

Landscape into Eco Art

Articulations of Nature Since the '60s

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collaborates with natural forces. In *Unity in Diversity* Beuys the shaman was both part of and distinct from the basalt columns. Long after the oaks of *7000 Oaks* are gone, the crystal markers will remain.

CASE STUDY 8: THE EMOTIONAL LIFE OF WATER; MATERIALISM AND AFFECT IN ECO ART

Basia Irland has been working with the languages of water since 1985, carving wooden books into which she embeds ecologically sensitive materials native to the areas in which she works. We may then read their materiality and place in the local ecosystem, much as we can read the volumes in Mark Dion's *Schildbach Xylotheque* (see fig. 15), considered in chapter 2. Her research involves bodies of water as far removed from one another as Puget Sound and the Dominican Republic, but each instance is specific and involves the fullest possible range of local actants, from microbes to people. Irland's work is striking in its comprehensiveness, its scientific foundations, and its involvement of and appeal among the many people it touches. At the same time, it is akin to the many contemporary artworks that focus on our relationships with water. Some are explicitly environmental in their message, such as Eliasson's *Ice Watch* (2015), with its eighty tons of ice blocks sourced from a fjord in Greenland marking the hours in a gigantic and relentlessly melting timepiece. Part of the collective effort to raise awareness about planetary climate disruption called artists4climate, and displayed in the prominent Place du Panthéon, Paris, at the time of the 2015 COP21 negotiations, it literally brought home to an urban context not only the effects of global warming but also the urgency to take collective action in the face of climate change. An earlier "melting" work by Eliasson was pointedly titled *Your Waste of Time* (2006) and used ice from Vatnajökull, Iceland, the largest glacier in Europe. More broadly focused is John Akomfrah's film *Vertigo Sea* (2015), which meditates on the whaling industry, slavery, and human migration. Taiwanese artist Vincent J. F. Huang's *Crossing the Tide*, a flooded pavilion at the 56th Venice Biennale in 2015, and other ongoing projects bringing attention to the nearly submerged island of Tuvalu in the South Pacific are another powerful case in point.⁷⁸ The diminishing availability and quality of water as well as the destructive potential of its excess because of climate change explain why it has become a recurrent subject in ecological art practices worldwide. Water is essential to every being on the planet.

I intend "The Emotional Life of Water" to be heard in two ways: first, as an evocation of the emotions we humans feel when thinking about water through eco art (the affective dimension reflected in commonplaces such as "water is life," which suggest that element's personal and planetary necessity; such reactions were on full display around Eliasson's *Ice Watch*). Second, of equal import but perhaps

hard for us to hear, is the sense that water may have its own emotional life. This is of course a massive topic central to aesthetics regarded as the philosophical examination of the sensate and to any account of viewer response in art history. It encompasses our reactions to nature and to art and the neurological coordinates of our feelings.⁷⁹ For example, think of the phrase's impact when you hear that animal agriculture uses an estimated 55 percent of fresh water in the United States and contributes massively to both global greenhouse-gas loads and water pollution.⁸⁰ It also needs to be said that emotion and affect are not identical and sometimes need to be distinguished in eco-art contexts.⁸¹ While I am not concerned with the intricacies of the disagreements among experts about these differences, I follow Brian Massumi in thinking that affect is a type of registration prior and fundamental to the expression of emotion. Another primary area of concern in the humanities recently is the intersecting investigations of new materialism, thing theory, and object-oriented ontology, all of which emphasize the material realm over that of the human. The less familiar connotation of "the emotional life of water" therefore makes reference to the potential independence of water, to its own material and nonanthropocentric "life," which I understand as fundamental to the eco art discussed in this case study.

It is important here to flag questions about disciplinary boundaries raised by the types of imagery that convey ecological information about water (or any other planetary element). When are ecological projects "art," and when they are "science" or perhaps something else, such as activism, design, lobbying, or advertising? To reiterate Braddock's challenge cited in chapter 1, "What is the *art* in ecological art, exactly?" I am not suggesting that such categorizations are ontologically based, that they are ultimately more than pragmatic and conventional—subject to use and subject to change—but I do think that we can tell which is which according to context and that we respond differently depending on the category perceived. The field of "information visualization" is highly active around the climate-change file. In a scientific paper, for example, we are likely to glean information from tables and graphs, many of which will require expert facility if they are to be understood. Information sources geared to a broader audience, by contrast, exploit the psychology alluded to in veteran ecological artist Iain Baxter's use of a tongue-in-cheek but telling maxim to describe the impact of one of his own ecological works: "A word is worth 1/1,000th of a picture."⁸² Olafur Eliasson and Minik Rosling make the same point: "Facts are one part; just as guilt does not inspire initiative, people will not act on facts alone. We are inspired to act by emotional and physical experience. Knowledge can tell us what we should do to achieve our goals, but the goals and the urge to act must arise from our emotions."⁸³

A *Guardian* newspaper article about the footprint of animal husbandry, "In Pictures: How the West's Appetite for Beef Is Felling the Amazon," is long on

emotive photographs and, as the section title suggests by substituting the image of a camera for the textual descriptor “In Pictures” in the online version, short on discursive explanation. Below the title of this article, three of the first four images of the clearing of rainforest for grazing purposes are by Daniel Beltrá, an artist working for Greenpeace in this instance, the captions tell us. “The fragility of our ecosystems is a continuous thread throughout my work,” Beltrá states on his own website. “My photographs show the vast scale of transformation our world is under from human-made stresses.”⁸⁴ Beltrá’s photograph *Cattle Ranch in Agua Boa, Mato Grosso, Brazil, August 8, 2008*—a stark aerial shot of a massive industrial cattle range, purportedly set up on illegally cleared land—is used as the lead image in the *Guardian* article and found in the “Forests” portfolio on the artist’s website. Do we need to ask when this image is art and when it is science or journalism?

Rather than pursue such distinctions and pretend that science is not part of culture and that imagery is not appropriate in science, it is more productive to think of these perspectives as fully integrated in eco art, which is now frequently deployed in whatever contexts will give it a voice in and beyond the art world. An acknowledgment of the superior affective power of images over words and statistics is increasingly found in scientific publications such as *Climate Change: Picturing the Science* (2009), which seeks to bring home the specifics of climate science in a more potent way by illustrating the phenomena at issue with images produced by professional documentary photographers. The documentary film *Chasing Ice* (2012), directed by Jeff Orlowski, follows scientist-turned-photographer James Balog and his team as they document the rapid recession of glaciers in Alaska, Greenland, and Iceland. Few statistics are mentioned; instead, the evidence of glaciers receding, conveyed in stop-action photographs and films, brings climate change into a human time frame with great effect. The U.K. firm Carbon Visuals promotes the same message about the sorts of visual information to deploy. It offers imaging services to clients who wish to get their ecological messages across more effectively through visuals, the basis of which is not simply information but the emotional, affective conveyance of that information. Of course, not all artists seek emotional response to their work; Michael Mandiberg’s CO₂ app for the Firefox browser, for example, sticks to the numbers and graphs, as does Mel Chin’s CLI-Mate app from 2008, which proposed to show its users numerical data regarding the impact of their day-to-day behavior on the planet. Bruce Foltz wrote in 1995 that “either tacitly or explicitly, the character of the environmental crisis is regarded as authoritatively defined by the natural sciences.”⁸⁵ Although the integrative efforts of Cape Farewell and the CLUI, for example, and exhibitions such as *Carbon 14* have rendered this authority less conclusive than it was twenty years ago, we should treat this balance of perspectives as an open issue today, one addressed in the water works I discuss.

Another counterexample to the domination of science is the long-standing practice of Christo and Jeanne-Claude. The methodological premise of their extensive projects on the land, such as *Running Fence* (realized in 1976) and *The Umbrellas* (Japan–United States, 1984–91), is one of consultation and negotiation across disciplines and interests. Christo makes this clear with reference to *The Floating Piers*, installed to both acclaim and controversy in Italy in 2016, and *Over the River*, a project proposed in 1992 to “suspend 5.9 miles of silvery, luminous fabric panels high above the Arkansas River along a 42-mile stretch of the river between Salida and Cañon City in south-central Colorado.”⁸⁶ In a 2013 interview, Christo underlined the purpose of artworks whose genesis is protracted, complex, and crosses multiple boundaries, from the legal to the ecological: “For many years, all the people are thinking how the work will be beautiful, how the work will be awful. Basically, the work is working in the mind of the people before it physically exists. This is probably the biggest satisfaction we have—Jeanne Claude and myself—because this is the only thing artists like to have, . . . to have the people comment and discuss their works.”⁸⁷ *Over the River* was to be an ecological action revealing systems of land use; even before installation, it triggered often-heated discussions about nature and preservation among local citizens representing a wide range of interests. In January 2017, however, Christo abruptly canceled the project, in part as a protest against the newly elected Trump administration. “[N]ow, the federal government is our landlord,” Christo stated. “They own the land. I can’t do a project that benefits this landlord.”⁸⁸

Ecological art is often motivated by artists’ commitment to act in the face of climate change, whether as protesters, restorers, educators, witnesses, or mourners. But as I asked in chapter 1 when canvassing the range of eco-art practices, what can and should artists, eco art historians, and art do in the face of these pressing planetary problems? Some early examples of ecological art featuring water fall under the heading of “direct action” adumbrated in chapter 1—remediation and reclamation—because they restore threatened habitats: Patricia Johanson’s *Fair Park Lagoon* in Dallas, Texas (begun in 1981),⁸⁹ Betty Beaumont’s *Ocean Landmark* (1978–80), and a range of work by Ichi Ikeda in Japan. While I hope to avoid either/or categories, numerous other water works do not fix anything but instead accentuate the emotional, sensate articulation specific to art, whether in contrast to or in conjunction with scientific presentations of climate issues. Such approaches can be part of an aesthetic withdrawal that honors the earth’s separateness, or they may work to more fully “articulate” human and nonhuman relationships with the earth.

I have noted the question of whether artists—and those writing eco art history—should continue to produce, display, and discuss art using the same largely capitalist structures, extracted resources, and attitudes that have generated our current environmental woes. Artist, cultural commentator, and founding

editor of *Third Text* Rasheed Araeen has argued in “Ecoaesthetics: A Manifesto for the Twenty-First Century” of 2009 that artists should “abandon their studios and stop making objects” and instead refocus their imaginations “to enhance not only their own creative potential but also the collective life of the earth’s inhabitants” (684). As Charles Palermo has commented, Araeen was understandably frustrated by the avant-garde’s ineffectualness: “The bourgeois institutions of Western capitalism’s artworld undermine even the best avant-garde projects, but they are also what legitimize them.”⁹⁰ My expectations for art, artists, and art historians differ from Araeen’s. My view is that eco art is most valuable in society when it is heuristic, positioned at an infra-thin remove from practical ameliorative interventions. As I argued in chapter 1 with reference to Adorno’s theories, eco art can most meaningfully speak to our climate predicament when it asserts its noninstrumental, aesthetic identity, when—in the environmental context—its differences from scientific and technological procedures convey a vulnerability or humility in the face of climate disruption. It is in a mode of “articulation” rather than instrumentalist efficacy that eco art can help us think beyond the overemphasized human “nar-ego” against which Araeen rails. Environmentalists assert that what is needed to avert environmental collapse is nothing short of a transformation of our worldview, what Jane Bennett in *Vibrant Matter* calls “green materialism.” If it can influence such changes in opinion, what might eco art’s mechanisms of impact be? To put this question as Stacy Alaimo does in *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self*, what or where is “the literal contact zone between human corporeality and more-than-human nature?” (2). I suggest that such zones or aesthetic ecotones are created by eco art, inasmuch as it can elucidate the ecologies of interconnectedness between matter and our perceptions and emotions. Alaimo calls this extensive web “trans-corporeality.” Nancy Tuana thinks in terms of “eco-cosmopolitanism.”⁹¹

The emotional life of water commonly refers to our responses to water themes in ecological art. This is the humanist default. Whether we think in terms of the phenomenology of reception, about relational aesthetics, or about more contemporary practices, the response paradigm is all about us. This is the view that I quoted Roni Horn expressing in “Saying Water,” for example: “When you’re talking about water, aren’t you really talking about yourself? Isn’t water like the weather that way?”⁹² As I claimed in chapter 2, both Horn’s *Library of Water* (see fig. 2) and Rúri’s *Archive: Endangered Waters* (see fig. 17) are highly emotive laments for what seems to be a lost ecological balance, and both works foreground the materialities of the elements they record and preserve. Can artworks also be understood—perhaps simultaneously—in terms of the independence of water, its own material and nonanthropocentric “life,” and if so, would this shift be valuable? We could reread Rúri’s and Horn’s installations in this way. To elucidate this

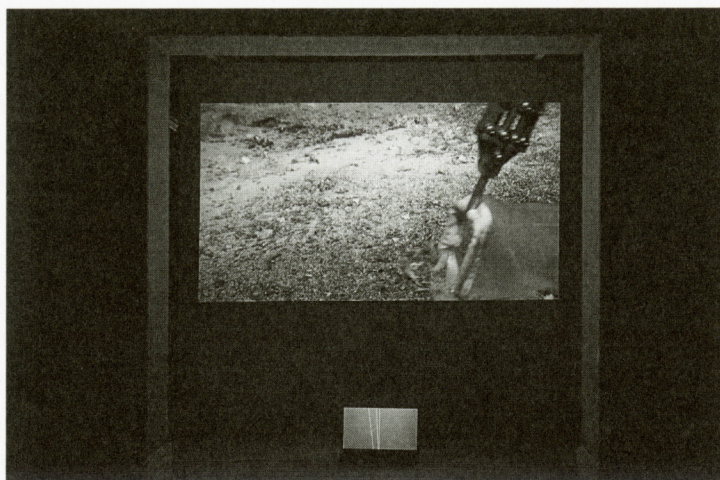


FIG. 57 Mariele Neudecker, *Dark Years Away*, 2013 (video still). One video projection, one monitor, 6 min. loop. By kind permission of the artist and Galerie Thumm, Berlin.

fundamental border question, however, I must focus on two additional examples that provide an opportunity to explore this question.

Dark Years Away by Mariele Neudecker (2013; fig. 57) takes undersea exploratory film by oceanographer Dr. Alex Rogers and his colleagues at the University of Oxford—shot at depths of more than three thousand meters in the remote southwest Indian Ocean—and reveals with it the otherwise invisible human impact on the seabed. We see a robotic arm scooping sediment; our eyes are aided by its searchlight, but total darkness would prevail otherwise at this depth. Her title plays both with the notion of remoteness (an inversion of “light years away”) and with relative illumination. To discuss the affective dimensions of Neudecker’s work, we need to attend particularly to the relationships she establishes between sound and image.⁹³ Here she translates machine-made footage from a scientific expedition into a more immediate human register, in part by supplying an emotionally taut soundtrack, *Voices of Silence* (1991) by the contemporary Latvian composer Pēteris Vasks. The plumes of fine deposits thrown up by the excavation we see in progress seem to move gracefully to this soundtrack. Improbably, they become part of our world and describe its beauty. For other videos using Rogers’s visual source material, the soundtracks make more prosaic reference to our telluric existence: we hear clocks, heartbeats, and helicopters. Banal, scientific research data become highly emotional, perhaps in a negative way. A survey of the scientific study of “emotional attention” notes that “[i]n recent years, abundant research has investigated the neural substrates of emotion processing, now allowing us to pinpoint brain circuits implementing specialized mechanisms for ‘emotional attention.’ Our understanding of emotional influences on perception

can now also be integrated with recent advances concerning the neural effects of selective attention on sensory systems.”⁹⁴ For Christian Marclay, creator of the masterful sound/image works *Telephones* (1995) and *The Clock* (2010), “sound is more powerful than the image and makes the image adhere to it.”⁹⁵ Marclay stitches together thousands of film clips on his stated themes; we are mesmerized visually, but how sound makes or breaks the visual connections is also remarkable in *The Clock*. Eventually—and against our dominant perceptual instincts—we must listen as much as watch and try to bring these inputs together. Neudecker’s *Dark Years Away* is simple in structure by comparison with Marclay’s compositions, but its images take on a grace and lyricism hard to imagine without their adherence to Vasks’s music. The work leads us to contemplation and perhaps to an articulation of our connections to nature in distress. Information becomes evocation.

Paul Walde’s video *Requiem for a Glacier* (2013; fig. 58) is a forty-minute, two-channel, large-screen version of his sound performance of the same name. *Requiem* memorializes British Columbia’s Farnham Glacier in the Purcell Mountains, an area that borders a nature conservancy but is now being opened to more tourist development. The piece relies on a potent mix of sound and dramatic landscape vistas to effect a sense of environmental loss. Walking an orchestra, choir, and vocal soloist onto the glacier, Walde establishes a situation in which he can



FIG. 58 Paul Walde, *Requiem for a Glacier*, 2013 (production still). 2k panoramic sound and video installation, 39 min. By kind permission of the artist.

examine the neuroscience of creativity and reception through this four-movement oratorio. His passionate soundscape is an example of “sonic mimicry”—in this case the conversion of temperature records for the area into music notation—a significant strand in contemporary eco art. The libretto is a Latin translation of the British Columbia government’s press release announcing the approval of a year-round resort community at the site. The work sounds liturgical but is decidedly material at its foundation. Its aural tracks are carefully intercalated with the two-channel video images we see. Often Walde’s camera pans the mountain range holding the glacier and traverses the dramatic skyscape above. One video channel is sometimes focused on the orchestra or the vocalist while the other investigates details of the landscape, especially the runoff from the glacier. The most dramatic visual and aural conceit in *Requiem for a Glacier* is the appearance and relentless expansion of a black rectangle in our field of vision. From a speck akin to a black deposit of the pollution-formed cryoconite that we see on glaciers worldwide now, the form grows quickly and eventually blacks out our panoramic view of the region. Walde thus elicits both the phenomenon of “dark snow”—the increasing amount of soot from incomplete combustion found globally—and the resulting drastically reduced reflectiveness of ice and snow on earth, the decreasing albedo effect that some climate scientists claim is responsible for a significant percentage of global warming. One result of the presence of these particles is cracking in the ice as the dark spots attract heat and melt into the frozen surface, an eventually devastating syndrome that we saw in chapter 2 in Diane Burko’s *Elegies* series (see fig. 18).

Artist Tiffany Holmes has theorized the issue of how best to communicate scientific information about climate change. Her process of “eco-visualization,” though not explicitly concerned with the integration of vision and sound as many eco artworks are, investigates and communicates our cultural relationships with natural resources in ways designed to catch our attention through emotional response. Finding inspiration in Hans Haacke’s *Rhine Water Purification Plant* (see fig. 3) and other early eco art examined in chapter 1, she makes the following claims:

- Eco-visualization offers a new way to visualize invisible environmental data.
- Eco-visualization can provide real time visual feedback that can increase conservation behavior or environmental awareness. . . .
- Eco-visualization can encourage good environmental stewardship.⁹⁶

Holmes’s work filters, digests, and redeploys abstract information so that audiences may understand and potentially act on given ecological issues. In *We Can’t Swim Forever* (2011), a kinetic sculpture displayed in a vitrine, Holmes positions miniature polar bears on and among three rotating forms that suggest both icebergs and layer cakes. Playing here on the plight of polar bears no longer able to find suffi-

cient ice to support seal hunting—a predicament brought to worldwide attention in former U.S. vice president Al Gore’s remarks about these bears and retreating Arctic ice in the film *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006), and whose empirical validity has been debated ever since—the work, by being overtly affective, sidesteps scientific disputes about rates of decline in ice and polar bears and about the causal relationships between these statistics. Holmes’s *We Can’t Swim Forever*, I would suggest, does not so much pull on our heartstrings as has us question that very strategy in eco art.

The anthropologist Philippe Descola has presented an ironic challenge to his discipline that we might adapt to eco art: he claims that anthropology can either “disappear as an exhausted form of humanism or else . . . transform itself by rethinking its domain and its tools in such a way as to include in its object far more than the *anthropos*.”⁹⁷ If new materialism across several fields challenges us to imagine the humanities as nonanthropocentric—to take “the nonhuman turn”⁹⁸—can and should eco art history move toward this paradoxical end? The goal, I believe, would be to find ways of being on the planet through art that would not focus on the human, the troublemaker of Parikka’s “Anthroscene,” but rather on the planet and on the relations between these actants. An object-oriented examination of this challenge is promising because eco art is especially tuned to nonlinguistic modes of being and to the materiality of things before we acculturate them as objects and artifacts. Affect studies are another recent preoccupation across the humanities, one characterized, according to Ruth Leys, by “the claim . . . that we human beings are corporeal creatures imbued with subliminal affective intensities and resonances that so decisively influence or condition our political and other beliefs that we ignore those affective intensities and resonances at our peril.”⁹⁹ While some could find affect theory’s focus on the human antithetical to a new materialist concentration on things, Jane Bennett underlines a possible confluence of these approaches, stating that she interrogates “affect that is not only not fully susceptible to rational analysis or linguistic representation but . . . also not specific to humans, organisms, or even to bodies: the affect of technologies, winds, vegetables, minerals.”¹⁰⁰ Water (or anything else) could have an emotional life. Enacting the radically porous and fluid situations wherein the human and nonhuman, organic and nonorganic elements of eco art combine, Walde’s and Neudecker’s videos allow us some purchase on what Lauren Berlant calls “a materialist context for affect theory” and “the transmission of affect” traced by Teresa Brennan.¹⁰¹

Is there an indication of an emotional life of water before, after, and without us in the Neudecker and Walde works, a suggestion of the perdurance of nature that contrasts with the “earth-death” pictures I examined in chapter 2? Or does water somehow speak through us via ecological art, yielding not only a precognitive experience but also an awareness of what is not human? Thinking with

Deleuze, we could say that water in both works has its own vital rhythm that is translated for our ecological perception. If, on one plane, both *Dark Years Away* and *Requiem for a Glacier* are eco-visualizations of scientific concerns—of plastics on the sea floor and melting glaciers—the emotive soundtracks to these works could remind us subconsciously of the invisible nature of water, both what we cannot literally see in these videos and what is habitually elided when we think of our human perceptions as central to what art (or water) is. If aesthetics is at root about our senses, we can acknowledge through this portal the existence of other, dissimilar, yet still sensate matter, matter of which we are a part and that flows through us. But what is more human than classical music, via which both works move away from the explicit representation of particular data to underscore emotional impact? Both Neudecker and Walde give a powerful sense that we are experiencing places and phenomena that we do not see fully through their works—Deleuze might label such dimensions as “outside”—but that, on the contrary, we may find even more remote, strange, and separate from our understanding *because* of their videos. Arguably, these artists move from the human emotional dimension to imagine material and affect without us or, at the minimum, with humans as implicated witnesses to and collaborators with the nonhuman. Both Henri Bergson and Charles Darwin suggested that human culture impoverishes what nature can be by focusing only on our inevitably limited interests. *Dark Years Away* and *Requiem for a Glacier* encourage us to dispel this narrow anthropomorphism.

Describing “cruel optimism” as “the condition of maintaining an attachment to a significantly problematic object,” Berlant claims that our current psychological and social state of perceived unceasing crisis, ecological trouble high on the list, leads to a range of cruelly optimistic bonds, such as the fantasy of the “good life” or a commitment to idealistic political projects.¹⁰² In *Requiem for a Glacier* the planned ski resort reflects this optimism. Berlant tracks “dramas of adjustment to the transformation of what had seemed foundational into those binding kinds of optimistic relation we call ‘cruel’” (3). She eschews trauma theory in her reckonings of such encounters and habits, focusing instead on the quotidian nature of critical situations, on “crisis ordinariness” (10). The cruel optimism in Neudecker’s, Walde’s, and many other examples of eco art, I suggest, is the global reliance on a carbon economy in the Anthropocene, a deleterious habit that more than meets Berlant’s criteria of being “too possible, and toxic” (24) and also satisfies Morton’s benchmarks for “hyperobjects.” As discussed in chapter 3, a hyperobject refers to an only incompletely perceived leviathan such as climate disruption and to interactions we have with such entities. Hyperobjects are both profoundly present and constantly elusive; they withdraw from the human yet affect us and one another profoundly. They therefore call us to consider the limits of the human

perceptual field, how we are impacted by forces and conditions in operation far beyond our spatial and temporal range, and how things might interact on their own. Tom Rand supplies an apt example of what Morton is getting at: “Atmospheric chemistry is a thing,” he writes, “and there is a complex causal chain between that thing and us [with] political, economic, and social repercussions.”¹⁰³

Isabelle Hayeur’s photographs and videos bring together explorations of water, borderlines, and affect. In an early artist’s statement she emphasizes her exploration of landscape and land use, especially the exploitation of arable land for suburban expansion in her *Model Homes* series of 2004–7: “It seems clear that our visions and lifestyles have a much greater impact on the world we occupy than in the past. It thus becomes particularly important that we assume responsibility for the landscapes we create and the worlds we imagine.”¹⁰⁴ The seventy images in her *Underworlds* series (2008–15) powerfully show the global implications of eco-suicidal habits of the Anthropocene while also dwelling on its material intimacies. Although this series of underwater photographs was taken in navigation canals and ship graveyards in the United States, *Underworlds* explores threatened individual ecosystems that stand in for the mistreatment of waterways globally. Visually seductive in their rich coloration, Hayeur’s images are also distinctly disorienting for two reasons. Though many of the images were shot in southern Florida, this is not the vacation spot we are used to seeing in advertising, and her images are anything but celebratory. Her technique is also unusual in that she shoots from a partly submerged position, so that we register two horizon lines, that of the water close to us and that between earth and sky in the distance.

“The aquatic landscapes I probe have been considerably altered,” Hayeur writes. “They are sometimes actual deserts where nothing is left to see. The images I capture bear witness to this absence.”¹⁰⁵ As we see in the upper quarter of *Substances* (2012; fig. 59), the day is bright and the water calm. Houses preside along the shoreline at the right. Commanding most of the image, however, is a close-up view of an underwater plant. Placed front and center as a “portrait” despite its smallness, it is a sickly specimen. Moreover, this marine plant is the only one that manages to stand and grow toward the light. Others wilt on the bottom amidst the silt—one aspect of the “substances” of her title—that makes the water through which Hayeur photographs brown and opaque. The waterline in this series is an uneven and unstable horizon that we nonetheless measure with and against as we see reminders of human domination here, a distant apartment building or ship, as well as the dying aqueous ecosystem in which she immerses us.¹⁰⁶ Conditioned by the stereotypical pictorial celebration of natural beauty in this area and by the normalizing conventions of landscape, we might be confused by Hayeur’s unusual perspective. It does not take long, however, to notice that the human landscape above the waterline, which she always includes, is the source of the destruction in

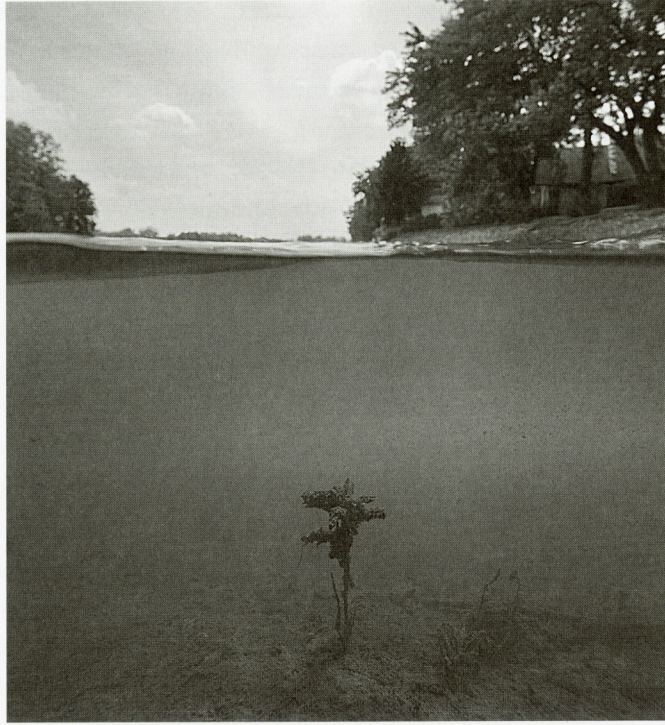


FIG. 59 Isabelle Hayeur, *Substances*, 2012. Inkjet on photo paper, 46 × 42 in. (116 × 107 cm). By kind permission of the artist.

what she calls the “aquatic landscapes” below. Such knowledge colludes with our perplexity to register a strong effect.

Hayeur multiplies affective responses in still photographs from 2011 of what she deems a “marine cemetery,” the submerged world of Witte’s Marine Salvage, a ship “burial ground” on Staten Island, New York. The collective title of these photographs is *Death in Absentia*. Again composed from under the limen of the water’s surface so that we see both the sea floor and the looming shapes of rusting hulls, the images are superficially quiet but simultaneously strange and disconcerting. In *Castaway* (2012), a video shot in this same spot, we are taken on a tour of what amount to underwater ruins. As it was in *Dark Years Away* and *Requiem for a Glacier*, sound is crucial to our absorption of this work. Where Neudecker’s and Walde’s music is stirring, however, the sound that we hear in *Castaway* even before the visuals come into focus, sound artist Nicolas Bernier’s mix of electronic overtones with echoes and clunks, is otherworldly, alien. While these noises seem to emanate from discarded human technologies, from the ships we begin to make out, they are no longer fully human. While some of the sounds seem like the reverberations of working ships in the area, to call them groans comes to seem

anthropocentric; we might think of them ultimately as registrations of nonhuman materials returning to the earth. Bernier describes his soundscape's inception and goals in detail:

I had quite specific sounds in mind even though the idea was a bit entangled: I wanted to suggest the material in the images, but also suggest something that isn't there, or something hidden, or something that was there before, or all those options. In the meantime, I wanted the sound to be abstract enough to leave some space to viewers so they could read the sound and image relationship their own way.

In the first section, I wanted the sound to give an impression of deepness. In practical terms (this might break a bit of the poetry of the soundtrack), most of the sounds come from wood, more specifically from a custom machine I have with levers and mechanisms. The sounds are pitch shifted in the low frequencies, and when adding the long reverb, we obtain those cavernous sounds. Around 3:00, the little high-pitched sounds are tiny feedbacks that I generated with some piezo microphones and small amplified speakers. There are also some notes of an instrument . . . in order to balance the noisy aspect of the soundtrack. Those instrumental sounds are tuned with the sound that will appear with the industries at 4:12 (this sound comes from a big compressor truck that I recorded near my studio a while ago, so it was well suiting the industries [in the] images). From there I wanted the sound to become a bit abstract, denser, more musical in my sense. When turning to the sky, the small feedbacks that we're hearing suddenly take another meaning. Textures of field recordings are layered. Then around 9:00, it is basically layering of noises that are, again, somewhere between that abstraction and narrative, recalling the sound of water.¹⁰⁷

Hayeur makes this progression clear in the video, which explores the ships from the surface for roughly its first half. In a transitional sequence, the camera looks at the refineries along the shore of New Jersey's "Chemical Coast," then at the landscape and up into the sky; we hear birds and other familiar sounds for a few moments. After visually linking the clouds in the sky with underwater clouds of sediment Hayeur throws up as she films, she then seamlessly conveys herself underwater to focus on the rotting hulls themselves. As in *Substances*, the ocean floor that we traverse is almost lifeless. The light has trouble penetrating even this shallow water. The final minutes of *Castaway* are quiet, inviting us to contemplate what we have seen. Where can Hayeur's camera go now? She films reflections of a wan sun and clouds on the surface of the water, looking down, before fading to black. Complementing Tacita Dean's intricate conversation with the novelist J. G. Ballard and Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* in her film *JG* (2013), though less directly,

Hayeur thus recalls both Smithson's intimate record of the Great Salt Lake's mineralogy and his cosmic sequence in the film version, the denouement in which he spirals toward the sun "from the center of the Spiral Jetty" in a helicopter while looking down on his sculpture and intoning, "Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water," as he lists the cardinal coordinates of the earthwork (149). Hayeur is the Smithson of water. Where he famously recorded postindustrial monuments near his home town of Passaic, New Jersey, she reveals what was hidden even to the ever-curious Smithson, the underwater underside of the landscape so close to his birthplace. Its ruins suggest not only the past of specific industries but the physical and ideological decay of modernity presided over by the Anthropocene of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Her video looks back to the heyday of generations of ships, but without nostalgia. Instead, Hayeur's focus is the baleful present in this area and the even less hopeful future of heavily polluted oceans. Her connections to Smithson—and, indirectly, to his land-art contemporaries' interests in water, Betty Beaumont's especially—figure in the long chronological sweep I have been establishing in *Landscape into Eco Art*.

In this context, though certainly not in terms of causation or intent, Hayeur's underwater pictures can also be productively contrasted with the shipping news central to J. M. W. Turner's landscapes. *Limulus* (2014; fig. 60) is an extended horizontal "aquatic landscape." The photograph was taken on Captiva Island in the Gulf of Mexico, site of Smithson's second uprooted tree in 1969. Close-up and underwater, we see the shell of a dead horseshoe crab whose genus lends its Latin name to the title. While there are plants on the seabed, the contrast with the verdant shoreline above the water is striking. This is not the Chemical Coast; we see no signs of habitation nearby, though in the distance and out of focus there are what appear to be large smokestacks. The crab shell is clearly the focus of this large image because it is seen in full detail. It is a still life, *nature morte*, embedded in a landscape. I want to suggest that *Limulus* is an image of contemporary history, another "earth-death picture" in the lineage discussed in chapter 2. It stands in sharp contrast to perhaps the only well-known image of a crab of this sort in Western art, Turner's enduringly controversial painting *War: The Exile and the Rock Limpet*, exhibited in 1842 (fig. 61).

Where Hayeur's crab is commanding, Turner's is so small as to be missed were it not for the poem he appended to the work when it was exhibited, a stanza in his extensive composition *The Fallacies of Hope*:

Ah! thy tent-formed shell is like
A soldier's nightly bivouac, alone
Amidst a sea of blood
but *you* can join your comrades.



FIG. 60 Isabelle Hayeur, *Limulus*, 2014. Inkjet on photo paper, 18 × 62 in. (47 × 158 cm). By kind permission of the artist.



FIG. 61 Joseph Mallord William Turner, *War: The Exile and the Rock Limpet*, exhibited 1842. Oil on canvas, 794 × 794 mm (support). Accepted by the nation as part of the Turner Bequest 1856. Photo © 2015 Tate, London.

John Ruskin quotes these lines in his approving discussion of a painting that was otherwise much lampooned and misunderstood in its time.¹⁰⁸ With characteristic ambition, Turner addressed several historical moments in this work. *War* was paired with *Peace: Burial at Sea*, his homage to his friend the painter David Wilkie, who was laid to rest at sea off Gibraltar in 1841. *War* depicts a disconsolate Napoleon Bonaparte in full uniform, even though he is pictured as a British captive on the island of St. Helena, where he died in 1821. One occasion for this painting was the return of his remains to Paris in 1840, but Turner had already painted famous episodes from the Napoleonic wars, including the death of Nelson, and saw no reason to venerate the military leader.¹⁰⁹ *Peace* not only memorializes Wilkie's gentle disposition and laments his loss with its dramatically dark coloration but also contrasts with the

belligerent behavior of another contemporary painter, the volatile Benjamin Robert Haydon, as well as that of Napoleon, the ruthless military leader. The Napoleon in *War*, standing at a watery shoreline and backed by a British guard and an extraordinarily sanguine sunset and its reflection, which was much criticized for its vividness, clearly contemplates the minuscule animal, which—in position if not scale—is comparable to Hayeur's crab. As we saw in his references to magnetism in *Snowstorm* (1842) in chapter 2, Turner frequently incorporated his knowledge of natural history in his landscapes. In this case, his interest in the lower reaches of the great chain of being came from an expert on crustaceans, his sometimes-physician, Sir Anthony Carlisle, who was also professor of anatomy at the Royal Academy, where Turner was professor of perspective. Turner's poetic commentary on *War* revolves on a reference to the limpet. His lines can be understood to attribute these thoughts to the pensive Bonaparte, who is reminded of his soldiering and of his captivity by the "tent-formed shell." The "you" of the final line, italicized by Ruskin, has a double meaning. If it refers to the mollusk that is joining its fellows, it is a lament for Napoleon's lost freedom. If it refers to Napoleon, it suggests that he was never again free and could only join his comrades in death.

Where Turner paints Napoleon's sublime fall to the status of a prisoner interacting with a mollusk, Hayeur's aquatic landscape is antislublime and antipicturesque. Her images invert the human/nonhuman hierarchy to deliver what Alexander Pope called bathos, the opposite of the sublime or an example of its failure, but nonetheless a profound and earthly state. *Limulus* explores the ecosystem we see: it is literally a picture of the earth's death. If her photograph were to be retitled *War: Limulus*, the conflict Hayeur presents would be that defined by philosopher of science Michel Serres, who, as noted above, claimed in 1990 that there is a new "world war" that takes the material earth and all its inhabitants as the target of multiple hostilities. Hayeur's bathetic reversal in *Limulus* implores us to respond. The challenge for her, as for Neudecker, for Walde, and for us as viewers, is to frame water, landscapes, and nature so that we can see them in their difference from what we already know and project into them, whether this is a set of conventions for representing landscape or another anthropocentric norm. By attending to the range of affective responses to these water works, we can see nature as both connected to and independent from our perceptions, not simply as another landscape for easy assimilation.