



The Far Other

Art as a Communicator of Climate Change

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis explores the question of what can art do better in order to facilitate action against climate change in the audience. It establishes the significance of climate change art, the direness of the crisis and the nature of art as a vital force of communication and transformation throughout history.

The importance of empathy and altruistic behaviour is discussed, as are the factors that determine them and how those can be addressed in art by incorporating three elements into climate change artworks: narrative, immersion and a balance of optimism and pessimism.

The creation of The Far Other, an artwork depicting sea turtles and incorporating said elements is presented, with emphasis on how the elements shaped decisions it its making. In addition, the coronavirus pandemic influencing the exhibition of the artwork is explained and implications for future climate change artworks relying on physicality are considered.

Key words: climate change art, empathy, altruistic behaviour, sea turtles

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1. INTRODUCTION

Art can be used for a myriad of different purposes, aims and goals. It can be used for personal expression, for personal enjoyment, for the sheer practice of making art and many others. However, art can also be used for the betterment of the world as a whole; as a force of positivity that raises awareness on pressing issues, maintains topics in the scope of attention of the public mind and even facilitates and directs opinions, emotions, and consequently – personal actions that may make the world a better place, little by little.

Presently, despite the abundance of contemporary artworks created with the intention of tackling climate change, the state of this global crisis does not appear to move towards either hopeful ecological outcomes or the many collective individual acts and behaviours needed to prevent predicted catastrophic outcomes within the near future (Bodkin, 2019; IPCC, 2018; Moser & Dilling, 2012; Ritchie & Roser, 2019; Ziser & Sze, 2009). Something in the manner by which art communicates climate change appears to not lead to such desired actions in the magnitude needed for change to occur, and so something needs to be changed in the artworks themselves (Moser & Dilling, 2012). To this end, this thesis will analyse the state of climate change art, its roots in transformative art, and in what way it ought to move forward in order to better create change.

Firstly, the role of art as a communicator and facilitator of social impact throughout human history will be explored in order to assess its capabilities as a transformative force. Secondly, the nature of contemporary transformative art which has been used to communicate the climate change crisis in recent years will be examined and analysed. Thirdly, elements within climate change art that have the potential of better facilitating individual action against climate change will be identified and discussed. Lastly, the creation of an artwork that will incorporate said elements will be presented.

2. A COMMUNICATOR OF SIGNIFICANCE

2.1 Art and Human Evolution

In his book, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, historian Yuval Noah Harari does not describe the origin, usage, influence and importance of art for the development of modern human beings, or *homo sapiens*, as a species. In fact, the concept of art is mentioned only scarcely in the text, and is not a main focus at any point. What Harari does choose to mention, however, is one of the earliest artworks known to have been created in the history of *homo sapiens*. This artwork is an ivory figurine of a lion-human hybrid found in the Stadel Cave in Germany, created approximately 32,000 years ago (Harari, 2011). The head of the figurine is leonine, while its body is that of a humanoid figure. In describing it, Harari writes: "This is one of the first indisputable examples of art, and probably of religion, and of the ability of the human mind to imagine things that do not really exist" (Harari, 2011, 28). It is noteworthy that the mentioning of this artwork can be found in chapter 2 of his book, titled "The Tree of Knowledge", which itself is of the first part of the book, titled "The Cognitive Revolution". In the context of the history and evolution of *homo sapiens*, it follows that art can therefore be associated with human knowledge and cognition. Perhaps ironically, the title of the preceding chapter is "An Animal of No Significance".

Whether or not *homo sapiens* is a collective of insignificant animals is worthy of philosophical debate, yet the reality is that it is a species that has grown to dominance on Earth and has outlasted all other species of the *Homo* genus, such as the Neanderthals. There are many theories and explanations as to what separated *homo sapiens* from the rest, but biology historian Thomas Junker suggests a lesser considered possibility – that on top of the largely accepted reasons, namely human-emblematic cognitive abilities such as symbolic thinking, advanced language and the likes, an additional facet of modern human cognition played a role as well: art (Junker, 2010).

Junker points out that while objects that can be considered art by modern standards were found in Central and Western Europe from approximately the time period in which the aforementioned lion-human hybrid was made, such artworks were created by homo sapiens, who migrated north from Africa a few thousand years prior. In contrast, Neanderthals inhabited the same European territories at that point in history but very few artworks were created by them when compared to homo sapiens. Moreover, while they did create aesthetically-shaped tools, those do not appear to possess a symbolic meaning – an abstract cognitive ability – which is synonymous with modern human cognition.

As Junker explains it, art is one additional superior cognitive ability that gave homo sapiens an evolutionary edge and advantage against the Neanderthals, which, unlike the former, apparently lacked artistic capacity. Not the defining factor, as there is no evidence to suggest that, but a factor nonetheless. Junker notes that all human populations alive today do produce and appreciate art, and so it is only logical to deduce, from a biological perspective, that artistic capacity is an evolutionarily advantageous, genetically inherent trait that was naturally selected over the course of evolution of homo sapiens. In this sense, it is possible to wonder whether homo sapiens would have evolved and survived to this day without it, and if the answer to this would be positive – how different would we be as a species?

A lingering question, however, is what was the advantageous role of art in this evolutionary context. As Junker puts it, art plays a certain role in how human communities operate and communicate: it helps transform abstract individual traits such as feelings, fantasies and desires into something common and shared by the community, thereby facilitating and reinforcing the way individuals within a group identify with a common aim or fantasy. As an example, we can imagine a cave painting of a group of homo sapiens hunting a mammoth. By creating this painting, individuals communicate to their group that this act holds importance to said individuals; that the aim of hunting the mammoth is desirable, as it helps them survive. Then, by virtue of being important enough to become an artwork, the act of hunting can become important to the group itself. The notion that hunting a mammoth is a cultural phenomenon may not be as easily obtained and identified within a group without a proper way to communicate such an abstract

and potentially personal sentiment to the group. Without the understanding that the aim of hunting the mammoth is of special significance, the cooperation needed to perform this act may not be as well-established.

In other words, art helps individuals cooperate on a larger scale by giving a clearer, more tangible form to something they can identify with on an abstract, cognitive level. Art from these ancient times is not merely a personal act of expression, but serves a social purpose and therefore cannot be properly understood when removed from its social context (Lewis-Williams, 2002). As true as this is today, it may have well been true 32,000 years ago when an individual made the decision to create the lion-humanoid figurine; to imagine and create something that does not really exist outside of their mind. Without art, it is possible that coordinating and synchronizing the interests and aims of a community would not be as successful. This form of social impact may not have come into existence. Although Harari referred to the modern human as an animal of no significance, it would be correct to add to this the words: “which is capable of communicating significance to itself.”

2.2 The Transformative, Propagandic Potential

As art acts as a converging method for the aims and interests of a community, it can very much be observed that art has had a great deal of social impact throughout the history of humanity. This transformative nature of art can be found, and hence utilized, throughout recorded history. An early example of this can be found in ancient Greek art, which purposely curated and provided the populace with a set of religious, moral, political and social values that helped identify and preserve social order within the community (Adams, 2004). Whether or not this constitutes as propaganda is worthy of debate, and indeed – discussing the social impact of art may in fact be impossible without discussing its utilization in propaganda as a political instrument and a tool for social engineering (Belfiore and Bennett, 2006, 135).

In ancient Rome, for instance, paintings were often used to depict the triumph of leaders and military campaigns in order for the populace to know of the success of those figures and campaigns (DeRose Evans, 1992). Similarly, the Romans

also depicted the faces of aristocrats on their coins as a way to make the populace familiar with their appearance. This recognizability of their image was considered to be advantageous when pursuing a political career. Likewise, the Church is notorious for using art in order to educate about and promote important Christian ideas and events in order to engrave this set of information into the minds of the populace (Belfiore and Bennett, 2006, 137). Later on, in the 18th century, leaders of the French Revolution were known for using art in order to promote the Revolution's values as a way to stimulate the national sentiment of their cause (Dowd, 1951). Art as propaganda was also later used by fascist leaders of the 20th century. In 1923, Mussolini spoke in the opening of a contemporary art exhibition in Milan, saying that running a country while ignoring its artists is not only impossible, but also stupid (Margozzi, 2001, 27, as cited in Belfiore and Bennett, 2006, 138). Similarly, the Nazis believed that art is the perfect medium for manipulating national desires and dreams and transmitting a political message, thereby controlling the emotions of the populace and directing its behaviour (Adams, 1992).

It can be observed that in each of those examples, art is used for a very particular end: exerting influence over the public and directing opinions, feelings and behaviours in a certain, controlled manner. The nature of this manner is subject to change and depends on the social context and zeitgeist, among other factors, but the end itself is essentially the same in its function nonetheless. Is this propagandic use of art inherently negative, or can it be used for the betterment of humanity? The expectation for such an approach certainly has historical precedence. For instance, during the late 19th century, art was expected to be a way to combat antisocial behaviour (Greenwood, 1888, as cited in Belfiore and Bennett, 2006, 144), and it was commonly believed that better taste and appreciation of art would lead to moral progress (Minihan, 1977, 52, as cited in Belfiore and Bennett, 2006, 144).

As an illustrative example of how art can perform this role, the case of how Yellowstone National Park became a national park in the first place can be examined. In 1871, painter Thomas Moran accompanied photographer William Henry Jackson and a fellow naturalist on a geological survey of Yellowstone (Main, 2019). Moran and Henry were the first to produce images of Yellowstone, which

featured its landscapes and geothermal features (picture 1). These artworks, alongside those of several other artists, such as Albert Bierstadt and Abby Williams Hill, later managed to convince the American Congress that Yellowstone is a unique place and that its beauty is worth protecting and preserving. The following year, Yellowstone became the first national park in the United States, providing its flora, its fauna and their biodiversity with governmental protection. Without the artistic contribution of these artists, the park may have never become a national park, and so it may have never received protection. Their art transformed the outcome of Yellowstone as a place and the fate of its many inhabitants, helping it remain the biodiverse bed of life that it is today. Moran and the other artists did not do something overly complicated: they captured selected landscapes and views of Yellowstone and presented their art to the Congress, but that alone was enough to change opinions and cause a group of people to shift their aim in a certain direction – one that most would consider to be good.



PICTURE 1. The Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone (Moran, 1872).

What Moran and the others did can be considered propaganda by some. They influenced the opinions of others by presenting them with selected information, in this case paintings of beautiful landscapes. A similar argument can be made on any use of art in a social context, and indeed, George Orwell wrote that “all art is to some extent propaganda” (Packer, 2009, 11). Regardless of whether this state-

ment is entirely true, it is clearly difficult to dismiss art's potential of having propagandic value. In this case, is there any ethical difference between Moran's artistic, yet potentially propagandic work, and that of the Nazis? Is the use of art as propaganda acceptable depending on the ethical nature of the aim it directs towards? The answer to this question, like that of essentially any philosophical question, is that there is no one right answer. It depends on one's subjective outlook on morality, ethics, and the nature of art itself. What counts as morally good and worthy of artistic depiction is subject to change over the course of history (Kieran, 2006, 133). In this sense, it can be argued that art can indeed be used for good in a propagandic manner, but the good it serves is inherently subjective and may cease to be subjectively considered as good at some point in the future.

Using art for the pursuit and support of good is one of its better uses. Art can be used to fight for things such as justice, equality, the life of others and other things commonly considered as virtuous. Art that raises awareness about contemporary issues that do not receive the amount of attention they may deserve, and art that, to some extent, is arguably a form of propaganda for the sake of promoting such virtues – is not unethical art in my opinion. To that end, there is a pressing contemporary issue that could benefit, and in some sense very much requires the support of art as a facilitator of a common, social aim and action: climate change. If we are indeed a species capable of communicating significance to ourselves, this is a topic worthy of this communication.

3. A MIRRORER OF CLIMATE CHANGE

3.1. Warming Planet, Changing Climate

In order to understand why climate change is a topic worthy of communication, and consequently of the transformative power of art, the present state and scale of this issue must be discussed. As this issue is highly complex and multi-factored, the following is somewhat of a brief introduction. According to a 2018 report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, humanity's activities on Earth, such as the emission of greenhouse gases, are estimated to have caused about 1.0°C of global warming, and is estimated to reach 1.5°C between 2030 and 2052 if the rate of warming does not decrease (IPCC, 2018). In other words, human beings are causing the earth to get warmer in an alarming rate. 1.0°C and 1.5°C may not seem like a great deal at first glance, but the estimations of what will happen in the coming decades based on these numbers paint a different, more serious picture.

Firstly, as the name of the issue suggests, the climate is projected to change. The average temperatures in most land and ocean regions will increase and become more extreme overall, and heavy precipitation and an increase in draughts will occur in some regions. The global average of sea level will also rise due to the melting of ice sheets. As a result of these changes to the climate, biodiversity will be negatively impacted in the form of species loss and extinctions, as well as loss of viable habitats. In terms of very direct risks to human beings, risks to health, food security, water supply and economic growth, among others, will increase. In particular, disadvantaged and vulnerable populations, such as communities dependent on agricultural or coastal livelihoods, Arctic and dryland regions and small island developing states are all at a disproportionately higher risk. Additionally, poverty and disadvantage are estimated to increase as well. Overall, a future in which no actions, or insufficient ones, to prevent these outcomes appears grim, to say the least. The present activity and form of how humanity operates, both on a micro and macro levels, needs to change in order to prevent these outcomes. It would therefore be more accurate to refer to climate change not as an issue, but as a crisis.

This crisis of climate change is not in any way obscured from the general public, at least from those who have access to free media. In fact, most populations are familiar with it to some degree, and can name a number of significant impacts of climate change when asked (Leiserowitz, 2007, as cited in Moser & Dilling, 2012, 168-169). Despite of this, most people's understanding of this issue is superficial, suffering from low personal concern and susceptibility to be replaced in their scope of attention by more immediate threats and interests (Moser & Dilling, 2012, 169). This, in turn, leads to a lack of individual action despite of continuous, widespread and successful attempts to raise awareness. In other words, climate change suffers from being difficult to perceive and being a rather nebulous crisis to maintain in mind, and consequently tackle on an individual level.

Climate change's element of immediacy, or perceived lack thereof, becomes significantly more apparent when juxtaposed to a more immediate crisis at the time of writing: the coronavirus. COVID-19, better known as the coronavirus disease, is a current global pandemic occupying the zeitgeist at the time of writing. Although first reports of it appeared in China at the end of December 2019 (Roser, Ritchie & Ortiz-Ospina, 2020), the disease was announced to be a global pandemic within a period of a couple months. Many countries worldwide announced states of mass quarantine and shutdowns, the purpose of which is reducing physical human interaction in order to stifle the spreading of the virus (Safi, 2020). The result was a world that adapted, coordinated and mobilized collectively and in a timely manner to what it considered to be an immediate, significant threat to humanity. The daily life and behaviour of millions of people around the world changed drastically due to governments acting quickly and enforcing action.

Writer Adele Peters asked a very significant question on the matter: "What would happen if the world reacted to climate change like it's reacting to the coronavirus?" (Peters, 2020). The two crises are, in a way, parallel to one another: they both grow and expand over time unless dealt with, and both become too late to deal with once their impact can be clearly felt (Gardiner, 2020). Similarly, the steps taken to prevent the spread of the virus are highly effective in dealing with climate change. The decline in global economy and transportation has caused unprecedented decline in carbon dioxide emissions worldwide (McGrath, 2020).

This highlights that society can, if it decides to, make actions that tackle the climate change crisis on both a governmental level and an individual one. It simply needs to consider it as a sufficiently immediate threat.

Moser and Dilling's advice for this problem is that the strategy of communicating climate change must be examined and challenged in order to better facilitate actions of change despite of climate change's lack of imminent effects (Moser & Dilling, 2012, 169). As previous attempts to psychologically push people into taking action, those of art included, have proven unsuccessful in the grand scheme of things, new approaches must be considered. However, in order to consider those, previous attempts of communicating climate change must be examined and lessons must be learned from them. What has art done, and why has it not been enough?

3.2 Climate Change Art

The role of art in in the climate change crisis has been a topic of much discussion and dialogue in the wake of how urgent the matter is, as well as appears to be (Black, 2013, 1). Unlike most issues tackled by environmental art, climate change is global, invisible and requires the actions of countless individuals in order to tackle effectively (Ziser & Sze, 2009, 385). Despite of this, there is no shortage of artworks about the crisis, be it portrayals of a changing nature or attempts to communicate important scientific data to the public in a more visceral, emotionally-engaging way. As an example of the former, artists Edward Morris and Susannah Saylor, in their Canary Project, chose photography as their main medium of communicating the changing, warming landscapes worldwide (picture 2). Many of the effects of climate change are more visible in the more extreme of places, where less people live, and so those are less seen by most people (Black, 2013, 1). As an example of the latter, artist Janine Randerson produced an instrument that translates carbon dioxide emissions data into sound that people can listen to (Randerson, 2007), giving vital and relevant scientific information a clearer, more identifiable form that is potentially more emotionally resonant than reading a sheet of numbers that most people would probably not know how to interpret.



PICTURE 2. Glacial, Icecap and Permafrost Melting LI, photographed in Cordillera Blanca, Peru as part of the Canary Project (Morris & Saylor, 2008).

These two artworks, alongside a plethora of others with a similar intent (Black, 2019; Lescaze, 2018; Thornes, 2008), highlight the distance between scientific knowledge of how dire things are in regards to the state of climate change, and the general public that is supposed to do something about it. Without artworks such as the Canary Project, people would rarely see the changing landscapes far from where they live. Without artworks such as Randerson's, there may be little emotional impact and resonance to paramount scientific information. Climate change, although very much an existing, present phenomenon, is in many ways invisible to our basic senses, and by extension to our scope of attention, to our shortlist of things to worry about and to our imagination. Consequently, climate change art has been primarily focusing on forming an emotional, imaginative impact on the audience as a means to portray the crisis as real, immediate and tangible, and keep it in their scope of attention.

Some, like the Canary Project, choose to focus on a distant documentation of the present. Their message is that the earth is changing, and that we can perceive it. Others, like Randerson, choose to focus on giving form to the formless. Her message is that our impact on this planet is tangible, and that we can perceive it. Others yet chose the method of presenting an image with the intention of shocking the audience – essentially demanding an emotional response from it. A clear example of this can be seen in the work of photographer Chris Jordan, *Midway: Message from the Gyre* (Jordan, 2009). Since 2009, Jordan has been photographing the decomposing carcasses of albatross chicks in the Midway Atoll islands in the North Pacific Ocean. The chicks inevitably eat plastic that can be found in abundance throughout the oceans, and die as they are unable to regurgitate the plastic they ate. Jordan's photographs highlight this presence of plastic pollution and its very real, very morbid impact, and document it for anyone to see (picture 3). It is noteworthy that the artwork is shocking simply because the truth itself is shocking. No special attempt at drama needs to be performed; reality is dramatic enough as it is.



PICTURE 3. Example photograph from *Midway: Message from the Gyre* (Jordan, circa 2009).

In a similar vein, in 2017 photographer Cristina Mittermeier filmed a video that became emblematic of the real, current effects of climate change. The video is that of an emaciated, starving polar bear filmed on Somerset Island in the Canadian Arctic (picture 4). Much like Jordan's work, Mittermeier's brought the present reality to the forefront of people's attention in a very shocking manner due to the morbidity of the reality of climate change. This type of shocking imagery went viral (Mittermeier, 2018), and clearly captured people's attention and imagination. Both Jordan's and Mittermeier's works serve the same purpose and function in a very similar way. Luckily, both went viral and made headlines, and so it is safe to assume that they indeed succeeded in raising awareness on the crisis in some capacity. However, at the sensitive point of irreversibility, is raising awareness alone sufficient? Did these works, as well as works similar to them, succeeded to move people emotionally? And perhaps more importantly – did they manage to facilitate action in the mass audience they reached?



PICTURE 4. A screenshot from Cristina Mittermeier's video (Mittermeier, 2017).

The answer is that it is hard to say exactly. While there is a notable rise in climate change activism in recent years, in particular among younger generations (Yeo, 2019), establishing a causative relationship between this fact and the continuous existence and occasional virality of climate change art is difficult to do. On the other hand, there is also a notable, persisting state of inertia and unwillingness to change that can be noticed in how people interact with global warming. Plastic

waste is still gathering in immeasurable amounts due to the simple fact that people still use and throw away plastic and that companies still produce plastic products in mass; single-use plastic in particular. Most of humanity still relies on fossil fuels for the most part, rather than on renewable energy resources (Ritchie & Roser, 2019). The planet continues to grow warmer and we move steadily towards irreversible outcomes by the day, with some outcomes already unfolding in the present (Bodkin, 2019).

Somehow, starving polar bears and plastic-filled dead albatross chicks are not enough to make the majority of us refuse drinks in plastic cups, vehicles with high energy consumption and other similar basic actions of choice. Something in the process of communicating the severity of the situation and need for change is not working as it ought to. In that sense, it can be argued that perhaps there is room for further focusing and directing climate change art in order to move beyond awareness, beyond mere emotion – and towards action.

3.3 From Emotion to Action

Making environmental art for a crisis on a scale as large as this is difficult, as many questions must be considered in the process of designing the artwork. Is the medium of the artwork useful and contributing to what the artwork is trying to convey? Is the artwork meant to raise awareness, elicit an emotional response from the audience, or push them towards action as well? If the latter, do the various elements of the artwork contribute to this goal? What type of emotional reaction is expected to facilitate action? Many of these questions are less about the physical process of making the artwork and more about understanding the psychology of the audience that will experience it, and how to create art that plays into this psychology; utilizing propagandistic elements for the sake of a transformative art experience that is actually transformative.

One of the most important goals for climate change art is to successfully create empathy within the audience, it being “the vicarious experiencing of the feelings, thoughts, or attitudes of another” (Fox, 1984, 1). It is well-established that forming a sense of attachment and connection to environmental issues via art leads to emotional engagement on the topic (Keller, Sommer, Klöckner & Hanss, 2019,

6). Emotions themselves can cause pro-environmental behaviours, but they are not bound to always do so. To understand this, three important aspects of empathy must be established (Decety & Jackson, 2004, 71-73). Firstly, it is an innate human experience and does not require any type of learning, although it can be developed through social interactions. This implies that much like art, empathy holds an evolutionary advantage and has played a role in the survival of our species. Secondly, empathy compels the individual experiencing it to act in a supportive or sympathetic manner, and so it naturally facilitates this type of behaviour. Thirdly, empathy is hypothesized to be egoistic in some capacity, and the altruistic behaviour it promotes is done not for the sake of others necessarily, but for the sake of quelling the emotions brought upon by empathy, such as sadness. In other words, altruistic behaviour is for the empathizer to feel better.

Empathy, and by extension altruistic behaviour, which is supportive behaviours motivated by other-oriented empathy (Eisenberg, 1986, as cited in Eisenberg, 2016, 72), do not occur equally towards every type of other, but are instead biased. People naturally care more about those close to them – family, friends, pets and their close social group, and empathize more with others of their culture and like-mindedness, as opposed to those different from them (Ganguly, 2018; Winner, 2018). Consequently, empathy and altruistic behaviour toward someone, or something, which is further away either physically or culturally, as well as a different species altogether (Fox, 1984) or even a place, is simply not as common.

For the purpose of this thesis, this type of other someone, or something, will be referred to as a *far other*. The far other, as an entity, is defined by its being perceived as different and with a lack of or significantly reduced sense of familiarity and personal involvement on part of the one perceiving it. It can be anything the existence of which is either unknown, unfamiliar, or simply not close enough to develop an empathic attitude towards. It is people on the other side of the world we do not interact with in any way. It is wild animals we never see. It is plant species we barely consider to be living things. It is places we have never been to or heard of. We don't pay much attention to all of these on a daily basis, and so we rarely empathize with them and, in general, don't care that much about them and their well-being. They are, on an emotional and cognitive level, far from us.

When examining climate change art, the entity to which empathy is being asked to be directed to is in fact the far other. Jordan asks us to empathize with the reality of albatrosses and Mittermeier with the reality of polar bears. Morris and Sayler ask us to empathize with faraway places and Randerson, with a more abstract, sound-based artwork – with the changing of the planet itself. In addition, in order for these artworks to facilitate actions of change, they also ask us to behave altruistically towards the far other: to use less single-use plastic because a bird far away will die from eating it, or to use less fossil fuels because using it ultimately causes polar bears to starve to death. This is not the same expectation as asking for such behaviour towards someone like us and near us. Even asking us to help a child next to us as opposed to a child in a country we cannot even place on a map would yield a different emotional and behavioural result. Likewise, asking us to care about the state of the city we grew up in as opposed to that of a forest we never visited and know little about is not going to produce the same emotional response, and consequently the same type of engagement and action. When viewed in this context, the vastness and highly-complex interconnectedness of our planet inevitably makes it perceived as a far other. The melting of glaciers affects everyone on Earth, but they are too distant, physically, emotionally and mentally, to override the need to take care of something more immediate, near, and to which we have a personal involvement with. The far other, as an entity, is inherently too abstract for the human mind to empathize with properly. It is too far and too other.

In order to evoke empathy, and in particular altruistic behaviour and action towards the far other, climate change art needs to contain elements that would cause it to be perceived as less far, and therefore mentally less of an other. The communication and artistic depictions of climate change and its effects need to involve the audience in order to make it more personal to each individual perceiver, as people are more likely to act in support of those they consider to be part of their personal group (Ganguly, 2018; Winner, 2018).

In truth, the far other is far because it is literally far, both in terms of physical distance and in terms of dissimilarity to us. As a species that evolved with tribalism in mind (Harari, 2011), we are perhaps not quite as evolutionarily equipped to act for the benefit of those we do not personally interact with. And yet, in order

to prevent the catastrophic outcomes of climate change, we as a species must behave as though this is not true. Our art needs to make use of, as Harari put it, "The ability of the human mind to imagine things that do not really exist" (Harari, 2011, 28).

3.4. Closing the Perceived Distance

In order to make the far other seem less far, elements that may be related to the perception and emotional response of personal involvement must be examined. The first element is narrative. Evidence shows that narrative can create and foster empathy, and in some cause altruistic behaviour (Winner, 2018), and so it follows that art that contains a narrative would have a better chance of evoking empathy and lead to action. In practice, it is therefore important to consider whether the medium of the artwork is well-suited for the construction of a narrative or not. A single photograph, for instance, limits its narrative construction ability to one image, whereas a video or a series of inter-connected photographs naturally have more space for doing so. For instance, each of Jordan's photographs showcases a different bird (picture 3), while Mittermeier's video follows the same bear over a short period of time (picture 4). The latter therefore has more narrative potential than the former. In addition, Randerson's data-based sound is inherently random in nature, as it is a work of translation rather than construction, and so finding and focusing on a narrative within it would be difficult for an audience to do.

The second element is a sense of personal engagement, or immersion, which can be described as a state of complete involvement (Denisova & Cairns, 2015, 1). One of the mediums that is known to facilitate an immersive experience is virtual reality, or VR for short, and it is also known to be a better facilitator of empathy when compared to traditional video (Schutte & Stilinović, 2017). One of the factors that plays into this is the fact that VR is inherently a first-person experience, i.e. the content is presented from the point of view of the perceiver itself. This type of first-person experience is inherently more immersive in video games (Denisova & Cairns, 2015), and so it follows that art that utilizes a first-person perspective could also be better suited at evoking empathy.

As an example of how VR can be used for such purposes, the iAnimal project by the British organization Animal Equality can be examined. Using VR as an educational tool to promote empathy and altruistic behaviour, Animal Equality filmed 360-degree videos in slaughterhouses in order to show the reality of pigs, cows and chickens (Santos, 2016). These videos allow the audience to experience the horrors of being an animal in the slaughterhouse from the point of view of the animal itself. It is, in a sense, a much more raw, visceral and real-feeling experience than what a normal video, photograph, painting, etc. could produce.

However, while VR is an excellent tool to be used in climate change art, as of today it still has a prohibitive monetary cost, and so it is not possible for every artist to utilize it. However, it still stands that climate change art should move towards more immersive mediums, and in particular those that allow some form of a first-person experience. One such solution is an installation, which occupies physical space that may be physically interactable by the audience. It is not possible to touch Jordan's albatross chicks or Mittermeier's polar bear; instead, it is only possible to look at them from afar, bound to the perspective of a camera far from our mind. Would such artworks be more immersive if it was possible for each individual audience to hold in their hands the very plastic waste that killed the chicks, for instance? This element of physical first-personhood would not rely on the economic limitations of VR and would therefore be more accessible, but is nevertheless not a particularly explored space for climate change art. While art installations of this nature may not have the sheer visceral reach of a VR video, which can be experienced online from anywhere, albeit not as profoundly without a VR headset, it may instead offer a more real, physical experience for the audience in one particular place. It is a potentially impactful medium for the arsenal of climate change art that overcomes the limitations of more traditionally-used mediums. Both installations of this nature as well as VR may help shorten the distance between the audience and the far other.

The third element will be referred to in this thesis, for a lack of a better term, as the *mism paradox*, which represents the struggle between optimism and pessimism in the context of climate change art, and arguably – in the context of climate change in general. Whether or not climate change discussion and communication should be pessimistic or optimistic is a subject of much debate and disagreement,

as some believe humanity is doomed while others maintain that there is still a chance to turn things around (Higgins, 2019). The mism paradox is a paradox for the following reason: optimism has the potential to cause people to believe that things are going to be fine, and so action, and individual action in particular, is not urgent, while pessimism has the potential to cause people to believe that things are hopeless, and so action is futile. Both carry the risk of promoting inaction rather than action (Pradhan, 2019). When it comes to climate change art, whether the artwork is pessimistic or optimistic in nature is a decision the artist often needs to make. It appears that most gravitate towards the pessimistic end of the spectrum, as there is nothing positive about dying animals and changing landscapes. On the other hand, how could such realities be portrayed in a more optimistic light?

Presently, it appears that there is no definite solution to the mism paradox, and any attempt to promote action may result in the opposite outcome. One possibility, as writer Sai Pradhan suggests when it comes to climate change mentality as a whole, is to try and find a certain balance between optimism and pessimism (Pradhan, 2019). Optimism gives us hope that change is possible, while pessimism gives us the realistic outlook that things are not going well and actions are needed in order for change to happen. If the solution to the paradox, both in terms of climate change mentality and in its art, may be a balance between the two – artists ought to strive to find that balance by including elements that portray the reality of things, but also ones that give a sense of hope.

It is currently unknown whether such an approach will be effective or not, or in what way can such a balance be artistically manifested, but it seems that attempting it would be a worthwhile endeavour, as opting to move towards either end of the spectrum carries the inherent risk of promoting inaction. If a balance of the mism paradox is difficult for individuals to cultivate in the way they think and discuss climate change, perhaps art can help give this balance form, thereby further facilitating the aim that humanity, and every individual that is a part of it, ought to have: act towards changing one's behaviour and lifestyle in order to help save this planet and its inhabitants.

4. THE FAR OTHER

4.1 *Leopidochelys Olivacea*

In the autumn of 2020 I had the opportunity to work with sea turtle conservation in the El Banco Turtle Hatchery (in Spanish: Tortugario El Banco) in Guatemala. Specifically, with *Leopidochelys olivacea* – commonly known as the Olive Ridley sea turtle and classified as a vulnerable species. This species experiences numerous threats, many of which are the result of human activities, but a couple of those are directly linked to global warming. The first is plastic pollution. It has been documented that sea turtles tend to either become entangled with plastic waste in the oceans or consume it (Robinson & Figgner, 2015). In both cases, the result is that plastic waste causes mortality among sea turtles. The second threat is the rising temperatures themselves. The gender of a sea turtle is determined during its incubation period depending on the temperatures in the nest of turtle eggs buried under the sand, with higher temperatures resulting in the birth of female turtles (Maulany, Booth & Baxter, 2012, 2652). As temperatures rise, their population becomes increasingly female-bias, meaning that in the future those females will struggle to find mates for reproduction and the species may face extinction as a result.

As human activity directly affects the survival of sea turtles, having the ability to film footage of the turtle hatchlings I was working with seemed like a perfect opportunity. The turtles are physically far from Northern Europe and are not a species people commonly interact with, especially in Northern European countries. As such, they would be perceived as both very far and very much an other in the eyes of most people. The far other in my artwork was therefore chosen to be represented as Olive Ridley sea turtle hatchlings, who would become the protagonist of the narrative.

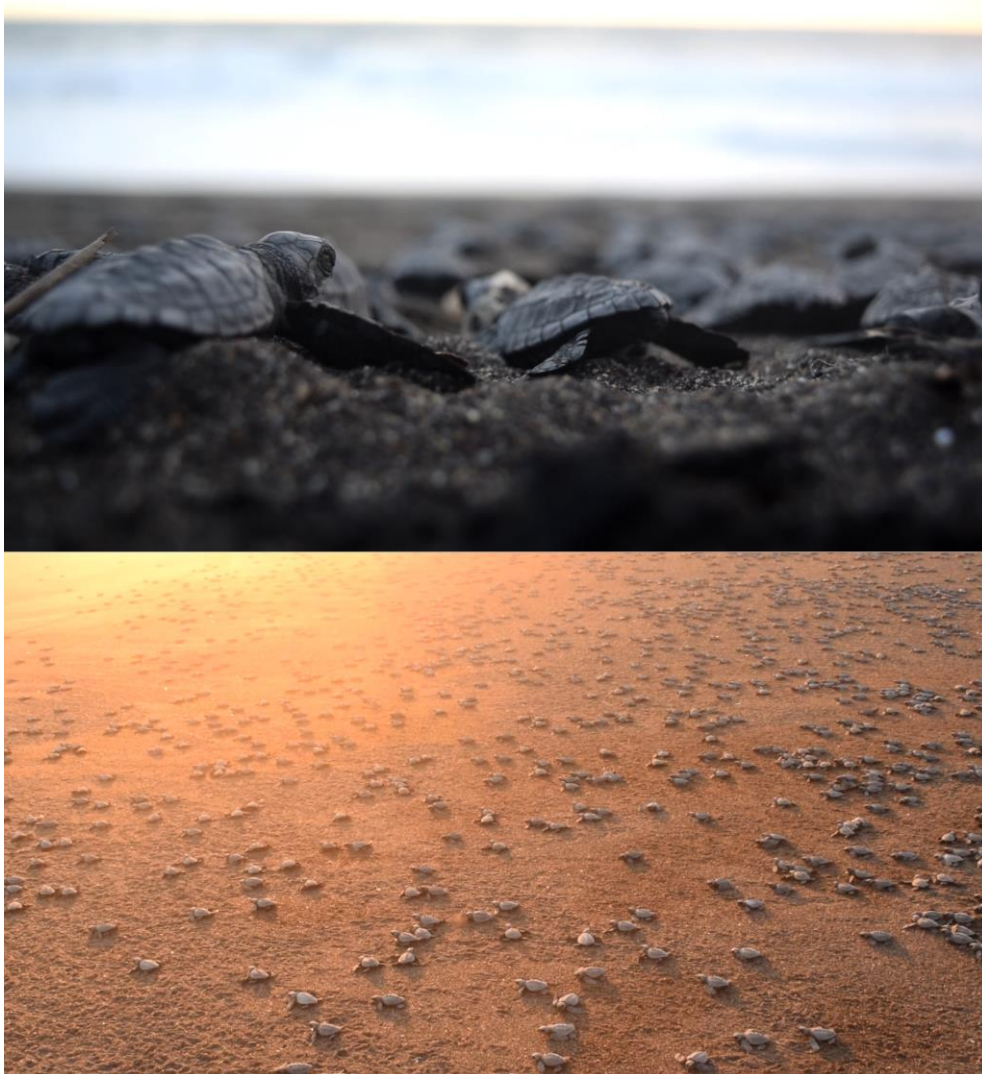
4.2 The Video

I chose to produce a single-channel video installation about the turtles as the medium of the artwork, due to the consideration that a video would be most suitable for incorporating the first element I have identified, namely that a narrative about the turtles could be feasibly constructed. Although a VR experience would have been preferable, VR equipment was not accessible for me, and so a traditional video was the second best fit. Although a two-channel installation was considered, the choice of it being one-channel was for preventing overstimulation and allow the audience to become more easily immersed in the single-channel video.

Filming for the video had to remain within the boundaries of how the hatchery releases its hatchlings. The turtles were released to the Pacific Ocean every day at 5 PM and the duration of release ranged from approximately 5 minutes to 20 minutes. Interfering with the turtles' path to the water was disallowed, which meant that any movement of the camera was highly limited as stepping in the sand would create footprints deep enough for the turtles to fall into, which would be unethical. It was also asked of me not to place the camera within the release area when tourists come to see the release, which tended to be every Friday, Saturday and Sunday. The result of these constraints was that I filmed once a day during most days of the week for a small number of minutes and had to plan in advance where to position the camera in order to fit the criteria of the hatchery. Any shot of the turtles in which the camera had to be placed near the edge of the water also required me to be very close to the camera and vigilant, as the waves of the Pacific Ocean are erratic and could easily sweep away the camera if no attention was paid to their unpredictable activity. Footage of the turtles was filmed during the months of October and December of 2019.

The best footage was then selected based on cinematographic aesthetics and length and arranged in order to construct the visual narrative of turtles heading towards the ocean, escalating from shots of the turtles walking or being idle on the shore and onto them being swept away by the surf and venturing into the waters. As the footage was filmed during many days with different states of

weather and natural light, the narrative was also constructed to follow the temporal pattern of a sunset, with footage filmed in grey, overcast daylight being placed early in the video and footage filmed during sunset with stronger orange hues being placed later in the video (picture 5). For the purpose of narrative, shots of individual turtles and shots of the collective of turtles were arranged to be juxtapose to one another (picture 6), going back and forth to keep the images from becoming repetitive and, as a result, for the narrative to become stagnant. On the other hand, it was also important for the shots to maintain length, as each shot showcases different individuals. The video was meant to be installed and looped, and so it was not possible to know at what point would any given person begin watching the video. Shots of longer duration would therefore enable the audience to spend time with each shot for immersion to occur and feelings to emerge.



PICTURE 5. Screenshots from *The Far Other*, highlighting the change in lighting as the video progresses from grey to orange.



PICTURE 6. Screenshots from *The Far Other*, juxtaposing a shot of an individual turtle with a shot of many.

The soundtrack of the video was made for the same purpose. It consists of a combination of a recording of the Pacific Ocean slowed down 200% and a royalty free piano piece slowed down 600%. The resulting soundtrack is a slow, ethereal and melancholic experience which mimics the slow movement of the turtles and allows the audience to slowly sink into an immersive state. The melancholy and minute drama of the slowed piano music was meant to balance the emotional tone of the video. On one hand, the turtles do successfully reach the ocean in a majestic triumph of nature. On the other, there is a foreboding sense of mystery and sorrow about their journey throughout life and the discomforting presence of plastic around the video. In this manner, the video attempts to stray away from being either too optimistic or too pessimistic, thereby attempting a balance of the

mism paradox. In addition, the slowing of the music disassociates the video from the realm of nature documentaries, as it both implies and invites a subjective perspective and feelings – which are elements of art, not documentaries. The resulting video is 16 minutes and 15 seconds long.

4.2 The Disallowed Installation

In order to make the video more immersive and personal, it was meant to be part of an installation in a physical space the audience would be able to inhabit and interact with. Exactly how the space would be laid out varied throughout the development process, but the core of the installation remained constant: the video would be projected on a wall and the audience watching it would be surrounded by plastic waste containing recognizable brands, as the plastic would be sourced locally. For this purpose, plastic waste was collected from individuals in Tampere, Finland before they would recycle it, and largely consisted of a wide variety of food packaging from Finnish supermarkets. The significance of the physical plastic surrounding the video and the audience was to enhance the reality of the subject matter. The plastic would be a physical, touchable and recognizable item of waste that the audience could have thrown away themselves, thereby giving the video a context that facilitates personal feelings of responsibility and reality. It would assist in closing the perceived gap between the audience and the far other. Plastic beach chairs were also meant to be placed among the plastic waste so that the audience could sit and inhabit the waste space while immersing themselves in the video, further closing the gap between the reality of the audience and that of the turtles.

An additional aspect of the plastic is that it was not possible to include it in the video itself, as plastic waste was removed from the release area of the shore every day before the release in order to give safer passage for the turtles. It would therefore be unethical to leave the plastic on the shore for the sake of the video. However, this removal occurs in turtle hatcheries, not in the wild, and the incorporation of plastic into the installation was therefore needed in order to convey a sense of reality. A sound shower would have been used for the soundtrack to be audible, as it would allow the sound to inhabit the same space as the plastic and

the audience without interfering with other artworks in the exhibition, some of which utilize sound in different ways.

This is what the installation would have been if it was possible to exhibit the artwork in a public space as was intended (7). However, the artwork was meant to be exhibited in the spring of 2020, which became the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. As a result, the artwork could not be installed and audience could not interact with the plastic waste space. Instead, the artwork ended up being part of an online exhibition as an installation-less video only, removed from an important aspect of the artwork that could not exist. Being able to touch and be in very close proximity to the plastic was not something that can be replicated digitally even if VR was a possibility for this artwork, as the work was designed with an element of physicality in mind. However, the video itself still incorporates enough of the elements that I have identified to potentially elicit the intended actions via empathy.



PICTURE 7. Digital model of how the plastic would have formed a space around the video projection, designed by Annika Korhonen.

Based on feedback received on the video in a TAMK feedback session with teachers and classmates, it appears that said elements have indeed manifested. The narrative of the turtles was referred to as strong and as including a human

presence in its perspective despite the lack of human narration or anthropomorphism. In addition, the video was said to strike a balance between optimism and pessimism, evoking both feelings of hope and calmness and feelings of concern and uncertainty. Perhaps most importantly, individuals found themselves identifying and empathizing with the turtles. It therefore follows that the far other was successfully represented in the video, and the perceived gap has narrowed.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The success of the video, despite the hindrance brought upon by the coronavirus, is a positive example of how art can move people by carefully cultivating empathy-evoking elements. In a time of crises such as this, maintaining the importance of climate change action is relevant, necessary and evidently achievable.

The present COVID-19 situation raises important questions regarding the future of artworks of this nature: ones that rely on the audience being able to be physically surrounded by touchable stimuli and cannot be digitalized without significant alterations in order to fulfil the same purpose. It asks whether physicality has a secure place in empathy-based artworks in the coming future, or if this would be a position given to VR instead, and even then online only. Without knowing the extent of which the coronavirus will shape society beyond the present pandemic, if at all, answering these questions is difficult. It is possible that artworks will need to have a digital safety net in mind when developed, that all elements of the artwork will need to serve the intended purpose, as some may become disallowed, and that artworks meant to elicit empathy and action may be better off starting out as digital only. That remains to be seen, but must be taken into consideration as the future unfolds unto the present.

Regardless, the purpose of such art remains unchanged by the circumstances in which it exists. According to playwright and poet Bertolt Brecht, “art is not a mirror to reflect reality, but a hammer with which to shape it” (Greinke, 2007, 1). While it is true that art can shape reality, hammers shape via blunt force. Art does not smash things, but influences them. To say that art is not a mirror is to assume that a mirror can only reflect, but mirrors can refract light and direct it to any direction. Mirrors can dispel darkness and ignite wildfires. For the crisis of climate change, art is neither a hammer nor a mirror that merely reflects, but a mirror that manipulates the flow of light to show that which needs to be shown in the most pragmatic of ways. At this point in time, climate change needs to be mirrored this way, with or without a global pandemic taking place. If art does nothing effective now and climate change continues on its current trajectory, we may not be here to prevent pandemics and create art in the future.

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