

# Distant yet so close

## Artistic inquiries into climate change research

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smiles & wrinkles

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HADRIAN

Concern

overexposure

# Distances to climate change research

Why do so many people struggle to engage with the climate crisis despite the overwhelming scientific evidence? According to Construal Level Theory<sup>1</sup>, the greater the perceived distance — whether temporal, spatial, social, or hypothetical — the more abstractly people tend to think about an issue. Climate change is often perceived as a distant threat, affecting future generations, faraway places or communities unlike our own, while in reality, it is already impacting us all — and in particular marginalized groups and communities — and posing a serious threat to the stability and existence of our societies.

Climate change research raises a dilemma here. The majority of work in this field focuses on quantifying phenomena, impacts or future scenarios. Such an approach is valuable in enabling us to adopt a more rational stance on this issue. However, as historian of science Theodore Porter suggested that “quantification is a technology of distance”, positioning the producers and receivers of data in a disembodied “view from nowhere” and creating a divide between dry, distanced facts and the relationality to climate change, non-human entities and materiality that is necessary to address the issue. Timothy Morton further suggests that merely presenting “ecological facts” cannot be the key to addressing climate change<sup>2</sup>. Instead, he argues that truly ecological thinking requires a radical reconfiguration of our relationship with the world—one that deepens embodiment, emotion, and lived experience. The question then arises: how can we convey facts derived from a “view from nowhere” while also communicating the associated emotions and experiences?

Art and science collaborations aim to create space for both practices, encouraging a dynamic conversation and rhetorical interplay between them. This Zine showcases the results of several months of exchange between a group of scientists at the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis and young artists dedicated to applying their creativity to drive change. These artists offered their perspectives on scientific inputs and the exchange process. Sometimes bumpy, the dialogue between arts and science requires time, understanding, openness and trust.

This zine features various contributions that explore the tension between distance and closeness in relation to climate change. Konstantina Hornek invites readers to explore the concept of “solastalgia” through engagement, archiving and mapping trash. Sophie Morelli shares her experience of the 2024 floods in Austria, questioning how we engage with climate disasters both digitally and physically when they affect us directly.

Several contributions in the zine engage with scenario-making, a practice climate scientists use to project and quantify different future—distant—possibilities, aiming to help policymakers and society better design the present. These contributions play with the boundary between scenario and speculation, attempting to make uncertain futures more tangible and feel closer. Biborka Béres presents a sketched installation where “charms” are burnt under different “burning speed” scenarios, materialized through different metal conductivities. Cornelia Dirlmeier questions the uncertainty surrounding distant sea level rise scenarios, drawing parallels with the unpredictability of water flows. Finally, Hannah Imhoff offers an interactive drawing which allows to actively choose a climate change scenario through sensory interaction with water and fire.

These works offer reflections on scientific findings and exchanges, aiming to make climate change feel more resonant and immediate, in an effort to reconfigure our relationship with the world. We hope they will inspire readers to engage with climate change and climate science, and encourage scientists and artists to join forces in order to communicate climate crises more meaningfully and open up new ways of imagining and responding to our changing world.

<sup>1</sup> Trope, Y., & Liberman, N. (2010). Construal-level theory of psychological distance. Psychological review, 117(2), 440.

<sup>2</sup> Porter, T. M. (2020). Trust in numbers: The pursuit of objectivity in science and public life.

<sup>3</sup> Haraway, D. (1988). Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism as a Site of Discourse on the Privilege of Perspective. Feminist Studies, 14, 3-99.

<sup>4</sup> Morton, T. (2018). Being ecological. Mit Press.

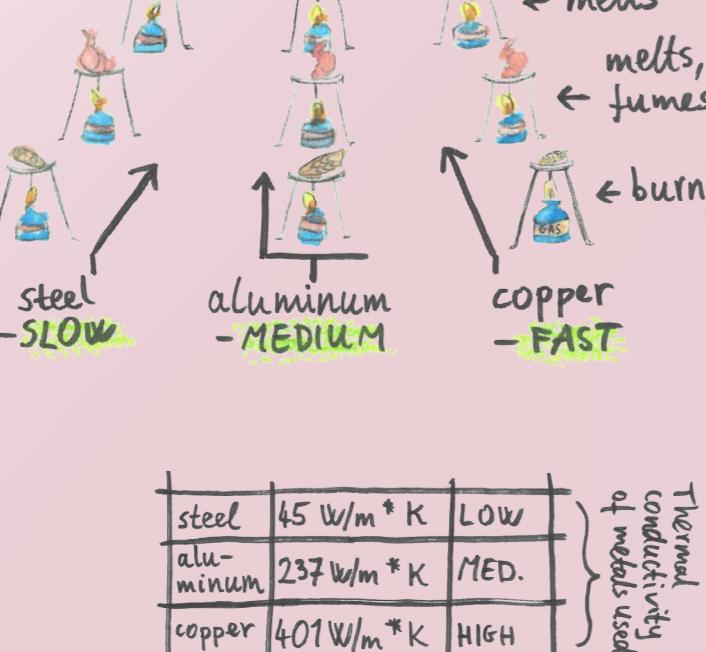


hufvuk



ARTS OF CHANCE

Operating the  
sculpture  
requires the  
cooperation  
of 12 people.



\*Examples include: <https://www.climate-solutions-explorer.eu/> or <https://climate-impact-explorer.climateanalytics.org>

## Introduction by Sophie Morelli written in collaboration with mouse becker



### INVENTORY NO.: encounter I / 23

OBJECT: fragment, shoe sole  
MATERIAL: rubber  
COLOUR: RAL 4012  
PRODUCTION DATE: unknown  
PRODUCTION COMPANY: Nike  
PLACE OF PRODUCTION: unknown  
PLACE OF ENCOUNTER: Golfo di Trieste, Trieste [IT]  
COORDINATES: N 45° 40' 58" / E 13° 45' 07"



### INVENTORY NO.: encounter II / 24

OBJECT: fragment, plastic container  
MATERIAL: polyethylene  
COLOUR: RAL 9016  
PRODUCTION DATE: unknown  
PRODUCTION COMPANY: unknown  
PLACE OF PRODUCTION: unknown  
PLACE OF ENCOUNTER: Großes Moor, Ribnitz [DE]  
COORDINATES: N 54° 26' 70" / E 12° 29' 22"



### INVENTORY NO.: encounter III / 25

OBJECT: fragments, toilet seat, plastic bags  
MATERIAL: polyethylene  
COLOUR: RAL 9010, RAL 1014, RAL 8001  
PRODUCTION DATE: unknown  
PRODUCTION COMPANY: unknown  
PLACE OF PRODUCTION: unknown  
PLACE OF ENCOUNTER: Lambo Meridionale, Milan [IT]  
COORDINATES: N 45° 44' 31" / E 9° 15' 97"



### INVENTORY NO.: encounter VII / 23

OBJECT: e-scooter  
MATERIAL: aluminium, plastic, rubber, lithium-ion battery  
COLOUR: RAL 6027  
PRODUCTION DATE: unknown  
PRODUCTION COMPANY: TIER  
PLACE OF PRODUCTION: unknown  
PLACE OF ENCOUNTER: Donaukanal, Vienna [AT]  
COORDINATES: N 48° 21' 17" / E 16° 37' 94"



### INVENTORY NO.: encounter IV / 23

OBJECT: plastic bottle  
MATERIAL: polyethylene  
COLOUR: RAL 5012  
PRODUCTION DATE: unknown  
PRODUCTION COMPANY: unknown  
PLACE OF PRODUCTION: United Kingdom  
PLACE OF ENCOUNTER: Regent's Canal, London [UK]  
COORDINATES: N 51° 53' 49" / E -0° 12' 45"

## Mapping future fossils, Hornek

### Burn it, Horneit

Take a wet brush and apply water below the graph.

Choose the future scenario by further watering the area below the projection curves of high, intermediate or low climate risks.

Then, set fire to the top right corner and let the flame burn downwards until it is stopped by the wet paper.

You can guide the flame by blowing gently.

Source: Figure SPM.4 (a) Subset of assessed climate outcomes and associated global and regional climate risks. Global surface temperature changes in °C relative to 1850–1900. IPCC (2023).

Navigating through the archive of the Nordico Stadtmuseum Linz, I found pictures documenting the history of flooding on the Danube. One in particular reminds me of the view I am experiencing from the university window these days. The picture was taken in 1965 and portrays children facing the river. Today, people are standing in the same place, also watching the river flood. The children in the picture are turned away, their faces directed toward the water. What do their faces express – surprise, fear, curiosity? I can't answer lies in our imagination, but I can see and interpret the expressions of the people today. Some are excited, others are nervous, anxious, and others seem empty, happy, or resigned, with a latent emotion in their gaze that I can't put into words.

I watch the river from the window of the university. The landscape seems different, many barricades have appeared near the river. When I observe the stream, I use specific objects as a kind of orientation to understand how high the water level is: a piece of wood, a shield, a tree. I observe them – some disappear sometimes and reappear out of the water. These days, I haven't seen the piece of wood at all. The pedestrian street is also flooded. The whole atmosphere of the city is different. The river is more present, stretching its banks. I feel somehow closer. The water is submerging the landscape; the beach hides under the water. How does land disappear and reappear from the water? I also take come pictures from a muddy surface. The water left its traces – it's visible how far it explored leaving abstract drawings, textures and strange shapes. What did the water want to communicate to us with these imprints?

It's been raining for days. Looking out of the window, everything is wet; the urban landscape is grey and leaking. Sipping a hot tea, I start scrolling through my phone. The river levels are rising. The Danube is flooding. I see pictures of people playing volleyball with water rising up to their knees; water; people building barricades near the beach, water, severe warnings; sandbags; warnings that it is impossible to reach certain places; overbank flow; water. Maybe the river needed more space to breathe and flooded.

Torrential rainfall has continued for days. Observing the river from above, many people approach and interact with it through the lens of a smartphone, taking pictures and videos. How many pictures have been taken during these days? The most common hashtags are #donauhochwasser. Where does all this documentation end up? It probably ends in some virtual space or social media platforms. It seems that everyone is now approaching the river just to have content to post online. The phone has become the tool to interact with this moment of flooding.

Image source: NORDICO Stadtmuseum Linz; Author: Michalek Franz; Title: Brückenkopf Linz, Hochwasser 1965; Date: 11.6.1965; Mixed with photographs of the Danube flood from June 2024.

## Overflooding, Morelli

### Speculative charms, Béres



Source: Adapted from Figure 3.4 (a) from IPCC AR6 Synthesis Report (2023) - Sea level rise: observations and projections 2020–2100, 2150, 2300 (relative to 1900).