

**CLIMATE &
PRECARITY:
AN ESSAY TO BEGIN**

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1. NOW, HOW

The writing and interviews that make up this issue of *The Distance Plan Journal* have been brought together over the latter half of 2015. During those months mainstream media coverage on climate change focused on the lead-up to COP21¹, the twenty-first conference of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).² This was seen by many as a last opportunity for the global community to prevent catastrophic climate change.

We began to write this introduction in the weeks following COP21, when enthusiasm over the largely positive outcome of the agreement, signed by nearly 200 countries, was still in the air. While the atmosphere of hope eclipsed a strong current of doubt about the actual ambition of the agreement, the comprehensive coverage of the occasion meant an unprecedented level of global attention was focused on climate change, and more specifically, on the disparity of its effects upon developed and developing nations. This presence of climate change in popular media aligns with a central aim of *The Distance Plan*: to promote discussion of climate change within the arts. We believe that art should directly engage with the social and political

1 COP: Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

2 Brought into effect in 1994, the UNFCCC's ultimate aim is "preventing 'dangerous' human interference with the climate system." See http://unfccc.int/essential_background/convention/items/6036.php

struggles of our times; it is also an objective of this project to monitor the changes in language and image production around climate change in mainstream culture, as a resource for critical reflection within the arts community.

Over the last year (since the previous issue of this journal) there has been a shift in the public perception of climate change. It is now part of everyday conversation, and we have moved beyond the occasional omen of unsettled weather patterns to consistent reminders of climate disruption at a global scale. As highlighted by the discussions around COP21, the debate seems to have finally accelerated and expanded its concerns. The manner in which we, as writers and artists, engage with climate issues has also shifted. Tracking coverage of climate change in the mass media is one means by which *The Distance Plan* chronicles change.³ In 2014 reporting on climate change peaked with coverage of the People's Climate March preceding Ban Ki-moon's climate summit, and responses to Naomi Klein's *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (2014).

In 2015 the media became even more engaged. *The Guardian* launched its Keep it in the Ground campaign, an editorial commitment towards sustained investigative journalism on climate issues.⁴ Perhaps most significantly, there was a noticeable increase of writing on how climate change is linked to capitalism, and system-produced inequality. For example, Pope Francis's June Encyclical on climate change asserted that climate change is an anthropogenic issue; advocated the rapid conversion of coal, oil, and gas to renewable energy sources; and emphasised that the first victims of the environmental crisis are the poor.⁵

3 An artist's book by Amy Howden-Chapman published by Distance Plan Press, *All the News I Read About Climate Change in 2014*, recorded climate change articles primarily in print versions of newspapers. See also 'Climate Change: A Lexicon', *The Distance Plan* contribution to *Reading Room 7: Risk*, Jon Bywater, Christina Barton, Natasha Conland and Wytan Curnow (eds.), (Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, 2015), 149-156.

4 This initiative also included a partnership with 350.org to lobby the Gates Foundation and the Wellcome Trust (the world's two largest health foundations) to divest from fossil fuel producing companies. *The Guardian* also moved its own £800m from companies invested in coal oil and gas. See <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/series/keep-it-in-the-ground>

5 See Bill McKibben, 'The Pope and the Planet', *New York Review of Books*, 13 August 2015.

Although proceeding slowly, the wider articulation of climate change as a social issue is occurring. Sheila Jasanoff, Professor of Science and Technology Studies at Harvard, has written, “Scientific assessments such as those of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change helped establish climate change as a global phenomenon, but in the process they detached knowledge from meaning. Climate facts arise from impersonal observation whereas meanings emerge from embedded experience.”⁶ Of course, the experience which creates such meaning depends significantly on your situation, and the degree to which you perceive climate change as a threat to your way of life –if only to your patterns of consumption. For example in late 2015 *The New York Times* ran in the style pages the headline ‘Too Warm to be Cool’ and the byline, “For some, climate change is personal: Will they ever get to wear winter clothes again?”⁷ The making of meaning, in this context, is premised on maintenance of the individual’s status quo, at the expense of a larger political picture.

The history of climate change, and weather, as a social issue is explored in Lauren Redniss’ recent graphic novel *Thunder and Lightning: Weather Past, Present, Future* (2014). Reviewer Sadie Stein writes “To think: There was a time when weather was safe! As a non-controversial counterpoint to dinner-table hot buttons like religion and politics, weather has probably played analgesic for generations of families. And then, of course, weather turned into climate, which combined all of the above, and suddenly there was nothing less safe in the world.”⁸ As Redniss defines it in the book, weather is a state of the atmosphere, while climate describes a larger scale or pattern of change—registered through changes in weather. If we are no longer ‘safe’ talking about the weather in everyday conversation, if the climate has become ‘politics’, we need to start talking about why.

6 Sheila Jasanoff, ‘A New Climate for Society’, *Theory, Culture, Society*, 2010, 27:233. doi: 10.1177/0263276409361497 http://www.climateaccess.org/sites/default/files/Jasanoff_A%20New%20Climate%20for%20Society.pdf

7 For full article see: <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/19/fashion/fall-fashion-too-warm-to-be-cool.html>

8 Sadie Stein, review of *Thunder and Lightning: Weather Past, Present, Future* by Lauren Redniss, *New York Times Book Review*, 16 October 2015 http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/18/books/review/thunder-and-lightning-by-lauren-redniss.html?_r=0

2. PRECARIETY & MOBILISATION

We take precarity as a central idea for this issue. Critical theorist Judith Butler sees precarity as the destruction of conditions of livability. In her framework, precarity is a politically induced situation in which certain groups of society are made un-equally vulnerable to livelihood instability, to violence or even death. More commonly, “increased precarity has come to exemplify the neoliberal labour market in developed economies... today’s jobs typically involve more casual working hours, low and stagnant wages, decreasing job protections and widespread insecurity.”⁹

Butler’s recent work has focused on demonstrations against precarity, and austerity measures, as an embodied politics. She writes, “when people are demonstrating about precarity, for instance, it’s not just that they get up and say, ‘We’re against precarity.’ They are also embodied creatures in public space who are calling attention to the embodied character of their lives: this is a body that doesn’t

9 Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, *Inventing the Future: Post capitalism and a world without work* (New York: Verso, 2015), 93.

have shelter, or this is a body that deserves shelter, or this is a body that ought not to be hungry, or this is a body that ought to have some sense of future..."¹⁰ Her point is that while such public demonstrations make a physical statement about rights of free movement and association, at the same time they reveal our susceptibility as individuals, and expose failures of our social, economic and political institutions.¹¹

Precariousness is also what underpins the social contract: we develop structures of interdependency such as welfare institutions in acknowledgment of our inherent precariousness as individuals. While Butler, in common with the contributors to this issue of the journal, recognises that contemporary neoliberal ideology has in many ways depleted the social bonds that mean we might face something like climate change as a collective body, a public, she invokes the power of becoming aware of our mutual dependency. This means looking not only beyond individualism, but across nation-state borders (drawn up largely for the purposes of colonialism),¹² and at ways of visualising and practising this dependency on each other.

Considering precarity, accentuated by neoliberalism, helps to understand the inadequacy of the current political responses to climate change. According to left-accelerationists Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, neoliberalism has been a primary driver of political passivity, forcing people "into increasingly precarious situations and increasingly entrepreneurial inclinations...Given these effects, political mobilization becomes a dream that is perpetually postponed, driven away by the anxieties and pressures of everyday life."¹³

10 See 'Demonstrating Precarity: Vulnerability, Embodiment, and Resistance; Arne de Boever interviews Judith Butler', *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 23 March 2015. <https://lar-viewofbooks.org/interview/demonstrating-precarity-vulnerability-embodiment-resistance>

11 Butler outlines three terms relevant to our discussion. The first is precarisation—a gradual process where policies implemented by governments and performed through economic institutions allow labour to be casualised, social services to be depleted, and the deconstruction of social democracy in favour of a totally entrepreneurial ideology. The second is precarity, which she understands as something experienced subjectively, in which there is an intensified awareness of one's disposability, and this is felt differently by different parts of society. The third is precariousness, a basic state of being—susceptible to injury or harm or deprivation by events outside of our control—which everyone is subject to. See Butler, 'For and against precarity', *e-flux*, 2013 http://www.e-flux.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/7.-Butler_Precarity.pdf and Isabell Lorey, 'Governmental Precarisation', *Eipcp*, 2011 <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0811/lorey/en> for a fuller outline of these terms.

12 See Judith Butler and Gayatri Spivak, *Who sings the nation state?* (Chicago University Press, 2011).

13 Srnicek and Williams, 2015, 64.

This narrowing of political horizons is amplified when the structures of support which define the social state are eroded. With a reduced social welfare state arises the necessity to fight for the most basic needs (steady employment, affordable housing and healthcare). This in turn has led to the conditions for what has been called 'folk politics.' Srnicek and Williams have defined the aims of folk politics as bringing "politics down to the 'human scale' by emphasising temporal, spatial and conceptual immediacy...against the abstraction and inhumanity of capitalism."¹⁴ While this is an understandable response, the scale and complexity of climate change requires political solutions that operate at both local and international levels, including extensively restructuring the global economy. High level policy progress is not achievable through the current 'folk' strategies of the left (occupy, local food movements, 'blockadia').

The fight for basic needs (primarily steady employment) can directly conflict with progressive environmental policies. This is discussed by in this issue by Paul Adler and Ryan Jeffery. Ryan notes that the coal mining industry in West Virginia means that the demand for employment defines the politics of the region, overwhelming any hope of reducing environmental externalities. "Economic concerns come up against environmental concerns, and the debate gets divided into two issues of externalities—it's almost like religion and politics, but under pressure, economic concerns always come first."⁴⁵

14 Srnicek and Williams go on to define these features: "At its heart, folk politics is the guiding intuition that immediacy is always better and often more authentic, with the corollary being a deep suspicion of abstraction and meditation. In terms of temporal immediacy, contemporary folk politics typically remains reactive (responding to actions initiated by corporations and governments, rather than initiating actions); ignores long-term strategic goals in favour of tactics (mobilising around single-issues politics or emphasizing process); prefers practices that are often inherently fleeting (such as occupations and temporary autonomous zones); chooses the familiarity of the past over the unknown of the future (for instance, the repeated dreams of a return to 'good' Keynesian capitalism); and expresses itself as a predilection for the voluntarist and spontaneous over the institutional (as in the romanticisation of rioting and insurrection." See Srnicek and Williams, 2015, 10.

3. POLITICAL CLIMATE

Our proposition is that precarity slows action on climate change, while climate change exacerbates precarity. Moreover, neoliberalism is a form of capitalism which accentuates precarity. The wider issue this raises is whether the climate crisis is even able to be effectively addressed within the system of capitalism.

The range of views about capitalism's ability to adapt to the climate crisis is representative of the political spectrum in general. On the left, contemporary Marxist theorists such as Nancy Fraser argue that capitalism is not self-sustaining, but free rides on background conditions while its "orientation to endless accumulation threatens to destabilize these very conditions of its possibility."¹⁵ These background conditions include social reproduction (a discussion of which has been brought to the fore by feminists), political power, and the environment (as given prominence by eco-socialist thinkers). All three have traditionally been sidelined in Marxist analysis focused on class,

¹⁵ Nancy Fraser, 'Behind Marx's Hidden Abode: For an Expanded Conception of Capitalism', *New Left Review* 86, March/April 2014, 71.

but Fraser regards a critique of their exploitation under capitalism as essential to maintaining Marxism's relevance in future courses charted by the left. This is especially the case when considering ecological conditions, which Fraser identifies as "the natural processes that sustain life," while also "provid[ing] the material inputs for social provisioning."¹⁶

A centre left view is that unconstrained capitalism is both self-destructive and destructive of the natural environment, but that a form of regulated capitalism—unyoked from an economic growth imperative—could be sustainable; in short, a green economy (rather than green growth) is possible. This situation is most closely approximated in the Nordic countries, but even there contradictions are evident, such as Norway's revenue from fossil fuel extraction.

The conventional centrist view is that it is possible to continue capitalism with deft and significant policy change, but that getting global leaders to make those changes is difficult. Such a view is held by Christiana Figueres, the leader of the Secretariat of the UNFCCC, who believes current levels of economic growth can be maintained. In the lead-up to the Paris conference she asked the key question, "What if growth and emissions could be uncoupled?"¹⁷ Figueres is of the view that, "Where capital goes over the next fifteen years is going to decide whether we're actually able to address climate change and what kind of a century we are going to have."¹⁸ She urged all those present in Paris to consider this when deciding on future investments, and to do so publicly.

Though decoupling is now occurring in large Western economies such as Germany, the UK and much of Scandinavia, in many cases this is due to the transference of emissions to developing economies such as China. In some cases where decoupling has occurred without such transference (for example in Denmark's energy sector, through initiatives such as the re-communalisation of power generation¹⁹) it is through government regulation. This points to a poor out-

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Christiana Figueres, as cited by Elizabeth Kolbert 'The Weight of the World,' *The New Yorker*, 24 August 2015 <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/08/24/the-weight-of-the-world>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Diane Cardwelljan, 'Fueled by Danish Ingenuity', *The New York Times*, 18 January 2015, BU1.

look for countries such as the US and New Zealand, characterised by the neoliberal variant of capitalism where wealth polarisation and extensive deregulation have taken place.²⁰ In New Zealand, under the Key Government, a range of public assets including segments of the power sector have been recently privatised, while the government continues to invest in roads more vigorously than public transport infrastructure. Even in light of the the recent Paris agreement, decoupling is unlikely to occur rapidly.

Naomi Klein's *This Changes Everything* reflects a part of the debate around capitalism's capacity to respond to climate change. Her position is that climate change can't be solved within the status quo, as it's a product of the status quo.²¹ Journalist Elizabeth Kolbert criticises Klein for failing to acknowledge that "One reason—perhaps the reason—the West is wealthier than the rest of the world is that it figured out much earlier how to exploit fossil fuels."²²

Reading Klein's book alongside the *Great Transformation*, a text from 1944 by political economist Karl Polanyi, sociologist Paul Adler puts forward an indictment of capitalism *as such* rather than its current dominant neoliberal variant. Adler concludes,

the nature of the capitalist system drives far too many enterprises towards environmentally destructive practices, drives far too few enterprises towards stewardship practices, and ensures that governments will fail to meet the resulting sustainability challenge. My reading of Polanyi suggests that enterprises in a capitalist economy cannot change their environmental practices far or fast enough to avert environmental crisis - neither spontaneously under the influence of wiser corporate leaders, nor pushed by greener consumers.²³

20 For a comprehensive discussion of this, see *Inequality, A New Zealand Crisis*, Max Rashbrooke (ed.), (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2013).

21 Elizabeth Kolbert, 'Can Climate Change Cure Capitalism?', *New York Review of Books*, 4 December 2014 www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2014/dec/04/can-climate-change-cure-capitalism/

22 Ibid.

23 Paul Adler, 'The environmental crisis and its capitalist roots: reading Naomi Klein with Karl Polanyi', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 17 March 2015, doi: 10.1177/000183921557918, 4.

In the face of environmental issues, the market is typically slow to respond. Environmental issues often develop slowly, while research to understand them and develop solutions can take more than a generation, even when the businesses involved are cooperative. Further, resistance to environmental regulation is particularly intense in the case of climate change. An example is Exxon's decade-long denial of original research they'd conducted in the late 1970s which pointed to the implications of burning fossil fuels, all the more disreputable as they withheld information from the public.²⁴ Exxon had a clear incentive not to publicly acknowledge climate change, as it would have cast doubt on their whole business model.²⁵

We believe that the strong capitalist tendency to exploit resources can be constrained by a greater or lesser extent through regulation, but that neoliberalism works against such regulation. Neoliberalism's logic pushes towards a specific image of the economic in which "every human domain and endeavor, along with humans themselves,"²⁶ is transformed. The growth and consumption drives that characterise capitalism, and particularly neoliberal capitalism, have led to the consistent undermining of ecological systems, and token attempts at regulation which have so far failed to reduce global emissions.

24 Bill McKibben, 'What Exxon Knew About Climate Change', *The New Yorker*, 18 September 2015.

25 An analogy for Exxon's resistance to investing in alternative energy production in the face of the developing science might be seen in the case of shipwreckers in the nineteenth century, an industry that was instrumental in lobbying against early weather forecasting because of the profits it reaped from the lack of public information about future weather. In 1869, there were 1,914 shipwrecks in the Great Lakes alone but knowledge about "two major innovations—weather forecasts and storm warnings" was for a time not shared by the British government, because of the power of the salvage lobby, and the policy was not reversed until a scientific and public outcry outmaneuvered the shipwreckers. See Kathryn Schulz, 'Writers in the Storm: How weather went from symbol to science and back again', *The New Yorker*, 23 November 2015 <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/11/23/writers-in-the-storm>.

26 Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2015), 9.

4. DISPLACEMENT AND PLANNING

Much of the recent literature on climate change is focused on population displacement. Both within and across borders, the instances of people having to move because of climate conditions – be those direct, such as soil salination from flooding, or related, such as conflict over increasingly limited territory and water-source insecurity—are growing.²⁷ Once again, this is an issue of inequality—those countries bearing primary responsibility for carbon emissions are at this point less affected, while a dramatic majority of people displaced live in the developing world.

Furthermore, many of those compelled to move do not qualify for refugee status under the terms of the 1951 Refugee Convention, despite the fact that their economic livelihood and wellbeing is severely threatened. In his conversation in this issue, Ezekiel Simperingham, a human rights lawyer, writes about the ‘black hole’ in

²⁷ See for example Henry Fountain, ‘Researchers link Syria conflict to drought caused by climate change’, *The New York Times*, 3 March 2015 http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/03/science/earth/study-links-syria-conflict-to-drought-caused-by-climate-change.html?_r=0.

existing legislation, and about current efforts towards expanding the protection agenda for climate displaced persons. Right now a primary legal requirement for protection under the convention is proof of political persecution as an individual. With climate change however (and particularly in the case of Pacific Island state citizens who have been through the New Zealand justice system seeking refuge on the grounds of climate impacts), individuals are not differentially at risk: the whole country is at risk and so no one individual is entitled to claim protection.

Simperingham points out a key difference between climate displacement and other forms of political persecution, which may arise apparently without warning. He writes, “[with climate change] we’ve got this benefit of hindsight already: we know what areas are at risk, we know what kind of effects are going to hit there...we can preempt what’s going to happen, rather than just being reactionary all the time.” (p.70) More than 150 million people live within one metre of sea level, and here displacement becomes an issue of planning; rather than the usual emergency-aid response to natural disasters, developed countries need to consider known future risk and help build capacity in an enduring way.

Planning is a major focus in the essay co-authored by researchers Veronica Olivotto and Bidy Livesey. Looking at two communities whose homes are threatened by potential or actual disasters related to water—post-quake Christchurch, New Zealand and a river dike in Cali, Columbia—they consider precarity as an issue of human vulnerability, and discuss models of ‘managed retreat’ in such circumstances. In both cases communities have intensively occupied historically swampy, low-lying land, and though the threat is not immediately related to human-caused sea level rise, the fragility of the system makes it particularly sensitive to environmental as well as political changes.

While the political, social and economic contexts are significantly different, Olivotto and Livesey point to parallels in the need to influence human behaviour toward change, rather than relying on technological or infrastructural solutions. In both Cali and Christchurch the disasters have become highly politicised, ‘disasterised’; as the authors write, “climate change is only one of the multiple processes of change that affect people.” (p.83) Successful adaptation to landscapes threatened by water means developing relocation practices that give communities agency in every stage of the process, including their future livelihoods.

Artist John Vea's work *29.09.2009 Tribute to Samoa, American Samoa, and Tonga* (2013) (p.104) is positioned as a statement of solidarity. Made in response to the 2009 earthquake and tsunami that took 190 lives in Samoa, American Samoa and Tonga, the work shows the artist working futilely to put a wall of cinder-blocks between the land and a tumultuous sea at Piha on Auckland's West Coast. It is a powerful tribute to resilience in the face of the 2009 event, and as Nina Tonga has pointed out in her introduction to the work in this publication, it has in subsequent exhibitions become an emblem for the ever-present reality of ecological instability and climate change in the Pacific.

It seems that progress can cover up the past; that we can say, this will be useful and that will not are the opening lines of Anna Livesey's 'Drowned Church' (p.133). The poem pictures the re-emergence of a church (the Temple of Santiago or the Temple of Quechula) in Mexico which has been underwater since 1966, when the valley it occupied was dammed. Recent drought has caused the water level to drop 25 metres. The building which resurfaces to 'uncompromising, engulfing air' cannot be the same, any more than the place into which it arrives is the same. Here the displacement is an effect of human history, as well as changing climate conditions. Precarity, at its most basic level, is not knowing what the future will look like, and having no means to construct its shape.

5. PRECARIETY & IMAGES

The work of Jennifer Teets makes material a largely invisible set of social and biological stresses. Teets is interested in the 'backstory' of matter, its conditioning as both 'natural' and cultural. Working with cheese, an everyday protein inherently in a state of decomposition, Teets presents it as a record of the psychic and physical effects the environment has on living beings—in this case milking goats. One such work, discussed in this journal, is "an effort to make a trace in cheese. A traumatic trace (in cheese form) made from a herd of dairy goats that were afflicted by psychosomatic effects as a consequence of a violent European windstorm that struck France in 2010." (p.126)

Within the frame of this project, the impact of the storm combined with associated events such as the swarms of helicopters surveying the devastation inscribes the cheese produced subsequently "as a micro narrative of climate change impact." (p.134) Teets' broader practice sets out to engage with both speculative and empirical forms of knowledge. The outcome is a proposition of intellectual imagination, a necessary response to problems which are often considered too large in scale, too dense in technical or scientific detail.

Curator Laura Preston—in conversation with Teets in this issue—speaks of ‘abstract thinking’ as a response to states of precarity. She writes, “A key resistant act may be in allowing for indigestible difference, as an offering in response to the consumptive habits and homogeneity of neoliberal ethics.” (p.117) In the context of curatorial work, she writes of the visual image as having performative potential of its own. That is, not as a representation of something else, but as carrying its own subjectivity, and as something in and of the world, defined by the same conditions we are.

Arne De Boever’s text also addresses the limits and instability of the representational image, asking, does the climate need a face in order for us to be able to care about it? Considering the many ways we relate to the image of the face—from the loving maternal face to the philosopher Levinas’ face of ‘the other’, to Francis Bacon’s distorted heads, to non-human faces in *Shrek 2*, and *Alien*—De Boever suggests that the soft-edged anthropomorphism of the ‘mother earth’ image is fraught with more difficult connotations: “That face is not necessarily the smiley face that we can easily inscribe onto planet earth. Earth is not cute. It’s not furry. It doesn’t have big eyes. Earth is not so easily turned into a mother; or it can only be so when the mother is partly scrubbed out, looking a little less ‘motherly’ as a consequence.” (p.60)

The reading of images is always political. Today’s climate science relies on modelling and projections to make clearer the implications of empirical evidence. During a recent residency in Greenland, Icelandic artists Bjarki Bragason and Anna LÍndal became aware of how political bias towards economic opportunity was impacting the scientific discussion around climate change and the way in which modelling was interpreted. While climate change in Greenland is a present reality, the dramatic melting of ice there is seen by some as an opportunity for large-scale extraction of uranium and oil, industries that could provide significant revenue, allowing Greenland to become economically independent of Denmark.

An important element of their project became their participation in the climate change conference Ilulissat Climate Days, using their positions as artists to politicise the context in which the scientific discussions were taking place. Their presentation involved listing the concerns of top business executives recently surveyed—rising taxes, over regulation, social instability, geopolitical uncertainty—emphasising the unacknowledged connection between climate research and extractive capitalism.

All that is solid melts into data (2014), a film by Ryan Jeffery and Boaz Levin (p.43), addresses data centres as the physical embodiments of the digital economy, from high speed trading to cloud computing. Looking at their architectural forms, scale and geographic locations, the film reveals the way these structures are increasingly invisible, increasingly inseparable from both the financial industry and our everyday lives, and increasingly energy-intensive.

A central motif throughout *All that is solid* is images of banality: ubiquitous concrete facades and those same facades viewed on Google Earth. We are shown the intentionally nondescript structures that represent the other side of hyper-branded corporations. The film’s role is as witness to this duality, contextualising the seemingly innocuous buildings with research about their real world operations. The banal images become a means of conveying how difficult it is to ‘see’, let alone critique, how contemporary capitalism functions.

The Distance Plan sees art as having the capacity to give context and coherence to the unfolding events of climate change, entangled as they are in our current system of capitalism. Further, art’s mechanisms (among them images, narrative, intervention and experience) can contribute to articulating political alternatives in which precarity is radically addressed. As such, this journal is both a site for the discussion of art which intersects, often in lateral ways, with climate change research, and a place where such research is considered—like art—to have wide cultural relevance.