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Review: Infowhelm: Environmental Art and Literature in an Age of Data
By Heather Houser

Reviewed by Dawn Lowe-Wincentsen
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When learning to be a writer you often hear, "write what you know." Similarly we create what we see around us when we make art. *Infowhelm: Environmental Art and Literature in an Age of Data* is about environmental information and data informing the artist and writer, and interpreting how that is portrayed in the work. The author describes the book as climate information as representational mode shaping aesthetics and literature through environmental discourse and policy. A particularly poignant example of this from the first chapter (pp. 51-52) is a graphic design showing carbon use data as balls piled in New York City. This type of representation gives a visual perspective to data that might otherwise seem to be abstract numbers.

Further examples include Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior* using a real flood in Mexico as reason for a fictional migration of monarchs in the novel. Another example from the same chapter is Michael Crichton's *State of Fear* where a fictional call for advocacy is based on real climate data. The author uses these as examples in part one of three where the protagonist "comes of mind" to a climate-related mindset. The very detailed analysis continues with other examples and other ways to describe and use true climate data in fiction and art.

Part two looks at the evolution of natural history in art. New naturalism works to manage loss through classification and extending the definition of naturalism. One example given is the art of James Prosek who draws naturalist type drawings with mix and match animals, or even technology. One drawing included was a cock-a-tool -- a cockatoo with a pocket multi-tool for a crest. The act of classifying comes out again as the reader sees how the author has classified the types of data and climate information in the text itself.

The last part looks at the air and sky. An example from the preface of this section is the aerial photography of Fazal Sheikh. The photograph is an aerial view of deforestation in a desert. Clear rows of earth and laid out in a pattern for a future forest to grow where one has not been in the living history of the earth. Part three looks again at loss, and loss of the environment - a theme throughout the text.

Infowhelm brings a depth and analysis of the works presented within the context of environmental information that a consumer of the works may not bring to the experience on their own. Each section and chapter are rich with references and notes outlined at the end of text. Readers should come to this ready for a researched view on art and literature.

The wide range of examples demonstrates not only the immense amount of research involved in the book, but also how climate and information shape so much of the world, especially in the themes of change and loss. As the works analyzed are interpreting and repackaging climate information, consequently is Heather Houser in her interpretation. Therefore, thorough that interpretation the reader does not need prior knowledge or experience with the works discussed.

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