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THE FOURTH STATE

By
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It changes you, this place.
    You break apart.
Like ancient ice calving,
    Cracking and folding,
    Violently breaking off.

You dissolve into the sea.
    And become all the dark.
The dark beneath the horizon,
    For eons and mere moments.

Until, at last, the sky opens up,
    And her cold sunlight sucks you out.
And you take new shape among
    The clouds.

(Sophie Hardcastle, 2017)
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INTRODUCTION

This research paper is an inquiry into the role contemporary art can play in environmental activism, specifically in Antarctica. Despite the overwhelming scientific evidence for anthropogenic climate change\(^1\) and the threat it poses to human health, livelihoods and security,\(^2\) humankind is disturbingly slow to heed its warnings. My project rides on the assertion that human action is motivated by emotion\(^3\). Therefore, activism that is didactic in nature is problematic as it speaks to reason. Artists have a unique ability to galvanise environmental activism by stimulating feelings. Through pure aesthetics, artists can speak the unspeakable, represent the unpresentable, and induce emotions that transcend language and cultural barriers, and thus are able to escape the trap of didactic activism. This paper will not idealise contemporary art as the answer to the climate crisis, nor as a perfect means to shift environmental consciousness, but will rather reveal the important role art can play in communicating the story of climate change by engaging people emotionally.\(^4\) Visual arts, as avowed by Finis Dunaway, ‘opens up a portal of perception’\(^5\) when positioned in a discourse with scientific debates and mass media that ‘invites us to rethink familiar ways of seeing climate change.’\(^6\)

With the onset of Modernity and its individualistic view of the human subject, man became an ‘experiencer’\(^7\) of an external ‘experienced world.’\(^8\) I argue that this binary opposition is problematic for all human and nonhuman entities, as it establishes and upholds a humanist hierarchy in which the human is elevated above the nonhuman. This hierarchy, I believe, has enabled anthropogenic climate change. The systematic exploitation of the nonhuman is permitted when nature is cast as an alien other, as nonhuman entities of this ‘external world’\(^9\) are rendered inert, ahistorical and timeless.\(^10\) Nature, robbed of meaning and value, has consequently suffered. This paper examines the ways in which artists can dismantle the humanist hierarchy and

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1 Flannery, Tim. *Atmosphere of Hope*, p. 43
2 Flannery, Tim. *Atmosphere of Hope*, p. XII
3 Pratt, Vernon, Emily Brady, and Jane Howarth. *Environment and Philosophy*, p.31
4 Kothe, Elsa Lenz; Mary Jo Maute, Chris Brewer, "Vanishing Ice: Art as a Tool for Documenting Climate Change." *Art Education; Reston 68, no. 2* p.49
6 Dunaway, Finis. "Seeing Global Warming: Contemporary Art and the Fate of the Planet." p. 11
7 Pratt, Vernon, Emily Brady, and Jane Howarth. *Environment and Philosophy*, New York; London; Routledge, 2000, p7
8 Pratt, Vernon, Emily Brady, and Jane Howarth. *Environment and Philosophy*, p.7
9 Pratt, Vernon, Emily Brady, and Jane Howarth. *Environment and Philosophy*, p.7
reconnect the human and nonhuman emotionally, and documents my attempts to achieve such aspirations in my own practice.

In February 2017, working as an artist-in-residence in Antarctica, a sublime experience of the nonhuman violently dragged me beyond my own creative understanding. I experienced dissolution of self, and the humanist structures embedded in Western thought that were holding me above the nonhuman were dismantled. The experience induced anxiety and was deeply unsettling. I was made to feel at sea with myself. However, through the reconstruction of my identity, I was repositioned as part of the world and emerged with a new understanding of the universe and the interconnectedness of all entities, living and nonliving, human and nonhuman. Sharing an affinity with the Antarctic landscape, and emotionally connected to the nonhuman world at large, my motivations for environmental activism have been galvanised because I now feel greater sympathy for the nonhuman in distress. I sympathise with retreating glaciers because I feel connected to them on a primal level. I believe that when we feel the nonhuman as an extension of ourselves, and us an extension of it, environmental exploitation is felt as a form of ‘self-mutilation.’

The first question I posed for this research project was how could visual arts galvanise environmental activism? Riding on the Romantic’s assertion that human action is motivated by emotion, I questioned, how can visual arts foster emotional connections between the human and nonhuman to prompt shifts in environmental consciousness and changes in behaviour? After analysing my aforementioned personal transformation in Antarctica, I hypothesised that art could galvanise environmental activism by emulating a sublime experience of the nonhuman. Over the course of this year, I’ve unpacked my experiences, and analysed the works of contemporary environmental artists working with analogous goals to ascertain what I feel is the most effective means of communicating the story of climate change and foster said connections.

In Antarctica, my engagement with glacial ice was the most potent cause for my own identity dissolution and feelings of dislocation spatially and temporally. Glacial ice is the build-up of snowfall on a landmass over millennia, forming a fourth state of water that differs from regular ice as the immense pressure of this build-up forces out air pockets to create ice that resembles clear crystal. And even more impressive than its visual, otherworldly aesthetic was hearing a

11 Pratt, Vernon, Emily Brady, and Jane Howarth. Environment and Philosophy, p.20
12 Pratt, Vernon, Emily Brady, and Jane Howarth. Environment and Philosophy, p.31
deafening Antarctic silence punctuated by the magnificently horrifying sounds of glacial calving. I’ve come to believe that sound is the ideal space to canvas a sublime experience of the nonhuman. This paper reveals how I’ve come to make this assertion and examines my studio practice, departing from traditional painting to the creation and evolution of a sound installation, a kind of ‘sound painting.’

My sound installation interrogates the materiality of glacial ice and the aesthetics of sound and silence. It’s an attempt to imitate my visceral experience of glacial ice’s movement, to reveal its agency as an actor factor in the ongoing becoming of the world, a nonhuman entity with its own historicity. I worked with a music producer to compose a soundscape inspired by glacial calving. I did not, however, sample any audio of an actual glacial calving event, as I’ve endeavoured to show that art can incite the feelings of a sublime confrontation with the nonhuman without literal representation. This paper documents my investigation of the sublime as a means to take the human subject beyond or outside their own creative experience, to extend one’s sympathies so that they embrace the nonhuman, motivating changes in environmental consciousness and in turn, behaviour. I investigate the most effective artistic means of collapsing the humanist hierarchy and stimulating personal transformation.

In chapter one, in a personal essay, I define the sublime, the uncanny and cosmic horror, unpack my experience of Antarctica’s sublimity, examine the materiality of glacier ice and explain why sounds and silences were the most affecting. I analyse the dissolution and reformation of my identity, how I was made to feel at sea with myself, and how I returned with a new understanding of the interconnectedness of all entities, of the inherent value of nonhuman matter and of my location spatially and temporally as part of the world in its ongoing becoming. I describe my emotive response to glacial calving and speculate how I could emulate this through an artwork. Chapter two examines contemporary artists who have incited shifts in environmental consciousness through visual mediums. I’ll refer to my practice at the beginning of this research project, how I’d endeavoured to dismantle the humanist hierarchy through traditional painting. I consider what is problematic about visual cues, particularly how they risk didacticism, and rationalise my decision to move to sound. Chapter three will elucidate why sound is the ideal medium to dismantle the humanist hierarchy and reposition the human as part of the world. I critically analyse a contemporary sound artist who has created work in response to the Antarctic landscape and a sound artist whose work reveals the agency and inherent value of nonhuman matter and explain how this has informed my own practice. I detail the creation of my
soundscape, and reasons for including a monochromatic painting of the colour my synaesthesia allowed me to see when I heard the glacier calving.
CHAPTER ONE: At Sea

In February 2017, I travelled to Antarctica to take up an artist-residency on the Eastern Antarctic Peninsular. My sublime engagement with the nonhuman at the end of the earth unquestionably fostered an emotional connection that has galvanised my motivations for environmental activism. Through my research - writing and in studio, I have come to believe that if art successfully emulates a sublime experience of the nonhuman, an experience that plays on cosmic horror to induce a psychological experience of the uncanny, it can be a powerful tool for shifting environmental consciousness. I’ll substantiate this belief by examining my sublime experience of Antarctica and my changed self, identifying my engagement with glacial ice as the most affecting for me personally. And I will detail my early interrogation of the materiality of glacial ice and my initial considerations for how to best incorporate it in my practice.

The sublime first appeared in Western philosophy with the onset of Modernity. Philosopher Edmund Burke ascribed greatness, vastness and power to this aesthetic category, and reasoned that it was especially pertinent in vast landscapes of pure nature, arguing that ‘greatness of dimension is a powerful cause of the sublime.’ Later, philosopher Immanuel Kant presented an abstract version of the sublime, asserting that sublimity ‘does not reside in any of the things of nature, but only in our mind,’ and that our ‘capacity for reason’ not only elevates man above nature, but also allows man to transcend boundaries and conceive the infinite. My account of the sublime departs from Kant’s definition and sides with 20th-century philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard who asserts that the sublime is that which is unrepresentable. It is beyond and in excess of man’s intellectual capacity, and by this prescription; it is a ‘weapon to cut through the treacherous unity of subject-identity.’ For this reason, I see the sublime as the ideal aesthetic category to strive for in my own practice, for its power to reduce my viewer, cutting through his or her unified identity to ultimately reposition him or her as part of the world.

15 Kant, Immanuel, as cited in Klinger, Cornelia, "The Concepts of the Sublime and the Beautiful in Kant and Lyotard." p. 212
16 Kant, Immanuel, as cited in Klinger, Cornelia, "The Concepts of the Sublime and the Beautiful in Kant and Lyotard." p. 212
17 Lyotard, Jean-Francois, as cited in, Klinger, Cornelia, "The Concepts of the Sublime and the Beautiful in Kant and Lyotard." p. 218
In addition, I assert an experience of the sublime is visceral and perceived through the senses, qualified by Vernon Pratt when he writes, ‘we are quasi-clocks… involving minds and bodies,’ acting on pleasure and eschewing pain, and it is our ‘capacity for sympathy’ that drives changes in behaviour to alleviate the personal distress we experience when sympathising with an other in distress. A visceral experience of the sublime took me beyond myself, and taught me to extend my sympathies to the nonhuman. When art emulates a sublime experience of the nonhuman, it can take the viewer outside their own creative experience, fostering connections with the alien other, and when one adopts trans-species sympathies, there exists the potential to galvanise environmental activism. When we feel for the earth in distress, we’re motivated to change our behaviour to alleviate our sympathetic distress. This is felt most powerfully when sublimity in art induces a psychological experience of the uncanny, notably sensations of unease, anxiety and disorientation, because these are sensations we instinctively want to eschew.

Perhaps the most important thing I have learnt about the sublime through my research, however, is that an experience of the sublime involves fear and relief, and only decentres a viewer to great effect when these sensations are felt in succession. Without relief, the experience of terror is merely terrible, and the viewer is left feeling adrift at sea. ‘Cosmic horror,’ the vague terror incited by an inability to conceive or comprehend the infinite, which I experienced in Antarctica, is the feeling I have aimed to induce through my work, and the notion of negative pleasure has informed the incorporation of a monochromatic painting to anchor a viewer in the gallery so that relief follows fear.

Antarctica left me feeling at sea with myself, a process of identity dissolution and identity reformation, one in which my perception of my physical location in the universe was called into question. My body was decentred in time and space, dismantling the humanist hierarchy that once elevated me above the nonhuman as a unified human subject, and placed me on equal ground with ‘all objects in the cosmos.’ In Antarctica, I witnessed, heard and felt the nonhuman reveal itself to me fully. Philosopher David Abram writes that when the human subject is isolated from the nonhuman, ‘it is all too easy for us to forget our carnal inherence in a more-than-human matrix of sensations and sensibilities.’ He adds that landscape is perceived in

18 Pratt, Vernon, Emily Brady, and Jane Howarth. Environment and Philosophy, p.87
19 Pratt, Vernon, Emily Brady, and Jane Howarth. Environment and Philosophy, p.88
20 Pratt, Vernon, Emily Brady, and Jane Howarth. Environment and Philosophy, p.88
21 Ralickas, Vivian. ‘“Cosmic Horror” and the Question of the Sublime in Lovecraft.’ Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts 18, no. 3, 2008, p. 364
23 Abram, David. Spell of the Sensuous, p.22
the West as ‘scenery… the backdrop of our more pressing human concerns,’ and I substantiate this notion with Karen Barad’s claim that observer/observed dualism has rendered nonhuman matter an inert and passive surface awaiting the ‘mark of an external force like culture’ to validate it. In Antarctica, the nonhuman was not a mere backdrop, but rather a space so thick and palpable; my engagement with it was visceral. Sinking into Antarctica involved spreading my awareness laterally and awakening my senses to the ‘multiple nonhuman entities that constitute the local landscape.’ The shifting of my sensuous perception fostered an emotional connection, akin to familial.

Rebecca Solnit writes, ‘getting lost is about the unfamiliar appearing,’ and I will argue that as I sunk into this uniform nonhuman landscape, I became lost when the unfamiliar other appeared, lost in ‘that other way that isn’t about physical dislocation by about the immersion where everything else falls away.’ And it was in this immersion that the sublime cut through my identity. But even more affecting than the visuals of inconceivable vastness, and a stronger catalyst for the dissolution of my former identity, was Antarctica’s glacial ice. Affecting for the way it revealed to me the agency of nonhuman matter in its ongoing becoming, its historicity, stretching deep into the before and moving far out into the after, and for the voice it gave to the mountains, a chilling voice I have tried to emulate with my sound installation.

With fewer air particles, glacial ice takes on an ethereal blue tint that has long been a source of inspiration and fascination for artists. My focus on glacial ice however, departs from its otherworldly visual aesthetic, and concentrates instead on glacial ice as an active body playing an active role in the ongoing becoming of the world. As Karen Barad writes, nonhuman matter is ‘not an end product,’ and ‘boundaries do not sit still.’ This assertion is evidenced in glacial ice in its ongoing becoming and un-becoming, in its formation and its movement. So powerful in the immensity of its weight, glaciers alter the topology of the earth beneath them. This fourth state of water is not passive or immutable, nor is it a fixed entity, but rather nonhuman matter

24 Abram, David. *Spell of the Sensuous*, p.9
27 Solnit, Rebecca. *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*, p.22
28 Solnit, Rebecca. *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*, p.36
with agency, existing as an ‘active factor in further materialisations,’\(^{33}\) shaping and transforming the landforms that inform Antarctic landscapes.

Coming to understand these processes of geological transformation and materialisation involved spreading my awareness to consider time beyond human temporality. My entire life was reduced to a heartbeat standing on ancient ice. As Jacob Smith writes, ‘planet time’\(^ {34}\) is a ‘spatio-temporal dynamic in which place is experienced in relation to a scale that is beyond human,’\(^ {35}\) and refers to the frozen continent as a ‘window onto deep time.’\(^ {36}\) In Karen Barad’s agential realist account, she claims, ‘language has been granted too much power,’ thus I will argue that by showcasing glacial ice as a portal onto deep time, artists may advocate the value of nonhuman matter by highlighting planetary history, a narrative written long before humans. My visceral engagement with Antarctic glacial ice, laying my palm on its skin, decentred me as a human subject in planetary history. And later, when I felt, heard and witnessed glacial calving, I experienced an overwhelming sense of loss, a kind of mourning for the death of the ice and the rich history deep inside it.

Unpacking my experience, analysing my emotive response, and reading Barad’s writings on the intra-activity of nonhuman matter, I first identified the difficulty I would face in exposing the agency of glacial ice pictorially with traditional paintings. I knew a glacier would be a powerful entity to examine loss and all the anxiety that comes with that, but I needed to find a way to reveal glacial ice as a complex substance, active in myriad materialisations and transformations. Anna McKee’s etching *Depth Strata* (2011) (see Figure 1), and Sarah Tomasetti and Heather Hesterman’s sculpture, *Slow Melt* (2015) (see Figure 2) both showed me that it is possible to reveal historicity, and even agency visually, but I believe the physical body of glacial ice, building up and breaking off, was a more potent cause for the anxiety I felt in Antarctica. And what was most affecting was the sound of these materialisations and transformations, hence my decision to consider sound as a medium to foreground the value of nonhuman matter and incite sensations of the uncanny.

I also believe glacial ice is an ideal medium for catalysing shifts in environmental consciousness, as despite being a natural phenomenon, it is being exacerbated by anthropogenic climate change, making it an acute example of the nonhuman in distress. Jacob Smith asserts, it is ‘immensely

\(^{34}\) Smith, Jacob. "Radio's Dark Ecology p. 118
\(^{35}\) Smith, Jacob. "Radio's Dark Ecology p. 118
\(^{36}\) Smith, Jacob. "Radio's Dark Ecology p. 118
important for the person who understands to be located outside.\(^{37}\) When outside our human experience, the unfamiliar other reveals itself, and through the process of unlearning and learning, unbecoming and becoming, we come to appreciate the inherent value of the other, ‘fostering cross-species creative understanding.’\(^{38}\) By fostering a creative understanding of glacial ice, I considered I could, as an artist, prompt a viewer to extend their sympathies ‘so that they embrace not only human beings but also animals, plants and ecosystems,’\(^{39}\) and in turn, so that they could embrace and care about Antarctica. Consequently, viewers would experience emotional distress if they could understand Antarctica’s suffering.

My emotional experience of glacial calving in Antarctica was one of brutal breakdown and decay, of immeasurable sadness as ancient ice, rich in history, was lost, dissolving into the sea. The calvings I witnessed paralleled my own dissolution of identity, a violent metamorphosis. As Rebecca Solnit writes, death, in many indigenous stories, is the point at which ‘the river enters the sea.’\(^{40}\) I knew I had to focus on glacial calving and the death of ice as it returns to the sea, seeing this as the best way to incite feelings of distress in my viewer, as he or she grapples with grief for history lost, and a feeling of being at sea with oneself. And when I analysed my experience closely, I realised the sense it affected me most through was my hearing. I considered that imitating the sounds of ice cracking, the deep rumbles and grinds, a violent breaking away, in a sound installation could be a powerful way to stir feelings of loss.

David Abram writes in *Spell of the Sensuous* about the ‘land and its many voices,’\(^{41}\) and the premise of my work rides on the idea that an Antarctic glacier is a ‘vocal organ’\(^{42}\) by which Antarctica makes itself heard, and I’ll assert that in listening to that voice, my own humanist speech was called into question. As Abram states, the nonhuman was ‘no longer just a melodic background to human speech, but meaningful speech in its own right.’\(^{43}\) Barad writes that ‘identity is inherently unstable,’\(^{44}\) an assertion qualified by Rebecca Solnit’s claim that ‘the landscape on which identity is supposed to be grounded is not made of solid stuff,’\(^{45}\) and I will argue that an aural experience of the nonhuman folding in on itself and breaking apart revealed to me the unstable grounds on which I’d assumed a fixed humanist position. Losing myself

\(^{37}\) Smith, Jacob. *Radio’s Dark Ecology* p. 133  
\(^{38}\) Smith, Jacob. *Radio’s Dark Ecology* p. 139  
\(^{39}\) Pratt, Vernon, Emily Brady, and Jane Howarth. *Environment and Philosophy*, p.88  
\(^{40}\) Solnit, Rebecca. *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*, p.61  
\(^{41}\) Abram, David. *Spell of the Sensuous*, p.11  
\(^{42}\) Abram, David. *Spell of the Sensuous*, p.14  
\(^{43}\) Abram, David. *Spell of the Sensuous*, p.20  
\(^{45}\) Solnit, Rebecca. *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*, p.121
involved a ‘voluptuous surrender’ to the nonhuman, and from it, came a newfound sense of home in a landscape outside my own human experience. This realisation solidified my decision to move to sound in my practice.

Furthermore, though Antarctic ice decentres the human subject in planetary history, focusing on glacial calving for my honours project stirs a sense of urgency, as there is a sense that time is catching up, coming to a close. As David Wallace-Wells writes in *New York Magazine*, glacial calving incites a ‘feeling of history happening all at once.’ The impending threat of climate change is felt profoundly with the juxtaposition of glacial flow, slow and smooth in its becoming, and glacial calving, violent and quick in its un-becoming. Therefore, the sublimity of glacial ice is my focus for this project for its deep historicity, and its capacity to incite feelings of anxiety, grief and terror through dramatic and sudden dissolution. Wanting to alleviate these feelings on a primal level, my experience of glacial landscapes in distress galvanised my motivations for environmental activism. And over the following two chapters, I’ll endeavour to show how contemporary art, and more specifically, my own work, can rouse similar motivations when art emulates an experience of the nonhuman that is both ‘heavenly and disastrous.’

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48 Solnit, Rebecca. *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*, p. 83
CHAPTER TWO: Deep Time

Environmental philosopher Vernon Pratt claims that a Cartesian\(^{49}\) model of the mind causes nonhuman entities and ecosystems to be perceived as alien, and ‘it is easy for us to wave the importance or significance or value of the alien.’\(^{50}\) Insulated from the nonhuman, entities that would otherwise be innately familiar, incite psychological experiences of the uncanny when the other meets the human subject. A visceral experience of the sublime takes the human subject outside his or her own creative experience, and in this space beyond, the unfamiliar alien reveals itself fully, inciting sensations of the uncanny. Timothy Morton’s ‘dark ecology’ and Jacob Smith’s ‘cosmic horror’ are powerful sources of the uncanny, and in this chapter, I will examine contemporary artists who engage with the uncanny through visual mediums to promote a newmaterialist standpoint and galvanise environmental activism. At the beginning of this year, my own practice was solely visual. I’d endeavoured to dismantle the humanist hierarchy through traditional painting. As will become evident in this chapter, through my research of visual artists, I’ve come to understand what is problematic about visual environmental artworks, particularly how they risk didacticism, and will use these realisations to rationalise my decision to move to sound.

French artist Jean de Pomereau photographed *Fissure 2* (2008) (see Figure 3) in the Pridz Bay Region of East Antarctica. The image captures a vast sheet of ice stretching back to a distant cluster of icebergs wedged in the icesheet. At the time it was photographed, Pomereau described a thin mist that had descended upon the landscape,\(^{51}\) blurring the horizon as if the sky is sinking into the ice. Soft, pale blue light colours the entire work, the aesthetic smooth and velvety. Pomereau’s image of a landscape untouched and at peace with itself, is violently torn open by a bold, horizontal fissure in the icesheet that rips from the foreground all the way back to the distant icebergs, severing the work in two. The landscape is so soft in its texture; it visually alludes to skin, the pallid flesh of Antarctica’s body. The vast, even expanse, juxtaposed with the shock of the jagged fissure is suggestive of the nonhuman in distress. Tim Ingold, on writing about immersive nonhuman spaces, argues that nonhuman landforms, perceived through the lens of Modernity as inanimate, are realised as animate materialities, significant for their ‘agentive powers’\(^{52}\) in giving ‘shape and direction to the world’\(^{53}\) when we engage rather than detach.

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49 Pratt, Vernon, Emily Brady, and Jane Howarth. *Environment and Philosophy*, p.11
50 Pratt, Vernon, Emily Brady, and Jane Howarth. *Environment and Philosophy*, p.11
51 Matilsky, Barbara C. *Vanishing Ice: Alpine and Polar Landscapes in Art*, 1775-2012, p. 110
52 Ingold, Tim. "Rethinking the Animate, Re-Animating Thought." *Ethnos* 71, no. 1, 2006, p.16
53 Ingold, Tim. "Rethinking the Animate, Re-Animating Thought." p.16
Pomereau’s work invites the viewer in, engaging him or her emotionally through immersion into a uniform landscape. Sinking deep, and without the horizon as a reference point, the viewer is disorientated. As the unfamiliar other reveals itself, sensations of the uncanny amount with the spatial and temporal dislocation of the human subject.

In *Fissure 2*, the fissure itself exacerbates one’s feelings of unease and anxiety by visually alluding to a wound. When the human subject is repositioned according to a newmaterialist standpoint as part of the world, as Pratt writes, one extends their sympathies beyond the human, and comes to feel the destruction of the earth as a form of ‘self-mutilation.’ Early artistic representations of the poles in the 18th century such as *The Resolution and Adventure* (1773) (see Figure 4) painted by William Hodges and *Islands of Ice* (1773) (see Figure 5) by Johann Georg Forster during the first expeditions of The Heroic Age sought to capture the grandeur and might of landscapes man wished to conquer. Contemporary representations are radically different; with artists ‘profoundly conscious’ of the threats climate change poses to the white continent, as evidenced in Pomereau’s work. The fissure is emblematic of the fragility and vulnerability of the Antarctic, a nonhuman body literally cracking open and breaking apart. In addition, the dark black colour within the crack is illustrative of an abyss, of the unknown that lies beneath, of the unfamiliar self deep within appearing in one’s familiar space of consciousness—a powerful source of the uncanny.

Pomereau’s sublime image rouses anxiety as it takes one outside oneself, opening a fissure to the unknown, inviting only one’s gaze, leaving the viewer ‘forever on the brink of knowability.’ Furthermore, Timothy Morton writes about a mode of ecological aesthetics he calls ‘dark ecology,’ which he claims exists in the shadowy in between, and includes horror, ugliness, negativity and irony, warning mankind of ‘their potential annihilation.’ He adds that ‘the more ecological awareness we have, the more we experience the uncanny.’ And I would argue that peering into the abyss in *Fissure 2*, Pomereau draws on the aesthetics of dark ecology, encouraging the viewer to contemplate the impending catastrophe that will likely arise from unabated climate change.

54 Pratt, Vernon, Emily Brady, and Jane Howarth. *Environment and Philosophy*, p.20
55 Mattilsky, Barbara C. *Vanishing Ice: Alpine and Polar Landscapes in Art, 1775-2012*, p. 114
56 Smith, Jacob. “Radio's Dark Ecology” p. 133
57 Morton, Timothy, as cited in, Smith, Jacob. “Radio’s Dark Ecology” p. 112
58 Morton, Timothy, as cited in, Smith, Jacob. “Radio’s Dark Ecology” p. 112
59 Morton, Timothy, as cited in, Smith, Jacob. “Radio’s Dark Ecology p. 112
Immersed in this work, the viewer is dislocated spatially and temporally and repositioned as part of this landscape, stimulating sympathetic distress for Antarctica, witnessing its fragile skin being torn apart. This emotive response is exacerbated by the chasm of unknowable darkness beneath the ice. There exists here in *Fissure 2* the opportunity for an artist to galvanise environmental activism by unsettling and decentring the viewer. Motivated by a need to alleviate their negative emotional response to the work, a shift in the viewer’s environmental consciousness and motivation for small changes in their behaviour are possible. What I consider problematic about this work, however, is that it only engages the viewer visually, and from my own experience, hearing the Antarctica’s skin rip was far more chilling.

Another work I looked at closely was *Burning Ice* (2004-5), a site-specific installation by British artist David Buckland, documented in an archival inkjet print of a projection on the wall of a glacier, *Burning Ice #4* (2005) (see Figure 6). The words *BURNING ICE* are projected in white block letters on a blue glacial face. The work is affecting because of the language used. The violent image of a world on fire connoted through the word *burning*, coupled with the imagery of frozen spaces associated with the word *ice*, implies an unnatural crisis, anthropogenic climate change, and stirs anxiety for a looming doomsday event. In my own practice in 2016, I painted frozen landscapes with unnatural colours, rendering icebergs and glaciers alien to highlight a dissonance between the human and nonhuman. I also used free verse poetry written in mirror image to render the text illegible and thus subvert the human claim to language. Modernity’s assertion that human reason and understanding, epitomised in language, gives privilege to the human over the nonhuman was undermined in my work.

What was most affecting in Antarctica however was my visceral engagement with the landscape’s sounds and silences. What Jacob Smith refers to as Cosmic Horror – a negative pleasure where one is both in awe of and horrified by an inability to conceive the overwhelming infinite, is a powerful catalyst for environmental activism as it repositions the human subject in time and space. While *Burning Ice #4* is affecting through the imagery the text conjures, viewers can conceive it in the mind. The image exists within the bounds of human reason; therefore, unified identity remains intact. The most powerful source of the sublime, and I will argue the most affecting, in Antarctica is the ‘monstrous perversions of known geometrical law,’ which philosopher Graham Harman asserts are in some ways, ‘impossible for film or

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60 Smith, Jacob. "Radio's Dark Ecology" p. 128
61 Smith, Jacob. "Radio's Dark Ecology" p. 128
62 Harman, Graham, as cited in, Smith, Jacob. "Radio’s Dark Ecology" p. 131
paint.” In the abyss of sound, an audience can ‘sense the metaphysical darkness of any place where such perversions are permitted to exist.’ For this reason, I’ve created a sound installation where I can ‘complicate the locatability’ of the human subject, rupturing expectations in an effort to rouse anxiety and ultimately shift environmental consciousness.

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63 Harman, Graham, as cited in, Smith, Jacob. "Radio’s Dark Ecology p. 131
64 Harman, Graham, as cited in, Smith, Jacob. "Radio’s Dark Ecology p. 131
CHAPTER THREE: Last Chance to Hear

My listening to the vocal organ of Antarctica – the glacier, has inspired my soundscape. As discussed in chapter two, the Antarctic sublime is difficult, if not impossible, to capture pictorially. In an image, the human subject can place the landscape, identify and measure it. The viewer can comprehend, or at least assume comprehension of scale. Cosmic horror is experienced when those perversions of human scale are beyond comprehension. Similarly, feelings of anxiety and unease associated with the uncanny are experienced when one is disorientated spatially and temporally, and also when one is unable to identify sources of sensory stimulus in their surroundings. The uncanny involves a feeling of always being at a loss, when one is on the brink of knowability, only almost able to identify the unfamiliar. And I will argue sound is the ideal medium to canvas my experiences. Radio is inherently dark, and as Jacob Smith writes, it is 'ripe with horror.' In radio, the near and far fold into each other, and as Burke claimed, an inability to determine distance is a powerful source of the sublime. In this chapter, I will discuss my early influence, Joyce Hinterding, before the analysis of a sound artist who has composed a soundtrack in response to his experience of Antarctica. I will conclude this chapter writing about my own practice, both the evolution of my own soundscape, and how my synaesthesia informed the creation of this work.

The sound installations of Australian contemporary artist Joyce Hinterding have been a major source of inspiration in my practice, as I’ve attempted to create a soundscape emblematic of a world in constant flux. With my soundscape, I endeavour to reveal the intra-activity of glacial ice. The idea that ‘everything is active, all materials are active,’ underpins Hinterding’s work, as evidenced in her sound installation, The Oscillators (1995) (see Figure 7). This work was of great interest to me, as the work is a visible modulation of what one hears. It allowed me to understand a possible relationship between seeing and hearing sound. On three pieces of 100% rag watercolour paper hung on a gallery wall, Hinterding used silver leaf and graphite to draw electrical circuits. Connecting the paper to a solar panel power source, Hinterding 'synthesised simple sounds by creating electrical feedback.' And though the work does not explicitly

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66 Smith, Jacob. "Radio’s Dark Ecology p. 111
involve itself with environmental advocacy, Hinterding spoke of the sounds produced as reminiscent of natural phenomena.\textsuperscript{72}

Furthermore, exposing the unfamiliar - revealing an invisible field that is always there, but normally beyond or outside human means of perception incites an experience of the uncanny. Hinterding’s employment of ‘sound as a means to interrogate the materiality of objects,’\textsuperscript{73} exposing the active agency of nonhuman materialities assumed to be passive, coupled with her ability to stimulate a subtle experience of the uncanny has informed my own practice significantly. Hinterding’s work, and the way she surrenders complete authorship, has taught me that, as Amelia Jones asserts, ‘the artist is one among a network of agencies activating what we call ‘art’ and giving it meaning in the world.’\textsuperscript{74}

Of Antarctica, Bernadette Hince writes, ‘Antarctica is silence. It is also piercing sound,’\textsuperscript{75} and the soundscape \textit{Chronography Animal} (2012) (see Figure 8) composed by sound artist, Jay Needham upon his return from the end of the earth, repositions the human subject spatially and temporally, taking them beyond, and into the realm of the Antarctic infinite. For this research project, I also looked closely at the works of sound artists Douglas Quin and Lawrence English, however word count constraints forced me to limit my written sound analysis to Needham’s work. As John Luther Adams writes, soundscapes are ‘not necessary to change the world, but rather to change the quality of our attention to the world.’\textsuperscript{76} A soundscape can open up a porthole onto Antarctica’s sublimity, immersing the viewer in a nonhuman landscape because of its intimacy. It can create the illusion of far-off distances, or the chilling sensation of the alien other breathing down one’s neck. What’s more, the biological and geological sounds my work emulates are a non-verbal language, able to affect an acute emotional response that is universal.

Jay Needham’s work \textit{Chronography Animal} was a live electroacoustic performance that saw him improvise sounds with an antique gramophone over a soundtrack composed from field recordings in Antarctica. The work was a bridge to connect sound art and improvised music as an ‘evocation of place.’ Although Needham worked with real field recordings, the additional

\textsuperscript{72} Kahn, Douglas. "Joyce Hinterding: Drawing Energy." p.252
\textsuperscript{73}Kahn, Douglas. "Joyce Hinterding: Drawing Energy," p.242
\textsuperscript{75} Hince, Bernadette. "The Soul of the Antarctic." \textit{EarthSong Journal: Perspectives in Ecology, Spirituality and Education} 2, no. 4, 2012, p.6
\textsuperscript{76} Adams, John Luther, as cited in Philpott, Carolyn. "Sonic Explorations of the Southernmost Continent: Four Composers' Responses to Antarctica and Climate Change in the Twenty-First Century." \textit{Organised Sound} 21, no. 1, 2016, p.84
sounds he layered on top in his performance were carefully selected sounds that resembled the geological and biological voices of Antarctica, a process of selection I carried out in the creation of my own soundscape. Faint rumbles, as if far-off in the distance, and louder, closer cracks and groans evoke a sense of scale that disorients the listener and is consistent with Jacob Smith’s assertion that sound can be used to ‘play with spatial scale, performing a kind of auditory zoom from place to planet that works to diminish the human.’\textsuperscript{77} The feeling of being reduced or diminished facilitates a levelling of the human and nonhuman, a levelling that can incite shifts in environmental consciousness when one comes to understand their place, entangled with an animate nonhuman world.

Sleeping on the continent in Antarctica, not in a tent but in a sleeping bag in the snow, the silence was deafening. Something I’d assumed would be beautiful and romantic was strangely terrifying. I thought I’d gone deaf. And then, in the early hours of the morning, I was woken by the magnificently horrifying sounds of a nearby glacier calving. It cracked, folded in on itself, exploded and grinded. Huge chunks broke from the icy cliff face and fell into the sea. Antarctica was making itself heard. And in that hour, with silence punctuated by the sounds of the calving, I became lost to myself, I felt at sea. And though it was summer and light at 3am, I felt adrift in the darkness of the cosmos. My soundscape is an interrogation of the materiality of glacial ice, and an attempt to simulate that experience for an audience. I worked for three months with a producer to compose my soundscape in the audio application Logic Pro. I’ve chosen not to use any sample recordings of actual glaciers calving, believing that an abstract soundscape has a greater potential to decentre the human subject, because the source of the sound is not identifiable. It is a suggestion of a glacial calving that leaves the listener on the edge of knowability.

I have synaesthesia, which allows me to see colours with sounds, words, numbers and people, and the colour of the sounds I heard sleeping on the continent is what I worked off when composing this soundtrack with my producer, Hugo. We started off by collecting sample sounds, some anthropogenic, such as walking on metal tiles, and some organic, nonhuman sounds, including thunder, rocks ricocheting and wood chopping. I selected sounds that were the same deep indigo as the calving I heard in Antarctica. We then manipulated the samples in Logic Pro with effects that rendered their original sources unidentifiable. For several sounds, we altered them with a hard pan to imply vastness and create the illusion that the sound was outdoors in a

\textsuperscript{77} Smith, Jacob. ”Radio’s Dark Ecology p. 118
wide, open space. The opening rumble in the track was a ‘midi’ preset sample, automated with crescendos and diminuendos to create a haunting feel, as if the sound is creeping up on the listener. We also recorded our own audio using a minimoog. Capturing LFO sweeps, we changed the harmonies to create atmosphere and texture. With a microphone, we recorded air from my voice, making reference to Antarctica as the lungs of the planet. We added and reversed the audio, and used panning to move the source of the sound around the headphones with the intention of disorientating a listener spatially and temporally. Finally, we layered the sounds to create depth, achieve new textures and build a thick wall of noise, fading at different points in the soundscape to chilling silence.

Initially, I wanted to exhibit this soundscape in total darkness, devoid of any visual cues. I hypothesised that this would be the strongest means of inducing terror. Through my research of the sublime however, I’ve learnt that an experience of the sublime involves a negative pleasure. As mentioned in chapter one, relief must follow fear. I decided that hosting this installation in a lit gallery allows one to experience the fear roused from listening to the soundscape from a position of safety. I also plan on exhibiting a single painting on the wall in front of the listener. The painting is a block colour, a physical manifestation of the deep indigo I saw behind my eyes when the glacier calved. I faced difficulty when trying to recreate the colour I saw with paint, as the colours I see with my synaesthesia aren’t always colours in the real world. It was like trying to translate a word from French into English when there is no exact equivalent. The final colour I mixed and am exhibiting is the closest visual translation of the colour I see when I listen to glacial calving and my soundscape. I’m excited to show this painting, as it will not only be a point of reference that anchors my listener in the safe confines of the gallery, but also as a means for my listener to both listen to and see my listening. The viewer will stand in front of the monochrome painting and listen to the soundscape through headphones (see Figures 9 and 10).

Furthermore, my monochrome painting is emblematic of the void, emptiness ripe with horror. Without line, texture or colour variation, there is no focal point. One searches for the familiar, his or her gaze sinks into the work and is held back on the skin of the canvas. With the ‘abundance of absence,’ the near and far fold into each other. The work is deep sea and flat surface, a cause for uncanny disorientation. Painter Yves Klein’s monochrome blue paintings influenced the creation of my own monochrome painting. In her essay The Blue of Distance, Rebecca Solnit writes Klein’s work represents ‘the immaterial and the remote, so that however

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78 Solnit, Rebecca. A Field Guide to Getting Lost, p. 129
tactile and close-up it is, it is always about distance and disembodiment,’ 79 and that his paintings are windows into ‘boundless realms.’ 80 This idea was especially pertinent to my practice, as I have argued in this paper that the sublime is the realm of the infinite, that which is beyond human reason. Thus my monochrome, though close enough for my listener to reach out and touch, represents the unrepresentable by insinuating vastness and depth, intensifying one’s feeling of being at a loss. If the soundscape and monochrome painting can rupture one’s expectations, make them feel at sea with his or herself, I’ll have shown it is possible for an artwork to facilitate shifts in environmental consciousness by simulating a sublime experience of the nonhuman.

79 Solnit, Rebecca. A Field Guide to Getting Lost, p. 159
80 Solnit, Rebecca. A Field Guide to Getting Lost, p. 160
FIGURE 1: Depth Strata V, Anna McKee, 2011
FIGURE 2: Slow Melt, Sarah Tomasetti and Heather Hesterman, 2015
FIGURE 3: *Fissure 2*, Jean de Pomereau, 2008
Matilsky, Barbara C. *Vanishing Ice: Alpine and Polar Landscapes in Art, 1775-2012*,
FIGURE 4: The Resolution and Adventure, William Hodges, 1773
FIGURE 5: *Ice Islands with ice blink*, Johann Georg Adam Forster, 1773
Matilsky, Barbara C. *Vanishing Ice: Alpine and Polar Landscapes in Art, 1775-2012*,
Washington: Whatcom Museum, 2013, p. 91
FIGURE 6: *Burning Ice #4*, David Buckland, 2005

FIGURE 7: The Oscillators, Joyce Hinterding, 1995
Haines, David; Joyce Hinterding, "The
FIGURE 8: Chronography Animal, Jay Needham, 2012
FIGURE 9: Sound Installation – front view – Sophie Hardcastle, 2017
FIGURE 10: Sound Installation – side view – Sophie Hardcastle, 2017
CONCLUSION

I began this research project wanting to know the role contemporary art can play in environmental activism. I first researched the binary oppositions that ‘form the grid of Western philosophical thought and the basic patterns of Western Culture,’ notably the experiencer/experienced dualism, and deduced that at the heart of these oppositions is man’s relationship with the nonhuman. I observed that when Modernity elevated man as an experiencer of an experienced world, the nonhuman was rendered ahistorical and timeless, lacking value and has subsequently suffered. I identified an emotional disconnect between the human and nonhuman, and found that humans struggle to extend their sympathies to nonhuman entities we are innately connected to when those entities are made alien. After researching the Romantics, I came to believe emotion is a far better motivator for action than reason, and therefore identified art as being able to play a key role in stimulating environmental activism by bridging the emotional divide between the human and nonhuman.

This research led me to question the best means of repositioning the human as part of the world, emotionally invested in the nonhuman. My answer was the sublime. I examined its sources, the emotive responses it provokes, and how it can be used as a tool to pull apart unified subject identity. I’ve shown that the sublime takes the human subject beyond or outside his or her own creative experience, and in this space; he or she can viscerally engage with the nonhuman other, establishing emotional connections akin to familial. I decided to focus on glacial ice as a body that is active in the ongoing materialisations of the world, yet vulnerable in the face of anthropogenic climate change. Creating a soundscape inspired by the voice of the glacier, I hoped to reveal the agency of the ice as an active factor in its own becoming and unbecoming so a viewer could appreciate its value and extend his or her sympathies beyond his or herself.

I focused on glacial calving, as it is a natural phenomenon exacerbated by human activity, and a striking example of the nonhuman in distress. I unpacked my experience of glacial calving in Antarctica, realising that it was the sounds and silences that disorientated me the most, dissolving my former identity and repositioning me in the cosmos. And after researching contemporary environmental artists, I found the most affecting works were also sound based, for their intimacy, and for the way radio’s inherent darkness rouses anxiety by disorientating

listeners. I realised that a desire to alleviate such anxiety could motivate changes in human behaviour.

In conclusion, I do believe art can play an important role in environmental activism by engaging audiences emotionally and fostering the aforementioned familial connections and creative understandings. Through the aesthetics of sound and silence, my abstract soundscape can speak the unspeakable, represent the unrepresentable, and when coupled with the monochromatic painting that anchors my viewer safely in the gallery, he or she may well experience a sublime engagement with the nonhuman, one that dismantles the humanist hierarchy and reveals to us our innate entanglement with the nonhuman universe.

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FOOTNOTES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY


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