

## MAIN SECTION

# Perceiving the Anthropocene as a Public Health Risk via Visual Culture

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## ABSTRACT

There is widespread scientific and cultural evidence that Earth's planetary boundaries are being exceeded in irreparable ways due to unsustainable behavior in the Global North's resource-hungry nations in particular, but responsiveness to the climate crisis is still lagging. It has become clear that significant numbers of people have limited engagement with ecological risks accumulating on a scale much bigger than the micro-level human actions causing them, such as the day-to-day build-up of industrial pollutants including nitrogen dioxide. How best to go about galvanizing socially just degrowth in the face of barriers to individual commitment that range from a sense of powerlessness to disinterest in futures-thinking? Given the extent to which a preoccupation with wellbeing spans walks of life across the globe, it is worth considering the motivational power of ecological dangers in terms of the potential for personal harm. With that end in mind, this article fleshes out an artistically and emotionally oriented approach to the totalizing extractivism of the Anthropocene as a source of public health problems, not least the COVID-19 pandemic.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The reasoning here was honed through exchanges with Cristina Baldacci, Shaul Bassi, Emiliano Guaraldo, Josh Habgood-Coote, Susan Harrow, Joanna Jordan, Katja Kwastek, Sara MacBride-Stewart, the postgraduates in Andrea Borsari's courses on "Estetiche per la città" and "Aesthetics of the City and Landscape" at the University of Bologna's Department of Architecture in November 2022, and attendees of the panel on "Narrare il rischio"—organized by Lucia Masotti and Carlo Mambriani—at the University of Insubria during the 12th Study Day of the Società di Studi Geografici in December 2022.

## KEYWORDS

*Cultural geography; Enviro-medical humanities; Nineteenth-century art; Pollution; Will-to-wellbeing*

## PEER REVIEWED

<https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.2612-0496/15990>

ISSN 2612-0496

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Increasingly frequent disruptions to the Earth system are the result of longstanding irresponsible conduct in privileged parts of the world where ethical concerns appear to have taken something of a back seat to the affordances of capitalism. Pressing problems such as greenhouse gas emissions compounding extreme weather are the bitter fruit of key nations' industrial quantum leaps: "in the 'West' during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries [...] coal-fired steam engines generated novel workplaces, new industries and products, huge factories, vast cities and machine-based movement."<sup>1</sup> These transitions contributed directly and indirectly to a planetary crisis. Anthony McMichael and Colin Butler's "Promoting Global Population Health while Constraining the Environmental Footprint" traces the spread of the trouble: "as economies grew and fossil fuels became central to industrial capitalism, environmental air pollution and the chemical fouling of waterways took on a more community-wide, even regional, character."<sup>2</sup> Micro-level choices stoked a cascade of slow violence at the meso and macro level, especially affecting regions lacking the capacity to insulate themselves against climate instability. In *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*, Amitav Ghosh is forthright about the situation amounting to deleterious deeds "returning to haunt us in unthinkable shapes and forms."<sup>3</sup> Without much regard for how ecosystems' integrity and the finitude of organic life go hand in hand, the impulse to profit from so-called "natural resources" continues to unfold. Seeing as "a capitalist system [...] is constitutionally driven toward ceaseless growth on a finite planetary resource base,"<sup>4</sup> the prospects for righting the ship can seem rather slim.

What is to become of the Anthropocene, the epoch in which humans have acquired geological agency? Its properties are becoming more and more pronounced: "economic globalisation; cultural cosmopolitanism; Earth System science; health pandemics."<sup>5</sup> Even if some societies have boomed in the course of this unprecedented state of affairs, it would be rash not to take account of the fact that problems like eco-anxiety or COVID-19 are occurring with greater frequency. Regarding the burden of responsibility here, much is to be said for interrogating the apparently monolithic *anthropos*. As part of efforts to address "the lexical and scientific vanishing point of the Anthropocene,"<sup>6</sup> it is fitting that "the language(s) of climate

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1 John Urry, "Editorial: The Problem of Energy," *Theory, Culture & Society* 31, no. 5 (2014): 10.

2 Anthony J. McMichael and Colin D. Butler, "Promoting Global Population Health while Constraining the Environmental Footprint," *Annual Review of Public Health* 32 (2011): 182–183.

3 Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 32.

4 Alok Amatya and Ashley Dawson, "Literature in an Age of Extraction: An Introduction," *Modern Fiction Studies* 66, no. 1 (2020): 4.

5 Abbey Ballard and John Parham, "Editorial—Ties that Bind: International Studies in Ecocriticism," *Green Letters* 24, no. 2 (2020): 104.

6 Phillip John Usher, "Untranslating the Anthropocene," *Diacritics* 44, no. 3 (2016): 60.

change should be called into question.”<sup>7</sup> Where alternative designations for the phase beyond the Holocene have sprouted in the humanities and social sciences, ranging from the Capitalocene to the Plantationocene, questions of intersectionality are of real urgency. In *Climate Change, Capitalism, and Corporations: Processes of Creative Self-Destruction*, the political economists Christopher Wright and Daniel Nyberg emphasize that “‘business as usual’ scenarios [...] singularly fail to acknowledge the desperate exigencies of a carbon-constrained world.”<sup>8</sup> With symptoms of ecological disturbance spreading across the planet, a multi-pronged strategy is needed to set enough people against sources of harm insidiously embedded in the everyday, not least pollution from heavy industry that goes back to the nineteenth century.

A fruitful method of accounting for rising threat levels is proposed in Molly Wallace’s *Risk Criticism: Precautionary Reading in an Age of Environmental Uncertainty*, comprising the recognition that “global warming is at once ‘fabulously textual’ and absolutely material, a product of expert assessment, media presentation, political accord, and public reception, as much as it is an interaction of CO<sub>2</sub> and methane gases in the atmosphere.”<sup>9</sup> Situating risk between materiality and textuality opens up space for delving into the qualitative dimension of a predicament such as greenhouse gas emissions, the consequences of which have been extensively mapped from various perspectives within the applied sciences. According to a place- and people-focused team led by Petra Tschakert in “One Thousand Ways to Experience Loss: A Systematic Analysis of Climate-Related Intangible Harm from around the World,” it must be borne in mind that “quantitative approaches to [...] risk assessments [...] are often at odds with the lived and felt realities of harm.”<sup>10</sup> Research in the energy humanities similarly highlights the importance of feelings ahead of facts: “given the cognitive biases that limit how far people ‘own’ the problem of climate change, emotional identification with the issue is the more important aspect of narrative persuasion to leverage.”<sup>11</sup> To what extent might the sentiments and storying at stake in cultural artifacts like Berthe Morisot’s *Hanging the Laundry out to Dry* (1875) or Giovanni Battista Costa’s *Unloading Coal in the Port of Genoa* (1892) help to mediate the complexities of empirical data surrounding Hothouse Earth and the like? As Angela Last explains, “artworks often promote a closer identification with a greater planetary

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7 Uwe Küchler, “Signs, Images, and Narratives: Climate Change across Languages and Cultures,” in *Teaching Climate Change in the Humanities*, ed. Stephen Siperstein, Shane Hall, and Stephanie LeMenager (London: Routledge, 2017), 154.

8 Christopher Wright and Daniel Nyberg, *Climate Change, Capitalism, and Corporations: Processes of Creative Self-Destruction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 72.

9 Molly Wallace, *Risk Criticism: Precautionary Reading in an Age of Environmental Uncertainty* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 20.

10 Petra Tschakert et al., “One Thousand Ways to Experience Loss: A Systematic Analysis of Climate-Related Intangible Harm from around the World,” *Global Environmental Change* 55 (2019): 59.

11 Simon Bushell et al., “Strategic Narratives in Climate Change: Towards a Unifying Narrative to Address the Action Gap on Climate Change,” *Energy Research & Social Science* 28 (2017): 47.



FIG. 1 World Wildlife Fund, "Air Pollution Comes from 5 Main Human Sources," *Twitter*, June 5, 2019, <https://twitter.com/WWF/status/1136185193272938502>.

history that might translate into new political demands and new forms of identity and participation.<sup>12</sup> Since social engagement with environmental challenges is acutely needed, this could well be the time for all things creative to come into their own.

At Venice's Architecture Biennial in 2021, the Catalan Pavilion hosted 'Air/Aria/Aire', foregrounding the European cities most polluted by nitrogen dioxide at a cost of thousands of deaths per year, with Turin 3<sup>rd</sup>, Paris 4<sup>th</sup>, Milan 5<sup>th</sup>, and Brussels 8<sup>th</sup>. Gary Fuller goes as far as warning that "the Po Valley in northern Italy [...] is one of Europe's most polluted regions [...] with ozone forming close to the ground, particle pollution and nitrogen dioxide," and that "ozone pollution in Paris is around twice as high today as that measured over 100 years ago."<sup>13</sup> In the words of a pan-European epidemiological team led by Rob Beelen, "particulate matter air pollution is ubiquitous and [...] reductions [...] can be expected to reduce the mortality risk."<sup>14</sup> This issue corresponds to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals on "Good Health and Well-Being" and "Climate Action," which subtended the orientation of World Environment Day 2019 toward #BeatAirPollution.<sup>15</sup> Twitter surged with responses to the major hazard in ways shaped by emotion as much as science, with high-profile organizations and figures posting images of smokestacks that attracted hundreds

12 Angela Last, "We Are the World? Anthropocene Cultural Production between Geopoetics and Geopolitics," *Theory, Culture & Society* 34, no. 2–3 (2017): 148.

13 Gary Fuller, *The Invisible Killer: The Rising Global Threat of Air Pollution—and How We Can Fight back* (London: Melville House, 2019), 100–01, 113.

14 Rob Beelen et al., "Effects of Long-Term Exposure to Air Pollution on Natural-Cause Mortality: An Analysis of 22 European Cohorts within the Multicentre ESCAPE Project," *The Lancet* 383 (2014): 793.

15 United Nations Environment Program, "Chemicals and the Right to Breathe Clean Air," *United Nations Environment Program*, June 6, 2019, [www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/chemicals-and-right-breathe-clean-air](http://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/chemicals-and-right-breathe-clean-air).



FIG. 2 Camille Pissarro, *Banks of the Oise at Pontoise/Saint-Ouen-l'Aumône*, 1867. Oil on canvas, 18 x 28 inches. Denver Art Museum, Denver, CO. Gift of the Barnett and Annalee Newman Foundation in honor of Annalee G. Newman, 2001.310. © Denver Art Museum.

of likes and re-tweets.<sup>16</sup> Such iconography, echoing Impressionist paintings including Camille Pissarro's *Banks of the Oise at Pontoise/Saint-Ouen-l'Aumône* (1867), indicates how certain aesthetics carry weight in environmentalism. Given that "air pollution and its effects are surprisingly ubiquitous in literature and art,"<sup>17</sup> there is a wellspring of stimuli to do with ecological risk. Andrew Patrizio's *The Ecological Eye: Assembling an Ecocritical Art History* reasons out "artworks metabolis[ing] the earth's materials into objects of value and aesthetic experiences that themselves set up chains of transformation."<sup>18</sup> Undoubtedly, it is worth heeding non-specialist pathways for broaching intricate subjects like noxious carbonways or ocean acidification.

Public perception of environmental changes and associated health questions tends to be rooted in emotion before logic, chiefly in terms of how information aligns with a person's worldview. Scientists seeking to convey the severity of Earth's condition have pursued an incontestable level of data but precise modeling has yet to hold sway as extensively as needed. Those unconvinced about what is at stake are even proving to be repelled by statements that diverge from their standpoint, most often "increas[ing] their opposition to both proposed governmental and personal climate

16 Bloomberg Quicktake, "Today Is #WorldEnvironmentDay," *Twitter*, June 5, 2019, <https://twitter.com/Quicktake/status/1136085588963205122>; Global Landscapes Forum, "Today, 5 June, Is #WorldEnvironmentDay," *Twitter*, June 5, 2019, <https://twitter.com/GlobalLF/status/1136106697997586432>; The Anthropocene Project, "Today Is #WorldEnvironmentDay," *Twitter*, June 5, 2019, <https://twitter.com/anthropocene/status/1136276864866168832>; World Wildlife Fund, "Air Pollution Is a Global Issue Affecting People and the Planet," *Twitter*, June 5, 2019, <https://twitter.com/WWF/status/1136185210079461376>.

17 Anna Souter, "Dirty Pretty Things: Air Pollution in Art from JMW Turner to Today," *The Guardian*, October 28, 2020, [www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2020/oct/28/jmw-turner-air-pollution-in-art-rain-steam-and-speed](http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2020/oct/28/jmw-turner-air-pollution-in-art-rain-steam-and-speed), paragraph 9.

18 Andrew Patrizio, *The Ecological Eye: Assembling an Ecocritical Art History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), 6.

change action.”<sup>19</sup> In parallel to potentially antagonism-inducing scientific expertise, an ostensibly less technical object can be apt for establishing an emotional connection with macro-scale risk, as was intimated in winter 2019 in exhibitions of contemporary art at the Royal Academy in London (“Eco-Visionaries: Confronting a Planet in a State of Emergency”) and the MAST Foundation in Bologna (“Anthropocene”). Opportunities for an ecological reckoning through the arts extend to all-the-rage reproductions of canonical paintings from the time of the Industrial Revolution in the form of canvas bags, coffee mugs, flasks, laptop cases, surgical-style masks, and T-shirts.<sup>20</sup> These items are an underestimated conduit for engagement with the Anthropocene’s problems via the logic of Ellen Winner’s *How Art Works: A Psychological Exploration*, which identifies how such stimuli are typically cognized: “when we respond to visual art, narrative art, or music with negative emotional content, we experience a combination of negative and positive emotions [...]—the more negative the content, the more positive and moved people feel.”<sup>21</sup> There thus appears to be scope for tackling the climate crisis by bringing into play realistically ominous creative depictions.

Considering the idea of “art [...] shap[ing] reality [...] in a compellingly new way,”<sup>22</sup> what practices would seem suited to spurring individuals to climate action over the long term? Several attempts to make an enduring impact on the public consciousness have centered on exposing threats to health, stirring up a mix of negative and positive feelings. A case in point is the “art attacks” in October 2022 at London’s National Gallery and Potsdam’s Barberini Museum by Just Stop Oil (@JustStop\_Oil) and Letzte Generation (@AufstandLastGen). There was shock value by the bucketload in the lobbing of tomato soup at Vincent van Gogh’s *Sunflowers* (1888) and mashed potatoes at Claude Monet’s *Haystacks* (1891), with coverage of the latter in *The Guardian* stressing how “the stunt was designed as a wake-up call in the face of a climate catastrophe.”<sup>23</sup> The shortcoming targeted by the

19 Jack Zhou, “Boomerangs versus Javelins: How Polarization Constrains Communication on Climate Change,” *Environmental Politics* 25, no. 5 (2016): 802.

20 MasterpieceCafe, “Factories at Asnières Coffee Mug,” Zazzle, September 28, 2009, [www.zazzle.com/factories\\_at\\_asnieres\\_by\\_vincent\\_van\\_gogh\\_coffee\\_mug-168554557097358505](http://www.zazzle.com/factories_at_asnieres_by_vincent_van_gogh_coffee_mug-168554557097358505); MasterpieceCafe, “Factories at Asnières Tote Bag,” Zazzle, May 7, 2010, [www.zazzle.com/factories\\_at\\_asnieres\\_by\\_vincent\\_van\\_gogh\\_tote\\_bag-149398704726871695](http://www.zazzle.com/factories_at_asnieres_by_vincent_van_gogh_tote_bag-149398704726871695); MasterpieceCafe, “Factories at Asnières T-Shirt,” Zazzle, September 28, 2009, [www.zazzle.com/factories\\_at\\_asnieres\\_by\\_vincent\\_van\\_gogh\\_t-shirt-235449501386056905](http://www.zazzle.com/factories_at_asnieres_by_vincent_van_gogh_t-shirt-235449501386056905); PaintingArtwork, “Bathers at Asnières Adult Cloth Face Mask,” Zazzle, December 17, 2020, [www.zazzle.com/georges\\_seurat\\_bathers\\_at\\_asnieres\\_adult\\_cloth\\_face\\_mask-256321481616492774](http://www.zazzle.com/georges_seurat_bathers_at_asnieres_adult_cloth_face_mask-256321481616492774); PaintingArtwork, “Bathers at Asnières Laptop Sleeve,” Zazzle, July 30, 2022, [www.zazzle.com/georges\\_seurat\\_bathers\\_at\\_asnieres\\_laptop\\_sleeve-12450355822664320](http://www.zazzle.com/georges_seurat_bathers_at_asnieres_laptop_sleeve-12450355822664320); PaintingArtwork, “Bathers at Asnières Stainless Steel Water Bottle,” Zazzle, February 3, 2021, [www.zazzle.com/georges\\_seurat\\_bathers\\_at\\_asnieres\\_stainless\\_steel\\_water\\_bottle-256335961982440496](http://www.zazzle.com/georges_seurat_bathers_at_asnieres_stainless_steel_water_bottle-256335961982440496).

21 Ellen Winner, *How Art Works: A Psychological Exploration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 99–100.

22 Andrew Simms, “Why Climate Action Needs the Arts,” *The Guardian*, June 3, 2015, [www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/jun/03/why-climate-action-needs-the-arts](http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/jun/03/why-climate-action-needs-the-arts), paragraph 14.

23 Sam Jones, “Climate Activists Throw Mashed Potatoes at Monet Work in Germany,” *The Guardian*, October 23, 2022, [www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/oct/23/climate-activists-mashed-potato-monet-potsdam-germany](http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/oct/23/climate-activists-mashed-potato-monet-potsdam-germany), paragraph 3.

activists—slowness in cutting back pursuits that are responsible for rising global surface temperatures—is perennial: “carbon is not a salient consideration in everyday decision-making, [...] misperceptions exist, and [...] the disparity between knowledge and behaviour (the ‘value-action gap’) would suggest certain barriers constrain the ability of even knowledgeable and motivated individuals to act.”<sup>24</sup> It might well be possible to get around this stumbling block by diversifying modes of reflection and knowledge transmission. In the words of reporting by Vox, “threaten[ing] the destruction of art [...] and the cultural value we ascribe to it [...] in the fight to save the planet [...] raises all kinds of questions.”<sup>25</sup> When looking to contend with the Anthropocene’s myriad facets and scales, the weightiness of internationally revered forms of culture is not to be sniffed at.

A culturally oriented understanding of our planet’s endangerment can bring new levels of meaningfulness to intersectional problems associated with certain economic and political creeds. Sara MacBride-Stewart, Yi Gong, and Jessica Antell observe that “there is an inequality in the distribution of environmental hazards and health risks [...] influenced by policy, economics and the social conditions of gender.”<sup>26</sup> Increasingly, disciplines running the gamut from art history to anthropology are rounding out data from the natural sciences about disruptions in biogeochemical flows, soil degradation, and much besides. Jonathan Rigg and Lisa Reyes Mason specify that “social sciences and humanities [...] can lead to a different kind of climate science—one characterized by deep interdisciplinarity, meaningful public engagement and the recognition that global processes have distinct local signatures.”<sup>27</sup> Some of the most innovative work in this regard has to do with how “medicine and the environment [...] overlap [...] in the field of health and well-being.”<sup>28</sup> Scores of enviro-medical lessons are to be learned from sites of injustice like the sacrifice zone colloquially known as “Cancer Alley,” the 85-mile stretch along the Mississippi between Baton Rouge and New Orleans where roughly 150 facilities handle a quarter of the United States’ petrochemical production. *The Bloomsbury Handbook to the Medical-Environmental Humanities* opens with Scott Slovic, Swarnalatha Rangarajan, and Vidya Sarveswaran remarking that “a particularly ubiquitous concern in the Anthropocene [is] the public health ramifications of widespread toxicity, a byproduct of

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24 Lorraine Whitmarsh, Gill Seyfang, and Saffron O’Neill, “Public Engagement with Carbon and Climate Change: To What Extent Is the Public ‘Carbon Capable?’,” *Global Environmental Change* 21, no. 1 (2011): 64.

25 Aja Romano, “How Many Van Goghs Is One Earth Worth?,” *Vox*, October 24, 2022, [www.vox.com/culture/23414590/just-stop-oil-van-gogh-sunflowers-protest-climate-change](https://www.vox.com/culture/23414590/just-stop-oil-van-gogh-sunflowers-protest-climate-change), paragraphs 10–11.

26 Sara MacBride-Stewart, Yi Gong, and Jessica Antell, “Exploring the Interconnections between Gender, Health and Nature,” *Public Health* 141 (2016): 283.

27 Jonathan Rigg and Lisa Reyes Mason, “Five Dimensions of Climate Science Reductionism,” *Nature Climate Change* 8, no. 12 (2018): 1031.

28 Tom Crook, “Thinking Ecologically: A Systems Approach to the History of MedEnv,” *MedEnv Network*, September 10, 2020, <https://medenvnetwork.wordpress.com/2020/09/10/thinking-ecologically>, paragraph 2.

industrialization.”<sup>29</sup> Right now, suffering is being perpetuated to the greatest measure in disadvantaged areas; soon enough, no-one will be able to run from this predicament.

Breaking the cycle of extractivism is to be deemed no mean feat, especially with the traction of disposable consumables in countries that are uppermost in the United Nations Development Program’s Human Development Index. Andrew Jameton’s “Outline of the Ethical Implications of Earth’s Limits for Health Care” goes to the heart of the problem: “without a healthy environment, people cannot stay healthy in the long run; the human ability to provide [...] food, shelter, immunity, and a toxic-free environment depends on the fundamental good health of the Earth.”<sup>30</sup> That said, swathes of the general public do not come across as overly preoccupied with the extent to which ecosystem health entwines with quality of life, notwithstanding initiatives to spread the word by organizations including the British Broadcasting Corporation: “there is no Earth *and* us—we are one.”<sup>31</sup> Significant numbers continue to treat their circumstances as somehow detached from the state of the world, which is of deep concern. The philosopher Corine Pelluchon is insistent that “our vulnerability is connected to our corporality—the fact that we eat, depend on air, on water and so on. [...] Ecology cannot be separated from existence.”<sup>32</sup> By the same token, Astrida Neimanis and Rachel Loewen Walker point out, “the weather and the climate are not phenomena ‘in’ which we live at all—where climate would be some natural backdrop to our separate human dramas—but are rather of us, in us, through us.”<sup>33</sup> In the hyperconnected era of globalization where unsustainable choices in high-income countries are co-extensive with climate change, the supposed separateness of Nature/Culture does not hold water.

The risks of the Anthropocene can be tough to grasp because they operate on a scale that is much larger than each activity causing them. As Serpil Oppermann underscores, “thinking the human impact in million-year spans is difficult.”<sup>34</sup> Environmentalism has tended to lose out to matters perceived as closer to home in a value hierarchy, with *utility* taking

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29 Scott Slovic, Swarnalatha Rangarajan, and Vidya Sarveswaran, “Introduction: Toward a Medical-Environmental Humanities. Why Now?,” in *The Bloomsbury Handbook to the Medical-Environmental Humanities*, ed. Scott Slovic, Swarnalatha Rangarajan, and Vidya Sarveswaran (London: Bloomsbury, 2022), 5.

30 Andrew Jameton, “Outline of the Ethical Implications of Earth’s Limits for Health Care,” *Journal of Medical Humanities* 23, no. 1 (2002): 45.

31 Eleni Dimou, British Broadcasting Corporation, and Flock London, “Is It Time to Reassess our Relationship with Nature?,” *BBC Ideas*, July 17, 2020, [www.bbc.co.uk/ideas/videos/is-it-time-to-reassess-our-relationship-with-nature/p08l2xcb](http://www.bbc.co.uk/ideas/videos/is-it-time-to-reassess-our-relationship-with-nature/p08l2xcb), 4:27–31.

32 Corine Pelluchon, “We Live in a World which Dehumanizes Us: Covid and Ecology,” *The New Institute*, December 22, 2020, <https://thenew.institute/en/news/covid/covid-and-ecology>, paragraphs 3–4.

33 Astrida Neimanis and Rachel Loewen Walker, “Weathering: Climate Change and the ‘Thick Time’ of Transcorporeality,” *Hypatia* 29, no. 3 (2014): 559.

34 Serpil Oppermann, “The Scale of the Anthropocene: Material Ecocritical Reflections,” *Mosaic* 51, no. 3 (2018): 2.

precedence over *virtue*. According to the sociologist Philip Smith and the cultural geographer Nicolas Howe in *Climate Change as Social Drama: Global Warming in the Public Sphere*, “climate change looks to be a chronic rather than an acute condition. It suffers relative to immediate threats, such as the S[evere]A[cute]R[espiratory]S[yndrome] virus, because life never appears to be in clear and present danger. This keeps it on the back burner.”<sup>35</sup> An ironic twist of fate is how chronic ecological problems augment the frequency of acute threats like SARS-CoV-2 that draw resources away from initiatives to address the underlying condition. In “Integrating Health and Environmental Impact Analysis,” an enviro-medical team led by the atmospheric chemist Stefan Reis makes no bones about the degree to which “the daunting challenge of maintaining and improving public health in the face of rapidly accelerating environmental change at the local, but especially the planetary level, is not being adequately met.”<sup>36</sup> Building consensus around endangered wellbeing comes down to issues of time and space—the very stuff of artistic objects, both narratively and materially.

Everyday industrially led toxification since the nineteenth century is a principal component of the disorder whereby “most of the earth has warmed.”<sup>37</sup> *The Paris Agreement*—the fruit of the 21<sup>st</sup> Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in 2015—sets out a rationale for “pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, recognizing that this would significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change.”<sup>38</sup> This type of benchmarking is expedient for getting big players pulling in the right direction, though the enterprise cannot stop there. “What the Coronavirus Curve Teaches Us about Climate Change” sees the economist Howard Kunreuther and the psychologist Paul Slovic advocating for “no longer delay[ing] aggressive actions to halt and reverse what otherwise will be inevitable pandemic-like crises arising from climate change. Already, tipping points have been reached.”<sup>39</sup> Swift societal adjustments appear a bitter pill to swallow in some quarters, but the whole of humanity is in jeopardy of too little, too late. Hilary Graham and Piran White—rooted in medical sociology and ecosystem services—declare that “challenges to public health and environmental sustainability are interconnected. [...] [B]oth human health and the planetary environment are [...] outcomes of

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35 Philip Smith and Nicolas Howe, *Climate Change as Social Drama: Global Warming in the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 3.

36 Stefan Reis et al., “Integrating Health and Environmental Impact Analysis,” *Public Health* 129, no. 10 (2015): 1387.

37 William J. Burroughs, *Climate Change: A Multidisciplinary Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 206.

38 United Nations, *Paris Agreement* (Bonn: United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Secretariat, 2015), 3.

39 Howard Kunreuther and Paul Slovic, “What the Coronavirus Curve Teaches Us about Climate Change,” *Politico*, March 26, 2020, [www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/03/26/what-the-coronavirus-curve-teaches-us-about-climate-change-148318](http://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/03/26/what-the-coronavirus-curve-teaches-us-about-climate-change-148318), paragraph 13.

dominant forms of economic and social development.”<sup>40</sup> As the clock runs down on the prospect of heading off full-blown climate breakdown, it is opportune to bring multifarious resources to bear on inaction linked to the impression of powerlessness and analogous hindering factors. What might be achieved through galvanizing the capacity for taking onboard small situated cues about looming scenarios, including those encapsulated in particular aesthetics?

All kinds of communities are motivated by a will-to-wellbeing, which suggests that correctives to the severe health risks of the Anthropocene would result from proper acknowledgment of processes of contamination and the like. According to Norman Daniels in *Just Health: Meeting Health Needs Fairly*, “many societies [...] financ[e] health-care institutions that deliver public health and medical services more equitably than many other goods.”<sup>41</sup> Essentially, a grasp of physical enfeeblement coinciding with ecological deterioration should pave the way for degrowth-aligned living in line with a person’s values. In “Shaping Perceptions to Motivate Healthy Behavior: The Role of Message Framing,” Alexander Rothman and Peter Salovey emphasize that a “message needs to be processed in sufficient depth, so it can be integrated into an individual’s mental representation of the health issue.”<sup>42</sup> Creative works have the potential to prompt this type of processing in subtle ways, thereby creating space for deeper psychological assimilation. Indeed, when it comes to “the costs of pollution [that] are hidden, [...] nudgelike steps [...] can help to reduce the problem.”<sup>43</sup> Futures-thinking can be fueled by quite different perspectives on threats and rewards, so there ought to be room for a softly-softly approach—somewhere closer to carrot than stick—in going about lifting the veil on the pitfalls of carbon-intensive realities originating in the Global North. Ultimately, sizable benefits are to be obtained from addressing vulnerability through a variety of cultural artifacts.

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40 Hilary Graham and Piran C. L. White, “Social Determinants and Lifestyles: Integrating Environmental and Public Health Perspectives,” *Public Health* 141 (2016): 275.

41 Norman Daniels, *Just Health: Meeting Health Needs Fairly* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 29.

42 Alexander J. Rothman and Peter Salovey, “Shaping Perceptions to Motivate Healthy Behavior: The Role of Message Framing,” *Psychological Bulletin* 121, no. 1 (1997): 17.

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