

From the Lens-Based Image Making research strand lectures, choose a theme, movement, or selection of artists or designers that relate to your practice or interests, and construct a 2,500-word essay. Critically assess primary themes, key writers, and relevant practitioners.

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Illustration List

Figure 1. Nicklen, P. (2018) *I have always been able to find bears roaming around on sea ice....*

Available at: [https://paulnicklen.com/stills/polar-bears/#!jig\[1\]/ML/2262](https://paulnicklen.com/stills/polar-bears/#!jig[1]/ML/2262) (Accessed 28 November 2019).

Figure 2. Burtynsky, E. (2016) *Dandora Landfill #3*. Available at:

<https://www.edwardburtynsky.com/projects/photographs/anthropocene> (Accessed 1 December 2019).

Figure 3. Burtynsky, E. (2016) *Building Ivory Tusk Mound*. Available at:

<https://www.edwardburtynsky.com/projects/photographs/anthropocene> (Accessed

Figure 4. Misrach, R. (1998) *Night Releases*. Available:

<https://placesjournal.org/article/illuminating-the-petrochemical-landscape/> (Accessed 1 December).

Figure 5. *The Human Element* (2019) Directed by Matthew Testa [DVD]. USA: Earth Vision Institute.

How home photographers sought to influence opinion on climate change?

Climate change has become a global phenomenon in recent years, because of this many photographers, artists and video producers have engaged in various methods to help raise awareness however, how effective are their methods and does their work influence change within society currently. 'The planet's climate has constantly been changing' (BBC News, 2018) over time however temperatures have been recorded to be abnormally much higher and lower than before. This can be shown by the rising sea levels, increase in floods and droughts, and irregular seasons. The following essay will evaluate various photographers and their impact on this topic by exploring their reasoning and assessing the impact it has towards forming a change. As a practising photographer it is important to gain an understanding towards the impact photographers and various other artists have made as they are 'our eyes to the world' (Laurent, 2017). This allows the artists to provide spectators with a perspective as well as awareness. Individual practice was a module that demonstrated the drastic effects of climate change and how it is having an impact on our community. The final piece consisted of re-usable bags that had the top 10 endangered species in the UK on them using cyanotype and was filled with plastic that was found around the university. In addition, I strive to ensure my work is made as eco-friendly as possible to illustrate how we are able to make a simple change in our lives to help the surrounding community. After watching David Attenborough's recent documentary series 'Seven Worlds, One Planet' it inspired me to aim to take more action in saving our planet as well as informing me how desperately we need to make a change to the "tragic desperate mess" (Attenborough, 2019) we have made.



Fig. 1

Protecting endangered wildlife is Paul Nicklen's focus in his photographs that are displayed in the National Geographic magazine. Fig.1 is a photograph of a male polar bear that had died due to climate change making it hard for him to source food which sadly resulted in starvation. In a recent interview (Ojala, 2011) Paul Nicklen expressed that photographs hold a great deal of power that can remove apathy and in order to do this the viewer must be able to make an emotional interaction with the image. Sympathy 'can ground environmental concern' (Fischer, 1987, p. 197). Sympathy can be felt when looking at this photograph as it forces the viewer to think about the future of polar bears and whether they will all suffer in the horrific conditions this bear experienced. This image could make a viewer feel a deep sense of remorse of anything they may have contributed to climate change which ultimately killed this polar bear's life and encourage them to make changes in their everyday life. During the time this polar bear was found Paul Nicklen and Cristina Mittermeier filmed an alarming video of a different polar bear, who was suffering from starvation and was near to death dragging himself to find food in empty fuel drums. The empty fuel drums were left by humans which converges onto the concern of litter and how the litter we dump can kill other animals by them getting trapped and suffocating. Currently at the Carnaby street Christmas display in London they have collaborated with Project Zero to produce an eco-friendlier display. The decorations are sea creatures and have been made

using recycled materials which is a statement aiming at the amount of litter in the oceans affecting the wildlife. Also, the lights in the display use renewable energy which illustrates that we can swap simple items in order to raise attentiveness. Unfortunately, the video of the polar bear received a negative response as the viewers blamed Nicklen and Mittermeier for neglecting to help the bear by giving it food. These negative responses expressed how 'disconnected people are from wildlife' (Mittermeier, 2018) and how they are still denying climate change exists and is causing significant consequences. After experiencing the negative feedback Nicklen created an organization, Sea Legacy which uses photography to promote ocean conservation as well as taking donations to fund sustainable projects. Sea Legacy uses gut-wrenching photographs to instil hope into others which according to Ojala (2011, pp 625) research shows that hope is a key factor to encourage motivation in a teenage group. Nicklen has recognised that even though the news is talking about climate change it is becoming background noise and in order to influence people to make a change there must be a face to what the news is telling people. In an article (Karunungan, 2019) Helene Joffe explains that statistics are valuable however they can not provide the emotions that a visual image can deliver, and these emotions are what will affect people's ideas of climate change.



Fig. 2

Dandora Landfill (fig. 2) is from Edward Burtynsky's book project *Anthropocene* which displays a landfill filled with litter in Kenya in 2016. The definition of Anthropocene is how our species is altering our planet into a different man-made state. Burtynsky's work depicts the man-made modifications our species has constructed on our landscapes and the impact of the global industry. As Edward Burtynsky explains in an article (Kelly, 2018) landfills often would go unnoticed as it not attractive to the eye which is why it is crucial that this is brought to people's attention. Burtynsky believes that photographers do not have much power but the power they do have is the "power of consciousness" (Burtynsky, 2016) which means they can educate and inform people on knowledge they have not known before and therefore be able to pass the information to other people. Plastic is mainly seen in this photograph and unfortunately the plastic that fills landfills often end up illegally dumped into the oceans. However, there is a huge amount of plastic in this photograph that there isn't a specific object that is more visibly seen than something else which illustrates the severity of the problem. In addition, landfills can cause issues with greenhouse gases and toxins. According to Environment Victoria (2016) during the process of decomposition,

plastic removes oxygen from the atmosphere and releases a toxic gas known as methane; which is twenty-five times stronger than carbon dioxide, a compound that is commonly known to be released from car emissions. If the number of landfills increase it will increase the amount of toxic gases being released adding more damage to the ozone layer. Furthermore, Burtynsky has recently released another book titled *Salt Pans* which is a continuation of the exploration of industrialised landscapes in our world. The harsh reality of traditions being diminished behind the beauty of the images is what Burtynsky illustrates. By producing an additional book, it signifies to a great extent how Burtynsky wants to communicate the world in multiple ways for people to gain an understanding of the damage being caused.



Fig. 3

Building Ivory Tusk Mound (fig. 3) is another photograph from the Anthropocene project in which elephant tusks and rhino horns were burned in Africa 2016. This photograph was included in two exhibitions and a documentary as well to ensure that it was observed by a wide variety of audiences. The purpose of burning the tusks was to raise awareness of extinction and send an anti-poaching message especially in regard to elephants and aiming to save them. According to

the National Geographic (Actman, 2019) over 100,000 African elephants were killed between 2014 and 2017, this is an outrageous statistic which is a main reason why Burtynsky wanted to raise awareness of the distressing impact poachers are building. Poachers are only caught when wildlife service rangers are on scene protecting the innocent animals which questions 'how much poaching goes unnoticed' (Lemieux, 2014, p.9). Edward Burtynsky's photograph raised awareness of United for Wildlife which is a protection organisation that works to protect endangered species and uses #WorthMoreAlive during events. Attenborough (*Africa*, 2019) clarifies that unless our communities work together and prevent poaching and climate change many of our animal species will go extinct in the next few decades. Edward Burtynsky is additionally recognized for two other documentary films titled *Manufactured Landscapes* and *Watermark*. Documentaries are important when spreading knowledge and awareness about the climate emergency as it 'helps us put ourselves in the shoes of others' (Blogger, 2016).



Fig. 4

Night Releases (fig. 4) is part of a collaboration between Richard Misrach, a photographer and Kate Orff, a landscape architect in a book titled *Petrochemical America*. The book is composed of photographs, drawings and maps and Orff (Shaheen, 2012) expects that with the mix of

photography and research it can produce an emotion to create a discussion about the future of our planet and the climate. A book is a complete different approach to the other artists about opening a discussion concerning potential solutions while 'recognising differential interests' (Eriksen, 2011, p.12) could broaden the audience. Misrach creates juxtapositions in which the photograph is visually pleasing whereas the content of structural change and environmental abuse is more serious when looked into. In *Night Releases* (fig.4) outlines of industrial buildings can be roughly seen behind this thick fog that could have been produced by toxins. As Stern (1977, p.3) explains many people consider carbon dioxide the main cause of air pollution, however Misrach reminds them that there is also other air pollutants such as nitrogen dioxide. Furthermore, Misrach explains in a video (Brower Center, 2013) that this particular photograph was taken at night where these discharges were released. By releasing the toxins at night, it allows the company to avoid many guidelines. This photograph brings recognition to the community about companies who will work around regulations if it means it is less work for them. It has been explained (World Health Organization, 2018) that air pollution can have serious effects on our health by causing strokes, lung cancer and heart disease also, a staggering 7 million people die a year from polluted air. As a community we may not be able to completely rid of air pollution but Misrach's photographs could inspire people to reduce the amount of uses of a car and use a cleaner commute. Similarly, companies of industrial companies should generate stricter regulations that are monitored.

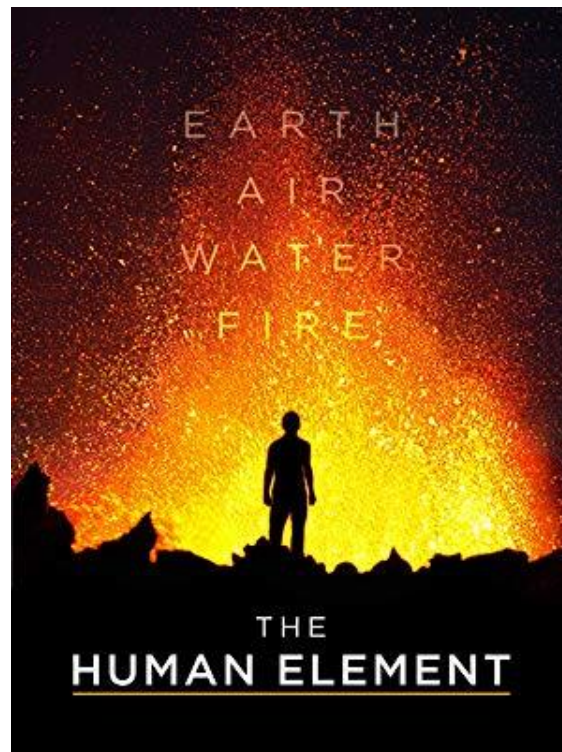


Fig. 5

The human impact on the environment is the key topic photographer James Balog focuses on in the documentary film *The Human Element*. In the film it explores the 5 elements earth, air, water, fire and people and how an imbalance in one element will cause another problem in another. An article by Renne Cho (Earth Institute, 2019) explains that maintaining a positive towards climate change can be challenging however in the film hope is a keyword mentioned multiple times. Even though our actions are leaving a negative imprint in the world, hope can inspire people to begin to make a change to remove the negative marks. Wildfires and evacuations are seen through the film and it brings what the stories new companies are releasing to life by documenting the harsh reality other people are facing. A quote that was expressed in *The Human Element* (2019) was that “We depend on the stability of the fundamental resources of our world’ which would allow viewers that we are not only affecting the lives of animals but we are affecting neighboring people in the world by our selfish actions. The aim of the film is to look at the root causes of climate change and increase the opportunity for the observer to be honest about how they may have enhanced climate change instead of having a defensive behavior. With technology

broadening in today's society people are feeling constantly pressured and stressed to keep up with the new gadgets. This dismisses focus on the consequences of the decisions they make, and digital communication lacks the emotional connection to our feelings which makes interaction skills harder. According to Wolpert (UCLA, 2014) our social abilities are deteriorating as the enhanced use of digital technology creates 'less time for face-to-face interaction'. The film would assist in improving social skills as communities and businesses work together and can be seen taking responsibility for their actions. James is also a global spokesman with his main focus of climate change and the effects it is having on the environment. During the conferences Balog displays his photographic study of glaciers which 'visuals aids for learning can have a huge impact' (Mcguire,2018) on how the audience would preserve the information presented. In addition, photographs would allow the audience to stay concentrated and is more engaging. James Balog founded the program Extreme Ice Survey in 2007 which mixes photography and science which is used as a visual voice to our planet's climate change.

To conclude this essay, many photographers are working to eliminate the arrogance of it is happening elsewhere and is not affecting that individual's life. Photographers are aiming to make climate change more visible by showing visual evidence of the outcomes to people who are in disbelief that this issue is occurring. In addition, photographs are easier to engage with as they provide an emotional interaction that a viewer would not be able to get from written statistics. Each photographer looks at different aspects of climate change, but they all have links to each other as it illustrates how one problem will create a knock-on effect to the others. By using a multiple of different medias such as books, documentaries and exhibitions to expose the facts of the global emergency, it allows for issue to brought to the knowledge of a wider audience. Extinction Rebellion is a non-violent international movement that creates events in order for

people in the community to find the courage to collectively bring political change and adapt into a healthy lifestyle. In order to be noticed they generate a civil disruption and question the political system on their potential decisions. Similarly, to photographers they take responsibility of any actions they take and want the government to declare a climate crisis to communicate the urgency. Many photographers produce conferences to demonstrate their work which is similar to the UK Citizens' Assembly that is a group of citizens who discuss climate change and reach a conclusion on what should be done. It is important that as a community we stop dismissing what we are causing in our world otherwise it will cause more suffering to animals as well as each other. If changes are not made immediately then our world will cease to exist.

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