As vectors of memory, the contributed objects of A People’s Archive of Sinking and Melting are material traces of locations that may disappear under the impacts of climate change. An ongoing participatory artwork, initiated by Amy Balkin in 2011, the Archive’s collection is both a product of deep time and recent cooperative technologies: its objects flotsam borne on the tides of cumulative forces, human and non-human, industrial and natural, local and global.

Ostensibly opposing preservation with loss, past causes with future effects, the project might be better understood as bearing witness to our present moment, our choices, actions and inactions. Against the profoundly entropic disorder of sinking and melting, the gathering and cataloguing of found objects might seem a small gesture. We could go further and ask what can, or should be, the role of Art in response to the Anthropocene?

To discuss the Archive and address this wider question, I will consider Bernard Stiegler’s concept of the Neganthropocene, the pharmakon, and his mobilisation of art as therapeutics. To be a neganthropic influence, art must do more than simply draw attention to issues and make visible their impacts. It must also work to develop knowledge and model practices required to imagine and make available futures that the Anthropocene blocks. Considered as a performative action, the Archive brings into being a contributory economy of care, attention and shared concern. As such it suggests a role for art that is at once political, ethical, and aesthetic.