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Leiana Vaughan   April 8, 2025

A PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE CLIMATE CRISIS:

TRAJECTORIES OF PHENOMENA AND HOW

CLIMATE CRISIS INFORMS OUR BEING-IN-THE-WORLD

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Abstract

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This thesis examines how the climate crisis shapes our being-in-the-world through a phenomenological lens. Focusing on five interconnected "phenomenological sites"—perception, mood, temporality, place and space, and intersubjectivity—I explore how each reveals the crisis's impact on our lifeworld. Rather than asserting the mastery of phenomenology, this study critically examines how the climate emergency disrupts and redefines our experiential realities.

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To my mom, for being my biggest supporter and my favorite pick me up. I could not have gotten

to where I am without you.

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celebrating my education.

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INTRODUCTION

Imagine that you, like me, are a student. You sit down at a desk to take an exam. You reach out to unzip your backpack and pull out a number 2 pencil. The professor lays down a stapled packet of paper and an answer sheet in front of you. You dial your focus in from the buzz around the room—a friend to your left, rushing to get settled in; a stranger to your right, taking calming breaths—and you lower your gaze to the exam. All you know in this moment is black ink on white pages, the content interpreted from it, questions, analyses, and responses. You finish it in an hour, and your focus returns to the room.

I want to begin my thesis with a broad, phenomenological analysis of this experience. At a baseline level, the process of "focusing in" and "focusing out" can be addressed as a shifting of what Edmund Husserl (the proclaimed father of phenomenology) refers to as *horizons*. This conception of the way we perceive the world around us is dynamic, yet structured. We are constantly focusing and reorienting our attention on some *thing*, it is only the description of *how* this focus shifts and translates between objects and environments that we articulate as one or the other, figure of focus or contextual horizon. The horizon will operate, always, as the presence which informs our understanding of the figure. When you take your seat at the desk in the classroom, you know you are being handed an exam, not a magazine, even before you look down at it.

Moving onto the objects on the table and in hand, how do we conceive of them as objects? What differentiates them from the friend sitting beside you? The classical phenomenologist would argue that the pencil and the exam, appearing as unmoving, unseeing, and lacking markers of sentience when we engage with them, appear very differently than other,

living things. However, they are not merely isolated entities waiting to be uncovered, but instead things that are constituted through our engagement and experience with them. You and your friend, possessing some ability to alter and amend these items, perform these constitutions through the possibility of action: to sharpen the pencil, to burn the exam. Thus, given your mutual recognition of each of your own agencies, you may identify your friend as a conscious being, and the paper and pencil as objects.

Further, you do not see a pencil. You see a *profile* of a pencil: the angles visible to you in one moment are not the same as those you would perceive if you rotated the pencil, or moved to its other side. If you look at it straight on, the eraser may not be in view, but by virtue of your preconceived notions and social conceptions of the pencil, you can infer the eraser's presence despite not seeing it. This dialogue between subject and object is what allows us to consider objects as *transcendent,* as Merleau-Ponty discusses.[1] That is, the object supersedes our immediate grasp of it, allowing us to perceive a pencil as a pencil and not simply a two dimensional wood stick based on our current perception of the object. Our understanding of the idea behind the pencil is not limited by space or time, and thus we are able to translate the idea onto its essentially matching object.

This brief situational instance is rich with phenomenological import, despite the mundanity of the moment, which philosophers often grapple with in terms of ascribing broader, more abstract concepts to quotidian life. These concrete groundings of phenomenology in "real life" are critical in laying the foundations for the argument of this thesis. Moving throughout this work, I will ground our theories in everyday experiences as often as possible.

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[1] Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Colin Smith, *Phenomenology of Perception: An Introduction*, Repr, Routledge Classics (London: Routledge, 2006), IX.

For me, for people in my generation, in my family, in my education system, everywhere we turn we encounter a climate crisis. It has become part of the horizon against which we engage objects, ourselves, and one another. It has become part of the fabric of what Husserl terms "the lifeworld." Even the climate change denier is explicitly denying something that has infiltrated our daily lives. It has become part of the fabric of the world. To this end, I will take up my first and most critical phenomenological theory of *Dasein,* or being-in-the-world. This concept originates in the work of Martin Heidegger, and it dictates that we ought to move away from subjectivity as an inner consciousness isolated from the world and instead move toward subjectivity as being intrinsically linked to the world.[2] Our moods, our activities, our thoughts and the things we care about, are all wrapped up in the contexts of our environment and the world around us. Today, the climate crisis perpetually circulates through all of these. Our interactions are dictated, modified, averted and promoted by a sense of climate crisis which appears in our cultural media, our conversations, our physical environments, our morning coffees—at every degree, the climate crisis emerges. This is what I will reflect on throughout this project. A climate crisis has woven itself into our being-in-the-world.[3]

It is not my goal in this thesis to demonstrate my mastery of phenomenology or its authors, but to use a small set of phenomenological analyses to show how the climate crisis informs our being-in-the-world. I will explore five recurring themes in the field of phenomenology–which I will from this point refer to as "phenomenological sites." These sites include perception, mood, temporality, place and space, and intersubjectivity. Each will render

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[2] Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Hoboken: Blackwell Publishing, 1967, 80.

[3] Heidegger denotes two concepts here: existential conditions and existentiell conditions. Existentiell conditions pertain to the daily ongoings of life, including concrete choices and circumstances which shape how a person is given in their everyday world. Existential conditions, on the other hand, refers to fundamental structures that underlie all instances of Dasein. The climate crisis manifests itself through both of these conditions, but I refer more closely here to the existentiell as a means of disclosing the climate crisis to us.

how the current climate crisis operates in our lifeworld. It is critical to disclaim ahead of the argument that we do not presume these sites to be discrete. In fact, the overlap between them is critical to our understanding of each, as they often inform one another. Interpreting our climate crisis within the scope of these sites will additionally offer dimensionality to a judgement about whether or not current phenomenological practices and studies can diligently account for a phenomenology of climate crisis, or if there must be a critical alteration to what we have previously accepted as relatively "universal" or "common" explanations of phenomena.

Using works of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, we will address this question of eco-anxiety through the lens of angst and transcendence, among other frameworks that have historically upheld the field of phenomenology. It is fundamentally the role of anxiety as a mode of experience that necessitates the privileging of the term eco-anxiety specifically, as it allows us to draw from and connect to a very particular set of circumstances which has emerged over the last hundred years through a vocabulary that has been operative for much longer.

PHENOMENOLOGY: A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in his preface of Phenomenology of Perception, defines phenomenology as a philosophical description—not an analysis or an explanation—of "things themselves," which is necessarily situated through our embodied experience of the world. Parsing this definition requires a degree of, first, suspension toward the abstract, and then reintegration into the world. These quickly prove themselves to be cyclical: taking steps back to see the whole picture, but then zooming in to take the picture apart. These hermeneutical elements of phenomenology are often what befuddle those who seek a clearer understanding of the field, and it has been a struggle for phenomenologists since Edmund Husserl's two-part,

Logical Investigations, was published in 1900. The critical dissonance that needs to be grappled with is the desire to articulate, formally, philosophically, and within its own vocabulary, an experience that is immediate for us. Picking our experiences apart at the level of lifeworld, horizons, or consciousness forces us to use language to describe something we already grasp by simply being in the world. However, this dialectical cycle has not hindered attempts to achieve this articulation.

The commonly recognized founder of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl, begins his foray into the phenomenological with what he refers to as transcendental phenomenology. He begins, like many of his successors, with consciousness. He coins the concept of the "natural attitude." The undertaking of this idea is that we exist in a state of taking-for-granted the world around us—that is, the objects we engage with, the roads we walk upon, the buildings we live in and the furniture we keep in them. We believe that we we sense exists independently of us and we think of these objects as more than the express functionality they offer us. This "natural attitude" forgoes the object's conceptualization, its production, and the principles on which it relies in favor of the operative "something" it gives us, whether that be a seat or an apparatus for writing.

Husserl routinely pits empirical experience—that of the senses and what is immediately tangible to us—against an intentional consciousness of experience. He claims that what empiricism lacks is the greater, more abstract assessment of how consciousness influences our experience. Sense data, he says, cannot accurately speak to the a priori (knowledges that are objective or independent of experience) because it is blinded by those contexts and functionalities which we take for granted. Husserl's foundational idea to combat, or more accurately to suspend, the natural attitude is the phenomenological reduction, also known as phenomenological bracketing or the epoché. The epoché seeks to reduce the presumptions and

judgments we carry throughout the world to enable an understanding of the structures or essences of the conscience, unimpeded by the phenomenal structures (environment, for example) that dictate our experience.

To put this notion into an example: the exam that was placed before you several pages ago was a stapled, printed, paper packet. The natural attitude takes into account the qualities of the object, its subject-independent existence, and the context of your environment (a classroom, in a university, which has the goal of educating you via traditional means of study, including a professor who presents information and expects you to take enough away from said presentation to be able to either relay that information back or synthesize it in a new way). All of this context informs your understanding of the paper packet. Maybe the packet makes you nervous as a result. Perhaps it makes you giddy, following three straight all-nighters wherein you were pounding Redbull, to know that one way or another, when you return this packet to the professor, it will be out of your hands. Either way, your initial thoughts on the stack of paper are not about the essence of paper and ink let alone on how they are given to us. The functionality of the packet—which is to demonstrate your accumulated knowledge on a particular topic—is what comes to mind first and foremost, and it is this immediate presumption that Husserl suggests we ought to try to disengage from to better get to the root of our conscience and the structures that comprise it. This is how we achieve an articulation of experience that is objective and unimpeded by the extra-conscious structures that build our world.

Husserl draws from Descartes' Discourse on Method, particularly the grand revelation of "Cogito, ergo sum" ("I think, therefore I am") as grounds for mainlining consciousness in his theories. Husserl asserts that consciousness must always be of something. It is not merely thinking, unprompted or abstracted, but instead an intentional directing toward some other entity.

This is why he takes the structures of consciousness to be so critical, because they fundamentally shape the necessity of that "thinking toward" as opposed to "thinking."

Martin Heidegger, a German philosopher from the early and mid-20th century, critiques Husserl's cogito and epoché on the basis that it still privileges a subject-object distinction that fails to fully take into account the pre-reflective nature of human existence. That is to say, Heidegger feels that the a priori is not sufficiently addressed in Husserl's analyses of intentionality. On Heidegger's view, we are in-the-world, engaging other beings, well before intentional consciousness acts. To account for these prior interactions, Heidegger introduces the idea of Dasein (of human existence) as being-in-the-world, with our being-in structured by more basic interactions such as care and understanding.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a French philosopher from the mid-20th century, takes Heidegger's critique a step further. He insists that the body is integral to our being-in-the-world. Human experience is always inherently embodied and situated in the world, making the cogito a lived, bodily experience rather than an abstract thinking subject. We will emphasize Merleau-Ponty's focus on embodiment in conjunction with Heidegger's being-in-the-world to hopefully situate and track the role of climate crisis in phenomenology.

ECO-ANXIETY, METHODOLOGY, AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL REASONING

Many have conceptualized our climate crisis in terms of the anthropocene. Clive Hamilton, Professor of Public Ethics at the Centre for Applied Philosophy at Charles Sturt University, writes: "The idea of the Anthropocene was conceived by Earth System scientists to capture the very recent rupture in Earth history arising from the impact of human activity on the Earth System as a whole. The evidence shows that the rupture in Earth history may have

occurred as recently as 1945 but certainly no earlier than the late 18th century."[4] The anthropocene is a proposed period of time beginning around the introduction of nuclear weapons and exponential industrialization. It denotes humanity's profound impact on Earth, although it has not been officially accepted by the Subcommission on Quaternary Stratigraphy, which is responsible for defining geologic time units.[5] While several organizations work toward the induction of this title in official geographic spheres, the common understanding is that we are, regardless of label, in an age of massive change caused by human activity. Anthropocene, broken down to its roots, means a *new age of humans.* The term was coined by Paul Crutzen, a Nobel laureate and atmospheric chemist, in 2000 to describe the significant, and potentially irreversible, impact on Earth's climate and ecosystems.[6]

Almost simultaneously to the comeuppance of the anthropocene discourse, eco-anxiety emerged as a concept in the vocabulary of climate activism and collective action around the late 1970s and early 1980s. While not necessarily referred to as eco-anxiety until the late 2010s, the ideas referenced in and around this experience of connection between environment and anxiety has been a fundamental underpinning of dialogues in both environmental science and psychological fields.[7] Yumiko Coffey and Navjot Bhullar of the University of New England School of Psychology co-authored "Understanding Eco-anxiety: A Systematic Scoping Review of Current Literature and Identified Knowledge Gaps" alongside Joanne Durkin, Shahidul Islam,

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[4] Clive Hamilton, "The Anthropocene as Rupture," *The Anthropocene Review* 3, no. 2 (August 1, 2016): 93–106, https://doi.org/10.1177/2053019616634741.

[5] UMBC, "12 To 18 Votes Decide The Anthropocene Is Not An Epoch − But The Age Of Humans Is Most Definitely Underway," March 7, 2024, https://umbc.edu/stories/anthropocene-not-an-epoch/.

[6] Jan Zalasiewicz et al., "The Anthropocene: A New Epoch of Geological Time?," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A: Mathematical, Physical and Engineering Sciences* 369, no. 1938 (March 13, 2011): 835–41, https://doi.org/10.1098/rsta.2010.0339.

[7] Glenn Albrecht, "Chronic Environmental Change: Emerging 'Psychoterratic' Syndromes," in *Climate Change and Human Well-Being: Global Challenges and Opportunities*, ed. Inka Weissbecker (New York, NY: Springer, 2011), 43–56, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-9742-5_3.

and Kim Usher of the School of Health. Their 2021 scoping review analyzed trends in the usage of the word "eco-anxiety" and its correlates in studies and research. They found that the lack of clarity around the vocabulary pointed to a vagueness that did not allow current academic fields of research to progress in more refined studies of the phenomenon, as different phrases such as eco-depression, solastalgia, ecological grief, and eco-rage encompassed a much wider scope of emotion than the field felt it could feasibly study in a way according with commonly accepted practices of scientific methodology.[8]

For our purposes here, I nevertheless want to keep to eco-anxiety. Why eco-anxiety and not solastalgia? What about eco-anxiety registers as any more or less true than its counterpart terminologies? To answer this question, I turn once more to Coffey et. al as they describe how eco-anxiety differs:

> [E]cological grief explains grief felt in response to experienced or anticipated losses in the natural world [8]; Solastalgia is defined as the distress that is produced by environmental change impacting on people while they are directly connected to their home environment [9]; eco-angst is a feeling of despair at the fragile condition of the planet [10]; and environmental distress is due to people's lived experience of the desolation of their home and environment [11]. While there is existing literature exploring negative emotions associated with climate change, to our knowledge, there is limited comprehensive research on eco-anxiety in response to climate change-induced trauma.[9]

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[8] Yumiko Coffey et al., "Understanding Eco-Anxiety: A Systematic Scoping Review of Current Literature and Identified Knowledge Gaps," *The Journal of Climate Change and Health* 3 (August 2021): 100047, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joclim.2021.100047.https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joclim.2021.100047. 5.
[9] Coffey et al.

Using works of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, we will address this question of eco-anxiety

through the lens of *angst* and transcendence, among other frameworks that have historically

upheld the field of phenomenology. It is fundamentally the role of anxiety as a mode of

experience that necessitates the privileging of the term eco-anxiety specifically, as it allows us to

draw from and connect to a very particular set of circumstances which has emerged over the last

hundred years through a vocabulary that has been operative for much longer.

PERCEPTION

Perception, as a phenomenological site of investigation, constitutes an awareness and an

understanding of things, of others, and of experiences. Working through Husserl's theories of

profiles and intentionality as well as Merleau-Ponty's theory of perception as embodied, I will

demonstrate both the parallels as well as the possible undoings that arise when the climate crisis

is factored into the equation. Perception can ground our understanding of climate crisis, but we

can also recognize how perception has changed in its wake.

To access basic structures of experience, I will move between autobiographical

reflections and social scientific generalizations, remaining open to the possibility that such

generalizations might have hidden limits that will need to be corrected at a later point in the

analysis. However, I will also put forward data from the 2023 Yale Climate Opinions maps in

addition to and in comparison with the 2024 United Nations Development Program (UNDP)

Climate Promise survey to understand what common perspective on the climate crisis might

entail. I will use a combination of autoethnographic data and scientific data to attempt a holistic

and epistemically sound assessment, such that one does not hold a position of superiority over the other. However, for the simple fact of assessing perception at a universal level before breaking it into its particularities, we will begin with metrics to build a baseline, assuming that scientific data is deemed valid epistemic evidence.

On December 13, 2023, the Yale Climate Change Communication team published a national survey in the United States on public opinion surrounding climate change specifically. Through a methodology that both cross-validated their own data and compared it with independent and third-party surveys, they found that the national average of people living in the United States who thought global warming was occurring was 72%.[10] The national average for people who are worried about global warming was 64%.[11] However, the average percentage of adults who believed global warming was mostly a result of human activity fell to 58%.[12] I am thus assuming the standpoint of someone who has a conceptual, although not necessarily highly informed, understanding of global warming. I will avoid making sweeping generalizations regarding where someone might place the fault of global warming, however, by virtue of the majority—however slight—I will maintain that this common perspective seems to understand global warming to have at least some human cause.

The data from the June 2024 UNDP Climate Promise's survey reinforces this description and allows us to inform it more globally. A summary of the survey says that the "Peoples' Climate Vote 2024 is the world's largest standalone public opinion survey on climate change."[13]

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[10] "Yale Climate Opinion Maps 2023 - Yale Program on Climate Change Communication," accessed February 23, 2025, https://climatecommunication.yale.edu/visualizations-data/ycom-us/.
[11] "Yale Climate Opinion Maps 2023."
[12] "Yale Climate Opinion Maps 2023."
[13] "The World's Largest Survey on Climate Change Is out – Here's What the Results Show | UNDP Climate Promise," accessed February 23, 2025, https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/worlds-largest-survey-climate-change-out-heres-what-results-show.

The survey, representing roughly 81% of people globally, found data supporting the fact that a majority of respondents (72%) wanted their governments and institutions to move away from fossil fuels quickly, while 89% of respondents want to see more climate action from their governments.[14] A smaller, although still extremely significant, portion of respondents (53%) said they were more worried about climate change in 2024 than they were the year before.[15] This data allows us to move forward with the concept of the ecological baseline as defined in the section above: global warming does exist, is likely caused by climate change, and human activity can and should be held accountable for it to some extent.

This is the framework we will use going forward, and I will address this combination of scientific data and my own experience as the epistemic warrant for these inquiries and investigations, while acknowledging as well that this perspective of climate crisis is heavily leveraged with extremes and gradients on either side of any one of the contested beliefs. For phenomenology's sake, ideal scientific rhetoric and methodology is going to be slightly blasphemed for the purpose of getting to the point, as traditional science does not typically inform a traditional phenomenology.

HUSSERL, PROFILES

Moving now toward the ways in which perception has been historically understood and the way it ought to be rethought in light of these understandings around the climate crisis, we begin with Husserl. In his earlier phenomenological work, he gives us the natural attitude and its *epoché* as a foundation for ways to access consciousness. He opens this door so that we may

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[14] "The World's Largest Survey on Climate Change Is out – Here's What the Results Show | UNDP Climate Promise."
[15] "The World's Largest Survey on Climate Change Is out – Here's What the Results Show | UNDP Climate Promise."

finally get to the root of the investigation—that is, studying the structures of consciousness more thoroughly in our assessment of what constitutes our world, our self, and the everything that goes on in between and because of them. Husserl describes perception as something occurring subconsciously and without our proactive engagement. He suggests that we perform these perceptions through *profiles*, which depict only one "side" of any one "thing," but which we are still able to assess as its whole even without being able to see all of it at once.[16]

      For example, take a mug. From where you stand, maybe near a kitchen counter but a fair ways away from it, you can see only the side of the mug and its handle. You can see, effectively, a trapezoidal shape and an arc shape. These forms are not indicative of the mug in its entirety, but you still know it is an entire mug. You do not anticipate there being three handles on the side that is currently out of your view, because your lived context with mugs is that there is typically only one handle, and you are currently looking at it. Similarly, you do not anticipate leaning over to look at the mug from an aerial perspective to see that the mug actually has no opening at all, and is perhaps completely solid and filled to the top with the same ceramic that makes up its exterior. The function of your consciousness in this moment is to take one profile, synthesize it with what you already "understand" through past experiences, memories, and knowledge, and extrapolate the object in its entirety. The mind goes through this synthesis of profiles constantly, enabling an immediate relation between subject and object that bypasses the critical function of digesting the profile as itself, or as unhindered by social context.

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[16] Edmund Husserl et al., *General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, Collected Works / Edmund Husserl. Ed.: Rudolf Bernet Vol. 2, Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, Book 1 (Dordrecht: Kluwer Acad. Publ, 1982).
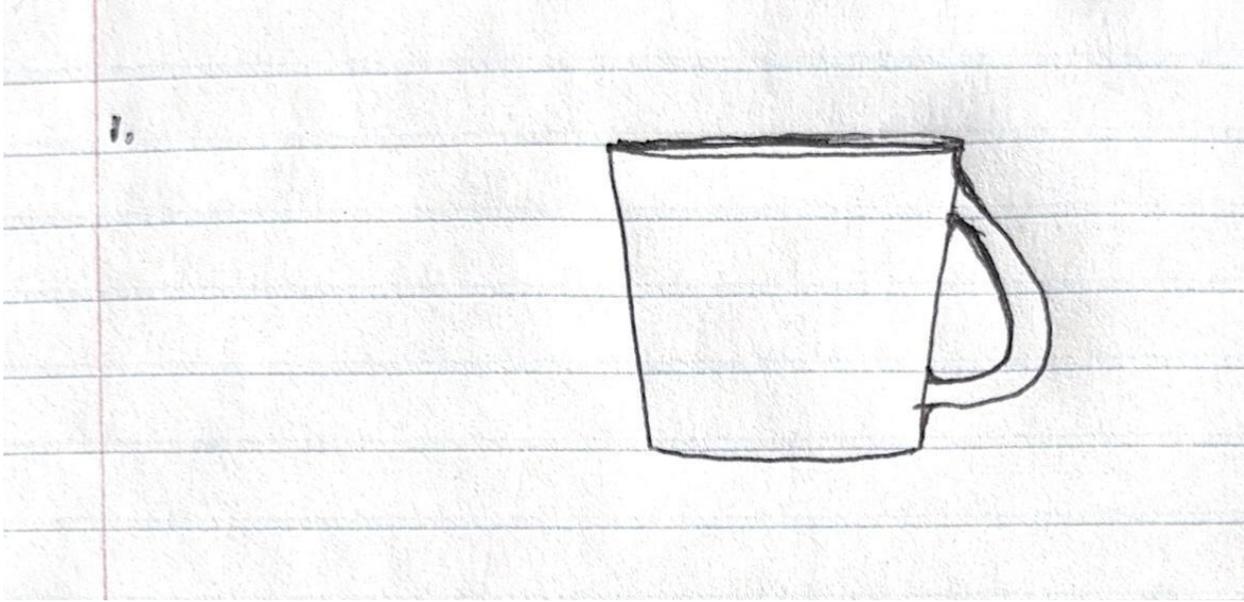
The same idea applies if you were to, say, only see the side with no handle, but to perceive it as having liquid inside. If you execute the *epoché* and take this single profile at face value, this image could be perceived just as easily as a pot of dirt than as a mug of tea.

Similarly, this aerial view could very well be a cooking pan if you isolated the profile from its surroundings, both spatially and socially. It is also worth noting that my own rudimentary drawings are presented without a background. I did not feel naturally inclined to draw the countertop, the objects nearby, or even the shadows the mug creates on its surrounding areas. My own inherent assessment of these profiles was a complete bracketing of them from the world around it–however, we can still make note of the lined paper they reside on, the pen ink I

II.
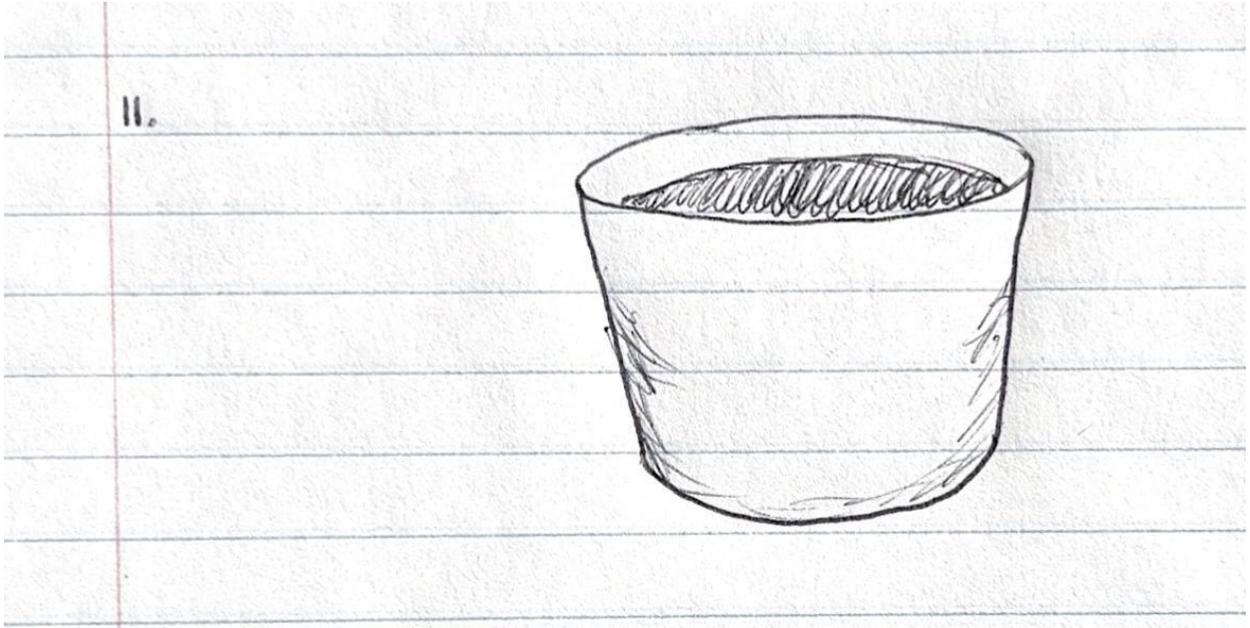
used to create them, and the roman numerals I placed to the side as a tactic of organizing the

illustrations, because we understand those lines to symbolically represent some quantity or order.
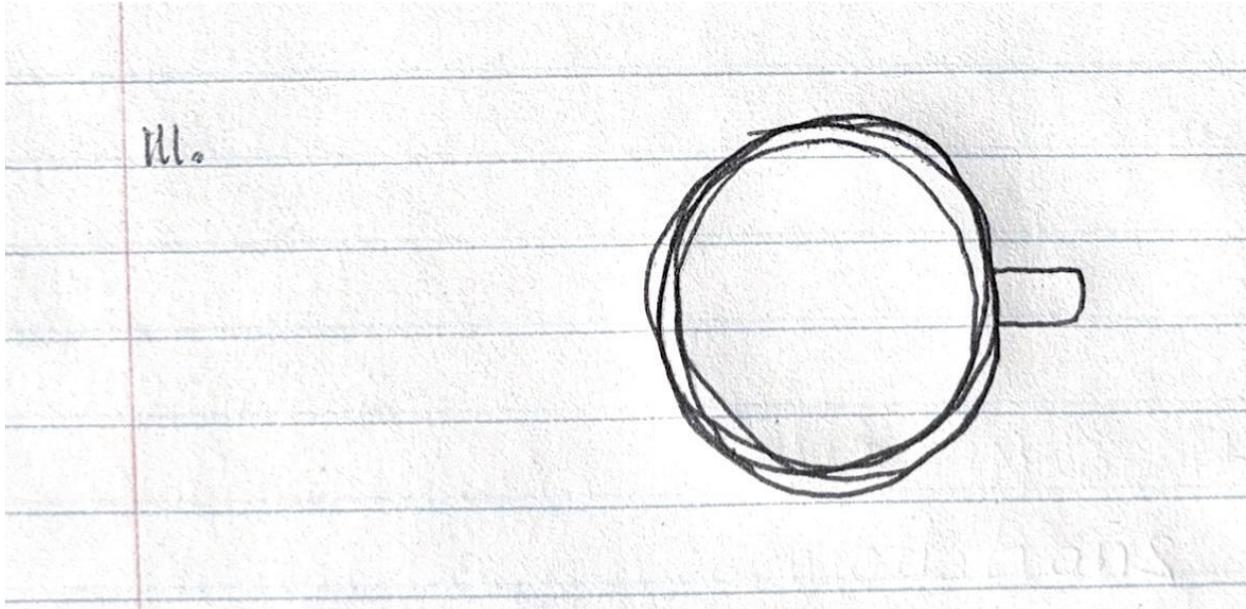
What, then, does this bracketing of profiles mean with the contextualization of crisis, and particularly climate crisis? How does perception, unbracketed, take on new ways of bridging profile gaps when sustainability or environmental terror is becoming an integrated element in our everyday social world? Does the mug take on new meaning?

Yes. The effect of crisis on perception is such that we activate a sort of reprioritized hierarchy of apprehension. For example, given a temporary medical emergency like a viral infection, the importance of skin temperature in our perception becomes remarkably more significant than when, say, the malaise person felt perfectly normal but would've liked the air conditioning turned up a bit a week beforehand. The things that we apprehend most immediately through perception can and often are context-dependent, and crisis often throws the orderliness of forms, colors, and senses into disarray.

These brute perceivables like skin temperature, the sight of a thermometer, the beeping sound it makes after some time in your mouth, are all part of a much vaster ecology of interactions in the context of climate crisis, however. In its permeation of our world, climate

crisis has reshaped and elongated perception as something that now exists *beyond* its immediate apprehension. We now consider production and disposal, the backstory of the object and its possible future destinations. Instead of apprehending merely profiles—a back side angle to the mug—we apprehend the additional consequence that comes with this object by virtue of its very being. We now grasp the world with ecological textures alongside and simultaneously with the kinds of sensory synthesis and social context that color our perceptions, and this ultimately amends the natural attitude.

Later chapters will discuss the role of temporality in these instances—the differences between a short-term crisis and a sustained one—but for now, as we analyze our mug, we can address the role of the climate crisis more specifically. The initial profile of the mug is now not only contextualized with its functionality, but with its material consequence as well. Where the mug's composition typically would not have been a part of our initial perception—instead it would have been its form, the shape of its handle, the liquid it holds, maybe its color—now, it is more and more frequent that physical material becomes privileged due to the social contextualization of what that material can mean for the environment. If the mug *is* ceramic, it must be reusable. But imagine a different cup, fundamentally serving the same function, but made of plastic or styrofoam. Our average person, the one who belongs to the 69% of survey respondents who say climate change impacts their life decisions (where they live and work, but also what they buy), is perhaps reprioritizing their perceptive assessments of this object. If that same social contextualization has given our average person an understanding of what is or is not recyclable, sustainable, or detrimental to the environment at an individual level, then the crisis element of climate change inundates their initial perception with considerations for the possible damage of their cup through its material alone, in addition to considerations of its disposal or

lack thereof. The direction of our consciousness toward the cup has now initiated a type of perception that blurs the distinction between subject and object by placing the cup's production and its disposal into our accountability in a more meaningfully contextualized way.

So as we inquire after the contemporary efficacy of Husserl's conception of profiles as the tool of perception, I argue that the theory overgeneralizes what is actually a much more complex and socially engaged process. The profile itself I take to be an accurate reflection of our bracketed experience, if we take bracketed experience to be an attainable goal. However, the bridge between the profile and the perceptual apprehension of the object as a universally consistent, passive undertaking is woefully under representative of the kinds of perceptual reorienting that can and do occur differently given our social and cultural embeddedness, our present circumstance, and our engagement with the moment at hand. What climate crisis as experienced by our standardized individual tells us about perception is that, if outside of the *epoché*, we ascribe differing aspects at differing levels of importance to an object—i.e. the cup as "for drinking" followed by the cup as "for landfill" followed by the cup as "for holding" as opposed to some inverse order—then we must necessarily acknowledge that as experience and situatedness alter an object's perception, so too must it alter that object's *epoché* or bracketing. Undoing the bridge that allows us to go from *circle* to *mug* will require a sort of peeling away of each layer of contextualization, and to assume these layers are discrete, let alone peelable, would be simplifying a much more intricate process in the name of a universalized legitimation of perception.

MERLEAU-PONTY, EMBODIED PERCEPTION

Consider next Merleau-Ponty's account of perception as an embodied experience. Building upon our previous analysis, Merleau-Ponty finds that universalist phenomenology fundamentally cannot serve the purpose it seeks to serve due to its blatant disregard (an attempted bracketing in its own right) for embodiment, situatedness, embeddedness, however we would like to refer to a socially constructed contextualization that dictates elements of our phenomenological perception. In his preface to *The Phenomenology of Perception,* Merleau-Ponty asserts "We are in the realm of truth and it is 'the experience of truth' which is self-evident. To seek the essence of perception is to declare that perception is, not presumed true, but defined as access to truth."[17] Accessing the truth, he would argue, is best done within the world we know and live—not within the abstract one we do not.

Along a similar line of thinking, Merleau-Ponty also vehemently rejects the Cartesian dualism that declares subject and object exist as separate and immutable to one another. He finds that perception is not a passive reception at all, but instead an active, meaning-making process. As we encounter the mug on the countertop, via touch, sight, maybe sound if your cat comes and knocks it over, the body synthesizes those inputs. Merleau-Ponty says that this synthesis occurs pre-consciously, allowing us to organize a *perception* into a meaningful structure without intentionally doing so. However, this "preconscious unintentionality" does not counteract the claim that perception is active and engaged. Merleau-Ponty considers perception to exist as a continuous model, with the preconscious steps creating the background for our immediate bodily experience. This background allows us to navigate the world without the constant need to engage in conscious thought. But when the situation calls for it, we actively take up that pre-reflective

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[17] Merleau-Ponty and Smith, *Phenomenology of Perception*.

data, interpreting and making sense of it in a way that shapes our conscious experience. The body is thus *always* in contact with its environment, perpetually gathering sensory data and ready to switch to more active, reflective engagement as circumstances demand.[18] But likewise, *because* we choose to engage in the world in addition to our preconscious perceptions, we can see how something like Husserl's *epoché,* which demands our own internal schema of things and their abstractions, is faultily emphasizing a *divide* between subject and object rather than a unity. Our engagement with the world is reciprocal, dynamic, and progressive. This is why, for Merleau-Ponty, the subject and the object are fundamentally inseparable, with the line between them blurring to a point of intertwining.

The blurring here comes from the way we perceive our own influence on the world. We can understand this in ecological terms as now having our own activity embedded into our perception of objects. Our actions are innately disclosed by the very presence of these objects, and we likewise consider these objects' givenness as evidence of our impact. The tree is not simply a tree, it is wood that has not yet been extracted as a human resource. So, even beyond embodied perception, we now encounter a process in which the perceived objects are loaded with our cause and effect, our production and destruction, our desires and our systems.

This development bears further importance when facing specific experiences of climate crisis. If we take subject and object to be intrinsically intertwined in this way, with one constituting the other and vice versa, then taking up human activity as cause for this crisis seems to be almost an *un*constitution of the objects addressed. For instance, before, there would be an interconnection between our perception of nature and nature's constitution of us as a part of a much larger network of beings. This doesn't point to a utopia in which violence is not wrought or

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[18] Merleau-Ponty and Smith.

death is less seen than life. It does point, however, to a world in which both *nature and humanity* are mutually constitutive with something almost like a respect in their perception of the others' existence. Nature's existence was not denied, just as nature felt the pull of our own existence as we took from it. But it seems that our ability to readily perceive nature as an undeniable entity in our being-in-the-world has become somehow less, or somehow fractured. Nature, to many, is something we had with certainty once, but which now lives in a state of endangerment. It is touching a flower, smelling it, sensing the life it has, but instead of synthesizing just this data, we have a looming sense of despair, or the flower's death, by virtue of the climate crisis that taints our perception of it altogether. Perception as a modality of being-in-the-world can almost never exist outside this mood of dread.

It is worth noting that dread has been felt before. A person can grieve their loved one before they've even gone because the thought of being without them is so immensely unbearable. But this kind of fleeting anxiety is ephemeral in its perceptive capacities, and the experience of anxiety is altogether different than that of grief. The way the person perceives the world will eventually revert to a baseline free of panic. However, it is with the vastness and profundity of climate crisis, that which shakes the entire foundation upon which perception is even understood (because truly, even understanding how we are trying to explain perception demands our own embeddedness in the description and modeling we choose to do so), that perception itself takes on a new dimension of constant anxiety. Perception and mood, which will be addressed in the next chapter, are thus intimately linked now in a way that before, they would come together as often as they would come apart.

MOOD

SOMETHING AMISS

It is 80ºF on November 8th, 2024, 20º more than the historic average for Atlanta, Georgia. People might be quick to let you know that Atlanta weather is notoriously mercurial, but then someone from back home lets you know that it is 65ºF on the same day in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 14º more than their own historic average. The weather is not a safe topic of small talk anymore. Instead, the weather—the daily, run-of-the-mill, wearing-a-jacket-or-not topic— has become an unapproachable, exhausting, and even controversial point of conversation. I speak to my friends, overwhelmed and scared for the future, and we wish that the constants around us—the mountains, the autumn leaves, the river—would offer a boon. But those constants and those creature comforts are not there, either, not in the same reliable way we used to know them. The earth is not as it was for the romantics: instead of allowing us to tap into some greater natural cycle of seasons and life, we are hot, and the world is getting exponentially hotter. A professor of mine speculates that hell may be manifesting itself.

This intense upheaval of an experience that used to be referred to as comically quotidian (asking how you like the weather to break an awkward silence) speaks immensely to the foreboding sense of doom, fear, anxiety, and overwhelm that has penetrated all angles and perceptions of our being-in-the-world. This vast and implicit overtaking of an entire atmosphere of daily life lends itself to a fundamental alteration of our perceptions, but not because of perception itself—instead, by a sort of *feeling* or *energy* that has managed to permeate our interactions, activities, and participation in the world at large. This is what Heidegger considered

to be *mood*.[19] This thing that creates a backdrop to our being-in-the-world is implicit, and yet

emerges explicitly. The affective power of mood is in its ability to alter perception. It is as if the

baseline perspective we have of the world and ourselves was perhaps initially a relatively

straightforward image of light-on-object, but with the addition of a mood—specifically one that

captures the anxiety of the heavy and corruptive nature of the climate crisis—that light has been

pushed through a prism, refracting and shifting the colors we thought to be true in a way that

expands our networks of consideration and perception, of past and present, of safety and

precarity.

The emergence of this energy, while it is always underlying our existence, seems to

occasionally disrupt what quotidian cycles we attempt to maintain on top of it. "Pretending" or

thinking *around* the prism's refraction can only be sustained until such a time that the truth outs,

and the mood explicitly emerges. This disruption does not need to be a catastrophic event,

although it certainly may be—our desensitization to news of massive, months-long wildfires or

storms with a mortality rate above 0% are certainly wakeup calls to some. However, it could also

be the video online you see explaining the production of Target clothing, where a brief shot

shows chemicals leaking into the ground outside in between massive machinery worked to its

limits to guarantee the cardigan of the spring season. It could just as well be the dumpster,

emptied by Waste Management only 12 hours ago, already overflowing with trash bags from

your apartment complex.

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[19] Heidegger, *Being and Time,* 172.

HEIDEGGER, MOOD

The sense of panic or perhaps anguish (realistically both) that emerges from these moments is understood in Heidegger's vocabulary of mood to be pre-intentional, meaning the something that shapes and alters our perceptions without our immediate awareness of it even being altered. In the same vein, it thus alters our thoughts and actions as well. It acts as a sort of background that comes neither from outside nor inside, but instead which arises from our being-in-the-world.[20] For instance, *fear* would not account for the same vast structure as mood. Fear, for someone who has just evaded a mugging in the street, looks different than panic that permeates the everyday: the fear here has a designatable object frame (the mugger), whereas a mood of panic that might emerge *from* this interaction later on will color everything. Maybe after this instance, you are leery of going anywhere in the dark, turning any corners, or smiling at any stranger. That mood has now, without discretion for whether there is true danger or not, influenced your perception of something as innocuous as the corner of a building.

Climate crisis treats perception similarly, and it works in conjunction with Heidegger's explanation of *Angst* specifically. The trigger of a natural disaster or an overflowing dumpster only works to bring forward a mood which is already present, even if it lurks beneath the surface. We reach for a sense of stability from our daily distractions, Google Calendars, and work schedules, but we never succeed entirely because this mood is implicit in everything we do. Even that Google Calendar, designed by a company which generates tremendous amounts of waste despite efforts toward net-zero emissions in the next decade, does not live in a vacuum uninfluenced and uninfluenc*ing* the climate crisis.[21] Technology can and often does allow us to

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[20] Heidegger, *Being and Time,* 176.

[21] Google's total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions increased by 13 percent in 2023, to 14.31 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (MtCO$_2$e). That year, Google's carbon intensity was

mitigate the forward facing confrontation of this mood of panic, but it is only successful insofar as it buffers us from our lived reality.

So what Heidegger says about mood is that the underlying nature of it, while to some degree always permeating, is not usually readily accessible to us in our day-to-day lives. The emergence of the climate crisis, when it does make itself known through our being-in-the-world, is immediately and entirely devastating perhaps *because* we finally become cognizant of this state of being that we live in even without conscious awareness of it. The devastation and anxiety supersede the present moment, charging us with a sense of past ignorance, present panic, and future doom, all inseparable from one another. This is not an easy realization to have, nor does it become easier over time. This is by virtue of the very mood of panic that underlies, pre-intentionally and without our choice, our entire way of being. The "coming-to-consciousness" of these moments is world-shifting, and coming out of this consciousness, while it happens with distraction, is equally as world-shifting.

Heidegger's points on *Angst* specifically carry tremendous resonance with the particularities of the mood of the climate crisis. *Angst* has historically been contextualized as anxiety, although its differing connotations bear relevance as well. Søren Kierkegaard has likewise translated *Angst* as having a more specific definition of *dread*, and still other translators deem *malaise* or *uneasiness* as more accurate interpretations.[22] In the theme of what was just discussed, he writes in *Being and Time*:

> When something threatening brings itself close, anxiety does not 'see' any definite 'here' or 'yonder' from which it comes. That in the face of which one has anxiety is

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approximately 11.4 tCO₂e per unit of revenue. "Google GHG Emissions 2023 | Statista," accessed February 26, 2025, https://www.statista.com/statistics/788517/ghg-emissions-released-by-google/.
[22] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 227.

characterized by the fact that what threatens is *nowhere*…'Nowhere', however, does not signify nothing: this is where any region lies, and there too lies any disclosedness of the world for essentially spatial Being-in. Therefore that which threatens…is already 'there', and yet nowhere ; it is so close that it is oppressive and stifles one's breath, and yet it is nowhere.[23]

This is precisely the impact of the climate crisis on the world around us. The inability to point at one factory's pollution or one person's plastic straw to say "you are to blame, you are at fault for this despair and this fear" makes the internalization of this crisis much more difficult to describe. An issue this multifaceted, coming at so many degrees and angles, and yet with consequences that are so damningly evident in our day to day lives, makes it easier for some to pretend as though the entire crisis is fundamentally out of our control. On the other hand, it makes it harder for others to articulate the vast effort required to make a more targeted effort at undoing this mood of crisis and devastation.

This mood—this panic, devastation, unease, anxiety—that interrupts and underlies our being-in-the-world modifies our perceptions in a way that is always, fundamentally, riddled with a degree of insecurity where there once was none; at least, not on the basis of environmental incertitude. Earth is a planet which we take for granted not only in the way of a Husserlian natural attitude, but also as a literal foundation upon which our entire being rests. The very phenomenological discourses I refer to here did not take this mood into account. How could they? The revolutionary and exponential rate of innovation that humanity has achieved in the past 200 years is unprecedented beyond even the innovations themselves. This rapidity and ambition has created a new, industrial, and technological world which has not been thoroughly

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[23] Heidegger, *Being and Time,* 231.

studied or described. More than that, the consequences of this emerging world seem to be untempered. With each ordinance or regulation placed on chemical waste or mass computer production, we are broached with the "NEW AND IMPROVED," the never-before-seen, and the altogether one-of-a-kind technology that draws our attention instead—all while creating its own unearthly amounts of environmental damage, as well.

This mood is a kind of frenetic energy that runs rampant, driven and produced by an anxiety that seems to be largely dependent on time as a limiting factor. Consider the investment banking employee or the tech startup CFO. These are individuals expected to work an 80 to 100 hour week because of the very mood that permeates these environments: any time spent not working is time spent not innovating, not progressing, and thus wasting time—no, *killing* time, killing progress, and killing the employee. The high pressure in these environments emerges from its own kind of *Angst*, but there are similar, although more serious, ideas at play with the mood of eco-anxiety. The sense of urgency that we feel regarding climate crisis is delineated by the way that we have managed to constitute, through our being-in-the-world (through our sciences, our experiences in differing environments, and through education) a series of deadlines for the planet. Reverse carbon emissions by 2050, lower the global temperature by 2035, all of these metrics we have created through our perceptions of the world lend themselves to the mood of eco-anxiety that riddles every conversation and every action we take. If we are not actively saving this planet, the mood tells us, we might be killing it, and we only have so much time to manage a change.

The key to this mood is that it is not a discrete or even articulable feeling in the moment that it takes up some kind of being. This urgency is underlying even moments where maybe nothing in particular has consciously reminded you of the climate crisis, you are just in the

world, being, and there is somewhere that sense of malaise that settles over you. The instability of something as profound as the very planet on which you and your entire species reside creates a similar and parallel instability within our being-in-the-world. The rupture that has initiated this insecurity, if it is powerful enough to undo a cosmic entity like the Earth, would have no such reservations about one species on that Earth. We ought to know, as we are that very rupture.

TEMPORALITY

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF TEMPORALITY

The approach to temporality in phenomenology is simultaneously the most and least straightforward of the concepts covered in this project. Temporality for Husserl is a dynamic structure composed of a primal impression (the present moment), retention (the immediate past), and protention (an anticipation, or the immediate future).[24] Similarly, temporality for Heidegger is a unification of fallenness (the present moment), thrownness (the immediate past), and projection (the immediate future).[25] The nuances between the two phenomenologists lie in the principles that make up these categories. Husserl bases his theories on an internal sense of time-consciousness, meaning temporality is something emerging from within us as opposed to an external factor. Heidegger disagrees, claiming a more existential structure for temporality as a key element of being-in-the-world. I will use both of these accounts to follow the experience of temporality under conditions of climate crisis.

THE MUG AS A CASE STUDY IN TEMPORAL PERCEPTION

We can return, first, to our mug. Our perception of the mug from the counter, as we picked apart its material and environmental consequences, leaps far beyond the present and further still into the past. When you consider the context surrounding it, you must also give heed to the mood of eco anxiety that has yielded such a change in perception in the first place, but *then,* you may parse the mug not only as it is in the moment you hold it or perceive it, but also how it came to be and where it might go. In this hypothetical, maybe the mug was on sale at a

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[24] Husserl et al., *General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*.
[25] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 311.

local department store. And now that you've thought about it, the mug has become the synthesis of some mass production of ceramic and paint and industrial process from within the past year or so, sent off en masse with little consideration for the carbon dioxide yielded from its production or the pollution of the paint runoff that seeps into the ground beneath the factory. But you are thinking about it now. So even subconsciously or without your intentional awareness, there will always be this underlying knowledge that you have somehow facilitated or participated in this process. You, the very consumer the mug was produced for, might feel as though you are in some small way responsible for the damage this one mug has managed to do just by being created.

Or maybe it is the inverse, but rooted in the same guilt: maybe you understand these outcomes and you weigh them to be unfortunate, but inevitable. You needed a mug, so you bought one. It's not as though you bought 100 of them for no reason, nor is it you who owns the factory, so maybe the impact is altogether negligible, because surely the factory would have made those mugs regardless of whether or not *you* would be the one to buy it. Unfortunately, no matter how you choose to take it, there still resides a perpetual blanket of responsibility, even if you choose not to take it on yourself—and that responsibility seems oriented toward the past. It is a guilt or a regret for something that has already caused damage to an already existing ecological crisis.

The future is likewise implicated as a result: regret tends to be functional only insofar as it continues to haunt the present and the future. If you were somehow blissfully unaware of the connection between industrial production and ecological destruction, then this understanding of the mug's production would not create the same sense of responsibility, for it would not make a difference whether they dumped 20 tons or 20,000 tons of paint water. Ignorance is often,

unfortunately, bliss. Ignorance is also difficult to achieve. This is why, even when the blame can shift to corporations or an invisible face behind a boardroom table, you still carry the burden with you regardless of whether or not you are truly culpable in any way. The knowledge that this mug will endure for several years, hopefully, but that even it will end up in a landfill somewhere, its painted exterior rejoining its material productive waste for thousands of years to come.

Perhaps then the immediate future—the mug in its reusability—can be a boon of sorts. To compare the alternatives and acknowledge that you could be using styrofoam that lasts for one use as opposed to a ceramic mug that might have decades of use is in some way a relief, although not a resolution, to the guilt. Even still, the future orientation of these damages still remains, simmering beneath the surface of each and every interaction, encounter, and event you partake in.

THE NATURE OF TIME IN OUR NATURAL ATTITUDE

Time, as far as elements of the natural attitude go, is surely one of the ones *most* taken for granted. Philosophers may toy with it and attempt to displace its commonly accepted linear nature, but what seems to persevere over these ideas is the impending sense of an immediate and distant future that seems to constantly jar us back into line. Memory of the past and experience of the present seems always to be allowed only so much leeway before the future demands our attention.

This is not to undermine claims about temporalities that do not adhere to a linear model. Instead, the goal is to acknowledge that historically, attempts to delinearize time have fallen short. Something about our experience of the present leans always towards a future that keeps us "in line," so to speak, and I would argue that the experience surrounding the climate crisis might

better inform this temporal description. The constant orienting-toward-the-future that we seem to fall into is exacerbated by the mood of eco anxiety that has infiltrated every crevice of experience. Impending dread and doom are intensely driving factors in keeping the future readily at the forefront of experience and being-in-the-world, even more so when we factor in a threat like extinction, which carries with it a sense of finality beyond anything the modern *Homo sapien* has been concerned with.

DIFFERENTIAL TEMPORAL EXPERIENCES IN THE CONTEXT OF CLIMATE CRISIS

The climate crisis is not, however, on everyone's mind at all times. More critically is the idea that even in *avoiding* the climate crisis, the evidence is far too damning to achieve a reality completely suspended from it. The student reading a headline that says "Unusually powerful March storm threatens to create a blizzard, tornadoes and fires as it crosses the US" from CNN on March 3rd, 2025 feels the impact. But the farmer who has to contend with tornado damage, regardless of the fact that she doesn't read the news, is feeling that impact in a different way. The farmer's experience of the climate crisis is more at-hand and readily available in the physical space she occupies, and significantly more devastating at that. It might end up hindering her daily life indefinitely until the point where certain repairs or insurance can be made available.

These are the temporalities that necessitate investigation. Because when the time comes that her equipment is fixed, the buildings repaired, the farmer can move *on*, move *past*. She does not have someone or something pressing down on her—not until the next threat of ecological disaster. And so maybe there is some differentiation in the temporal experience of crisis, because even in contending with it firsthand, when the evidence has been erased, perhaps so too has the

past. This temporal plane for the farmer is much more grounded in the present than in any past or future.

But when we return to the student and her news headline, we find an altogether different focus and perception of temporality amid crisis. For her, sitting in a lecture hall or a library, the headline is an overt interruption of her present being-in-the-world because it yanks her away from her current world to place her into a dangerous, unforgiving disaster zone. Only, it doesn't. For her, this world exists almost *outside* of time. Only for the extent of time in which she is concentrated firmly on the news article and its contents can she feel the gut wrenching devastation that comes with pictures, videos, and interviews from people like the farmer, who have been affected more tangibly. I argue that this period is not deemable as an experience of the present moment, because by virtue of media and the ways in which we consume it, there seems to exist an almost otherworldly digital timeline which, although frequently referring to our lived temporality, exists as both fleetingly ephemeral and completely enduring. This concept merits further investigation, but not for this thesis.

The goal in assessing the student's experience is to say that she experiences an unshakeable future-oriented dread that is somehow more sustained than that of the farmer. The student, experiencing odd climate changes on campus but ultimately not taking the brunt of the damage, is internalizing a passing news headline in a way that seems to fundamentally alter her sense of temporality in a way the farmer's remains unchanged. The physical experience of an ecological disaster every so often is more forgettable somehow than the intangible knowledge of the ecological disaster that comes up every other day on the student's news feed. It may seem sensible that consistency is more constitutive of a future-oriented being-in-the-world: if you hear about the fires, the storms, the droughts, the tornadoes, and the hurricanes near constantly, you

may be led to carry that burden of information in a way that more readily changes your perceptions. However, we encounter two dilemmas then: first, the farmer surely is not living in blatant denial anytime there is no tornado on her property; and second, surely there exists a degree to which this digital timeline, overflowing with information, becomes a source of desensitization instead.

The farmer decided to stop looking at the news at some point in the past, maybe because it was upsetting, maybe because she didn't care for it. Regardless of her reasoning, she has experienced tornadoes and storms all her life (let's say she inherited a family farm somewhere in the midwestern United States). She is accustomed to outsiders who see a tornado as an extreme weather event. But what she gleans from the occurrence of more frequent, more unpredictable, and more extreme tornado clusters is that something *is* amiss, regardless of how she feels about others' judgments of these phenomena. These tornadoes are not the same as the ones from when she was a child. So regardless of an interim between disasters where everything seems to be alright again, there is *still* an ever-present and overbearing sense of *change*. Her perceptions may remain presently-oriented for most of the time, but as this reality sets in with each passing ecological disaster, even she will begin to live in a state of anxiety for what is to come, and at what cost.

But as we return to the student who has the climate crisis on her mind, playing at a low volume at all times and a high volume whenever it comes up in conversation or in the news, we see how the establishment of the climate crisis as a perpetual and indefinite challenge can lead to a kind of desensitization of the issue. Despite the fact that incidents get consistently worse and more violent, the news headline will continue to read "Unusually powerful March storm." And while they do continue to become more and more unusual, the apprehension of this collapse

seems to stick to the present. *Unusual* can only seem unusual so many times before it becomes the norm, and for many like the student who live their lives in a way that is more isolated from the environment than the farmer, the disruption caused by the news headline might not seem so disruptive anymore. The future has met the present, and the student has become ambivalent.

These two instances are evidently not representative of all experiences with the climate crisis. There are those who face the disasters and catastrophes who must evacuate, those who are expected to stay, those who live amidst only non potable water sources because pollution and poor air quality are simply a given of their space and environment. In these cases, the future seems closer at hand. The present blurs into an immediate future wherein the only choice is to keep moving ahead, regardless of the havoc and destruction wreaked around them. So maybe the distant future feels like a wash, but what they have to go on is tomorrow, the day after, and the day after that.

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ADJUSTMENT TO TEMPORALITY

Temporality has been taken up by Heidegger, who said that our being-in-the-world is essentially temporal in nature. He suggests that being-in-the-world is characterized by the non-reductive integration of past, present, and future, but I feel that there is more nuance to be found in how much of each influences any one moment or one person.[26] Heidegger's main assessments of past (thrownness), present (fallenness), and future (projection) are helpful patterns in laying out the examples I've just given. Thrownness says that the past will always have bearing on our being-in-the-world through the experience that has been disclosed to us from "before," whether that be generations ago or last month. So for the farmer who grew up with her own tornadoes,

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[26] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 397.

this context gave her a buffer between her present and a future that seems riddled with grief and destruction. She could hold out for longer with perceptions unmarred by present realities because for her, that present still identified itself with her past. Only when her experiences broke out of the schemas she kept them in could she address the quiet anxiety that had permeated her being-in-the-world.

Fallenness for Heidegger is engagement with the world as it exists *immediately*. Apprehension, perception, these are both processes that are necessarily embedded in the present moment, because they are what is *at hand* to be grasped in the first place.[27] The student's immediate world looks like a library, with old book smells and page flipping sounds. Her perception of this sound comes with a sense of familiarity, wherein these perceptions have some kind of belonging to their environment. That means whenever she reads her news headline, leaping from her computer screen, the upheaval of a moment that seems entirely dissonant with her environment seems to take her out or away from the present moment.

Finally, Heidegger's projection offers a sense of our being-in-the-world as inherently oriented toward possibilities and potentialities, constantly projecting itself into future situations and endeavors, but when the possibility becomes in some way diseased—an Earth that is considered, to some, to be terminally ill, for instance—the future becomes finite in a way that it has not been before. Environmental scientists speak of tipping points as occasions that, if they have not already occurred, are fast approaching.[28] I will introduce a brief diversion to highlight the gravity of the situation coming from Surveys in Geophysics, an international review journal covering Earth and space sciences. A tipping point is defined as "a critical threshold beyond

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[27] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 220.
[28] A. Romanou et al., "Extreme Events Contributing to Tipping Elements and Tipping Points," *Surveys in Geophysics*, November 16, 2024, 1–46, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10712-024-09863-7.

which a system reorganizes, often abruptly and/or irreversibly (see Chen et al. 2021), or in other words, the point at which a small perturbation can yield large changes ('little things can make a big difference')."[29] An example would be the feedback loop of ice albedo (the reflectivity of ice) as it affects the global temperature. Usually, ice albedo helps to counteract global warming, because it reflects sunlight back instead of absorbing the light and its heat the way that a material like pavement would. But as the planet warms due to carbon dioxide emissions and the greenhouse gas effects, ice at the poles melts at an even faster rate. Less ice means less albedo, which means more heat is absorbed where it previously would have been reflected away from the Earth's surface. So in one global warming consequence, another is further exacerbated; and what we find is that after a certain degree of ice melting, there is no way to bring it back, and the temperature of the Earth will continue heating at an even faster rate.[30] These are points of no return. Points at which we can no longer recover to the Earth's baseline temperature, or detract meaningfully from the carbon dioxide makeup in the atmosphere. To return to the impact this kind of activity has on our understanding of temporality, what happens when the future has a totalizing terminal endpoint—-or, at the very least, a breaking point?

Across this entire spectrum of lived experience with climate crisis, there will be some fracturing of the barrier between past, present, and future. I previously alluded to the fact that efforts to delinearize time often find themselves in some way lacking, and I feel that it has much to do with the notion of time as having a binary or exclusive structure. What is not linear must be multidimensional *or* round *or* undefinable, but it must remain *non-linear*. I would like to attempt (very broadly) to assert that time could be structured as all of these things, together at a moment and separate at another, as dynamic and adaptive. As is typical of the phenomenological

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[29] Romanou et al.
[30] Romanou et al.

dilemma, what most often hinders our understanding of time is a lacking vocabulary or apparatus to apprehend what is a fundamentally abstracted pillar of our being-in-the-world.

I might consider it, for the sake of introducing a vocabulary of geometry, like a triangle. The triangle consists of three line segments with terminal points, meaning they do not extend beyond the points at which they intersect with their adjacent line segment. If I open this triangle to introduce one more line segment in the same fashion, I've made a square. Two more, a hexagon, two more, an octagon, so on and so forth, until I am looking at a shape composed of millions of tiny line segments which, to the far away eye, looks remarkably like a circle.
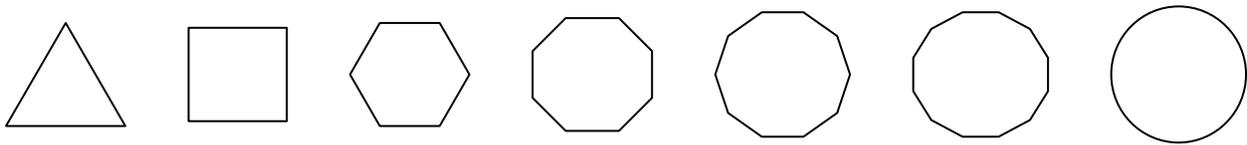
We could imagine the triangle to be a semblance of traditionally oriented timelines: your calendar for the week, your five-year plan, and your bucket list, maybe. These have a clear delineation of start and end. They overlap in some ways, such as the intersections where maybe during your calendared week, you've scheduled an activity from your bucket list. These timelines are not independent of one another, but they can be independently defined by their endpoints—or lack thereof. When you have yet to begin the week, it is clear it is a future anticipation. But when we zoom in on a timeline like the bucket list, where the terminal endpoints are birth (or more realistically, coming to consciousness) and death, the lines blur: the immediate future might be felt more like the present moment if, for instance, you try to argue that you could skydive or travel the world *later on*, during a future that you understand as further away from your present moment.

Heidegger explains that the being-in-the-world aspect of temporality is that it will always be a being-*toward-death*.[31] This is the third dimension I seek to add to the geometric analogy. If the triangle becomes a pyramid, then maybe the point is that all temporality for human beings works toward death. But I want to return to the purpose of progressing the polygon model: our experience, as explained in prior chapters, is wrapped up in the constitution of the world, with subject as object and vice versa, and with much of our experience determined by perceptions that are closely attached to emergent moods as well as intersubjective productions of ideas. This complication means that we all are occupied by so much more than just one timeline. We are more than our birth and our death, and we know this because we lead exceedingly convoluted lives in between those two points; lives which are based within and around other subjects' timelines, which exist on the broader scale of genealogy, the smaller scale of the cosmos, and the everyday scale of having a birthday every 365 days.

This line of reasoning in this particular vocabulary seems to demonstrate a temporality that does not necessitate defined binaries or concise definition. Much like these illustrations, we have experienced time as explicitly linear (a busy week with a deadline before the weekend) and as implicitly *non*linear (a long conversation with a person you love). The way we apprehend these moments and their temporality changes given any number of factors, but the point remains that while there is more than a tripartite past, present, and future, those categories are still at play even when they find themselves braided together, taken apart, or turned into a circle of a million moments that may never repeat, but that will find their parallels.

The idea of the tipping point finds itself in a similar structure, and this is why I find the polygon model effective; this is an epoch of polycrisis, of one catastrophic event that will

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[31] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 279.

constantly trigger at least two others, even when they seem insignificant to someone for the present moment. They will go on for different periods of time, but they will overlap, coexist, and affect one another. Nothing that occupies a role in the climate crisis exists in a vacuum, and neither do our phenomenological encounters with them.

Similarly to the ecological tipping point, being-toward-death reaches for its own tipping point: a being-toward-*extinction*. Where do we find our limit, our one that becomes two and four? As climate coalitions and operations to undo our activity on the planet come to the forefront, we frequently encounter setbacks, obstacles that hinder the progress many of them seek to make. As this sense of urgency tears at the fabric of our being-in-the-world, we encroach on the death not only of ourselves, our peers, but the death of our entire species as a real possibility of future orientation. To make this move only furthers the profound reforming of temporality the way we used to conceive of it.

The analysis of temporality reveals that our experience of time—traditionally conceived as a linear progression of past, present, and future—is being radically reshaped by the pervasive influence of the climate crisis. The idea of dwelling provides a rich framework for understanding how eco-anxiety and environmental degradation disrupt our temporal horizons, infusing even mundane objects like a mug with layers of historical and future responsibility. This reconfiguration forces us to consider a more dynamic and multidimensional perspective that acknowledges the profound, cyclical intersection between our lived past, the pressures of the present, and the uncertainties of the future, all the way to the level of being-toward-extinction instead of being-toward-death.

PLACE & SPACE

NATURE AS MALLEABLE

Despite the word, "nature" is an idea that frustrates any singular signifier. It is an idea abstract enough that its conception varies from person to person, based largely on their own positioning geographically in the world. If someone asked me what symbol or sign came to mind when I think of nature, I would describe a forest of trees found in the northeastern United States, because that is where I grew up and the context in which I most often encountered nature. For

someone growing up in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, nature is most closely associated with a tropical savanna that looks more like a grassland than a forest.

In a way that is more concrete, and yet parallel, to that of mood, physical space and its components largely inform the backdrop upon which perception takes place. This is why the upheaval of such a space yields such a strong bearing on not only the perception itself, but the *way* it is perceived. When my imagining of nature, my Pennsylvanian forest, has been burnt to the ground in a forest fire, what is left for me to imagine is now only that: imagination. The loss of such a critical aspect of experience goes far beyond damages or cleanup efforts. If the world and our livelihoods were theatrical performances, the stage would have just dropped out from underneath us. If our being-in-the-world is necessarily precluded by a world—that which is not inherently defined by geographical space but which certainly includes it—then we have lost the very axis upon which our experience depends.

Comparisons between Husserl and Heidegger are effective in developing a better sense of how climate crisis impacts and is impacted by place and space. Before that, however, I want to clarify that the use of both place and space as distinctive and yet categorically entwined is a choice made with accuracy of vocabulary in mind. By asserting two discrete ideas here, I acknowledge that historically, there has been a conceptual conflation between the two, and that both possess distinctive qualities from one another. Place, considered by several more contemporary phenomenologists to be too limiting a descriptor for the phenomenon of spatiality, is still hugely representative of the physical grounding we exist within and upon. Space attempts to move further, encapsulating a physical atmosphere in addition to the physical grounding, but it often becomes overly abstracted, taking away the meaningfully tangible elements of literal

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positioning in the world. Thus, space and place together compose a broader base than simply one or the other.

HUSSERL, LIFEWORLD

Husserl continued to emphasize pre-reflective experience as the foundation of his theory of place and space, which he calls *lebenswelt* (lifeworld).[32] This lifeworld is a space of immediate experience, unprocessed and unreflected upon. This is the very setting wherein perception occurs. Lifeworld acts as the setting for intersubjective activity, meaning-making, and understanding. It includes cultural contexts as well as social and personal ones, allowing it to shape perception by virtue of the formative atmosphere it creates. For instance, for me to conceive of *nature* in a meaningful way, I must assign some significance to the symbols making up the word, the letters and phonemes that dictate something to me through some socially constructed system of grammar and reason. After that, or rather simultaneously, I will take into account my prior associations with the word. People usually said "nature" to me when we were surrounded by trees, birds, shrubs, and chipmunks, engaging in activities like hiking or camping, so I feel a rather socially and culturally informed sense of confidence when I assert the same association at a different moment. Husserl says that all these signifiers and meaning-makers that are at work in my consciousness are not only based on the places and spaces I correlate them with, but are in fact also constitutive of those places to begin with.[33] Nature as a unified idea of a forest is a construction of intersubjective activity and conversation. If something somewhere along the line had altered it, *nature* could just as easily have been representative only of the rocks on the ground while the flora and fauna around it were instead considered their own urban

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[32] Husserl et al., *General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*.
[33] Husserl et al., General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology.

civilizations and tiny cities. This example is to identify that our ideas are formulated *through* our perceptions, but they are also constructed *by* them, as well. We are both the initiators and the recipients who negotiate meaning and establish social norms, all because of our relationship to space and place.

If we take Husserl's lifeworld seriously, what happens when we factor in a crisis that so viscerally affects place and space? If this lifeworld is so intrinsically linked with our own social and cultural constructions, what does its upheaval disclose? Once again, we are left without a pillar of critical support. If the idea of climate instills political controversy before nature, death before growth, and instability where there once was a concept of—literally—-ground, anchor, stability and unyielding stagnation, then the constructions that have emerged from past conceptions of climate are thrown into uncertainty and disarray. The very basis of the symbol of "that which is unchanging" has not only become changed, but is continually reacting in violent and erratic protest to the role of the human race on its surface (and below it as well).

What then does nature become in our new lifeworld, hindered by climate change, pollution, and an all too rapid erasure of biomes that predate the *Homo sapien* by tens of thousands of years? If nature truly held the status of (at least one of) our most historically reliable constants, how does social and contextual structure amend itself around the development of nature as perhaps a foe? We can look to those who were born and raised with little perceived impact from "nature" to seek a possible path. If nature, to the young New Yorker, has been internalized as Central Park (made by man, and thus an anthropocentric rendition of nature to begin with) and the grass that grows between the sidewalk cracks against the city's will, then nature's upheaval doesn't seem to have much bearing on the day-to-day pavements and skyscrapers of the city.

But until the young New Yorker thinks of taking a day trip to Niagara Falls only to be denied entry because flooding from the glacial melts has brought the water level too high for public safety, the perception of nature as tilted or upended may not consciously land. This isn't to say one must occupy a certain kind of space to understand it, but instead to point out that the Husserlian constitution of things as a result of *lebenswelt* is contingent upon a profound understanding of the place and space at hand and immediately available. Similarly, if I were on Mars and something were awry, I probably wouldn't notice as easily because I do not make a habit of traveling to Mars.

So then maybe what happens to a devastated lifeworld is an undoing of long held ideas and conceptions. As the Earth begins to embody uncertainty as opposed to stability, so too must our perceptions as a result. It seems as though there may be a sort of *firstness* to this experience: one in which Husserl's lifeworld is no longer as equally distributed between the cycle of us constituting the lifeworld which then constitutes us. Now, perhaps the lifeworld has managed to come "first," in a purely phenomenological sense where we as human beings did not have the wherewithal to register these changes as they were happening. Because we have historically taken the lifeworld as stable, we have taken it for granted, and in so doing, we have been slow on the uptake of the consequences of our own activity. Only as the outcomes of this changed lifeworld have come to affect us and our daily lives have we begun to understand the world as not-how-we-conceived. So while this lifeworld was our doing—re: industrialization, imperialism, and globalization—the lacking perception around this "doing" has made it so that the cycle of constitution has almost reversed itself. We are at the whims of the lifeworld more than we are the asserters of its conceptualization.

Because using teleological reasoning, it does not matter whether we think of the wildfire as a hot ocean or a giant hearth. If no one is there to talk about it in the first place, then our conceptualizations seem to come second to the fire's will. We need not generalize to a point of doom, but it bears arguing that the meanings we negotiate truly can only go as far as we ourselves are able to. This is where I find Heidegger's notions of dwelling to be informative in finding a way forward from this disorientation.

HEIDEGGER, DWELLING

Heidegger maintains a similar constitutive property about space, declaring that space is not an objective or external repository for our experiences, but that it is *revealed through* our experiences. He generally abides by a similar template as Husserl on the matter, contending that our comprehension of space is inherently linked to our activities, the meanings we attribute to our environment, and the intersubjective relationships that emerge therein.[34] What he adds to the discourse is the idea of dwelling: a sense of being at home in the world.[35] This phenomenon of homeness is critical in this discussion, because what point is there in discussing feelings of safety or danger without the stake of a home to lose? Survival can work as a motivating tool to understand spatial consequences of climate crisis, but what would be much richer in analyzing that recognition is a sense of belonging, of warmth, or of love for some space or some thing. This feeling of intimate belonging-to is altogether beyond vocabulary and inexorably familiar.

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[34] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 251.

[35] Heidegger, Martin. "Building, Dwelling, Thinking." In *Poetry, Language, Thought*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001. Heidegger details several iterations of dwelling as being defined by Being. As this thesis pertains predominantly to being-in-the-world as distinct from Being, I am using the elements of this essay which concern more phenomenological ideas than ontological ones to try and place climate crisis within these parameters.

Heidegger places dwelling in his theory of the fourfold, which marks the intersection between Earth, Sky, Divinities, and Mortals. The Earth is the "serving bearer," or the vessel through which all exists, and it implicates all four concepts without our conscious awareness of it. We cannot think of the one without necessarily taking into account the others, if not by inclusion than by contrast. The Sky, always and already considered to be above the Earth, is "the year's seasons and their changes, the light and dusk of day, the gloom and glow of night," and it also implicates the other three concepts.[36] The Divinities "are the beckoning messengers of the godhead." They refer to aspects of wonder, mysticism, and sacred belief, and they, too, imply the other three concepts. Finally, we are the Mortals, because our death defines our finitude relative to the other three concepts.[37] The interrelation of all four of these dictates the characteristics of dwelling that make it so relevant to this discussion. This profuse intertwining that is inescapable by any one of the four helps us explain why even the New Yorker, despite her suspension from nature as we conceive of it, can still sense the looming danger in the atmosphere instead of on the ground.

This is also why dwelling is critically distinctive from one structure or building, as Heidegger denotes: "Even when mortals turn 'inward,' taking stock of themselves, they do not leave behind their belonging to the fourfold. When, as we say, we come to our senses and reflect on ourselves, we come back to ourselves from things without ever abandoning our stay among things."[38] Dwelling can go on without a singular physical checkpoint. And yet, we cannot ever

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[36] "Building, Dwelling, Thinking."

[37] "Building, Dwelling, Thinking."

[38] "Building, Dwelling, Thinking." Heidegger contends that authentic dwelling is at the very heart of what it means to be human. Rather than simply occupying space, he argues that "dwelling" involves a thoughtful, reflective engagement with our environment—a way of being that acknowledges our finitude and our responsibility toward the world. In his essay *Building Dwelling Thinking*, Heidegger suggests that mortals must learn to dwell in a manner that honors the natural, cultural, and existential dimensions of their surroundings, rather than reducing them to mere resources or backdrops for modern technology. This

truly leave behind our physical and spatial surroundings—we will always return *to things*. Our mortal nature is always imbricated in Earth, Sky, and Divinities for Heidegger. This is why when space and place become unstable in a way they should not be, in a way caused abruptly and forcibly by our own activities, the sense of belonging that we used to feel is betrayed. The divide between us and space is not an abstract one. A more apt visual might be that of a necrotic limb. We have steadily relied on that limb as a quintessential part of our being, but we have taken it for granted. It is difficult to imagine living with one less limb when you have always had four to begin with, but this is what makes it all the more devastating when it slowly begins to fail. The urge is to say, *the rest of me is still working, so why wouldn't you be?* We must have space and place to go on with our being-in-the-world, and if our other systems—our cultures, our technologies, our intersubjective developments—are operative, why is this limb dying? But the most critical aspect of this visual is that it itself puts the human at the center. The rectification of this is to invert the role. If we are one limb of the Earth's, we have become necrotic, and we are spreading. The Earth's own systems were perfectly operative before we began to industrialize and nuclearize. Now, our sense of dwelling has also been encroached upon by that necrosis.

The relationship we had with the Earth has been bastardized in this way, and it creates a rupture in our understanding of the spaces we exist in. Is the new building on campus the result of further alienation from the Earth? How many trees were cut, how much water and electricity used, how much carbon dioxide emitted, to create a building that serves the same functionality as the other ten buildings constructed before it? As we further internalize these questions, they arise with more frequency, disclosing a new kind of being-in-the-world where space becomes tenuous.

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kind of dwelling, he argues, is essential for revealing the true meaning of being and for sustaining a genuine, poetic relationship with the world.

This analysis of how place and space have evolved from traditional notions of lifeworld and dwelling shows us a new way to understand the climate crisis, as something which has the power to fundamentally untether experiences which have always been tethered. Even when our conceptions of nature are disclosed differently, there still used to exist a reliability that has now been troubled. The desert will bounce back from the drought, the forest will regrow after the fire—these are not givens anymore. Climate crisis has amended the way nature is constituted by us, placing nature itself at the forefront regardless of whether or not we, the mortals, choose to recognize or act on it. Place and space have been changed to such an extreme by our own activities that as geography collapses, floods rage, and the atmosphere heats, we have no choice but to live in the consequences of that activity. And this, above all, makes our rendering of place and space even more anthropocentric, because we are the ones who abused it to this point. Lifeworld will now always include a degree of *us,* not in a traditional sense where we are one of the many species and things belonging to it, but where we are the weapon which has maimed and exploited it to this point. As the climate crisis accelerates and transforms our environments and our long-held meanings are destabilized, we must reimagine our relationships with the places and spaces we call home. This critical juncture not only exposes the fragility and destruction of our ecological constructs, but it also moves us toward a deeper dialogue on what it might mean to rebuild and sustain an intersubjectively-informed lifeworld, where the balance of the fourfold is to some degree restored.

INTERSUBJECTIVITY

You're on a first date in a diner, looking for a read on the person across the table from you. You've weighed a plethora of factors already in considering their merit, starting with an assessment of your friendship with the friend who set you up, continuing with a judgment on where the date chose to take you, and finally concluding with an evaluation of the person themselves. You understand them to be their own subject, an agent capable of their own decision-making and reasoning, despite the fact that they are currently unfamiliar to you. This is why, moments later when your beverages arrive with paper straws in them and your date's face takes on a look of disgust before they begin a tirade about how paper straws are stupid and plastic actually isn't even that bad for the environment, your previous judgments are overruled.

Something about your being-in-the-world has just aligned your date with the role of *foe*. Maybe you can't immediately pinpoint why, or maybe you can. Either way, the immediate response is informed by an emergence of the same blame or responsibility you have taken on yourself at some point or another. There is an instinct around this particular topic of conversation wherein you pay closer attention, focus more intently and consciously, to try and assess if this person is part of the problem of climate crisis, or part of the solution. In this instance, given your unfamiliarity with this person, all future perceptions for the foreseeable future may have just taken on a tint of unease at the blatant display of uncaring for the planet you both reside on.

Climate crisis shades the way we understand others' agency. If an object in climate crisis discloses a backstory, then an agent discloses a motive, or an ethical standpoint, through a

moment as trivial as a facial expression. This agent now embodies *either* problem *or* solution in a way that might have little to do with actual discussions of climate change, and more to do with what kind of car they drive, where they go shopping, and how often they recycle their trash. The mood of crisis is disclosed through agency in this way: your date has taken this mood and amplified it in a way that alienates you in your concern over the crisis. You are alone in this moment as Someone Trying to Help, while your date has disclosed themselves as Someone Who Does Not Care. In other instances, perhaps where you speak to a friend who feels similarly to you, the mood of crisis still emerges, but this time as something shaded by the knowledge that you have a collaborator or a communal comprehension of this mood as one of crisis. Mood has leaked into our perceptions, dictating the direction of our intersubjective experience. The foundation where these interactions between subjects occur will always dynamically shape the end result of them, whether that be a friend or foe assessment or a will-you or will-you-not see them again. The mood of anxiety that emerges from our being-in-the-world colors our experience, and if that experience is specifically of another agent, then the way we come to understand them *as* someone with agency and as a subject upon whom we can assert judgment in a meaningful way is changed by the very mood from where it emerged.

There is more to intersubjectivity in crisis than agency that now denotes friend or foe, however. Merleau-Ponty upholds his theory of embodied experience in this realm as well, arguing that intersubjective engagement is foundational to the constitution of the social world, as it allows for a shared experience of reality. If we are essential in the constitution of this world and our being-in-it, then intersubjectivity accounts for the social contracts, the agreements and fights, the norms and customs, the cultures and the languages that comprise the majority of our lived experience. Given the degree of importance around these relationships and their emergent

concepts, it follows that something as literally earth-shattering as the climate crisis would throw these structures into struggle.

To be clear, people will disagree. They will love each other and hate each other and not care about one another. The difference denoted here by this crisis is an existential level of apathy or unwillingness to take up a stance for the protection of the planet upon which we as a species subsist and build our lives. This is the stance of the environmental advocate and the scientist. The other side of this argument, the climate denier, exists in a world of ignorance which is likely easier to stomach, but which, even for them, will only yield more turmoil from the fractured intersubjective experiences they will conduct. Relatives will be cut off from one another, communities will be disrupted—and it will likely go beyond the climate crisis, itself. Many struggle to empathize with that which is unlike themselves, in this case, a forest full of endangered animals or a wind current that now, blowing the wrong direction, divides schools of fish in the ocean. But for the many who have internalized and empathized with this experience of crisis in all its urgency, there are profound complexities that go hand in hand with it that are also implicated in someone's perceived apathy. In the political postscript of this thesis, I will delve into the many interconnected elements of social situatedness and the climate crisis. But in terms of the intersubjective constitution of being-in-the-world, if embodied interaction is how we come to a mutual understanding that *transcends* intellectual comprehension, then how do we engage as subjects with other subjects who, despite maybe having gone through the same ecological disaster, refuse to engage reciprocally?

This is why grasping how shared perceptions and communal understandings influence our collective response to the climate crisis is such a key point to this phenomenological situating. Merleau-Ponty finds that perception itself is inherently intersubjective, as people

collaborate in order to create social structures and to literally *make* sense.[39] But the critical word

here is collaborate. Disagreement and denial are very differently accessed activities: denial

completely removes any possibility of collaboration or disagreement in the first place.

Disagreement is to perceive some thing and to take up different stances on it, but it is

fundamentally the same thing you are perceiving. Denial, on the other hand, fully refuses to

acknowledge that thing as a thing at all. The climate change denier says to climate advocates that

they are concerned about a phenomenon that, in fact, simply is not occurring at all. This odd

form of gaslighting makes it exceedingly difficult to find an angle for collective action toward

fixing this climate crisis, because you truly cannot argue about something with someone who

will not acknowledge its existence; the argument will never get past the dissonance in

perception.

Intersubjective collective action is also largely impacted at levels beyond the individual

and their conversation with another individual. Social norms around environmental sustainability

hugely dictate the degree of reality and the degree of severity that people take up with the

climate crisis, and education often compounds those ideologies. Societies that have encountered

more environmental catastrophe or scarcity tend to have a more ingrained understanding of long

term sustainability practices, whereas societies that reap more benefits from industrial

development are much more likely to address climate change as up for debate or a hoax.

Socially, the strain presented by this intersubjective dissonance has fractured, and will

continue to fracture, communities, relationships, and families. You and that friend-of-a-friend

will not be going on a second date, and frankly, you might now be questioning your friend's

judgment as well. Aside from the setback this poses for environmental activism and advocates

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[39] Merleau-Ponty and Smith, *Phenomenology of Perception*.

for sustainability, it poses an even more intensive setback for the shared experience of people as it constitutes our being-in-the-world. If we lose each other in this process, how can we progress?

POLITICAL POSTSCRIPT

THOUGHTS ON THE MATTER

If we're discussing climate change, what immediately comes to mind for me is an intense division in generational perceptions of the same issue. If I'm speaking to my peers, there is not a question of climate change as a possibly nonexistent phenomenon—there is certainty of its reality, followed immediately by mixtures of concern, fear, anger, and disempowerment. This is to say that alternatively, speaking about the experience of this issue with older generations—generally beginning around Generation X and upwards towards the Baby Boomers—this phenomenon is treated as a boogeyman for many. Climate change is treated almost like an apparition: some believe, but even they acknowledge the nonconformity and unorthodox nature of that belief, ultimately discrediting the phenomenon by allowing a reality to exist for the "normal body" of nonbelievers wherein climate change is a hoax, a misunderstanding, or a wokeist claim to ruin empires of nonrenewable fuel sources.

It is also critical to further distinguish the perception of climate change as a phenomenon beyond age using frameworks of intersectionality, particularly regarding where the impacts fall and how the consequences are felt by the masses. We have seen the gentrification, redlining, and policy choices that ultimately leave working class or impoverished communities of color in regions of heavy air and water pollution, intense and unpredictable weather disasters, and food deserts. This is all to say that in engaging with climate change as a phenomenon, we are situating several realities at once. A metric from the Global Footprint Network tells us how many resources one individual ought to be using per year. A person using three times the number of

resources has an entirely different perception and interaction with the concept of climate change than does a person who uses less than the resources they should have.

Friends have shared that their courses related to medicine, business, and law have begun to include ecological data on climate change, not only for the optics of caring for the planet, but because the data they use has overtly shifted as a result. One friend of mine shared that she, a diligent subscriber to the Patagonia listserv, noted that the extremely popular and eco-conscious brand has seen a significant reduction in the sale of winter coats globally—because on the whole, people who are in a position to purchase a new coat no longer have a need for one, given that winters have not been as cold on average. Similarly, according to the same friend, Patagonia began marketing shorts and summer wear in February as opposed to their usual April releases.

WHAT DO WE DO WITH THIS?

The nihilist would argue we're already well on our way to the very doom that has permeated our being-in-the-world: if we take tipping points and poor policy choices seriously, there seems to be little motivation to manage the crisis in the first place. I am not with the nihilist, although I understand the urge and where it emerges from. Despair, as far as emotions go, seems the one that most readily takes from the ease of being-in-the-world. It leaves a sense of maladroit unbelonging to the very world, the very body, in which you reside. As this phenomenology of crisis becomes a default for many, the goal then becomes finding a way through to what is likely an altogether new sense of belonging.

The complication with this goal, beyond innumerable obstacles in the realm of environmental science, is the obstacles posed by our social, historical, and political entanglements. As the activity that creates the climate crisis is the very same activity upon which entire economies and social orders lie, it is clear that any move to undo or rectify this crisis will be hard won from those who benefit in the short term

from these activities (and it will only be the short term, given the rate at which climate crisis has exponentially increased).

Similarly, intersectional outcomes of capitalism make it so that the fullest impact of ecological disasters is felt for marginalized communities, often without the adequate resources to recover entirely before the next catastrophe. Consider the town regularly hit by a hurricane. These hurricanes have been getting more extreme and unpredictable. Maybe this town used to be equipped with customs like boarding up their homes and gathering extra food to keep in shelters, but now, with little warning for the storms that come and even less warning for their severity, things like aid, infrastructure, and communication are placed in even worse positions by a lacking governmental response based on an unwillingness to acknowledge the reality of the situation. I hope to render the invisible elements of this phenomenon visible. The implicit must be made explicit in order to work through the climate crisis.

The foremost conclusions we can draw from a phenomenological understanding of the climate crisis will not do justice to the entire phenomena of climate change. Phenomenology strikes from a point of very specifically human, anthropocentric experience. In trying to track the rerouting of our relationship with the Earth and its ecology by treating it as a subject, by addressing it with care, by reconsidering temporality and decentering the human from this narrative to try and fix the problem, we often do not consider that although Earth may heat us to the point of extinction, the planet itself will likely go on in some way. The planet, a combination of magma, phytoplankton, crust, insects, and plantlife, will continue to change and adapt, regardless of whether we can be found on its surface or not. In this there is a kind of anthropologic cycle where the truth of our efforts in "saving the planet" has much more to do with "saving us" than with a desire to see the planet go on, because even covered in ash and drowning in seawater, it will go on. I do however find this to be a reasonable instinct. The preservation of our species is a worthwhile endeavor, it is merely worth pointing out the rhetoric used to defend larger scale movements to improve climate change.

CONCLUSION

What I find most critical about this project is the amplification of what I consider to be a profound sense of emergency. Phenomenology gives us an insight into how this experience of climate crisis has fundamentally changed *us*—and in a world driven by anthropocentrism, it is my hope that in identifying the effects of this crisis on our own comportment, we might find a way to get closer to a unified movement of intersubjective experience that could constitute driven action toward a more secure being-in-the-world than the one we currently occupy. Addressing this crisis from phenomenological sites of import has yielded several truths regarding how contingent our understanding of being-in-the-world is on the stability of that thing which we refer to as *a world.* As mentioned, "world" need not apply only to physical or geographical space, but it most certainly does include it. Our very conceptions of the way we can be are rooted in ideas of how the Earth operates, as a point of stagnant reliability upon which we have agency to engage with our cohabitants.

Perception will always be at the forefront of experience, but as our capacity to perceive changes or as the modality with which we understand it to function becomes strained, our ability to rely on perception as a meaningful signifier of experience becomes more uncertain. The reality that we constitute out of intersubjective experience may not align as readily with others as it used to, especially if my reality sees the world in crisis and someone else's, somehow, does not. The way I occupy space and time will be fundamentally at odds with the experience of the climate denier who, in spite of the mood of panic or maybe in ignorance of it, remains a facade of security through this crisis. They seem to feel as though this crisis will at the very least have no real bearing on their being-in-the-world, and so what would be the use in expending energy trying to fix something that—for them—is not broken?

As we have concluded, however, the dilemma with this ignorance is the isolating factor which promises a lack of community, and thus a lacking constitution of the social and cultural productions and benefits that tend to make being-in-the-world worth doing at all. The relationships between all of these phenomenological sites are deeply intertwined, and as they inform our being-in-the-world and as we have explored their interconnection, we have established their irreducibility in the context of climate crisis. No one site belongs to the other. They all engage in different ways, altering one another and influencing the fabric of our world.

We have analyzed how phenomenology has successfully and unsuccessfully tended to these crises. As we have entered this Anthropocene, newer and bigger and more unorthodox developments have made their way into our being-in-the-world, whether that be technology or the natural disasters that emerge as its consequence. By working to unearth these phenomenological gaps or upheavals, we have disclosed a different and more frightening recognition of the implications of this crisis. Reading data can be impactful in its own right. But concretely pointing to experience as something that has fundamentally changed, as something which has pulled and wrinkled and stressed the fabric of our being-in-the-world, signals an alarm for human beings as a whole entity.

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