

Humans as Parasites: A Plea for the Environment
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I created a body of work dealing with the destruction of the environment by human actions; a series of illustrations create an underlying metaphor comparing humans to parasites. Historically, human beings interacted with their surroundings in a caustic manner. The mere presence of humans leech resources and erode the environment in which we live. In my work, I call attention to these pressing issues. The illustrations I created impart snapshots in time that focus on certain detrimental activities, such as: genetic experimentation, strip mining, factory run-off pollution, deforestation, and overpopulation. I encourage the audience to draw parallels between themselves and the characters they see in my work. Using a depiction of a surrealistic world, the illustrations demonstrate the potential effects of certain irresponsible behaviors humans indulge in. The project imagines the results of not treating our surroundings and fellow inhabitants of the planet with care and respect.

I have chosen to depict the illustrations in the format of digital painting, using a Wacom™ tablet. This allowed me to be more clean and precise in the choice of tones and distinction of spaces. Furthermore, the targeted demographic is North Americans between the ages of 20 and 30 years. As a result, digital media acted as a hook, since digital painting as visual medium has become popular in the video game industry. Because the target group recognizes and identifies with the medium, this may make them more susceptible to a persuasive visual argument.

Over the course of the year, my artistic process developed into a succinct method. First, I determined the intended statement, researched the topic, and

found references. Then I developed a series of thumbnail sketches. Next I created a larger drawing and determined the value system and color scheme. In this manner, I performed a self-assessment to determine if the piece was communicating the intended message.

I sought to visually express potential effects of certain actions, such as genetic experimentation, factory pollution, strip mining, deforestation, and overpopulation. Strip mining involves the drilling of a mountain to access coal beds; it can cause contamination of the water supply, the destruction of homes and farms, and the destruction of habitat for wildlife. Strip mining has been a notable problem in East Kentucky whose economy depends highly on the coal industry. In his book, *The politics of environmental reform: controlling Kentucky strip mining*, Marc Landy describes the coal deposits in the Appalachian Mountains; the coal is deposited among layers of sandstone and slate. In order to access the coal, the site must be cleared of vegetation and topsoil. This creates a flat space for the workers and equipment. The excess plant matter is removed by pushing it over the edge of the mountain, affecting the region below the site. As a result, the platform and the area below are much more likely to be affected by erosion and have a higher likelihood of landslides. Furthermore, sedimentation may occur as a result of strip mining. Water drain ways run through excavation sites and accumulate the loose earth and vegetation, which in turn negatively affects the wildlife, and contaminates the drinking water (Landy 17-25).

As a result, I created an illustration depicting a surrealistic representation of strip mining. Please refer to **Figure 1.2**. The figure in the foreground is carrying an immense coin which is representative of the coal garnered from the pursuit of mining. The horse-like creature in the foreground is forced to carry a heavy coin on its back. The scene takes place in what appears to be a desert, it is a wasteland after years of drilling. The landscape, which was once picturesque and mountainous has become flat and dry. Hulking dremmels in the background are drilling into the ground, in search of more coins. The illustration makes use of a yellow, hot tone to emphasize the starkness of the landscape. With this piece, I seek to draw a comparison between emptying our mountains of coal and parasites emptying a host of blood. I am inspired by Hieronymus Bosch's work- *a Dutch painter of the 15th century*. Bosch created surrealistic scenes, often dealing with the theme of human sin and wrongdoing. Like Bosch, I create strange creatures and environments to convey a sense of unease and extend a criticism of human behavior.

Another pressing issue I address in my work is deforestation. According William Boyd, fifteen percent of global greenhouse gases result from deforestation (qtd, in Bosetti 1-12). Forest degradation constitutes a significant loss of organic matter which absorbs carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Through the process of photosynthesis, trees and other plants absorb CO₂ and produce oxygen and carbohydrates. Thus, protecting the forest is an important factor in terms of affecting the climate. For this reason, the UN has been performing negotiations about the possibility of adopting a policy called Reduced

Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD). The current policies in place are called the Marrakesh Accords (established in 2001); these policies put severe restrictions on deforestation in third world countries. However, the restrictions were much less stringent on other 1st world countries such as the United States, Canada, Japan, and Russia. Forest credits acted as a means for those countries to get around the policies, so the results could be improved if changes are made. A proposal from Papua New Guinea suggested that the UN allocate funds to the REDD, and negotiations are to take place in 2012 (Bosetti 1:12). This would be a step in a positive direction. The protection of the forests would yield positive benefits, not only for the reducing carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, but also for maintaining biodiversity and preventing soil erosion.

“Hydra,” depicts deforestation by setting a menacing, six-armed machine at its focal point in the center of the forest. Please refer to **Figure 1.3**. This image is intended to shock and amplify the horror of the action of the machine. Furthermore, the strong vertical lines created by the trees create a sense of entrapment. This piece is informed by the paintings of contemporary artist Malcolm Liepke; I was interested in the expressive brushstrokes and the manner in which he puts down the paint. Like Liepke, I focus the viewer’s attention on certain areas of the painting by rendering them with more precision in certain areas rather than others, and use an anomalous pop of color to create a sense of dynamism. One can perceive the visual connection relating humans to parasites in this image. The ground is the skin, the tree trunks are the hair follicles, and the machine is placed in such a way as to seem to be eating away at the surface

of the skin. This illustration makes an emotional appeal against deforestation through associative imagery.

Next, I created an illustration addressing the issues of overpopulation. According to Steven LeBlanc, humans have engaged in warfare in the past because they reach a breaking point (qtd. in Brand 22). People run out of resources and then are forced to either fight for what's available or starve to death. Times of peace align with times of plenty. For example, LeBlanc mentions the 1300's when Europe's population dropped by a third as a result of the Black Plague. In times of significant population drop, there may be peace in accompaniment. However, if we are faced with climate change and the depletion of resources, it may result in a war or several wars over the food and space that is available. In modern times, only three percent of the global population is killed in wars, so this problem is becoming more and more apparent with a world population of six billion and growing. We need to make changes in accordance with the carrying capacity of our environment, or else suffer the consequences of the depletion of resources (Brand 5:14, 21).

The final illustration, therefore, depicts the effects of overpopulation in the surreal environment. Please refer to **Figure 1.5** to see the image representing overpopulation. The scene is derived from the idea that with excessive numbers of people, resources and space for living are greatly reduced. The scene depicts the average living accommodations barely allowing for a single individual to lay or sit. There is not enough room for them to stand. The building also features a pen area, for exercise, much like the yard in contemporary prison systems. The

people are forced to remain in these terrible living conditions, because there simply are not enough resources to sustain them. In the background, other similar domes emerge from the horizon, showing that this is a global problem, rather than an isolated occurrence.

Once again, the overpopulation illustration carries the metaphor comparing humans to parasites. Parasites depend on a host organism for heat, water, food, and habitat; much in the same way humans rely on the Earth. Reproducing rapidly, the parasite population swells much more quickly than the organism. In the symbiotic relationship, the parasite benefits at the expense of the host.

Through depictions of genetic experimentation, factory pollution, strip mining, deforestation, and overpopulation, I have sought to draw a parallel between humans and parasites. The body of work calls attention to urgent issues, and questions whether the actions we choose will be sustainable in the long-term. Furthermore, the illustrations investigate the possibility of a dark, ominous future as a result of negligence and waste.



Figure 1.1



Figure 1.2



Figure 1.3



Figure 1.4



Figure 1.5

Works Cited

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