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Paper Title: From information overload to climate anxiety: mountain feelings and figures of excess in early eco-poetics

Information overload is everywhere; who nowadays can say they have never felt overwhelmed by facts, images, opinions, information of all kinds, coming at us relentlessly on our various devices, as digital media continue to expand? In the same period, however, another kind of “overwhelm” has also beset us: climate anxiety, an increased awareness of and concern for the damage to the world’s ecological systems.

These two phenomena – information overload and climate anxiety – are not unconnected; the rise in digital information technology contributes significantly to global warming and environmental damage, while the increased accessibility of information means that more of us than ever are aware of the severe threats to our climate and environment. In both cases, furthermore, we find the idea of excessive stimulus – information that is either quantitatively or qualitatively excessive – which by its sheer scale or force induces a sense of being unable to respond or move on: there is too much to cope with.

This nexus of excess is not just a phenomenon of our current era, however. What we can learn from the feeling of “overwhelm” that people in the past have felt in response both to large environmental phenomena and to human-generated cognitive excess? Late-seventeenth-century written accounts of mountain tourism and travel allow us to elucidate the practices, experiences and contexts of historical “mountain feelings” in order to offer fresh perspectives on our current feelings about nature, knowledge and excess.