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"Glacial Time and Lonely Crowds: The Social Effects of Climate Change as Internet Spectacle"

Grebowicz, Margret

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This paper is part of my larger project to underscore the significance of critical theories of mass society for the environmental humanities. I offer a reading of James Balog's Extreme Ice Survey (EIS), in particular the time-lapse films of glaciers receding, which I argue present a unique example of what Guy Debord calls the "tautological" nature of spectacle, its capacity to serve as its own evidence at the same time as it becomes a mode of relation among people. My questions concern the political potential of the EIS. As the effect of the real created by time-lapse technology locates itself in the optimistic promise of Internet community, what kind of collective relation is produced? My key interlocutors are Timothy Morton, who claims that ecological thinking effects a loss of authentic world, and Jonathan Crary, who argues that late capitalism robs us of shared time, thus precluding the possibility of organized resistance. I argue that, despite the unprecedented challenges faced by the "we" that Balog's project calls to action, the form of sociality produced by the technologies on which the EIS relies has its own political potential. (Text from author's abstract)

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