1977. Available at: <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2017/11/02/the-un-changing-ever-changing-earth-room/> [Accessed 30 Jan. 2025].

Figure 10: Röder, N. (2020). Solo Show »Über das Verschwinden« 2020. Available at: <https://ninaroeder.de/exhibition-views> [Accessed 30 Jan. 2025].

Figure 11: Barnes, A (2024) (Photograph)

Figure 12: Barnes, A (2024) (Photograph)

Figure 13: Aldrich, D.P. (2025). Nest and other doorbells are capturing the destruction in L.A. Available at: <https://atmos.earth/home-cameras-offer-horror-movie-moments-and-essential-help-amidst-la-fires/> [Accessed 30 Jan. 2025].

Figure 14: Rafman, J. (2021). Nine Eyes of Google Image. Available at: <https://9-eyes.com/post/631924029078568960/jon-rafman-scheveningseslag> [Accessed 30 Jan. 2025].

Figure 15: Rafman, J. (2021). Nine Eyes of Google Image. Available at: <https://9-eyes.com/post/631924029078568960/jon-rafman-scheveningseslag> [Accessed 30 Jan. 2025].

Figure 16: Barnes, A (2024) (Photograph).

Figure 17: Barnes, A (2024) (Photograph)

Figure 18: Barnes, A (2024) (Photograph)