

THE DISTANCE PLAN #3 CLIMATE & PRECARITY

7

**CLIMATE
& PRECARIY:
AN ESSAY TO BEGIN**

**AMY HOWDEN-
CHAPMAN
& ABBY CUNNANE**

24

**THOUGHTS ON
INFINITE NEXT**

**BJARKI BRAGASON
& ANNA LINDAL**

40

**CAPITALISM
& ITS LIMITS**

**PAUL ADLER
& RYAN JEFFERY**

57

FACING THE CLIMATE
(ON DIFFICULT
MOTHERS)

ARNE DE BOEVER

104

29.09.2009
TRIBUTE TO SAMOA,
AMERICAN SAMOA,
AND TONGA

JOHN VEA,
ARTIST PAGES
INTRODUCED BY
NINA TONGA

62

CLIMATE
DISPLACEMENT

EZEKIEL
SIMPERINGHAM

116

ANOTHER KIND
OF WE

LAURA PRESTON
& JENNIFER TEETS

82

THE THREAT
OF WATER:
RELOCATION
IN CALI
& CHRISTCHURCH

BIDDY LIVESEY
& VERONICA
OLIVOTTO

133

DROWNED
CHURCH

ANNA LIVESEY

**CLIMATE &
PRECARITY:
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1. NOW, HOW

The writing and interviews that make up this issue of *The Distance Plan Journal* have been brought together over the latter half of 2015. During those months mainstream media coverage on climate change focused on the lead-up to COP21¹, the twenty-first conference of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).² This was seen by many as a last opportunity for the global community to prevent catastrophic climate change.

We began to write this introduction in the weeks following COP21, when enthusiasm over the largely positive outcome of the agreement, signed by nearly 200 countries, was still in the air. While the atmosphere of hope eclipsed a strong current of doubt about the actual ambition of the agreement, the comprehensive coverage of the occasion meant an unprecedented level of global attention was focused on climate change, and more specifically, on the disparity of its effects upon developed and developing nations. This presence of climate change in popular media aligns with a central aim of *The Distance Plan*: to promote discussion of climate change within the arts. We believe that art should directly engage with the social and political

1 COP: Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

2 Brought into effect in 1994, the UNFCCC's ultimate aim is "preventing 'dangerous' human interference with the climate system." See http://unfccc.int/essential_background/convention/items/6036.php

struggles of our times; it is also an objective of this project to monitor the changes in language and image production around climate change in mainstream culture, as a resource for critical reflection within the arts community.

Over the last year (since the previous issue of this journal) there has been a shift in the public perception of climate change. It is now part of everyday conversation, and we have moved beyond the occasional omen of unsettled weather patterns to consistent reminders of climate disruption at a global scale. As highlighted by the discussions around COP21, the debate seems to have finally accelerated and expanded its concerns. The manner in which we, as writers and artists, engage with climate issues has also shifted. Tracking coverage of climate change in the mass media is one means by which *The Distance Plan* chronicles change.³ In 2014 reporting on climate change peaked with coverage of the People's Climate March preceding Ban Ki-moon's climate summit, and responses to Naomi Klein's *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (2014).

In 2015 the media became even more engaged. *The Guardian* launched its Keep it in the Ground campaign, an editorial commitment towards sustained investigative journalism on climate issues.⁴ Perhaps most significantly, there was a noticeable increase of writing on how climate change is linked to capitalism, and system-produced inequality. For example, Pope Francis's June Encyclical on climate change asserted that climate change is an anthropogenic issue; advocated the rapid conversion of coal, oil, and gas to renewable energy sources; and emphasised that the first victims of the environmental crisis are the poor.⁵

3 An artist's book by Amy Howden-Chapman published by Distance Plan Press, *All the News I Read About Climate Change in 2014*, recorded climate change articles primarily in print versions of newspapers. See also 'Climate Change: A Lexicon', *The Distance Plan* contribution to *Reading Room 7: Risk*, Jon Bywater, Christina Barton, Natasha Conland and Wytan Curnow (eds.), (Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, 2015), 149-156.

4 This initiative also included a partnership with 350.org to lobby the Gates Foundation and the Wellcome Trust (the world's two largest health foundations) to divest from fossil fuel producing companies. *The Guardian* also moved its own £800m from companies invested in coal oil and gas. See <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/series/keep-it-in-the-ground>

5 See Bill McKibben, 'The Pope and the Planet', *New York Review of Books*, 13 August 2015.

Although proceeding slowly, the wider articulation of climate change as a social issue is occurring. Sheila Jasanoff, Professor of Science and Technology Studies at Harvard, has written, “Scientific assessments such as those of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change helped establish climate change as a global phenomenon, but in the process they detached knowledge from meaning. Climate facts arise from impersonal observation whereas meanings emerge from embedded experience.”⁶ Of course, the experience which creates such meaning depends significantly on your situation, and the degree to which you perceive climate change as a threat to your way of life –if only to your patterns of consumption. For example in late 2015 *The New York Times* ran in the style pages the headline ‘Too Warm to be Cool’ and the byline, “For some, climate change is personal: Will they ever get to wear winter clothes again?”⁷ The making of meaning, in this context, is premised on maintenance of the individual’s status quo, at the expense of a larger political picture.

The history of climate change, and weather, as a social issue is explored in Lauren Redniss’ recent graphic novel *Thunder and Lightning: Weather Past, Present, Future* (2014). Reviewer Sadie Stein writes “To think: There was a time when weather was safe! As a non-controversial counterpoint to dinner-table hot buttons like religion and politics, weather has probably played analgesic for generations of families. And then, of course, weather turned into climate, which combined all of the above, and suddenly there was nothing less safe in the world.”⁸ As Redniss defines it in the book, weather is a state of the atmosphere, while climate describes a larger scale or pattern of change—registered through changes in weather. If we are no longer ‘safe’ talking about the weather in everyday conversation, if the climate has become ‘politics’, we need to start talking about why.

6 Sheila Jasanoff, ‘A New Climate for Society’, *Theory, Culture, Society*, 2010, 27:233. doi: 10.1177/0263276409361497 http://www.climateaccess.org/sites/default/files/Jasanoff_A%20New%20Climate%20for%20Society.pdf

7 For full article see: <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/19/fashion/fall-fashion-too-warm-to-be-cool.html>

8 Sadie Stein, review of *Thunder and Lightning: Weather Past, Present, Future* by Lauren Redniss, *New York Times Book Review*, 16 October 2015 http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/18/books/review/thunder-and-lightning-by-lauren-redniss.html?_r=0

2. PRECARIETY & MOBILISATION

We take precarity as a central idea for this issue. Critical theorist Judith Butler sees precarity as the destruction of conditions of livability. In her framework, precarity is a politically induced situation in which certain groups of society are made un-equally vulnerable to livelihood instability, to violence or even death. More commonly, “increased precarity has come to exemplify the neoliberal labour market in developed economies... today’s jobs typically involve more casual working hours, low and stagnant wages, decreasing job protections and widespread insecurity.”⁹

Butler’s recent work has focused on demonstrations against precarity, and austerity measures, as an embodied politics. She writes, “when people are demonstrating about precarity, for instance, it’s not just that they get up and say, ‘We’re against precarity.’ They are also embodied creatures in public space who are calling attention to the embodied character of their lives: this is a body that doesn’t

9 Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, *Inventing the Future: Post capitalism and a world without work* (New York: Verso, 2015), 93.

have shelter, or this is a body that deserves shelter, or this is a body that ought not to be hungry, or this is a body that ought to have some sense of future..."¹⁰ Her point is that while such public demonstrations make a physical statement about rights of free movement and association, at the same time they reveal our susceptibility as individuals, and expose failures of our social, economic and political institutions.¹¹

Precariousness is also what underpins the social contract: we develop structures of interdependency such as welfare institutions in acknowledgment of our inherent precariousness as individuals. While Butler, in common with the contributors to this issue of the journal, recognises that contemporary neoliberal ideology has in many ways depleted the social bonds that mean we might face something like climate change as a collective body, a public, she invokes the power of becoming aware of our mutual dependency. This means looking not only beyond individualism, but across nation-state borders (drawn up largely for the purposes of colonialism),¹² and at ways of visualising and practising this dependency on each other.

Considering precarity, accentuated by neoliberalism, helps to understand the inadequacy of the current political responses to climate change. According to left-accelerationists Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, neoliberalism has been a primary driver of political passivity, forcing people "into increasingly precarious situations and increasingly entrepreneurial inclinations...Given these effects, political mobilization becomes a dream that is perpetually postponed, driven away by the anxieties and pressures of everyday life."¹³

10 See 'Demonstrating Precarity: Vulnerability, Embodiment, and Resistance; Arne de Boever interviews Judith Butler', *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 23 March 2015. <https://lar-viewofbooks.org/interview/demonstrating-precarity-vulnerability-embodiment-resistance>

11 Butler outlines three terms relevant to our discussion. The first is precarisation—a gradual process where policies implemented by governments and performed through economic institutions allow labour to be casualised, social services to be depleted, and the deconstruction of social democracy in favour of a totally entrepreneurial ideology. The second is precarity, which she understands as something experienced subjectively, in which there is an intensified awareness of one's disposability, and this is felt differently by different parts of society. The third is precariousness, a basic state of being—susceptible to injury or harm or deprivation by events outside of our control—which everyone is subject to. See Butler, 'For and against precarity', *e-flux*, 2013 http://www.e-flux.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/7.-Butler_Precarity.pdf and Isabell Lorey, 'Governmental Precarisation', *Eipcp*, 2011 <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0811/lorey/en> for a fuller outline of these terms.

12 See Judith Butler and Gayatri Spivak, *Who sings the nation state?* (Chicago University Press, 2011).

13 Srnicek and Williams, 2015, 64.

This narrowing of political horizons is amplified when the structures of support which define the social state are eroded. With a reduced social welfare state arises the necessity to fight for the most basic needs (steady employment, affordable housing and healthcare). This in turn has led to the conditions for what has been called 'folk politics.' Srnicek and Williams have defined the aims of folk politics as bringing "politics down to the 'human scale' by emphasising temporal, spatial and conceptual immediacy...against the abstraction and inhumanity of capitalism."¹⁴ While this is an understandable response, the scale and complexity of climate change requires political solutions that operate at both local and international levels, including extensively restructuring the global economy. High level policy progress is not achievable through the current 'folk' strategies of the left (occupy, local food movements, 'blockadia').

The fight for basic needs (primarily steady employment) can directly conflict with progressive environmental policies. This is discussed by in this issue by Paul Adler and Ryan Jeffery. Ryan notes that the coal mining industry in West Virginia means that the demand for employment defines the politics of the region, overwhelming any hope of reducing environmental externalities. "Economic concerns come up against environmental concerns, and the debate gets divided into two issues of externalities—it's almost like religion and politics, but under pressure, economic concerns always come first."⁴⁵

14 Srnicek and Williams go on to define these features: "At its heart, folk politics is the guiding intuition that immediacy is always better and often more authentic, with the corollary being a deep suspicion of abstraction and meditation. In terms of temporal immediacy, contemporary folk politics typically remains reactive (responding to actions initiated by corporations and governments, rather than initiating actions); ignores long-term strategic goals in favour of tactics (mobilising around single-issues politics or emphasizing process); prefers practices that are often inherently fleeting (such as occupations and temporary autonomous zones); chooses the familiarity of the past over the unknown of the future (for instance, the repeated dreams of a return to 'good' Keynesian capitalism); and expresses itself as a predilection for the voluntarist and spontaneous over the institutional (as in the romanticisation of rioting and insurrection." See Srnicek and Williams, 2015, 10.

3. POLITICAL CLIMATE

Our proposition is that precarity slows action on climate change, while climate change exacerbates precarity. Moreover, neoliberalism is a form of capitalism which accentuates precarity. The wider issue this raises is whether the climate crisis is even able to be effectively addressed within the system of capitalism.

The range of views about capitalism's ability to adapt to the climate crisis is representative of the political spectrum in general. On the left, contemporary Marxist theorists such as Nancy Fraser argue that capitalism is not self-sustaining, but free rides on background conditions while its "orientation to endless accumulation threatens to destabilize these very conditions of its possibility."¹⁵ These background conditions include social reproduction (a discussion of which has been brought to the fore by feminists), political power, and the environment (as given prominence by eco-socialist thinkers). All three have traditionally been sidelined in Marxist analysis focused on class,

¹⁵ Nancy Fraser, 'Behind Marx's Hidden Abode: For an Expanded Conception of Capitalism', *New Left Review* 86, March/April 2014, 71.

but Fraser regards a critique of their exploitation under capitalism as essential to maintaining Marxism's relevance in future courses charted by the left. This is especially the case when considering ecological conditions, which Fraser identifies as "the natural processes that sustain life," while also "provid[ing] the material inputs for social provisioning."¹⁶

A centre left view is that unconstrained capitalism is both self-destructive and destructive of the natural environment, but that a form of regulated capitalism—unyoked from an economic growth imperative—could be sustainable; in short, a green economy (rather than green growth) is possible. This situation is most closely approximated in the Nordic countries, but even there contradictions are evident, such as Norway's revenue from fossil fuel extraction.

The conventional centrist view is that it is possible to continue capitalism with deft and significant policy change, but that getting global leaders to make those changes is difficult. Such a view is held by Christiana Figueres, the leader of the Secretariat of the UNFCCC, who believes current levels of economic growth can be maintained. In the lead-up to the Paris conference she asked the key question, "What if growth and emissions could be uncoupled?"¹⁷ Figueres is of the view that, "Where capital goes over the next fifteen years is going to decide whether we're actually able to address climate change and what kind of a century we are going to have."¹⁸ She urged all those present in Paris to consider this when deciding on future investments, and to do so publicly.

Though decoupling is now occurring in large Western economies such as Germany, the UK and much of Scandinavia, in many cases this is due to the transference of emissions to developing economies such as China. In some cases where decoupling has occurred without such transference (for example in Denmark's energy sector, through initiatives such as the re-communalisation of power generation¹⁹) it is through government regulation. This points to a poor out-

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Christiana Figueres, as cited by Elizabeth Kolbert 'The Weight of the World,' *The New Yorker*, 24 August 2015 <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/08/24/the-weight-of-the-world>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Diane Cardwelljan, 'Fueled by Danish Ingenuity', *The New York Times*, 18 January 2015, BU1.

look for countries such as the US and New Zealand, characterised by the neoliberal variant of capitalism where wealth polarisation and extensive deregulation have taken place.²⁰ In New Zealand, under the Key Government, a range of public assets including segments of the power sector have been recently privatised, while the government continues to invest in roads more vigorously than public transport infrastructure. Even in light of the the recent Paris agreement, decoupling is unlikely to occur rapidly.

Naomi Klein's *This Changes Everything* reflects a part of the debate around capitalism's capacity to respond to climate change. Her position is that climate change can't be solved within the status quo, as it's a product of the status quo.²¹ Journalist Elizabeth Kolbert criticises Klein for failing to acknowledge that "One reason—perhaps the reason—the West is wealthier than the rest of the world is that it figured out much earlier how to exploit fossil fuels."²²

Reading Klein's book alongside the *Great Transformation*, a text from 1944 by political economist Karl Polanyi, sociologist Paul Adler puts forward an indictment of capitalism *as such* rather than its current dominant neoliberal variant. Adler concludes,

the nature of the capitalist system drives far too many enterprises towards environmentally destructive practices, drives far too few enterprises towards stewardship practices, and ensures that governments will fail to meet the resulting sustainability challenge. My reading of Polanyi suggests that enterprises in a capitalist economy cannot change their environmental practices far or fast enough to avert environmental crisis - neither spontaneously under the influence of wiser corporate leaders, nor pushed by greener consumers.²³

20 For a comprehensive discussion of this, see *Inequality, A New Zealand Crisis*, Max Rashbrooke (ed.), (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2013).

21 Elizabeth Kolbert, 'Can Climate Change Cure Capitalism?', *New York Review of Books*, 4 December 2014 www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2014/dec/04/can-climate-change-cure-capitalism/

22 Ibid.

23 Paul Adler, 'The environmental crisis and its capitalist roots: reading Naomi Klein with Karl Polanyi', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 17 March 2015, doi: 10.1177/000183921557918, 4.

In the face of environmental issues, the market is typically slow to respond. Environmental issues often develop slowly, while research to understand them and develop solutions can take more than a generation, even when the businesses involved are cooperative. Further, resistance to environmental regulation is particularly intense in the case of climate change. An example is Exxon's decade-long denial of original research they'd conducted in the late 1970s which pointed to the implications of burning fossil fuels, all the more disreputable as they withheld information from the public.²⁴ Exxon had a clear incentive not to publicly acknowledge climate change, as it would have cast doubt on their whole business model.²⁵

We believe that the strong capitalist tendency to exploit resources can be constrained by a greater or lesser extent through regulation, but that neoliberalism works against such regulation. Neoliberalism's logic pushes towards a specific image of the economic in which "every human domain and endeavor, along with humans themselves,"²⁶ is transformed. The growth and consumption drives that characterise capitalism, and particularly neoliberal capitalism, have led to the consistent undermining of ecological systems, and token attempts at regulation which have so far failed to reduce global emissions.

24 Bill McKibben, 'What Exxon Knew About Climate Change', *The New Yorker*, 18 September 2015.

25 An analogy for Exxon's resistance to investing in alternative energy production in the face of the developing science might be seen in the case of shipwreckers in the nineteenth century, an industry that was instrumental in lobbying against early weather forecasting because of the profits it reaped from the lack of public information about future weather. In 1869, there were 1,914 shipwrecks in the Great Lakes alone but knowledge about "two major innovations—weather forecasts and storm warnings" was for a time not shared by the British government, because of the power of the salvage lobby, and the policy was not reversed until a scientific and public outcry outmaneuvered the shipwreckers. See Kathryn Schulz, 'Writers in the Storm: How weather went from symbol to science and back again', *The New Yorker*, 23 November 2015 <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/11/23/writers-in-the-storm>.

26 Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2015), 9.

4. DISPLACEMENT AND PLANNING

Much of the recent literature on climate change is focused on population displacement. Both within and across borders, the instances of people having to move because of climate conditions – be those direct, such as soil salination from flooding, or related, such as conflict over increasingly limited territory and water-source insecurity—are growing.²⁷ Once again, this is an issue of inequality—those countries bearing primary responsibility for carbon emissions are at this point less affected, while a dramatic majority of people displaced live in the developing world.

Furthermore, many of those compelled to move do not qualify for refugee status under the terms of the 1951 Refugee Convention, despite the fact that their economic livelihood and wellbeing is severely threatened. In his conversation in this issue, Ezekiel Simperingham, a human rights lawyer, writes about the ‘black hole’ in

27 See for example Henry Fountain, ‘Researchers link Syria conflict to drought caused by climate change’, *The New York Times*, 3 March 2015 http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/03/science/earth/study-links-syria-conflict-to-drought-caused-by-climate-change.html?_r=0.

existing legislation, and about current efforts towards expanding the protection agenda for climate displaced persons. Right now a primary legal requirement for protection under the convention is proof of political persecution as an individual. With climate change however (and particularly in the case of Pacific Island state citizens who have been through the New Zealand justice system seeking refuge on the grounds of climate impacts), individuals are not differentially at risk: the whole country is at risk and so no one individual is entitled to claim protection.

Simperingham points out a key difference between climate displacement and other forms of political persecution, which may arise apparently without warning. He writes, “[with climate change] we’ve got this benefit of hindsight already: we know what areas are at risk, we know what kind of effects are going to hit there...we can preempt what’s going to happen, rather than just being reactionary all the time.” (p.70) More than 150 million people live within one metre of sea level, and here displacement becomes an issue of planning; rather than the usual emergency-aid response to natural disasters, developed countries need to consider known future risk and help build capacity in an enduring way.

Planning is a major focus in the essay co-authored by researchers Veronica Olivotto and Bidy Livesey. Looking at two communities whose homes are threatened by potential or actual disasters related to water—post-quake Christchurch, New Zealand and a river dike in Cali, Columbia—they consider precarity as an issue of human vulnerability, and discuss models of ‘managed retreat’ in such circumstances. In both cases communities have intensively occupied historically swampy, low-lying land, and though the threat is not immediately related to human-caused sea level rise, the fragility of the system makes it particularly sensitive to environmental as well as political changes.

While the political, social and economic contexts are significantly different, Olivotto and Livesey point to parallels in the need to influence human behaviour toward change, rather than relying on technological or infrastructural solutions. In both Cali and Christchurch the disasters have become highly politicised, ‘disasterised’; as the authors write, “climate change is only one of the multiple processes of change that affect people.” (p.83) Successful adaptation to landscapes threatened by water means developing relocation practices that give communities agency in every stage of the process, including their future livelihoods.

Artist John Vea's work *29.09.2009 Tribute to Samoa, American Samoa, and Tonga* (2013) (p.104) is positioned as a statement of solidarity. Made in response to the 2009 earthquake and tsunami that took 190 lives in Samoa, American Samoa and Tonga, the work shows the artist working futilely to put a wall of cinder-blocks between the land and a tumultuous sea at Piha on Auckland's West Coast. It is a powerful tribute to resilience in the face of the 2009 event, and as Nina Tonga has pointed out in her introduction to the work in this publication, it has in subsequent exhibitions become an emblem for the ever-present reality of ecological instability and climate change in the Pacific.

It seems that progress can cover up the past; that we can say, this will be useful and that will not are the opening lines of Anna Livesey's 'Drowned Church' (p.133). The poem pictures the re-emergence of a church (the Temple of Santiago or the Temple of Quechula) in Mexico which has been underwater since 1966, when the valley it occupied was dammed. Recent drought has caused the water level to drop 25 metres. The building which resurfaces to 'uncompromising, engulfing air' cannot be the same, any more than the place into which it arrives is the same. Here the displacement is an effect of human history, as well as changing climate conditions. Precarity, at its most basic level, is not knowing what the future will look like, and having no means to construct its shape.

5. PRECARIETY & IMAGES

The work of Jennifer Teets makes material a largely invisible set of social and biological stresses. Teets is interested in the 'backstory' of matter, its conditioning as both 'natural' and cultural. Working with cheese, an everyday protein inherently in a state of decomposition, Teets presents it as a record of the psychic and physical effects the environment has on living beings—in this case milking goats. One such work, discussed in this journal, is "an effort to make a trace in cheese. A traumatic trace (in cheese form) made from a herd of dairy goats that were afflicted by psychosomatic effects as a consequence of a violent European windstorm that struck France in 2010." (p.126)

Within the frame of this project, the impact of the storm combined with associated events such as the swarms of helicopters surveying the devastation inscribes the cheese produced subsequently "as a micro narrative of climate change impact." (p.134) Teets' broader practice sets out to engage with both speculative and empirical forms of knowledge. The outcome is a proposition of intellectual imagination, a necessary response to problems which are often considered too large in scale, too dense in technical or scientific detail.

Curator Laura Preston—in conversation with Teets in this issue—speaks of ‘abstract thinking’ as a response to states of precarity. She writes, “A key resistant act may be in allowing for indigestible difference, as an offering in response to the consumptive habits and homogeneity of neoliberal ethics.” (p.117) In the context of curatorial work, she writes of the visual image as having performative potential of its own. That is, not as a representation of something else, but as carrying its own subjectivity, and as something in and of the world, defined by the same conditions we are.

Arne De Boever’s text also addresses the limits and instability of the representational image, asking, does the climate need a face in order for us to be able to care about it? Considering the many ways we relate to the image of the face—from the loving maternal face to the philosopher Levinas’ face of ‘the other’, to Francis Bacon’s distorted heads, to non-human faces in *Shrek 2*, and *Alien*—De Boever suggests that the soft-edged anthropomorphism of the ‘mother earth’ image is fraught with more difficult connotations: “That face is not necessarily the smiley face that we can easily inscribe onto planet earth. Earth is not cute. It’s not furry. It doesn’t have big eyes. Earth is not so easily turned into a mother; or it can only be so when the mother is partly scrubbed out, looking a little less ‘motherly’ as a consequence.” (p.60)

The reading of images is always political. Today’s climate science relies on modelling and projections to make clearer the implications of empirical evidence. During a recent residency in Greenland, Icelandic artists Bjarki Bragason and Anna LÍndal became aware of how political bias towards economic opportunity was impacting the scientific discussion around climate change and the way in which modelling was interpreted. While climate change in Greenland is a present reality, the dramatic melting of ice there is seen by some as an opportunity for large-scale extraction of uranium and oil, industries that could provide significant revenue, allowing Greenland to become economically independent of Denmark.

An important element of their project became their participation in the climate change conference Ilulissat Climate Days, using their positions as artists to politicise the context in which the scientific discussions were taking place. Their presentation involved listing the concerns of top business executives recently surveyed—rising taxes, over regulation, social instability, geopolitical uncertainty—emphasising the unacknowledged connection between climate research and extractive capitalism.

All that is solid melts into data (2014), a film by Ryan Jeffery and Boaz Levin (p.43), addresses data centres as the physical embodiments of the digital economy, from high speed trading to cloud computing. Looking at their architectural forms, scale and geographic locations, the film reveals the way these structures are increasingly invisible, increasingly inseparable from both the financial industry and our everyday lives, and increasingly energy-intensive.

A central motif throughout *All that is solid* is images of banality: ubiquitous concrete facades and those same facades viewed on Google Earth. We are shown the intentionally nondescript structures that represent the other side of hyper-branded corporations. The film’s role is as witness to this duality, contextualising the seemingly innocuous buildings with research about their real world operations. The banal images become a means of conveying how difficult it is to ‘see’, let alone critique, how contemporary capitalism functions.

The Distance Plan sees art as having the capacity to give context and coherence to the unfolding events of climate change, entangled as they are in our current system of capitalism. Further, art’s mechanisms (among them images, narrative, intervention and experience) can contribute to articulating political alternatives in which precarity is radically addressed. As such, this journal is both a site for the discussion of art which intersects, often in lateral ways, with climate change research, and a place where such research is considered—like art—to have wide cultural relevance.

THOUGHTS ON INFINITE NEXT

BJARKI BRAGASON & ANNA LÍNDAL

Bjarki Bragason and Anna Línal are Icelandic artists who have been collaborating for the last year on Infinite Next, a project that seeks to consider the historical and social implications and origins of climate change through the scope of their practices as artists.

In the summer of 2015 we spent a month in Greenland as part of a residency at the Ilulissat Art Museum. Throughout that time we noticed signs everywhere of a changing climate. We were told stories of traditional hunting becoming difficult in many parts of the country, and also stories of black ice. Black ice is a collection of small chunks of ice that are largely invisible because they sit beneath the ocean's surface. The small boats widely used for travel and fishing have become dangerous because they are frequently dented by the now ubiquitous black ice, are damaged and sink. While in Greenland we went on an expedition onto the ice sheet at Kangerlussuaq with the SVALI (Stability and Variations of Arctic Land Ice) team of Nordic glaciologists.

Research which we'd been engaged in before coming to Greenland was presented in an exhibition at Ilulissat Art Museum, the opening of which we timed to coincide with Ilulissat Climate Days, a conference on the effects of climate change on Greenland. This conference was held in Western Greenland and brought together the work of leading international scientists and climate scholars. We were explicitly interested in participating as artists in the context of the conference; we made contact with the organisers who then invited us to speak. We presented our work in the form of a lecture at the

opening ceremony, an event aimed at creating dialogue with the public. The opening ceremony was held in the town's largest public venue, a sports hall, and it was nearly full.

Climate change is a present reality for everyone in Greenland but there are a range of views on the degree to which it is a problem, and the degree to which it is an opportunity. The possibility of major resource extraction is now part of the general discourse. You can see it if you pick up the inflight magazines, where many articles are devoted to mining (Uranium mining might begin in the near future) and oil. The subtext to this discussion is an awareness of what the profits from these new industries could mean to an independent Greenland.¹

Greenland has a history of forced relocation, due to centralisation on behalf of Denmark. In the past, by order of the authorities, populations that were considered too far apart from each other and uneconomical to sustain were compulsorily moved together into towns. This history of grievances over large scale administrative interventions into Greenlandic society colours the present debate. The mood feels like one of a society in need, a society that is already experiencing the problem of climate change. The discussion is everywhere and it is becoming polarised.

We decided to try and provoke a conversation around these issues, and to be as honest as possible about our view that it is contradictory for a country that is so dramatically affected by climate change to be taking seriously the idea of oil extraction in its own territory. That it's even up for discussion speaks to the tragic history of Greenland as a colony of Denmark, and as a historically poor country that now has the possibility of gaining wealth through this industry. It's part of a broader conversation about whether developing countries should have the right to pollute the environment and extract resources at the expense of already established industrial powers, who've of course had a very long head start. We don't blame Greenland for maintaining a positive position on the prospect of resource extraction; it is one of the few ways they have to further the development of their economy, and establish a greater level of independence from Denmark.

As artists we are interested in formulating a conversation with those doing the research from a natural science perspective. Presenting

¹ Greenland has been under Danish rule since 1814; the Self-Government Act of 2009 grants some but not full autonomy, and the process is a gradual transition requiring Greenland to establish economic stability on its own.

our work at the start of the conference was a way to participate in the dialogue. We wanted the discussion about climate change in Greenland to be one that was dissected by those in different fields, including the natural sciences, the social sciences and art. The scientists were open to our participation in the conference and welcomed our approach. Among other speakers at the event were representatives from the Greenlandic Ministry of Nature, Environment and Justice, the US National Science Foundation, NASA, climate scientists and many other experts from various fields.

At Ilulissat Climate Days we spoke about our work following a spokeswoman from the US National Science Foundation (NSF). She talked about her top ten NSF supported projects that dealt with Greenland and climate change. Among these were smart mobile research stations ('dwellings') placed on the ice sheet, designed to structurally adapt to the rapidly melting ice. The altitude is lowering so the existing stations often get turned around or half collapse; some have now been redesigned to include automatic hydraulic systems that extend legs out to communicate with the changing terrain beneath them. Climate change is not only evident in data collected; it is transforming the way research is conducted, and the types of apparatus used.

The items on the top ten list of the NSF resonated strongly after a speech by Mala Høy Kuko, the Greenlandic Minister of Nature, Environment and Justice, who acknowledged the extreme challenges posed to the environment and society of his country. He also asserted that climate change provided unprecedented business opportunities; the extraction of Arctic oil and minerals, new fish species with warmer waters, more agricultural production and ice-free ports: "...but climate changes also give rise to new opportunities, and in some cases it is possible to convert challenges into opportunities...At the same time research and monitoring is a necessary prerequisite to know what climate changes to prepare for, and thus what we should adapt to." His message is reminiscent of a common stance, that climate change is a unique opportunity, making possible oil extraction in some of the most fragile and least accessible regions of the world.

When it was our turn to speak, we brought up the question of capitalism in relation to climate change by noting that climate change had not been among the top twenty concerns of the 18th Annual CEO



Image: Bjarki Bragason, 2015.

Survey, published at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland in January 2015. The survey, carried out by PWC, is an opinion poll of thirteen hundred top business executives.

The top concerns are rising taxes (70%); ‘over regulation’; (78%), social instability (60%) and geopolitical uncertainty (72%) the last two being new additions in the poll. One of the key findings from the PWC survey is that “Many CEOs this year are looking for the positives even as they continue to be wary about the state of the global economy. 61% say they see more opportunities for growth today than three years ago..This, despite rising concerns across a range of business risks, suggests there is little recognition from many CEOs that their industries face upheaval.”²

The clash of priorities represented by the NSF top twenty projects and the Greenlandic minister’s optimism regarding a possible oil boom brought to mind a reading note from Naomi Klein’s latest book, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*. The text had accompanied us on the multiple plane rides which brought us to Ilulissat, the site of the UNESCO listed ice fjord, Kangia. The Jakobshavn glacier feeds the fjord with its signature floating ice bergs (the one which intercepted the Titanic is believed to have originated here) and provides the conference with a setting in which climate change is acutely tangible and makes its own case for change, despite the problem that one must take a series of flights to see it.

Klein writes, “In other words, changing earth’s climate in ways that will be chaotic and disastrous is easier to accept than the prospect of changing the fundamental, growth based profit seeking logic of capitalism. We probably shouldn’t be surprised that some climate scientists are a little spooked by their research findings. Most of them were quietly measuring ice cores, running global climate models, and studying ocean acidification, only to discover, as Australian climate expert and author Clive Hamilton puts it, that in breaking the news of the depth of our collective climate failure, they ‘were unwittingly destabilising the political and social order.’”³

When presenting at Ilulissat Climate Days we accompanied our talk with the following images to provide the audience with some context of our previous work.

² Price Waterhouse Cooper’s 18th Annual Global CEO Survey (www.pwc.com/gx/en/ceo-survey/2015/assets/pwc-18th-annual-global-ceo-survey-jan-2015.pdf) accessed December 2015.

³ Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), 89.



June 5 2014. I was heading back after a visit to the crater formed by the 2011 eruption at Grimsvötn Caldera in Vtnajökull. For some reason the snowmobile had used the time when we were measuring changes in the crater to make a parking lot for our car. The tyre tracks were somehow alien to the surroundings. I picked up a part of the tyre tracks, put it into a plastic bag and placed it with other specimens collected on the site.

Anna LÍndal



I found the block of glacial ice in front of the cinema back in September 2013, when leaving the movie. It was the same block which had been on display at the science fair earlier that evening.

Bjarki Bragason



Tyre track in a plastic bag. The Context Collection, an archive that grows in every possible direction, encompassing tangible objects, single events or longer-term experiences.

AL



The glaciologists at the university had used it to explain carbon and how time is read from information stored in the ice. Now it was standing on the pavement, melting onto the street.

BB



July 16 2014. Part of preparing for the Surtsey island expedition was to meet with Sveinn Jakobsson at the Icelandic Institute of Natural History. There, I found out that Greenlandic stones have been found on the surface of Surtsey. Originally they were carried with icebergs from Greenland that then disintegrated off the south coast of Iceland. The island was formed 1963; during the submarine eruption material from the seabed was brought to the new surface, and the stones were scattered across the forming land. I decided to take this one with me to Greenland, briefly bringing it back to its starting point.

AL

I took the block of ice home, and put it in the freezer. The next spring I cut it in two with a hot kitchen knife.

BB



Pumice and water in a plastic bottle. Specimen from the swimming in the Grimsvötn Crater Lake, Vatnajökull.

AL



One half I melted with a heat gun onto a pile of paper where it rapidly evaporated, leaving behind streaks of sediment. The other half I sunk in a cardboard box full of wet drywall concrete. During the chemical reaction the concrete mixture heated up and melted the half block of ice, leaving behind its exact shape.

BB



June 5 2013. The weather was relatively mild, especially considering the extreme weather on the glacier in the previous days. We departed from the rim of the Arímsroth caldera at around lunchtime and I was excited to see the conditions in the crater. When we arrived they were dragging a small boat down the hill towards the water to measure the crater bed and the water temperature. My aim was to swim in the crater, using the body as a measuring device. I undressed where the avalanche had fallen earlier that morning, put on a swimsuit and walked into the water. The temperature was 0°C and the air around 5°C. Somehow I did not feel the cold. When I turned around I swam through the floating ice brought down by the avalanche that morning.

AL

CAPITALISM & ITS LIMITS

PAUL ADLER & RYAN JEFFERY

The Distance Plan invited organisational sociologist Paul Adler and filmmaker Ryan Jeffery to talk about common ground in their research into representations of capitalism and its limits. Their conversation took as its starting point Paul's recent book review *The Environmental Crisis and its Capitalist Roots: Reading Naomi Klein with Karl Polanyi*, and Ryan's film *All that is solid melts into data* (2015; a collaboration with Boaz Levin).

***All that is solid melts into data* positions data centres as emblems of the often-overlooked materiality of networked technologies, in order to consider their social, environmental, and economic impact. In his review of Klein's book *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (2014) Paul notes that Klein "claims that the root cause of this environmental crisis lies in the capitalist character of our economy. But at other points she indicts not capitalism as such but rather its neoliberal variant, and at yet other points she attributes the crisis to an 'extractivist mindset'. This blurred identification of the issue is problematic as each analysis points to very different remedies." Paul reads economic historian Karl Polanyi (2001) for a theory of capitalism that helps us clarify the alternatives. Polanyi argues for the indictment of capitalism as such, rather than its currently dominant neoliberal variant or an extractivist mindset. The conversation took place in September 2015 in Paul's office at the Marshall School of Business, University of Southern California, in Los Angeles.**

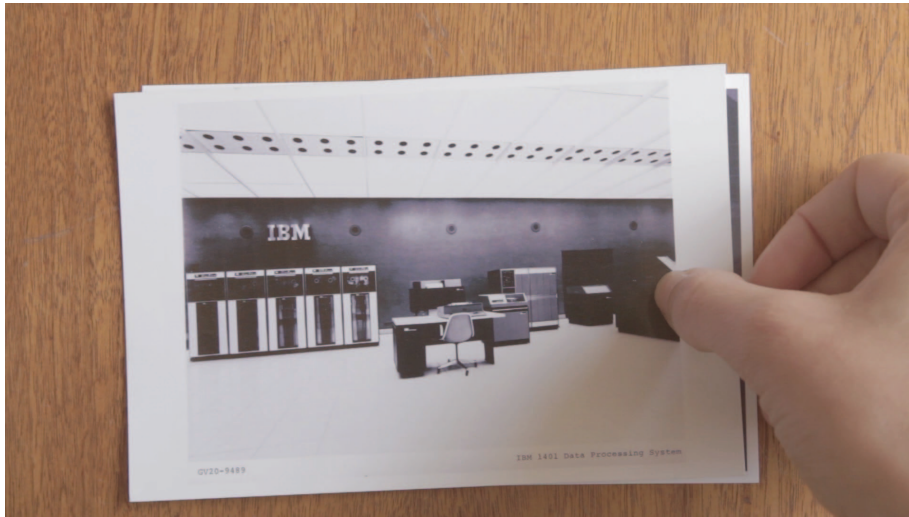
Ryan Jeffery

All that is solid melts into data is about the history of data centres. It really starts in 2006 when Google established their first data centre up in Oregon, which they built—for tax and energy economy purposes—in the high altitude desert of the American Northwest. But the history of data centres goes further back than this, really beginning with IBM just after WW2. The film looks to this history in order to understand the technology of the internet by specifically looking at the history of the buildings that make up what we might call the internet. So I guess I could say it's a pseudo-architectural documentary, but really it is a means to talk about the politics and the political economy of data centres and the structures of power behind these buildings.

I really identified with a statement you made in your review of Klein's book, about the problem of the division between social and environmental issues. In making this film we began with the political and economic issues, but in the process issues concerning the environment quickly revealed themselves.

Paul Adler

I stumbled into that distinction by accident. Let me explain how. My research has been about the dynamics of the capitalist system of private enterprise, where firms compete to maximise profitability. In this kind of system, firms will ignore whatever doesn't affect their bottom line, and the result is that the system generates a lot of what economists call 'externalities'—results of the business's action that affect other people or the planet but are not reflected in the price of the business's products. Some externalities are positive—such as people learning new skills on the job and as a result expanding their capacities and opportunities. The externalities we worry about are the negative ones. Some of these are social—such as demanding that employees work such long hours that they don't have time to spend with their families, or firing people when there's a business downturn and leaving communities devastated by unemployment. And some negative externalities are environmental, such as discharging effluent into rivers or polluting the air with toxins or carbon dioxide. In a capitalist economy, the only way to reliably limit these externalities is through some kind of regulation and taxation.



Stills from *All that is solid melts into data*, 2015.

When I started getting interested in environmental issues in my teaching and research, my assumption had been that businesses and government would treat social and environmental externalities in broadly similar ways. But the more I thought about it the more it seemed that the dynamic associated with each of them was different.

On the one hand, on the social side, capitalism has managed over the last 200 years to find ways to absorb most of these negative social externalities. That has happened through both economic and political processes.

First, capitalism has both created and absorbed many social externalities through the more or less automatic economic cycles so characteristic of the capitalist market economy. Markets are not stable—they move in cycles. Booms lead to over-investment and busts. Those busts inflict unemployment on working people and destroy a lot of otherwise viable businesses. However, when there are a lot of unemployed people and when a lot of businesses fall into bankruptcy, that creates juicy prospects for business—it means the surviving businesses or newly formed ones can get people to work for lower wages and they can operate with fewer competitors. So the busts create the conditions for a new boom.

The other way capitalism has absorbed these social externalities is through regulation. When capitalist business practices inflict suffering on working people, these people often mobilise to improve their lot—forming unions and demanding changes in management policies, and when that fails, demanding stronger government regulation. While some firms ferociously resist these demands, others are happy to see government regulations block their more ruthless competitors.

The result is that, in the long run, living standards have tended to improve under capitalism. We may be—should be!—angry about inequality, about business cycles that throw people out of work, and about the ruthless destruction of traditional communities. But in the long term, capitalist development hasn't meant a degradation of the social conditions of working people, but on the contrary, improvement. Sure, it's a path that's scandalously slow and jerky, but very few people want to turn the clock back.

Environmental externalities work differently. When business practices create externalities that screw up the environment, there are not typically hundreds of firms eager to rush in to capitalise on the resulting new business opportunities. Let's say a firm like GE (General Electric) pollutes the Hudson River: there may be some environmental remediation businesses who step forward to fix that—but only if the government has forced GE to pay for a cleanup. Otherwise, there's no cleanup work here. So there is no automatic equilibrating process like the boom and bust business cycle.

In the social domain, the business cycle means that when a lot of people lose their jobs and firms go out of business, we can be pretty confident that sooner or later there'll be a lot of businesses aiming to profit from this misery, and their investment will drive a new boom. But there's no parallel to this in the environmental arena: there's no automatic cycle in which businesses' destruction of the environment calls into existence a burst of investment by business aiming to restore the environment. The destructive effects of coal, for example, have spurred investment in solar—but only after government has stepped in to subsidise it.

A second, and closely related difference between social and environmental externalities is that when people get hurt, they are likely to fight back. To defend themselves from overwork, low pay, and so forth, people form trade unions, mass movements — they revolt, and they force the state to intervene. But when the environment gets destroyed, it doesn't assert itself as a political actor, and the linkage to political action on behalf of the environmental is very weak. When agricultural spaces are devastated, people are more likely to move away rather than organise to stop the destruction. Political organisation is a critical step in the process leading from externality-related damages to remedies, and that step is much harder to take when it comes to environmental externalities. The environment needs people to speak for it. The environment doesn't speak for itself in the political arena.

So what are the prospects for the environment? While there is a growing number of people who are willing speak on its behalf, and while we could imagine that eventually governments

could be forced to regulate industry more rigorously, the underlying processes of environmental destruction have accelerated—things have gotten out of hand. We are on a trajectory of environmental degeneration. You see it with global warming and with the destruction of the ice coverage: this is happening at such a rate, and the acceleration is so rapid, that it's very hard to see political mobilisation succeeding soon enough to save us from a very dark future.

RJ

Yes, that makes me think of the current coverage of the Syrian refugee crisis and the debates about are they economic migrants or are they refugees from a war—as though war has no economic element to it. I guess in one sense you need a taxonomy, specific language, you need to compartmentalise things to a degree. But in my mind it's dangerous when you start to describe such things as though they are autonomous.

PA

That's a deep point. Yes—environmental problems both generate and are caused by social problems, and those problem cycles are intertwined in a profound way.

RJ

The coal mining industry in West Virginia is a helpful illustration of this. Economic concerns come up against environmental concerns, and the debate gets divided into two issues of externalities—it's almost like religion and politics, but under pressure, economic concerns always comes first. There is of course empirical evidence that burning coal is polluting the air and that it will affect future generations, as well as the current generation—everyone really knows this—but the first question raised is what's the economic alternative? If there is no apparent market alternative then there appears to be no alternative at all. Employment gets pitted against the environment.

PA

On the one hand I would want to say this is a false dilemma. If we had a sane social system, the coal miners would be offered attractive opportunities to move into new occupations and industries and get on with their lives without participating in this

polluting industry. And yes there might be something sad about the loss of a traditional way of life of coal mining, but if the future were a brighter one for them they'd gladly leave it behind and cherish the fond memory rather than continue with the dirty reality. But on the other hand I'm worried that in a capitalist form of society, the opportunities to move into a new industry are typically not there in time, and in that case, there really is a trade-off between jobs and the environment.

And I'd go further: under any system of government, even the most utopian, we won't be able maintain the rich world's affluent lifestyle if we start to behave more responsibly towards the environment. It's very hard to see how we can be environmentally responsible and not radically reduce the rate at which we're absorbing non-renewable resources. We're sitting in an air-conditioned office and burning all these fluorescent lamps. If I understand it correctly, we are going to have to reduce my energy consumption—and the energy consumption of the billion richest people on the planet—by something like 80% within the next 20 years if we have any chance at all of not tilting the planet into a massive cycle of climate turmoil.

I fear we are headed into a new dark age—both in terms of environmental conditions and political prospects. And that has me wondering about our understanding of politics, our templates for social mobilisation: What would it look like to mobilise people in a progressive direction, when hundreds of millions of people are fleeing coastal areas? When people are driven by hunger out of traditional agricultural areas? When there are demagogues on the far right waving xenophobic banners? I think we will soon need a whole new kind of politics for the crisis situations that we're heading into. I have no idea what that kind of politics will look like.

RJ

The two examples that I reach for here are the austerity measures we see happening in Europe, and the current Syrian refugee crisis. They are both telling examples of what we are told is *going* to happen. It's happening already. Maybe not in an entirely identifiable one-to-one relationship with climate change yet—but it's people migrating nonetheless and it very much resembles the picture that's

been painted what climate change will look like. I've recently been following the political scientist Mark Blyth, and his discussion about the situation with Greece and Germany, and the history of austerity, back into the Scottish enlightenment. He thoroughly proves that austerity never works; therefore the question quickly arises, why is it administered? How did we get here? It seems like it comes down to the loudest voice just arguing people into the ground. Blyth flatly states: if we really cared about empirical evidence we would have done something about climate change a long time ago.

This separation of social externalities and environmental externalities becomes very troubling, because to my eyes they seem very much like the same issue. For me, at the centre of this is what people think the purpose of the state is, and what the purpose of the market is. The irony in the case of the environmental crisis is that of course the free market is supposed to be able to respond faster than the state to solve needs and problems. At the end of your article you point this out. Precisely because it's governed by investor needs, the market has demonstrated that it's actually too slow to handle this problem. But it's still the loudest voice.

Going back to Virginia, it seems quite obvious that if they don't mine for coal there the economy will suffer greatly, but that's only because of the assumption that there has to be a market solution. There's supposedly no way out of this because the market is supposed to be free and autonomous—no one would dare say, hey wait a minute, maybe the state should step in and help to define what our markets are. This is the whole liberal trap. Blyth's point is that we need the state to uphold our markets and then they need to step out of it. So we want the state, but we then we don't want the state.

PA

It's interesting that you bring up Mark Blyth. His intellectual frame of reference is shaped by Karl Polanyi—the historian I was referring to in my article. I like a lot of what Blyth has to say, but fundamentally, I think he misses Polanyi's most important point. I don't think Blyth has a very good answer to your question as to why we find ourselves confronting such a powerful lobby for austerity. His explanation is basically that this lobby is driven in a

mistaken direction because they are in the grip of old, disproven ideas.

I find that pretty weak, because I don't think all these finance ministers across Europe are stupid. I think they know what they're doing: they're representing their own classes' interests. Their austerity policy may seem to us to be mad in its unnecessary destructiveness, but to the economic elite, the alternative—the one we propose, of state intervention to create jobs and re-balance the economy—is even more dangerous: it takes power out of the hands of the elite (the capitalist class) and puts it in government hands. And who knows—they say to themselves—where that may lead: democracy is always a risky proposition to this elite. When economic conditions are okay, they let us have our little elections to see if Tweedledum or Tweedledee will govern us, but when the economy crashes, the 'little people'—us—might get ideas about using democracy for more radical change.

Blyth argues that the elite's neoliberal celebration of the market and their mania for deregulation will eventually prompt a progressive reaction. This is what Polanyi calls the 'double movement' – first, the capitalist market is dis-embedded from state, societal and normative controls, and then that creates so much social turmoil that eventually there is a wave of government regulation to restore the balance and 're-embed' the market by protecting workers, communities, and the environment. So Blyth and many social democratic liberals put their faith in this re-embedding movement, hoping it will eventually reassert itself.

But this misses one of Polanyi's key points: such re-embedding movements eventually prompt another round of dis-embedding. Yes, the New Deal re-embedded a capitalist market economy that ran off the rails in the great Depression...but then those capitalist interests came back with a vengeance in the 1980s and since, with Reagan, Thatcher, and the neoliberalism that we are still living under today. The capitalist class is not going to stand by as you gently dispossess and disarm them as Roosevelt tried to do. They eventually fight back. And so long as the basic structure of the economy is a capitalist one, it's the capitalist class that holds all the strongest cards.

The double movement, in other words, is an infernal pendulum. We can only escape it by a more fundamental, qualitative transformation of capitalism into socialism—we need to move to a completely different system. That's not re-embedding the market with stronger government regulations or with the ethical influence of 'conscious consumers'. Instead, it's a system that replaces the market with democratic planning of the whole economy.

RJ

Is it helpful to think of Polanyi's double movement of embedding and re-embedding as essentially the discourse we hear over deregulation and regulation?

PA

Yes that's a good way to summarise it. What I think he [Polanyi] was actually trying to say was that you're crazy if you think we can solve capitalism's basic problems by regulation: regulation prompts deregulation and this back and forth cycle will never get out to any truly civilised form of society.

You might ask whether this view is too pessimistic about what democratic politics can do to restore some sanity to a market economy. But I think the jury of history has already returned a verdict on this issue and declared Marx correct: in a class-based society—where some people own the means of production and other people have to work for them for a wage—government and the whole 'state system' are basically an instrument of the dominant class.

When well-meaning liberals wring their hands about the influence of money on our political system, it's hard to keep a straight face: are we really supposed to believe that campaign finance reform would turn the government of this country into a vehicle for advancing the interests of working people? That's seems to me like a fantasy. If the rich people who control the means of production were confronted by a truly democratic government, what do you think they would do? They would simply take their money and move it somewhere else. We would see a 'capital strike'. They don't need to let you use their factories. These are their factories and if push comes to shove they'll use violence to make that understood.

So, yes, we should try to get Bernie Sanders elected and get the government to raise the minimum wage and create universal health insurance. But that's not going to eliminate the boom and bust cycles of capitalist economic development, the periodic financial crisis, and certainly not halt the downward spiral of massive environmental destruction.

So, sure, we need to mobilise people so they call on government to give these [West Virginian] miners employment opportunities. But at the same time we need to completely rethink the nature of society, as well as rethinking our consumption patterns, and the industrial technologies we are using which generate these environmental crises.

RJ

Yes, and perhaps that's where you can locate the connection, within Polanyi's double movement. If I'm understanding the way you're describing it, we have fallen into some sort of false debate in which re-embedding and dis-embedding, or deregulation and regulation, is formulated as an antagonism between the market and the state. But those are both internal to capitalism, so it's not where the real debate should be.

What your article also made me think more about is the language and terminology that's used to work through these problems, specifically the use of *Neoliberalism* or *late capitalism*, and now *cognitive capitalism* and *turbo capitalism*. I found myself questioning how helpful many of these terms can be at times. Because if I'm reading your article right, and going back to Polanyi, there's a call to look at events within capitalism on a larger horizon, rather than dividing them into discrete smaller stages?

PA

Clearly there is some merit to the idea of Neoliberalism. It's been quite a self-conscious ideological movement, which has managed to influence government policy in the economic and social arena—not to speak of foreign policy—in a lot of countries. But the question at the centre of this article is—is Neoliberalism the problem, or capitalism?

Mark Blyth would say Neoliberalism is the problem. If we only had a more enlightened form of social democratic government then

we would be able to solve all these problems. So that's an attack on Neoliberalism from within the capitalist frame. And I'm all for efforts to shift things from Neoliberalism to social democracy and American-style liberalism. But to imagine that's going to get us anywhere near to where we need to be seems just a delusion.

RJ

I am curious if this is accurate: I remember at one point hearing that insurance companies were the first industry to actively admit that climate change was happening, quite simply because it's been affecting their bottom line.

PA

It's not exactly the insurance companies—it's the re-insurance companies. They're the people who insure the insurance companies, and they do indeed have a very broad view. Like you, I've also been very impressed about how vocal they've been. But I think, as with all of these issues—whether they're social problems, or environmental problems—there are always sectors of the capitalist class that see the issue and can even make a profit from responding to it—such as solar energy companies, and re-insurance companies. There is always a diversity of views within the capitalist class. The question is whether you can count on the dominant factions being committed to driving the necessary regulations.

RJ

Yes, and that's had me thinking about the role of the knowledge economy—the knowledge-intensive sector of the economy. You were talking about the way capitalism functions. How it absorbs and hides the costs of certain things. In regard to land use and the environment, the film I made about data centres tried to illustrate how the communications industry does this, specifically looking at data centres, the bunkers that warehouse communications data. This technology and these structures are intentionally designed so that its users, basically all of us who use the internet, don't think about its materiality and its cost, but these buildings of course have a huge expense in resources.

PA

You mean beyond the energy side?

RJ

It's mainly energy, but also equipment. They constantly need to update their equipment. Machines are constantly being replaced for faster and faster processors, which of course take up more energy. The technology is accelerating so fast that they have to be constantly buying new equipment, but by and large it's energy.

But they can absorb that cost and hide it from us, because of course they want us to use their services free of charge. For the business of warehousing data, the real value and profit is concerned with its potential use; in turn this speculative drive results in the constant construction of larger and larger data centres to accrue more data, for more speculative potential.

For a business, the larger the sets of a data that you have, the better you can propose its potential use to suit a larger array of needs or markets—you can approach virtually any industry, be it pharmaceutical, or policing, of course advertising, which is the most lucrative. This has also led to the new industry of data brokers who aggregate and buy and sell data just like stocks. For private enterprise, not to mention the government, the value of data, or more specifically its potential value, far outweighs the material costs to store and collect it. The two central costs for data warehousing are taxes and the electricity bill. This is why so many are up in Eastern Oregon, where there are a lot of energy sources, and where there is a state government that has been very cooperative in their tax policies for the communications industry.

PA

I'd like to get more of your thoughts about the role of art in all this. I had a very interesting experience in my teaching last spring. I showed a video about what life is going to be like 50 years from now under severe water shortage conditions. The images were very crudely drawn and the voice-over was pretty rough too, but it was evocative. So I showed it to my class, and I was stunned by how strong an effect it had. Several students were in tears. They were so upset by the picture of the world it drew. I realised that even these students—students interested enough in environmental issues to take an elective—had not thought about how bad things are likely to get.

This seems like an important role for artists—helping people see and feel the future. But I wonder how artists can succeed in this. We have great science fiction, post-apocalypse movies, but they don't seem to prompt any real thinking. Some of them are surely produced with good intentions, and the directors feel honestly that it's best to sneak in the message behind the entertainment, but the end result leaves the audience more cynical than angry—more passive than eager to get involved in any effort to change things.

Perhaps one of the reasons this video I mention worked so well was precisely because it was rather crude and heartfelt. Because it wasn't so polished or entertaining.

RJ

The artist Zachary Formwalt¹ made a simple statement that I was struck by. He said, "We need images in times of crisis." I heard him say that within the context of a project he was working on before 2008, trying to visualise the economy. He had been collecting images that related to the economy, for example someone looking at a stock ticker, computer screens, trading floors. At that time there weren't that many, maybe one or two a month, and then the sub-prime mortgage crisis happened and suddenly there was an overflow of imagery. He ended up abandoning that particular project, but out of it came a deeper understanding of the image's role in a crisis, and how and under what circumstances we relate to images. After 2008 we suddenly needed some representation of the ephemeral abstraction of our economic systems. Most of us had happily lived without this imagery when the system seemed to predominantly work, but as soon as it was 'broken' the abstraction was no longer acceptable.

PA

Yes, surely explaining things is very hard without images. But I'm struck by how critical images are even to the simpler task of getting people to imagine where things are headed.

RJ

I think there is a tendency to want a crisis explained, but there

1 See <http://www.zacharyformwalt.com>

is also a desire for that explanation to fit within a pre-existing worldview, whichever view that might be. Images can be tools for this, susceptible and malleable to fit different needs and agendas. But even in these instances the lies that images can be used for are also able to speak deeper, unintended truths.

P: I also wonder about images of hope versus fear. I was at a meeting a while ago with the head of the Sierra Club, and his pitch was: "We environmentalists have to stop all this dark pessimistic talk about environmental crisis, because people are not going to respond to a message of fear and anxiety. People respond to a message of hope." There is a lot of research that supports that point: fear tends to paralyse people. But to me the emotion that seems most important here is anger—anger that things could be so much better and that you bastards are too selfish and are standing in the way of urgently needed change.

RJ

So fear and anger seem like the dominating commodities of our capitalist discourse.

PA

But I suppose the hope thing matters a lot too. I've heard some pretty smart people argue that even if the hope is deluded, you need to start there. Take, for example, AB32, the climate change initiative here in California. These measures are terribly insufficient—way too little to avoid environmental catastrophe—but you can make a good argument that if people hope that regulations like this will help solve the problem, then, when it becomes clear that we need far stronger measures, they will be willing to take the next step. If they are immobilised by fear now, then when things get really bad, they're only going to be more so.

RJ

That's sort of the guiding principle of what agitprop is: to agitate and propagate. The propagation part gets a little dangerous depending on what's being propagated, but fear can also inspire greater engagement, especially if rights are being taken away or threatened, and this has the potential to encourage stronger action in regards to climate change—which is hopefully different to regressive fear mongering.

I think people's alienation from both market and state actors might be what leads to the immobilisation that you're describing. As someone working with images, my hope is that they can provide some reorientation or connection to events and images right in front of all us, but I'm interested to defamiliarise them through selective juxtaposition, to reveal the power relations occurring beneath them.

I absolutely agree with you about the depictions of the future typical of Hollywood science fiction movies. These stories always seem to be about young individuals at odds with everyone around them. There's no suggestion that solidarity might be possible, and there is an assumption by the writers that audiences will identify with that.

PA

Great point! It does seem that when well-meaning filmmakers try to communicate a progressive idea in the form of a compelling 'narrative', they almost inevitably make a hero of the story an individual, and in that way obscure the critical role of collective solidarity in making change happen.

We have to encourage hope and the feeling that by working together we can master these challenges. The Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci had a personal motto: "Pessimism of the intellect and optimism of the will." Be rigorously objective in assessing where we stand, but remain confident that working together we can move forward. To be honest, when it comes to the environmental dimensions of our crisis, I'm not sure where we find the hope—but without that, no one is going to get off the couch and into the streets.

RJ

How does that play out for you as an educator?

PA

I encourage students to feel like they can change the world, and through my work as a teacher, help them to be a little less naive about the challenges that they face. There is no great glory in teaching despair. [Laughs.]

RJ

I don't want to make films in a vacuum; for me it's important to just be out in the world and talk to people, whether it's researching or during the filming stages. I wouldn't dare call myself a journalist but I like how the writer/journalist David Simon² positions himself: as being part of the argument.

FACING THE CLIMATE (ON DIFFICULT MOTHERS)

ARNE DE BOEVER

1

Does the climate have a face? You've probably heard of (maybe you've even experienced it) the ethical import of the first images of planet earth: somehow, seeing the planet at a distance enabled people to care about it more. It probably helped that the planet appeared as a beautiful, colourful ball onto which, very easily, a face could be projected. Everyone can relate to the planet as a person, to a 'mother' earth. We all love our mothers, right? Perhaps even a little too much.

Indeed, do mothers have to be lovable? What kind of love is solicited by the lovable mother? Might mothers want to be loved otherwise— from beyond the limitations of the kind of love that is solicited by lovability? Doesn't one want to be loved first and foremost in those abilities that pose a limit to what is called love?

Another way of asking this is: does the climate need a face in order for us to be able to care about it? Some might say that yes, it does— and they may refer to the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas when they do so. For Levinas, the face of 'the other' (it's been suggested he has

2 Writer and creator of TV series *The Wire* (2002) and *Treme* (2010) among others. For his writing see <http://davidsimon.com/>

mostly humans in mind) is where the ethical relation opens up, as a dimension or epiphany that challenges not just my power ('pouvoir') but my very capacity for power ("mon pouvoir de pouvoir", as Levinas puts it). If the face challenged only my power, I would just need to apply myself more to master it; if my capacity for power is being challenged, on the other hand, the game changes (from quantitative to qualitative). Levinas is in the qualitative, not the quantitative game.

But to read Levinas literally, as if he were talking about actual faces, about what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari call faciality—the structured distribution of eyes, nose, mouth, ears, et cetera—would be an error: at its best, least gentrified (and it's gentrified motherly love that I was targeting earlier on), Levinas's face challenges such a "beautiful" distribution, appearing instead much more like a smashed-up face, a Francis Bacon face (or "head", as Deleuze suggested)—as no "face" at all. *Face off. The mother's head. In Precarious Life*, which takes its title from Levinas, Judith Butler suggests that the face may just as well be a human back. Granted, it's still a *human* back we are talking about here, even if the description that Butler takes from Levinas when she points this out—it talks about "shoulders with blades like springs, which seemed to cry, sob, and scream"—invites us to also take into account the non-human (animal; object) when we think the Levinasian face.

2

Compare and contrast these two challenges to the human face: in the animation classic (yes?) *Shrek 2*, the ogre Shrek and his side-kick Donkey encounter, in the middle of the forest, a pussycat in boots. Introducing itself as Puss in Boots, the pussycat attacks the ogre, crawls (and claws) under his shirt, to suddenly burst out of it, hissing. The scene is a rewrite of that other, even more famous chestburster scene—from *Alien* (which, coincidentally—or not?—also involves a pussycat—albeit in the background—or rather two pussycats, if you count the pussy that's brought up in the dinner conversation). (Look it up, you'll see what I'm talking about.) In *Alien*, it is not the pussycat that comes bursting out of a human chest, but, you've guessed it, the titular alien: it also hisses, but it's no furry cat to be sure. Covered in blood and slime, and with corrosive acid pumping through its veins (as we later find out), it slithers away from the dinner table, where this scene—a kind of last supper scene—takes place.

Now, both these 'others'—Puss in Boots, the alien—represent challenges to the Levinasian face, because if there is a face here, it is the face of an animal or of an alien—not a human. But the challenge is drastically different in both cases: Puss in Boots is still a humanised, and ultimately cute other (note how the film plays with the pussycat's big eyes), whereas the alien stubbornly resists those qualifiers (the alien is and remains markedly unhuman, and not cute). And yet, as such, the alien may *really* be the ultimate carrier of what Levinas calls the face—of the otherness that the face names. It's worth noting here that when the alien first appears, it covers up the face of the space traveller whose chest it will later burst open. Note also that we're witnessing a kind of birth scene here, with a man being cast as the alien's mother. It's a birth, but it seems to unwork much of the ideology associated with birth. In fact, and judging by my experience alone (my wife and daughters will have to forgive me this one), the chestburster scene in *Alien/Shrek 2* seems to be a more realistic representation of birth than all of the rosy-coloured mother-and-child stuff that's become the order of the day. A hissing alien that comes bursting out of a spasmodic ogre—yeah, that pretty much captures it as far as I'm concerned (but I am, of course, no mother).

Finally, worth noting also at the simple, 'human' level are the voices that circulate in the scene from *Shrek 2*: Mike Myers, Eddie Murphy, and Antonio Banderas. White, Black, and Latino—and they all become fellow travellers. It's classic case of the American (US) 'buddy movie' (think *Lethal Weapon*, where white and black cop team up to save the world!) that brings 'others' together, beyond the racial differences that all too often divide us.

But isn't there a deeper difference, the difference of *Alien*, that divides us not so much from each other but even from ourselves? Isn't that the difference of the mother, and the love she inspires? Isn't that where our true face can be found—as the absence of all the facialities that are violently inscribed onto us, and that we sometimes also happily claim, even if we may realise (we've read some Foucault, yes?) that such a claim is not a claim to the truth about ourselves?

Here's the point: the climate may need a face in order for us to be able to care about it, but that face is not necessarily the smiley face that we can easily inscribe onto planet earth. Earth is not cute. It's not furry. It doesn't have big eyes. Earth is not so easily turned into a mother; or it can only be so when the mother is partly scrubbed out,

looking a little less 'motherly' as a consequence. (Ecology without nature, as Timothy Morton has put it. Motherfucker!)

In fact, doesn't the planet actually look more like one of those Francis Bacon faces I alluded to earlier on, with the clouds swirling around the planet's brown and blue ball evoking some of the visual effect of Bacon's scrubbing away the structured distribution of the face? Bacon as a planet painter, and our relation to the planet mimicking the relation triggered by a Bacon portrait.

3

The climate, with its Levinasian face, appears to us precariously, as something that humans can alter, upset, and possibly even destroy. At the same time, as Levinas would have it, it commands that we should not kill: a commandment that in this case does not come from far above the earth (the place from where we are looking), but appears to be resonating from within it (perhaps God was always below rather than above?). Because, however, when it comes to the climate as other, the climate is an other in which we are all wrapped up—there is no one who is unaffected by it, unless we want to count those spending their lives in climate-controlled offices that are rendering inhabitable the climate outside by creating a habitable climate inside—the precariousness of the climate is at the same time our own precariousness. This is already so in the relation between self and other as it is theorised in Levinas; it becomes particularly clear, however, when the other is an other by which the self is enveloped. The climate is precarious, but since the climate is our living environment, its precariousness marks our own. We and the climate depend on each other; and we all depend on each other in our relation to the climate.

What we encounter here is an intensified precariousness, a precariousness that demands us to think an interdependency that far exceeds the self-other relation into the relation of all to all and to the environment in which we live. The climate as hyperobject (Morton's term) can have this effect. Climate refugees collapse these various relations—self/climate, self/other people—into one: here's where our environmental interdependency lies most precariously exposed. What we run into when we encounter climate refugees are the economic conditions that determine both our 'ethics' toward refugees ('our social security system can't support this abuse of the right to asylum!') and our ethics toward the climate (we need to change capitalism if we

really want to do something about global warming, as Naomi Klein has pointed out in her powerful book *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*.

Klein, at the end of her book, includes a moving chapter about what she calls "the community of the infertile." Giving an account of her own struggle to conceive a child, and tying it to various reproductive issues that have appeared in a nature challenged by capitalism, she suggests her infertility is environmentally caused and that the continuation of the human species is already at stake in the battle for the climate. The planet may not be a mother, but many living on the planet are, or may want to be so in the future—no matter the accelerationist (xenofeminist) call for automatic reproduction. Klein, as the mother struggling to conceive, as the one barely being able to be a mother, who can be a mother only with extreme difficulty, is the face of our precariousness today—which is the precarious of a difficult humanism. Motherly love—both love for and of the mother—is reconceived here, outside of all *naïveté*, as the love of a difficult mother. The kind of precariousness that is produced by the climate (which we produce) is foundational and forces us to recommence all of our endeavours—the ecological struggle, living together, taking care of ourselves, et cetera—from this state of the difficult mother.



The island of Pelau, in the northern reaches of the Ontong Java atoll, sits just 1-2 metres above sea level and has a population of approximately 700. Image: Beni Knight.

CLIMATE DISPLACEMENT

EZEKIEL SIMPERINGHAM

Ezekiel Simperingham talked with Amy Howden-Chapman over Skype in October 2015. Ezekiel is based in London and is a legal consultant for Displacement Solutions, an organisation that works with climate displaced persons, communities, governments and the United Nations to find rights-based land solutions to climate displacement. An international human rights lawyer, in previous roles he has focused on refugee law, international criminal justice and housing, land and property rights.

The conversation centres on the consequences of language, especially the term 'climate displaced persons', as opposed to the more widely used but inaccurate 'climate refugees', as well as considering how visual narrative is a tool increasingly used by advocates and climate policy workers. As Ezekiel and Amy are both originally from New Zealand, the conversation inevitably turned to consider the implications of climate change for the Pacific region.

Amy Howden–Chapman

How long have you been working on this issue? And how did you get into it?

Ezekiel Simperingham

Since 2008. My background is international law, specifically refugees and displaced people, and the link between refugees, displaced people and their human rights. To clarify displaced, it means that rather than voluntarily moving, you're forced to move. For a long time we worked with people who had to leave their houses because of armed conflicts, and then we started working a little bit on development. So for example—the World Bank wants to go into a country and finance a giant dam project, and they try and relocate an entire village: rights for those people. And then in about 2008 our work became about climate change.

AHC

All roads lead to climate change?

ES

I think we just realised that displacement, because of the effects of climate change, was going to dwarf all other forms of displacement. And not only was the scale of the problem, or the crisis, overwhelming, but also the people who are most affected are the poorest, the most marginalised, the most vulnerable. The world had no way of dealing with this issue. As an international lawyer, I could see it was just this massive legal black hole that the people affected fell into. At least if you're displaced by armed conflict or if you're a political refugee there's a framework for dealing with you and for accessing rights and receiving protection, but if you're displaced because of the effects of climate change, you're just a nobody.

So at the time there were a lot of different proposals going around, thinking through, what can we do to protect these people?

AHC

And a framework has been developed subsequently, is that correct—a framework that Australia has recently blocked?

ES

There's an emerging issue around including a 'climate change displacement coordination facility' in whatever agreement comes out of the current Paris climate change negotiations. It's not clear exactly what that facility would do, but at least it would be a recognition that climate displacement is a real issue that requires a real global response, in a coordinated way. But one of the most recent drafts of the Paris agreement dropped all mention of the facility—and a *Guardian* article revealed that Australia was the driving force behind getting that mechanism excluded.¹ Interestingly, that mechanism may be back on the cards now, we'll have to wait and see.

I think more broadly there have been a lot of proposals for dealing with this issue. From a legal perspective one of the really significant differences is if the displaced people move across an international border, or stay within their own country. A lot of attention has been focused on people who have to leave their home country, or are displaced across an international border. And a lot of people call those people climate refugees. But the Refugee Convention signed in 1951, in the aftermath of World War Two, was designed to protect political refugees in the context of that War. Initially it was just for Europe, and then it was extended to the whole world. But that only affects a very, very limited category of person, and it definitely doesn't say anything about climate change, natural hazards, or environmental degradation.

A lot of people assume that if you're displaced because of climate change and you cross a border you can get protection under the Refugee Convention. But in the vast majority of cases you absolutely can't, and a big reason is because when it was created people just didn't know about climate change.

AHC

Does the Refugee Convention include economic hardship?

ES

No, it doesn't. And unfortunately that's led to the perspective

¹ Oliver Milman, 'UN drops plan to help move climate change affected people', *The Guardian*, 7 October 2015 <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/oct/07/un-drops-plan-to-create-group-to-relocate-climate-change-affected-people>

that if you're fleeing your country and you fit the definition in the Refugee Convention, you're deserving of protection, but if you're fleeing your country because of economic hardship you don't deserve protection. But that's a false dichotomy. For the Refugee Convention (A) you have to be outside of your country; (B) you have to face persecution and (C) that persecution has to be for a specific reason: race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, but nothing about someone's economic situation.

So people said, maybe we need to amend the convention to include climate change, but then others said hey refugees are already having a bad enough time as it is, we should just leave the convention alone because if we open that up for discussion then we might lose the protections that already exist. So people said maybe we need to create a new convention entirely, and the general consensus was that there was just zero political willingness to do that.

Then around 2012 the Nanson Initiative, led by Norway and Switzerland, was started. It aims, not to create a new binding international law, but instead a 'protection agenda'. They've just released a document which looks—specifically in the context of people moving across international borders—at what can countries do to protect people in the absence of binding international law. What is there already from other parts of international law that we can piece together? And what are existing practices around the world that are good examples that other countries can follow? But this is just focused on displacement across borders, whereas one of the things we know about climate displacement is actually the vast majority is going to be within countries.

AHC

How is that measured? Or, who is measuring that?

ES

I think there are massive gaps: Who's measuring displacement, how they are measuring it, and is there a robust scientific approach?

There are two main effects of climate change that lead to displacement. The first is the sudden-onset effects: increasingly frequent and severe storms, flooding, storm surges, erosion. And then there are the slow-onset effects: sea level rise, drought, saline intrusion into freshwater sources, things like that. The sudden-onset effects generally result in what are conceived of as natural disasters. And these are being counted at the moment.

The IDMC's (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre) analysis is that on average 26.4 million people are displaced by natural disasters every year. What's not being measured are the slow onset effects, or the fact that you can't grow your crops any more because there is just too much salt water around. No one knows exactly what that's going to lead to, but the risk is pretty clear; already more than 150 million people live within one metre of sea level.

AHC

Yeah I did a project a few years ago that was situated in the Wellington CBD that tried to make palpable the effect sea level rise will have on that area. And of course it's not where people live, it's not people subsistence farming, but it's where a lot of New Zealand's government is located.

ES

The thing with those natural disasters, those 26.4 million displaced every year—the larger tragedy is that 97 percent of those people are in the developing world. Mary Robinson (former Irish president and former UN Human Rights Commissioner), UN Special Envoy for Climate Change, calls it an issue of 'climate justice'. The people by far the most affected are by far the least responsible. And the slow-onset effects like sea level rise, again, are going to most obviously impact the developing world, but the developed world is starting to realise that it's a problem for them as well. There was a report last week in an American scientific journal that said that based on current levels of climate change 20 million people will be affected by sea level rise in America alone.

AHC

I know that Boston...

ES

Boston, Miami, New Orleans, New York, they are all really vulnerable. The developing world is starting to think hey maybe we'll be affected. For example there was recently a speech on climate change made by the CEO of the Bank of New Zealand, and he said, already on the Kapiti Coast the effects of sea level rise and climate change are affecting coastal property values. That's people who are in New Zealand and thinking actually maybe this is an issue for me.

AHC

Is the Nanson Initiative intended as a precursor to possible binding agreements?

ES

Yeah I think they didn't quite know how it was going to go. In 2011 they had this big workshop in Norway. At that point only Norway and Switzerland, two great humanitarian countries supported it, and everyone else kind of backed off. Three years later I think they've got more support, they've got about nine countries on board. But they're still miles away from consensus or a binding agreement. There's really a lot of resistance to this issue; basically it means if someone who is displaced because of climate change turns up in your country, you should protect them, and they should be able to stay. And people just don't want to commit to that.

AHC

Just for my clarification, one example that I know of this in New Zealand (perhaps related to immigration, not refugee status?) was a family coming from Tuvalu, and climate change was mentioned in the case, not as the key factor, but as one of the contributing factors.

ES

That's an interesting case because in the end it wasn't even a contributing factor. There have been quite a lot of cases in New Zealand where people from Pacific Islands asked for protection from the effects of climate change. A lot of them have gone through the refugee process in New Zealand and 100 percent of those people have failed because they can't

prove that they are going to be persecuted, as persecution is understood in international law. And, even if they can prove that they're going to be persecuted, they are not differentially at risk because of their political opinion or because of their religion: everyone in the country is at exactly the same risk.

There is the now infamous case of the man from Kiribati who some people claimed to be the world's first climate refugee, and he's just about to be deported from New Zealand because he couldn't meet the definition in the Refugee Convention. In the Tuvalu case—where someone was actually able to stay in New Zealand—the decision maker said you are not entitled to protection under the Refugee Convention for the reasons we've given lots of other people in your situation, but there is another category available in New Zealand. If you're going to be deported and there are compelling humanitarian reasons for not doing so, you can allow that person to stay. So, it's not that you're going to be returned to the effects of climate change, it's that your children have grown up in New Zealand, you've got extensive family here, and so you shouldn't be deported. But the actual decision had nothing to do with climate change. The other interesting thing is that the decision maker said, this is not to say that climate change might not be a compelling consideration in another case, it's just not in this case because there is an easier way to do it.

This is the cross border stuff. Again we know that the vast majority of people are going to stay within their own country—mostly countries that have the least resources and people who have the least ability to cope with displacement. So that's really where our work comes in. Asking governments what are you doing to prepare for this, what are the legal and policy and institutional frameworks, in your country, to deal with displacement?

AHC

An interesting aspect of this for me, something which I think you've covered to some extent in your work, is the differentiation between individuals and families who might be seeking refugee status or displaced person's status, and entire communities or societies that are affected—and the difference in planning that is required between those two scales.

ES

I think that's interesting because every other form of displacement or refugee protection is premised on the individual's circumstances. It's almost like providing surrogate protection to the individual because their own country has failed them, and often that's people fleeing armed conflict, or a political refugee who has been targeted because they're a member of an opposition political group, or someone who has been targeted on the basis of their religion. But climate change is different because we've got this benefit of hindsight already: we know what areas are at risk, we know what kind of effects are going to hit there, and so for the first time in this area in which I work, we can preempt what's going to happen, rather than just being reactionary all the time.

AHC

So you're saying a political uprising, or a conflict, or a genocide, is a lot harder to predict than what the effects of climate change are going to be, given the modelling we can do with the knowledge we currently have.

ES

Yeah that's right. You normally don't get a lot of notice. You might get a day or two, but in the past there was often no way of predicting what was going to cause mass displacement. Now we're already talking about how in Bangladesh alone 30 million people are going to have to leave their homes because of sea level rise, as currently projected. So we need to start thinking—where are those people going to go? The answer is they're going to stay in Bangladesh. It's saying to the government have you got any plan for these 30 million people who are going to be on the move? Such foresight is...a weird benefit.

AHC

As this journal partly comes out of New Zealand we're interested in the Pacific, but as far as your work goes, it seems like Bangladesh is a key area, and then the Pacific. What geographic regions do people in your area, or you, find yourself focusing on?

ES

I work a lot in Bangladesh, I coordinate a project there. But as an organisation we work a lot in the Pacific, particularly in Kiribati and Tuvalu.

In the future I'm going to be working more in the Solomon Islands. It's an interesting situation there because quantitatively less people are going to be affected there than somewhere like Bangladesh, but their response is quite developed. There is already quite an advanced conversation happening there about how to adapt to the effects of climate change. These effects are very real, they're happening now, and they are asking what can we do to change the way we live, invest in infrastructure; what can we do to protect ourselves? There is a bunch of things that they can do, but, particularly in the really outlying islands and coral atolls, they have concluded that no amount of adaptation can protect those communities; they have to relocate to somewhere else in the Solomon Islands.

AHC

I know that Kiribati has bought land in Fiji, is that something that they're considering?

ES

The thing is, for Kiribati, they don't have anywhere to go: it's one to two metres above sea level, the whole country, while in the Solomon Islands they can go somewhere else within the islands. But there is a lot of conflict over land—that's what their historical civil war was caused by.

Ontong Java is 400 kilometres away from the capital; it's a tiny coral atoll and everyone there is Polynesian, and the proposal is to move them to a Melanesian area. And they're saying, we just don't want to go there, because basically we can't get on with Melanesian people and they can't get on with us and it just won't work if we turn up there. We've lived on these beautiful coral atolls, they're weird and isolated, but that's our life, and you're trying to move us to this semi mountainous region on the mainland. We just don't want to go.



Above: Sprouting coconut of hope on Henua Aiku. Below: Henua Aiku (Spirit Island) showing signs of major erosion. Both images taken in the northern reaches of the Ontong Java atoll. Images: Beni Knight.

It's also incredibly complicated because 87 percent of land in the Solomon Islands is owned at the tribal level or under customary law, meaning the state doesn't really have any control over the land. So if you want to move all these people from the outside islands, the state has to negotiate with, for example, the Melanesian community on Malaita and say have you got any land that you want to give or sell to these people coming here? They will either say, no, or they'll say, here is some rubbish land at a ridiculous price.

Whereas in Kiribati the questions are as big as, if everyone leaves Kiribati what happens to Kiribati? What happens to your language, your culture, your way of life? What passport do you get—a Fijian passport? From an international legal perspective there is no way of dealing with those questions, because we've never had to deal with them before. There has never been a state that has literally disappeared, like Atlantas.

AHC

Ahhhhh, you're giving me weird conceptual despair.

ES

I think the Pacific Islands are a really really interesting challenge.

AHC

Are you finding that there are models of negotiation and governance that are transportable between these different nations, or is the Solomon Islands' situation so specific because of tribal land holdings and customary issues that in different Pacific Islands and Bangladesh for example there are no equivalences?

ES

There is a lot of context specificity, and there are so many ways you can approach this issue. In some ways it's a humanitarian crisis. What do you do with people when they're displaced? How do you make sure they have shelter and food and water?

But it's also a development issue, and the United Nations Development Program, which Helen Clark is the leader of, names natural disasters as one of the greatest threats to development

worldwide.² And it's also a security issue: NATO has just released a report linking climate change with security.³ For small island states like Kiribati and Tuvalu it's an existential crisis.

But as we see it, even though there is a lot of specificity, the best way to address this issue is through a human rights framework. It's not just an issue of humanitarian response, like having a response in place if something happens; governments now have a responsibility to protect their own people against this happening. They have a responsibility to make sure that people can continue to live their lives in safety and dignity and are protected against hazards. And if they are displaced—bearing in mind that adaptation is not infinite and there is no way that every country is going to be able to protect every community against displacement – asking how can we allow this community to rebuild their lives? And to really make sure that all of their human rights are protected.

AHC

So if a country was failing to protect the human rights of their citizens, is the UN convention on human rights the enforcing body?

ES

Human rights enforcement is 180 million people's PHD topic! And for good reason because although these states have signed up to binding conventions, of which there are many, if they're not respecting the human rights of their population there is no clear international enforcement. In fact what we often find is that domestic measures are more effective than international measures. For example in Bangladesh we're saying to the communities themselves, hey you aren't just passive victims in

2 "Disasters caused by natural hazards are now among the greatest threats to long-term development worldwide. Over the last 20 years, they have killed 1.3 million people, affected 4.4 billion, and caused over US\$ 2 trillion in economic losses. Not only do disasters cause suffering, they also undermine the fight against poverty." Foreword by Helen Clark, Administrator, UNDP and Bekele Gelata, Secretary-General, IFRC in UNDP and IFRC, *Effective law and regulation for disaster risk reduction: a multi-country report*, 17 June 2014 available at: http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/crisis%20prevention/UNDP_CPR_DRR_fullreport2013.pdf.

3 NATO Parliamentary Assembly, Science and Technology Committee, 'Climate Change, International Security and the way to Paris 2015', Draft Special Report, 20 March 2015, paragraph 26 onwards.

this, you're the holder of human rights, your communities have rights and the government has a duty to protect those rights, so you need to make sure they are being enforced. And the way to do that is to be aware of your rights and the government's obligation to protect them, and also to be aware of what measures of enforcement are there in your country. Maybe there is a constitution; in Bangladesh there is, and it protects many of these international human rights. We work with groups of lawyers and trainee judges there. We're asking if they want to take a public interest case in the Supreme Court of Bangladesh to protect people's rights. We also do a lot of work with journalists, to say come and meet with local communities and see what their needs are, from a human rights perspective, and that puts pressure on the government to act.

AHC

I suppose that's one of the issues that intersects with our Distance Plan project: how do you create visual understanding around these issues. So you do see working with media as part of the way your organisation functions?

ES

Absolutely, I think it's critically important; this is a new kind of challenge. I don't think we can just release a human rights report and then try and get the UN to say something about it and think that's enough. I think we have to have a new approach.

AHC

I've seen in some of your reports this term—framing the 'causation conundrum'—I was thinking about that in relation to representation of the Syrian Crisis, because I know there has been some analysis that suggests the crisis was caused, or at least exacerbated by the drought there⁴ and the widespread crop failures it caused, which necessitated many farming families moving to the cities. It may be a contributing factor, but not the only

4 "Drawing one of the strongest links yet between global warming and human conflict, researchers said Monday that an extreme drought in Syria between 2006 and 2009 was most likely due to climate change, and that the drought was a factor in the violent uprising that began there in 2011", writes Henry Fountain in 'Researchers link Syrian conflict to a drought made worse by climate change', *The New York Times*, 2 March 2015. See also Thomas L. Friedman, 'WikiLeaks, Drought and Syria', *The New York Times*, 21 January 2014.

factor in that crisis. Do you think it's important that issues like that be framed more in terms of climate change?

ES

Sometimes I think the opposite. Sometimes I think that climate change is a massive distraction, unhelpful to developing a response, and really if someone is impacted by a natural hazard or they just can't use their land anymore because there is too much salt water infiltrating it, we should just ask what can we do to help those people. Practically, if someone is affected by drought, or if a whole country goes underwater because of sea level rise, what can we do to help? But at the same time climate change is a necessary part of the conversation because it's telling us that all of these things are going to become worse, and so the response also needs to be structural. Ad hoc responses won't be enough.

In terms of the Syrian conflict, I think what's happening there is that the left wing is trying to motivate right wing politicians who are sceptical about climate change. What they're not sceptical about is ISIS and international terrorism. So maybe if we start drawing links between climate change and security then you and your constituencies are going to start caring as well.

In terms of the causation conundrum, a lot of time attention and energy is spent on it, and I don't think it's particularly helpful. What we need to do is start helping countries where the impacts are already great to deal with the problem, rather than debating the nuances of were they displaced by climate change or weren't they; was it a normal storm or a climate change storm? It's often suggested that these people have an element of choice in the matter; maybe it's just a voluntary migration decision to move to the slums of Dhaka? But if you can't farm your land because it's destroyed by salt water, there's not really an element of choice in that.

Because people can't really think clearly about climate change, or about climate displacement, I think we need different ways of representing it, and of thinking about it. That's why I think art is critical as a way of initiating discussion and thought, outside of endless scientific reports and human rights analyses and policy

documents, which is where a lot of energy is going at the moment. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change recently released its Fifth Assessment report, and it's hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of pages of very boring scientific analysis. Maybe if an artist can transform that into something that people can understand, and it provokes them to think about that in a different way, then that is critical.

AHC

Amy Balkin, a colleague, whose work I think deals very smartly with these issues, did make a work that addressed this very difficulty—how we as a community go about collectively absorbing the vast amount of scientific information presented in those reports. She organised a public readings of the IPCC Fourth Assessment Report.⁵

ES

(Laughter) That's funny, I like that.

AHC

It's her way of showing that these reports exist, and people are really interested in them, but how do you absorb information? You absorb it when someone is telling it to you, and you're sitting in a group and you can discuss it afterwards.

ES

I met one of the authors of one of the chapters of the report that deals with displacement and human security, and they said, you shouldn't pay too much attention to the summary, because it is a negotiated text that governments agree to. Whereas the actual report is what the science says. And I was like okay, interesting recommendation, but really who's not just reading the summary, have you seen how big your report is? Even the summary takes 12 hours to read out.

⁵ The work titled *Reading the IPCC Fourth Assessment Report on Climate Change (2009)* is described by Balkin. "While the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports are revealing documents about the current science and geopolitics of climate change, their length makes them unlikely to be consumed beyond specific readerships. *Reading the IPCC...* attempts to make these documents more public through a participatory public reading. Self-volunteered readers took part in a three-day attempt to read the entire third volume of the Fourth Assessment Report, the 800 page *Climate Change 2007: Mitigation*. Over 50 volunteer readers participated in the reading." See: <http://tomorrowmorning.net/ipccreading>

AHC

I suppose it's a question for all of us. Where we put our energy on these issues.

ES

We do a lot of work with photojournalists, or just photographers, because it is really a visual thing. We work with Kadir Van Lohuizen⁶ a lot and he's come to Bangladesh a number of times, and contributed photographs to a *New York Times* article that we helped facilitate. A journalist came to Bangladesh and travelled around with some of our partners there, and wrote this article and used Kadir's photographs. And at a lot of meetings I've had with American government officials and other people I've met in Bangladesh, they've said that that article and those photographs were really influential in their thinking about this issue.⁷ And those are people who are already in Bangladesh. Just because you're stationed in Bangladesh as a foreign diplomat, it doesn't mean that you get to these remote places that are the most affected. Often you just sit in Dhaka in your compound. I think that photography has been a really important tool for us.

Beni Knight is another photographer we work with and he just went to Ontong Java Atoll, that place I mentioned before, in the Solomon Islands. He had to take a freight boat to get there, which only goes once a month, and because there was a cyclone when he was out there he missed the ride back, so he had to stay out there for two months. He took some amazing images. Some of them ended up in a *Guardian* article that talks about the Climate Displacement Coordination Facility.⁸

I was saying to him you must have some really unique information about how people are living and what their options are in terms of climate change. And he was saying, I think I'm the only

6 See <http://www.lohuizen.net/>

7 Gardiner Harris, 'Borrowed time on disappearing land', *New York Times*, 29 March 2014 http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/29/world/asia/facing-rising-seas-bangladesh-confronts-the-consequences-of-climate-change.html?_r=0

8 Oliver Milman, 'UN drops plan to create group to relocate climate change', *The Guardian*, 7 October 2015 <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/oct/07/un-drops-plan-to-create-group-to-relocate-climate-change-affected-people>

person in the world who's not from there who has that information. There is no government official in the Solomons who's hopping on that boat. And so he feels he has this awesome responsibility now to do something about it.

AHC

I've been interviewing the biologist Richard Primack who is looking at changes in the Boston area,⁹ and he has the view that the publicity of the issue is a major part of his job. He's a conservation biologist and this is not what he signed up for—he thought he would be looking at specimens—but realises that in the duration of his career his role has changed from studying something to studying something and promoting his findings to a general public. And it's interesting that as a lawyer you've found that as well.

ES

And the challenge is, yes you have to publicise this issue but how do you deal with that responsibly? You can't just take photos of a flood in Bangladesh and say, look at climate change. It's almost impossible to link a specific environmental event with climate change. Yes, climate change is going to make flooding worse, but you can't just go take a bunch of photos of a flood and say look at these climate refugees. Also, the issue of numbers is massive. How many people are going to be affected? We just don't have a 100 percent accurate way of counting climate displaced people. Actually, we often don't even agree on who should be counted. But even with those complications there are these widely publicised numbers of hundreds of millions of people or even a recent study that suggests two billion people will be displaced this century.

It's hard because people don't usually care about these issues until it's too late, when people are already displaced. It often takes a major disaster for people to start caring, or thinking maybe we should get some laws or policies in place to deal with this. Like after Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines, or after New Orleans, that's also when you see global support pour in. But what we are trying to emphasise is that we know these things are

9 Richard Primack's work investigates the impact of climate change on the flowering and leafing out times of plants, the spring arrival of birds and the flight times of insects in Massachusetts and beyond. He is the author of *Walden Warming: Climate Change Comes to Thoreau's Wood* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2015) <http://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/W/bo8829988.html>

going to happen, to a large extent we know where they're going to happen, and so people and governments have a real responsibility to do something about it now. It's almost like you want to stand around screaming, "hey two billion climate refugees" or "1.5 trillion dollars in economic loss" or "waves of refugees and terrorists from Syria," just to get people's attention...

AHC

That's one of the roles I think art has historically been effective in: dealing with a precision around language. Artists helped bring feminist ideas into the mainstream. Art was part of the discussion that said, hey every institution has to look at the way it uses gendered language, and by extension every institution has to consider if it's reproducing sexism. That was a model for precision around how we use language.

Related to that, I was reading coverage of remarks the Micronesian president had presented to the UN, and he talks about climate change as an issue of potential genocide to Oceanic peoples.¹⁰ I think it's interesting to consider whether those words should be used, what tenor of language is most effective, and doesn't just antagonise the situation. Even differences in the definitions you end up using matter, like between internal displacement and displacement across borders. Should we be trying to promote a broader understanding of different terms?

ES

The more you focus on the nuances the more boring it gets and the less people care. There has been a really big discussion in our sector about the term 'climate refugees' because a lot of people say it. Barack Obama says it, Joe Biden says it. And a lot of people in our sector are like, hey, that's legally incorrect, they're not refugees. There is a very specific protection mechanism for refugees and they don't fit in it, so to say climate refugees is not only legally wrong, but might actually have a side effect of decreasing protection for existing refugees. So we need to be really care-

¹⁰ "I speak as an islander who has walked the shores of many atoll islands, where there was once sandy beaches and coconut trees", Peter Christian, President of Micronesia, told the UN assembly. "Now there are none. I am told this will continue. We must become more cohesive in our actions to bring a useful conclusion to help mitigate the threat of sinking islands and prevent the potential genocide of Oceanic peoples and cultures." Oliver Milman, 'UN drops plan to help move climate-change affected people', *The Guardian*, 6 October 2015.

ful about the term, in fact most people I work with never use it. But when I met with these community groups in Bangladesh and gave them this boring legal speech about climate refugees, and how they are not climate refugees, but climate displaced peoples, and I got to the end of it, and they were like, we're just going to keep calling ourselves climate refugees, because otherwise no one is going to listen, and I was like, fair enough. When Barack Obama or Joe Biden says climate refugees, they know they're not climate refugees, but they use it because it has resonance for people.

A lot of what we're trying to do is influence policy makers, and they have a lot on their plates, so how do you influence them in a responsible way and without getting bogged down in nuances? We don't even have an agreed upon term for what to call these people, let alone how to go about protecting their human rights.

THE THREAT OF WATER: RELOCATION IN CALI & CHRISTCHURCH

BIDDY LIVESEY & VERONICA OLIVOTTO

Veronica Olivotto and Bidy Livesey are researchers. Bidy lives in Auckland, New Zealand; Veronica lives in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, where they met in 2009. Rotterdam is threatened by water in a dramatic way. The university where Olivotto and Livesey studied urban management is in Kratingen, near the lowest point of the Netherlands, which is approximately seven metres below mean sea level. Situated on the River Maas, Rotterdam is protected by dikes, and the whole river system is protected from storm surges in the North Sea by the Maeslant Barrier, a massive barrier which can be moved to block the entrance of the river. When they lived there, Rotterdam was experimenting with floating houses, and water transport as a way to reach isolated parts of the city, and has since built a public 'water plaza', that collects excess rainfall during downpours. Livesey and Olivotto were in Rotterdam when the Christchurch earthquakes occurred in New Zealand, and also when the 'winter wave' of 2010-11 forced the evacuation of families from the Cauca dike in Cali, Colombia.

Relocation and community

Examining relocation is critical when assessing adaptation as a response to climate change. 'Managed retreat'—the abandonment of settled areas vulnerable to hazards—is a technical response with significant social, economic, and political implications. This text considers two communities who live by rivers in different parts of the world. Both are threatened by water, and as a result have been relocated from their homes. In neither case is the threat explicitly related to sea level rise caused by anthropogenic climate change. In Christchurch, a natural disaster has caused the earth around the river to liquefy, unsettling housing foundations, roads, and infrastructure. In Cali, people are living on a human-made dike protecting the city from river flooding, which civic authorities worry is unsafe. In both cases, communities have intensively occupied historically swampy, low-lying land.

Cali and Christchurch illustrate the precarity of communities living in vulnerable places, and the vulnerability of peoples' lives and livelihoods within a shifting geological and political system. When considering global environmental change, vulnerability is considered to be a function of the exposure (who or what is at risk) and sensitivity of a system (the degree to which people and places can be harmed).¹ Adding to this concept an awareness of the biophysical and social forces that can make specific communities more or less vulnerable², we frame vulnerability as an issue of 'human security' where climate change is only one of the multiple processes of change that affect people.³

1 Adger, N. (2006), 'Vulnerability', *Global Environmental Change* 16, 268–281 and Cutter, S., L. (1996), 'Vulnerability to environmental hazards', *Progress in Human Geography* 20, 529–539 in Cutter, S.L. et al. (2008), 'A place-based model for understanding community resilience to natural disasters', *Global Environmental Change*, 18(4), 598–606.

2 Frerks, G., Warner, J. & Weijls, B. (2011), 'The politics of vulnerability and resilience', *Ambiente & Sociedade* (2), 105. doi: 10.1590/S1414-753X2011000200008, 106.

3 O'Brien, K. (2007), 'Why different interpretations of vulnerability matter in climate change discourses', *Climate Policy* Vol.7 (1) DOI:10.1080/14693062.2007.9685639.

Living by the Cauca River

Nested in the Cauca Valley, Cali is considered Colombia's epicentre in the Pacific. Although it is 100 kilometres from the coast, Cali is also one of Colombia's most flood prone regions. The city we see today began around the San Antonio hill, once home to indigenous populations, who cultivated fruits and vegetables in the hot climate and rich soils periodically inundated by the Cali river. The Cali river flows northwards from the west and drains into the Cauca River, which flows to the east of the city.

In the 1950s a dike was created along the Cauca River, preventing flooding at peak discharges.⁴ Built as part of an urban expansion program, 'Proyecto Agua Blanca', by the Autonomous Regional Corporation of the Cauca Valley (CVC), which also owns the land on which the dike is situated, the dike protects agricultural lands and the expanding eastern part of the city from the waters of the river. At the time, the city was expanding as a result of migration—between 1951–1964 the population of Cali increased by 5.9 percent.⁵ Most migrants were displaced by conflict in the northern areas of the Valley. People in these regions, and especially Afro-Colombian farming communities, were caught in land and cattle disputes between the Colombian Government and armed Marxist guerrillas. Due to this conflict, Colombia has over five million internal refugees.⁶ Other migrants have also come from the Pacific Coast of the Cauca Valley, another area overwhelmed by violence due to drug trafficking and lack of employment.

In the eastern parts of Cali, the land was used mainly for grazing livestock, and its value was very low. Over the last 50 years, the value of land in eastern Cali has risen, including the value of the land on the dike itself. Early on, landowners with political ties and *gamalones* (a Spanish term for large landowner bosses who appropriate land originally owned by indigenous communities) began to sell their ranch land by the square metre. These sales were neither prevented nor regulated by the city administration, which saw the opportunity for new housing

developments for medium and low-income people. However, these developments could not meet the increasing housing demand from rural migrants, fuelling the growth of illegal settlements.⁷ Ironically the Cauca Valley Corporation itself played a key role in establishing the first settlements on the dike in the 1970s, allegedly issuing land lease contracts to seven families relocated from another area. The families began selling lots of the same land to family members, and settlers quickly grew from 70 families in the 1990s to more than 7852 households today. The dike became a lively gathering of informal commercial activities, from working in garages and metal workshops to livestock rearing.⁸

Vulnerability of people

Early risk studies indicated that the dike was not suitable for occupation because of its steep slopes and high water table. However, authorities failed to enforce environmental and land regulations. The danger is real: the Cauca River can be incredibly powerful with a flow rate of 250 cubic metres per second, and 60 percent of the city, including the water treatment plant that serves 80 percent of its inhabitants, would be affected by a major dike rupture.⁹ This area was home to swamps and lagoons at the beginning of the century and is mostly below the river level. The river overflows whenever the water level is high and several sections of the dike and its residents have been affected. The area has been declared one of 'unmitigable risk'.

Dike settlers are physically vulnerable because the structure on which they live has not been properly maintained by local authorities. Termites and tree roots are major dike enemies. Settlers live in temporary houses made of bamboo (*guadua*) and adobe (*bahareque*) unsuitable for a flood prone environment. Their informal status also implies lack of land tenure and, initially at least, poor access to basic

4 'La eterna agonía del río Cauca a su paso por la capital Valle', *El País*, 2014 <http://www.elpais.com.co/elpais/cali/noticias/eterna-agonia-rio-cauca-su-paso-por-capital-ville>

5 Giraldo, U.F. & Sanchez, R.A.D. (2012), 'Transformations socio-demographic and living conditions in two indigenous and black populations in northern Cauca in the period between 1993–2005', *Colombia Medica* Vol.43 (2).

6 Council on Hemispheric Affairs (2015), 'Colombia's Invisible Crisis: Internally Displaced Persons': <http://www.coha.org/colombias-invisible-crisis-internally-displaced-persons/>

7 Castro Uribe, H. (2006), 'Agricultores urbanos y ocupación del espacio en el nororiente de Santiago de Cali', *En Revista Electronica de Geografía Y Ciencias Sociales*, Universidad de Barcelona, Vol.X (224).

8 'Bloqueo de tres horas en recta Cali y Palmira por predios', *El Tiempo*, 2015 <http://www.eltiempo.com/colombia/cali/protesta-en-la-recta-cali-palmira/15331221>

9 Castro, 2006.

services. Furthermore, families have built an extra padding (*relleno*) on the slope facing the river to increase their amount of available land, enhancing the risk of inundation as padding replaced the shore.¹⁰

Politics of relocation and community organising

Since the mid-1980s people living on the dike have been threatened with eviction. In 1987, in an effort to clear the dike from what authorities now called ‘invaders’, the Instituto de Credito Territorial, the administrative branch of the Colombian banking institution, began to take legal action against settlers, claiming the area for the “reinstatement of public use.” Families and groups began to organise to obtain land tenure in an effort to resist the constant threat of eviction. As Big Chief Albert Lambreaux said, referring to his occupation of a housing project deliberately kept shut after Katrina, “They think people won’t fight and most won’t, but some will.”¹¹

In 1988 the Association of Urban Farmers of Comercio was formed, aiming to represent households that farmed the land as a way to generate extra income on and around the dike. The Association lobbied the municipal council, forging alliances with large landowners resulting in a land concession and in the legalisation of the Association’s properties by the Municipal Council.¹² In the lead-up to the elections, aiming to gain votes, the Municipal Council required the Instituto de Credito Territorial to suspend any legal action against the settlers.¹³ In many cases EMCALI, the local public service provider, granted connections to water and electricity in order to minimise illegal connections. The issue was silent until the 2000s when the municipality, under the pressure of the Environmental Department and the CVC, proposed a new relocation plan within the City Strategic Development Plan (2000). The municipal budget alone, however, could not fund the relocation plan, and it was never implemented.

10 Castro, 2006; Holguin, J.C., Osorio, G.H., Castro, Uribe, H. (2013), ‘Asentamiento informal, sostenibilidad y resistencia frente al estado: el caso de los samanes del Cauca en Cali’, Artículo presentado a al 14 Congreso Colombiano de Trabajo Social, Universidad Externado de Colombia 14–16 Agosto 2013.

11 Albert Lambreaux is a Mardi Gras Indian chief from *Treme*, the HBO series by David Simon on the socio-political injustices occurred during and after Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans.

12 Castro, 2006.

13 Ibid.

Another self-organised association emerged under the name ‘Los Samanes del Cauca’ (the *saman* is a tree species indigenous to this area). This powerful act of self-determination and sense of place-identity was an historic moment for the dike’s residents. In an effort to be recognised as a legal figure in the eyes of city authorities, Los Samanes formed the Board of Community Action (Junta de Acción Comunal). The Board’s aim was to enhance the community’s quality of life by collecting funds and making strategic alliances with external organisations, such as hospitals, the police and civil defence. These alliances led to community activities promoting health awareness and food security and allegedly played a crucial role by helping families resist relocation.¹⁴

Politics of relocation and persisting vulnerability

In Colombia, increasing floods over the last 40 years have not been matched by national investment in disaster management. Colombia also lacks a directive for the assessment and control of flood risks, although since 2012 more comprehensive legislation is being introduced.¹⁵

After the media attention surrounding the events of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in 2005, the situation of the dike settlers became a matter of “imminent danger.”¹⁶ This urgency, in the context of climate change, was used by the municipality to justify “relocation with force” by seeking alliances and funding opportunities beyond the city administration both at the national level and through private entities like the Bank for Families Compensation of the Cauca Valley (COMFANDI). Between 2006 and 2007 the municipality relocated approximately 119 families from the areas of Villamoscas (southern sections of the dike).¹⁷

14 Holguin et al., 2013.

15 Cruz, S., Karime, R. (2012), ‘Gestión integrada del riesgo de inundaciones en Colombia’, *Tesis de Maestría*, Universitat Politècnica de Valencia.

16 Castro, 2006; Castro & Holguin, 2012.

17 Castro, 2006.

Conditions for people living on the dike were made worse by the 'winter wave' of 2010-2011. Following intense rainfalls, the Cauca River inundated 17 districts of the city, affecting 1,500 people in Cali alone, and 45,000 people in the Cauca Valley.¹⁸

In 2011, new relocations began in other areas of the southernmost part of the dike called Brisa del Nuevo Amanecer. Clashes erupted once again between the settlers and authorities over the violence used to destroy shacks and remove families, and over the uncertainties of the compensation conditions.¹⁹ Then, in 2012, a Dutch engineering firm and a Colombian consultant developed an analysis of the status of the dike giving recommendations to improve its safety. These recommendations formed the Rio Cauca Dike Plan.

All this reinforced the case for further relocations in the eyes of the Colombian national government, which mobilised \$823 million pesos (US\$260M) from their National Adaptation Fund to support the technical strengthening of the dike, the drainage system and wastewater infrastructure. Cali's municipality had less than a third of the budget needed to provide new housing for those displaced, so the National Adaptation Fund was also used to create the Rio Cauca Housing project in the nearby neighbourhoods of Potrerogrande and Llano Verde. This housing project was supported with an extra US\$700M from the Rockefeller Foundation's 100 Resilient Cities program.²⁰ As of February 2015, apartment units of 35 square meters were built and allocated for free to approximately 1129 households, only a small fraction of the 7852 total households after the winter wave.²¹

The relocation process has not been a success. The families affected by the winter wave were promised a three-month rent subsidy but



Families live in tents after the 'winter wave' hits the area of Juanchito, next to the dike.

18 'Invierno en el Valle', *El Pais*, 2010 <http://www.elpais.com.co/elpais/especiales/invierno/index.html>

19 'Que esta pasando con los desalojos del jarillon del rio cauca', *El Pais*, 2015 <http://www.elpais.com.co/elpais/cali/noticias/esta-pasando-con-desalojos-jarillon-rio-cauca>

20 'Announcing our next round of cities', Rockefeller Foundation, 2014 <http://www.100resilientcities.org/blog/entry/announcing-our-next-round-of-resilient-cities#/-/>

21 'Traslado de las familias del jarillón debe hacerse este año', *El Pais*, 2015 <http://www.elpais.com.co/elpais/cali/noticias/traslado-familias-jarillon-debe-hacerse-este-ano>

in at least 40 cases it was never received and in many others it was delayed.²² Additionally, those who received the subsidy often negotiated the transfer of their land to other families, who then could claim another rent subsidy, while others rented out their apartments in the new housing project, and returned to the dike. Many had to find shelter (illegally) in other city districts.

Most importantly, the Rio Cauca Housing project did not allow for small home-based businesses or for livestock rearing, which represented a substantial amount of daily income for many people.²³ Displacing vulnerable people challenges the security of their livelihood options and their chance to reestablish a life worth living. In the case of Cali, authorities adopted a very narrow view of housing as a physical shelter, rather than as an issue of functional and symbolic livelihoods that includes people-place relationships with the surrounding environment. Giraldo asks ¿Qué es vivienda digna? ¿Quién decide qué es vivienda digna? (“What is dignified housing? Who decides what ‘dignified housing’ is?”).²⁴ We could ask the same of the 100 Resilient Cities, regarding national and local authorities’ complacency with a housing project that ignored the diversity of people’s aspirations for dignified housing. Some people may be satisfied with the new housing arrangement—especially those who have experienced flooding events in the past and yearn for a better housing situation; or younger generations who grew up on the dike, and wish for the opportunities associated with urban living too. However it should also be considered that people who maintained a rural way of life, rearing livestock in their backyards and who still recall the experience of being forcibly relocated from their rural land may not wish to live in an apartment block, but prefer to relocate to a safe rural area where their livelihood is possible.

22 ‘El Exilio de los ex-invasores del jarillon del rio Cauca en Cali’, *El Pais*, 2011 <http://www.elpais.com.co/elpais/cali/exilio-exinvasores-del-jarillon-del-rio-cauca-en-cali>

23 ‘Una solución que reproduce conflictos’, *El Pais*, 2014 <http://www.elpais.com.co/elpais/cali/noticias/opinion-solucion-reproduce-conflictos>

24 Giraldo, V.C. (2012), ‘Macroproyectos de Vivienda: Bombardeo en las ciudades’: <http://www.democraciaentucara.com/2012/03/macroproyectos-de-vivienda-bombardeo-en.html>; [English text] Critical Legal Thinking: <http://criticallegalthinking.com/2012/03/19/large-scale-housing-projects-bombardment-in-the-cities/>

Recently the State Council filed a judicial order demanding the municipality to (temporarily) suspend the resettlement process as it had failed to notify families about their displacement²⁵ and ignored settlers’ alternative plans. As of June 2015, 1484 families were relocated; according to authorities the process will end in 2017.

Meanwhile, a few tower blocks in the Rio Cauca Housing project were occupied by a group of 100 displaced people who have been waiting to receive a house since 2011.²⁶

Living by the Avon river

The city of Christchurch in New Zealand was built around a river known as Ātākāro by indigenous Māori, renamed the Avon River after colonisation. A description of the arrival of European settlers in 1850 illustrates the swampy nature of the land on which the city is situated—“Hundreds of men, women and children toiled to the top of the Port Hills carrying bundles of luggage and with pots and pans around their necks. Having reached the summit, they scrambled down the other side through a wilderness of tussock grass, then walked for five miles over swampy ground, often wading knee deep in the marsh, to the site of Christchurch, the future city on the plains.”²⁷ The land was drained, occupied, and built on, but the water table remained high.

Vulnerability of place

Christchurch was significantly damaged by a series of earthquakes in 2010 and 2011. The city’s geology was highly vulnerable to earthquakes because in some areas of the city “...sandy soil deposits saturated with water sit close to the surface. Because water is incompressible, vigorous shaking can cause these deposits to rise to the surface in

25 ‘Ordenan suspender provisionalmente desalojo en el jarillon del rio Cauca’, *El Pais*, 2015 <http://www.elpais.com.co/elpais/cali/noticias/juzgado-ordena-suspender-manera-provisional-desalojo-jarillon-rio-cauca>

26 ‘Desplazados del jarillon del rio Cauca se toman viviendas para reubicados en Cali’, *Noticias Caracol*, 2014 <http://www.noticiascaracol.com/cali/desplazados-del-jarillon-del-rio-cauca-se-tomaron-viviendas-para-reubicados-en-cali>

27 Roberts, J. (2014), ‘A City of Dreams’, *History Today*, May 2014, 47.

a process called liquefaction. In those suburbs, roads, gardens and houses filled up with saturated silt."²⁸ In Christchurch suburbs the damage from liquefaction was arguably as significant as the damage from the earthquake itself, with approximately "...half a million tonnes of silt flooding houses and destroying infrastructure."²⁹ Approximately 83 percent of Canterbury homes suffered some damage,³⁰ but the suburbs most severely affected by liquefaction are located in Christchurch East.³¹ These areas had reduced "access to basic necessities, sanitation, power, transport and support from frontline responders."³² Loss of services also included "retail, medical centres, sports and cultural facilities."³³

A red zone, orange zone, white zone and green zone coding system was developed to allow residents, landowners, insurers and government authorities to assess the extent of damage and the possibility of rebuilding. Land in the red zone was considered to "...have area-wide land and infrastructure damage, and an engineering solution to repair [this] would be uncertain, costly, and is likely to be highly disruptive." Housing redevelopment will be prevented in these areas, which include some of Christchurch's poorest suburbs.

Land classified as white meant that "complex geotechnical issues relating to land slip and rockroll required further assessment and observation before land decisions could be made." Land classified as orange meant that engineers needed to undertake further investigation."³⁴ Finally, green zone areas were generally considered to be "suitable for residential construction."³⁵

28 Pollard, S.D. (2013), 'Shaken City: two years after its big quake, Christchurch is still trembling', *Natural History*, 00280712, Vol. 121, Iss. 3.

29 Wilson, G. (2013), 'Community resilience, social memory and the post-2010 Christchurch (New Zealand) earthquakes', *Area*, Vol. 45, No. 2, 207-215.

30 Power, B. (2015), 'In the wake of disaster', *Acuity*, February 2015.

31 Lambert, S. (2014), 'Indigenous peoples and urban disaster: Māori responses to the 2010-12 Christchurch earthquakes', *Australasian Journal of Disaster and Trauma Studies* 18:1 http://www.massey.ac.nz/~trauma/issues/2014-1/AJDTs_18-1_Lambert.pdf.

32 Kenney et al. (2015), 'Community-led disaster risk management: a Māori response to Otautahi (Christchurch) earthquakes', *Australasian Journal of Disaster and Trauma Studies* 19:1 http://www.massey.ac.nz/~trauma/issues/2015-IRDR/AJDTs_19_IRDR_Kenney.pdf, 9.

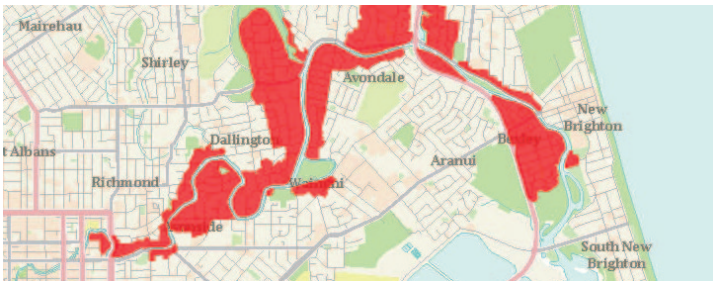
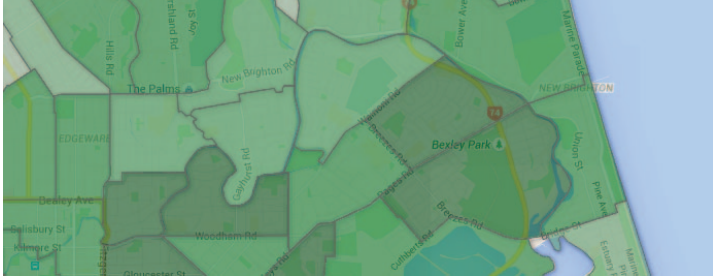
33 Lambert, 2014.

34 See <http://cera.govt.nz/>

35 Ibid.



Residential Red Zone. A site affected by earthquake damage in Christchurch. Houses and fences have been removed, leaving only plants, trees, and a slowly degrading road, 2015.



A map showing the extent of the Residential Red Zone in Christchurch, which follows the path of the Avon/Otākaro River. Housing development will be prevented in these areas. Source: www.maps.cera.govt.nz

Vulnerability of people

Vulnerability to earthquakes was amplified in Christchurch because there was little ‘social memory’ of earthquake events.³⁶ Before the earthquakes, Christchurch was seen as one of New Zealand’s safest cities—particularly compared to Auckland, which is built within a volcanic field, and Wellington, Napier and Hastings, all of which have well-documented earthquake histories.³⁷ In addition to residents’ limited experience (and expectation) of earthquakes, Wilson points out that the ongoing sequence of earthquakes, rather than a single discrete earthquake ‘event’, added to residents’ vulnerability. Many properties affected by liquefaction in the February 2011 earthquake were affected again in the June 2011 and December 2011 ‘aftershocks.’³⁸ Because of the demolition of houses, Christchurch is now suffering a housing shortage and housing conditions for many people are poor.

Disaster affects different communities differently and assistance or compensation offered to communities will also be of varying value. Considering the most vulnerable in society, “A flood itself may not make all that much difference in light of the myriad challenges they face, and the flood relief itself may not be much help either. A flood or drought may turn out to be just another hazard in a long line of adversity.”³⁹ Two vulnerabilities emerged in the months following the disaster, centred on the inequality of assistance offered to the badly-affected Eastern suburbs and wealthier areas; and ongoing attempts by residents to receive insurance compensation to repair their homes, rebuild, or relocate.

The communities worst affected are also the communities with the least socio-economic and financial resources. Māori people are geospatially concentrated in these areas.⁴⁰ Local researcher Simon Lambert observed that for “...badly affected suburbs, and particularly in the Eastern suburbs, concerns were expressed on the marginalisation

36 Wilson, 2013.

37 Davey, F. (2011), ‘Natural hazards – the Christchurch Earthquakes’, *New Zealand Journal of Geology and Geophysics*, Vol. 54, Iss. 2

38 Wilson, 2013.

39 Frerks et al., 2011, 108.

40 Kenney et al., 2015.

of response with the comparative limited distribution of portable toilets becoming a *cause celebre*.⁴¹ A comparison of Aranui, an Eastern suburb, with the suburb of Sumner found that “Aranui was able to quickly activate existing support organisations and networks but once Sumner residents had established support networks, these networks were better resourced and of broader scope than its poorer near-neighbour.”⁴²

Different treatment of households with and without insurance also exposed vulnerabilities. The Canterbury earthquakes were the fifth-largest insurance event in the world since 1953.⁴³ Frerks specifically identifies insurance as a structural vulnerability, explaining that “...the loss of a house may be overcome by social groups that could afford an insurance policy or had sufficient reserves to rebuild it, but is absolutely devastating to others.”⁴⁴ In Christchurch, this structural vulnerability was reinforced through the government’s offer to differently compensate insured and uninsured owners of property within the red zone. Residents who had insured their houses were offered compensation equal to 100 percent of the value of their home before the first earthquake in 2010, while residents who hadn’t insured their home were offered compensation equal to only 50 percent of the value of their home.⁴⁵ The purchase offer for uninsured owners has subsequently been overruled by the New Zealand courts. Residents working with private insurers have been concerned at the “time taken to settle claims and repair properties.”⁴⁶

In response to these vulnerabilities, new non-government organisations have been created, such as the Canterbury Communities Earthquake Recovery Network, or existing organisations re-focused on supporting communities through the rebuild. Initiatives like Greening the

41 Lambert, 2014, 41.

42 Sarah Yanicki (2013) ‘East Side Stories: cases of quake-related innovation. Christchurch, New Zealand’ in Lambert, 2014, 41.

43 Vero (2015), ‘Four years On: Insurance and the Canterbury earthquakes’. Prepared by Deloitte Access Economics for Vero Insurance.

44 Frerks et al., 2011, 108.

45 Siembieda, W.J. & Johnson, L.A. (2015), ‘Christchurch Recovers’, *Planning*, 81(8), 37.

46 Vero, 2015, 1.

Rubble and GapFiller have worked with communities to create new public spaces⁴⁷; Te Runanga o Ngāi Tahu, a Māori tribal organisation,

established an earthquake information and advisory service; local marae were designated as community hubs; and the Māori Recovery Network was supported by Māori organisations from all over the country.⁴⁸

Politics of rebuilding

One of central government’s responses to the earthquake sequence, the most damaging natural disaster in New Zealand’s history, was to reorganise the roles and responsibilities of central and local government. Following the first earthquakes, a ministerial portfolio for Canterbury Earthquake Recovery was created, supported by an agency called the Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority (CERA). It has been suggested that that the creation of these new structures reflected central government’s stance that, as the principal investor in the reconstructing Christchurch, it should control the rebuild.⁴⁹ However, the direct involvement of central government appears to have come at a cost to local government:

In 2011, the national government directed the Christchurch City Council to develop a reconstruction plan for the central city. The resulting draft plan that was delivered to the Earthquake Minister has been internationally recognised for its public participation process. While the Earthquake Minister supported the plan’s general concepts, he set aside all the transportation-related elements and the regulatory and implementation framework. In April 2012, he ordered CERA to create the Central City Development Unit and devise a new blueprint plan. This step effectively transitioned leadership for the central city rebuilding from the local to the national level.⁵⁰

47 Siembieda & Johnson, 2015.

48 Kenney et al., 2015; Lambert, 2014.

49 Siembieda & Johnson, 2015.

50 Siembieda & Johnson, 2015, 39.

The shifting of power from local to central government can be viewed as an example of a situation being ‘disasterised’—“brought into the special domain of emergency decision-making, legitimising exceptional measures, the deployment of the military and the exclusion of stakeholders.”⁵¹ However, emergency decision making powers have not necessarily resulted in a quick response. Architect/researcher/blogger Barnaby Bennett, who led the GapFiller initiative, considers that the five-month delay between the delivery of the reconstruction plan by local government and the response of central government to develop a further plan “...was the beginning of the problems that continue to haunt the city”, creating a sense of crisis.⁵²

Initial decisions demarcating the boundaries of the red zone were made in June 2011.⁵³ People living within the red or orange zone suffered while waiting for decisions to be made by government or insurers about the status of their land. These decisions affected whether residents would stay in their neighbourhood, or could move elsewhere. For some, a move may bring relief from the constant threat of seismic activity, but also requires finding new schools, new jobs, and a new community. As a result, wellbeing surveys since the earthquakes “...have found consistently higher rates of anxiety and depression due to the dislocation and financial hardship that is associated with prolonged decisions regarding property settlements and insurance coverage.”⁵⁴ Wilson describes the feelings of uncertainty and loss of control expressed by residents within the orange zone, who were waiting for a decision about whether their house or land could be reoccupied or destroyed.⁵⁵

By 2015, CERA had acquired 7500 properties with ‘extensive ground failure damage’ within the residential red zone.⁵⁶ Around 7000 families have now been relocated out of the red zone, although 135

households termed ‘red-zone stayers’ have so far refused to accept the Crown’s offer to purchase their properties.⁵⁷ It has been estimated that Christchurch, with a pre-earthquake population of around 375,000, experienced a net loss of about 15,000 people between the first earthquake in September 2010, and 2012.⁵⁸ Migrants from Christchurch have moved elsewhere in the Canterbury region, which is growing due to the relocation of jobs and housing,⁵⁹ and to other parts of New Zealand, or Australia.

The political situation in Christchurch has not yet stabilised. Bennett argued earlier this year that it is time for Gerry Brownlee to step down from the role of Earthquake Minister, stating that Brownlee “...doesn’t have the temperament or skills this job demands and he has lost the trust of the people in Christchurch.”⁶⁰ CERA has been criticised for acting ‘unilaterally’, and community groups identify the lack of engagement in decision-making for the rebuild as the critical issue for Christchurch residents.⁶¹ Political conflict has “severely affected public trust in political decision-making regarding alleviation of earthquake-related problems such as housing shortages, poor services and decision-making regarding the zoning of damaged properties.”⁶²

In June 2015, the New Zealand government released a ‘transition proposal’ to create a new agency called ‘Regenerate Christchurch’ which to replace the “expensive, unpopular and ineffective”⁶³ Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority and Central City Development Unit. The transition plan includes three options for community feedback—including transferring responsibility to a ‘council-led agency with close support of government.’

51 Frerks et al., 2011, 115.

52 Bennett, B. (2015), ‘Yeah yeah yeah, nah Minister: Why Brownlee is unfit to lead the recovery’. <https://medium.com/@mrbarnabyb/yeah-yeah-yeah-nah-minister-why-brownlee-is-unfit-to-lead-the-recovery-c6ff2b6b7aa8#.tltomat7n>

53 Lambert, 2014.

54 Vero, 2015, 1.

55 Wilson, 2015.

56 Siembieda & Johnson, 2015.

57 ‘Living in a wasteland’, *The Press*, 2015.

58 Wilson, 2013.

59 Siembieda & Johnson, 2015.

60 Bennett, 2015.

61 ‘Who will run the rebuild of Christchurch?’, *The Press*, 2015; Siembieda & Johnson, 2015.

62 Wilson, 2013, 210.

63 Bennett, 2015.

LESSONS FOR VULNERABILITY: POLITICS, POWER, PEOPLE AND PLACE

Disasters are highly political

Analysis of relocation projects require attention to the “politics of place.”⁶⁴ In Cali, the municipality justified the relocation from the dike by speaking of ‘decent housing’ and ‘risk mitigation’ within the context of Hurricane Katrina and impending climate change. By evoking these statements, the municipality was able to access funding from both national and international funds aimed at adapting populations to climate change. However, the symbolic meaning of these statements, supposedly benefitting residents, is crushed by offering small apartments in tower blocks as the only option. While reducing the risk to the wider city of Cali, and reclaiming public land ‘for the public’, the municipality marginalises the lives and livelihoods of already vulnerable displaced residents.

However, power and politics are not the exclusive domain of formal governments. Within a relational dynamic, we can see the ‘settler-in-vaders’ consciously rejecting government domination and establishing new political subjectivities, such as the farmers associations and the board, that allow them to move out from hierarchical relations of power.⁶⁵

In the case of Christchurch, conflict has arisen between local and central government over planning and funding the rebuild of Christchurch. Central government agencies are seen as acting without engagement from the community; and although the community’s relationship with local government has not been easy, there is now agitation towards returning power from central to local government. Within this power struggle, the role of tribal and other Māori organisations within Christchurch city has become more visible, and it could be argued that their relationships with community and government have been strengthened as a result of the disaster. Kenney et al. suggest that the “...prompt and effective Māori response

64 Massey et al., (1999) in Manzo, L., Perkins, D.D. (2008) ‘Finding Common Ground: The importance of place attachment to community participation and planning’, *Journal of Planning Literature* Vol. 20 (4): 335-350.

65 Mahoney & Yngvesson, 1992; Nightingale, 2011 in Eriksen et al., 2015.



Crown sign: ‘significant planting’. CERA and the Christchurch community are considering redeveloping cleared land as an park, incorporating existing plants and trees from now-abandoned gardens.

to the Christchurch quakes has acted as the genesis for increased engagement and collaboration between iwi (tribes), local authorities and government.”⁶⁶

'Building back better'?

In both Cali and Christchurch, local government is considering revegetating the areas cleared through relocation as 'ecoparks' for recreational and educational activities, such as replanting local plant species, learning about medicinal plants, recycling, landscaping, walking paths and interpretation signposts. In Christchurch, both the reconstruction plan developed by Christchurch City Council and the blueprint plan developed by CERA for the central city "...propose a greener, more accessible city with a compact core and recognisable built identity. The plan documents follow urban design concepts proposed in 2009 by Jan Gehl, FAIA, the Danish architect renowned for fostering pedestrian-friendly cities.”⁶⁷ The rebuild is seen as "...an opportunity to rebuild a seismically safe (as well as energy-efficient 'green') twenty-first century city.”⁶⁸

However, Frerks warns that from a resilience perspective, 'better' is only better "if it gives vulnerable actor(s) more options and flexibility in their coping with future adversity.”⁶⁹ In Christchurch, there are suggestions that 'building better', particularly in the Aastern suburbs of Christchurch, must include a managed retreat from the coastal areas vulnerable to sea-level rise, and around the Avon-Ōtākaro River.⁷⁰ In Cali, a better engagement processes with communities considering a managed retreat policy should encompass multiple worldviews and preferences, in order to anticipate some of the variations of experience and expectations in communities facing the threat of water.

66 Kenney et al., 2015, 17.

67 Siembieda & Johnson, 2015.

68 Pollard, 2013.

69 Frerks et al., 2011, 116.

70 Meurk, C. (2015), 'Ecologist says 100-year plan needed for East Christchurch', <http://www.healthychristchurch.org.nz/news/resources-and-information/2015/10/ecologist-says-100-year-plan-needed-for-east-christchurch>

Chronic complex resettlement

Managed retreat will be a key strategy of future climate change responses. However, "Resettlement is an inherently complex process.”⁷¹ Are successful resettlements possible? Can we manage retreat? An analysis of 'successful relocation projects' suggests that there is a need for resettlement policies that are socially sensitive and resettlement laws that make resettlement a legally enforceable right; for planning for resettlement in advance, including ensuring adequate budget provision and finding adequate land for resettlement; as well as focusing on rebuilding livelihoods, and improving living conditions of the poorest. During resettlement, people should be moved as a group, in accordance with decisions made with the involvement of all concerned parties.

The threat of water will be an increasing presence in our lives, and disaster caused by water could become a "chronic condition.”⁷² We will need to learn to "influence human rather than river behaviour", rather than continuing to put faith and investment into infrastructural works and technological solutions.⁷³ The stories of Cali and Christchurch illustrate communities' empowerment and disempowerment when affected by potential or actual natural disaster. We need to develop relocation practices that recognise the complexities of vulnerability, and that allow for the reconstruction of lives and livelihoods away from the threat of water.⁷⁴

71 De Wet, C. (2006), 'Development induced displacement: Problems, policies and people' in H.M. Mathur (2015), 'Climate Change and Displacement: Learning from Resettlement in the Development Context', *Social Change* 45 (1) 118:130.

72 Frerks et al., 2011, 108.

73 Frerks et al., 2011.

74 Scudder, T. (2005), in A. de Sherbinin, et al. (2011), 'Preparing Resettlement Associated with Climate Change', *Science*, Vol. 334.

29.09.2009 TRIBUTE TO SAMOA, AMERICAN SAMOA, AND TONGA

JOHN VEA, ARTIST PAGES INTRODUCED BY NINA TONGA

On the 29th September 2009 a powerful magnitude 8.1 earthquake ruptured the seafloor south of Samoa unleashing a destructive tsunami on Samoa, American Samoa and Niuaotupoua in Northern Tonga. The tsunami caused extensive damage including severe casualties and over 190 deaths. In the days that followed, heart-breaking eyewitness accounts of loss circulated in the media as did images of ravaged villages.

Amongst the relief and support efforts that quickly ensued, a number of contemporary Pacific artists responded creatively to the impact of the tsunami. John Vea's video installation *29.09.2009 Tribute to Samoa, American Samoa, and Tonga* (2013) is a creative tribute to the ongoing resilience of Tonga and Samoa and their rebuild efforts following the 2009 tsunami. In the video, which is typically shown projected onto cinderblocks, Vea attempts to build a cinderblock wall on the waters edge of Piha Beach in West Auckland. As the waves crash against the wall, several cinderblocks topple over forcing Vea into a continuous process of rebuilding. Clearly struggling against the power of the surf, he perseveres and constructs a wall that slowly gives way under the rising water and soft black sand.

Over the past two years Vea's installation has been shown in several exhibitions in a time where the impact of global ecological change has intensified. With each showing Vea's work has become laden with new political and environmental messages that point to the immediate impact of climate change. Vea's futile struggles against the ocean become extremely pertinent actions that enact and expose the realities of rising sea levels. His cinderblock wall, like the many sea walls constructed on the coastlines of low-lying atolls in the Pacific, is a symbol of the dangers of climate change. The ephemeral nature of his wall paired with the overwhelming oceanscape is a poignant reminder of the force of the ocean and its ability to destroy. This is heightened by the site-specific nature of Vea's performance on the iconic black sand of Piha Beach, notorious for its dangerous surf.

Vea's video installation functions as an ongoing tribute to the resilience of Pacific Island nations battling natural and human-made ecological changes. At the same time, the work serves a greater political purpose in raising our awareness and more importantly prompting a call for action.













Terra Lemnia rubra – troche of red clay from the medicine cabinet of Sir Hans Sloane. Diametre 23mm. Probably late seventeenth to early eighteenth century. Natural History Museum, London.

ANOTHER KIND OF WE

LAURA PRESTON & JENNIFER TEETS

The Distance Plan invited curatorial colleagues Laura Preston and Jennifer Teets to put down in writing part of an ongoing conversation around how artistic production and criticism is evolving in a time of precarity and ecological urgency. As Preston is based in Berlin and Teets in Paris, the conversation was conducted via Skype and email throughout September and October 2015.

Laura Preston

Jennifer, we connected again over your exhibition 'Elusive Earths'. This project took as its departure point the historical belief in the medical properties of consuming tablets made of clay. The project was a group exhibition presenting various visual responses to this history. In light of this issue of The Distance Plan emphasising the relationship between climate change and economic precarity, I'm really interested in taking our conversation into places of counterpoint and resistance. I wish to question whether working with others and within the framework of abstract thinking offers another way through states of precarity. A key resistant act may be in allowing for indigestible difference, as an offering in response to the consumptive habits and homogeneity of neoliberal ethics.

How did the exhibition project 'Elusive Earths' operate as a proposition and as a collective enterprise? May a project that extends from an ecological issue also demonstrate another take on what ecology is?

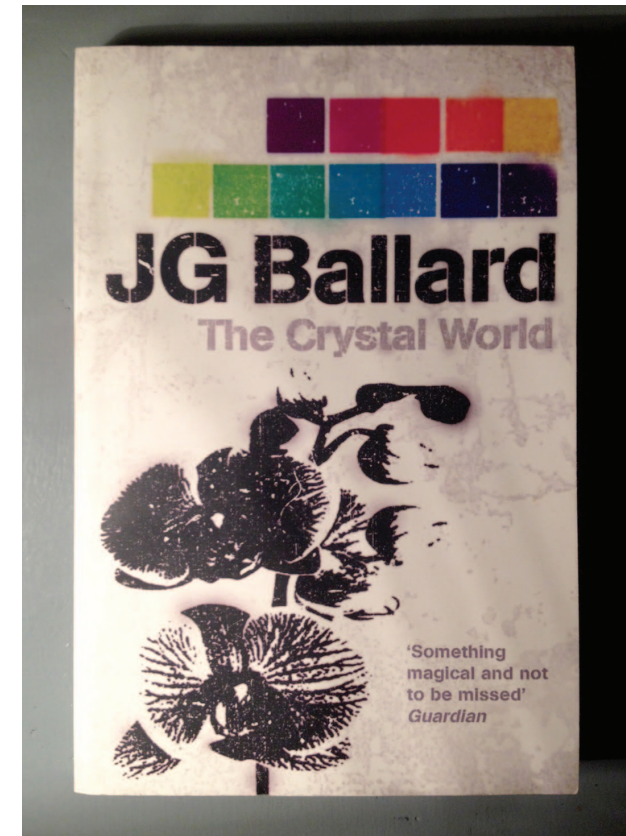
Jennifer Teets

For a number of years I was in dialogue with a group of artists who lead Etablissement d' En Face Projects, a small and innovative art centre in Brussels. Artist Michael Van den Abeele invited me to expand on my work with mud and our conversation ensued from there. For me, mud is a way to approach all that is sinking, hindered, and entrapped in writing about time. It is also material as methodology. A kind of 'ceramics without the fire' (as coined by Post Brothers) that probes the ethos of ecology in the face of ficto-critique. It was sometime after I had curated 'A clock that runs on mud' in 2011 at Stereo, Poznan, and later led a collective mud bath at a health centre in Druskininkai, Lithuania (as a preamble to a writing workshop—a time-based sludge revelry of physiological speculations and absurd pathologies) that I began to conceive 'Elusive Earths'.

At the time, I was thinking through the personal-political and how to define a space of meaning through scientific forms of thought. Lorenzo Cirrincione, an artist/philosopher who specialises in a history of collections, told me about his reading of *terra sigillata* (sealed earth) in *Antidotarii* from the early modern period, where they comment on how to prepare 'treacle', the most famous anti-poison since antiquity. Essentially, the *terra sigillata* were clay cakes or pastilles that were excavated vis-à-vis a ritual led by a priestess; laid to dry and stamped with a seal. Later, they were loaded on a cart and exported throughout Europe and brought into the limelight inside of collector and pharmaceutical circles. The ingestion of earth offers an interesting route to discuss a politics of nature, and where we stand today regarding nature/culture divides. I channelled this into aesthetics, and towards a field of abstraction.

From the beginning, the research and its theoretical underpinnings were a curatorial/artistic metonym, yet meant to tie into politically enmeshed issues within ecology, both historically and in the present. Other axes of the exhibition turn to ques-

tions of self-multiplication, ingestion, inner transformation, the breeding of selves and bodies, metabolisms, etc. In Bogotá at FLORA ars+natura in November 2014, you could witness a reworked version extending over into research on *terra preta*.¹ I suppose both *terra sigillata* and *terra preta* are angles from which to think about the history and processes of clay use, expansion, and effectiveness on the one hand, and on the other grander questions around the flux of materiality, which I aimed to bring back into the exhibition in a full turn.



J.G. Ballard, *The Crystal World*
(1966; repr., London: Fourth Estate, 2011)

¹ Translated as 'black earth', *terra preta* is a type of very dark, carbon-rich anthropogenic soil found in the Amazon Basin.

LP

Jennifer today I read in the newspaper that a truck branded with ham advertising and full of people was discovered on the border between Hungary and Austria. No one had survived. Nightly there are unsuccessful attempts by young hopefuls from the Calais jungle to cross the channel via the Eurostar tracks. The 'crystal forest' of the fearful nation state seems to be getting in the way. A turn of the newspaper pages and a glimpse of a pixelated boat on water is a short-cut image to the population pressure and the ever-increasing mobility of people seeking their own patch of the limited resources. These are the times. I write to you considering this precarity from Germany, the European centrifugal power force and nation state accountable for how best to deal with Greece. The world seems more fictional than fiction. Your words resonate. Ficto-critique.

A past exhibition project I set the brief for, 'The Future is Unwritten', took another approach to writing.² At the time there wasn't the same media attention on ecological issues, although the economic fluctuations of 2008 had developed a rhetoric—crisis and collapse. The artists were invited to respond to an entropic text I had written and to use the university gallery as context and the building as site, and to borrow your term, as a metonym for climate change. It was an experiment that showed what little needs to be done to alter one's behaviour and write one's actions differently. You could say that the conversation of institutional critique was updated to address infrastructure through an assemblage of gestures which included opening the back door, turning off the air conditioning system, making existing operations visible—for example, moving the office into the gallery space, and transforming university property into artworks (a process very literally made transparent).

Since 'The Future ...' an architecture of relations between the artists and myself continue. Re-visionings—Fiona Connor's follow up to a letter which she addressed to the gallery suggesting ways of making the building more energy efficient has lead to an online publication (<http://alettertotheunwrittenfuture.org>) that is now tracking her research and how different perspectives on climate change have shifted. Acquiring new

language—William Hsu is retraining in computer science and the language of mathematics to account for unpredictable change and the abstraction that comes from working within algorithms. Exposing expectations of production and offering other models—as interlocutor for Kate Newby's challenges to public space, and working with Amit Charan on a post, one-year exhibition series, *Alterations*³ which has gone on to inform his startup of a bespoke tailoring company.

Acts of re-visioning and rewriting were already present at the time of exhibition when Daniel Malone followed up on a previous proposal to the gallery requesting to throw a brick through its front windows. The clay brick was based on a form and carried an insignia related to his time living in China in the early 2000s where he witnessed rapid urban development. Denied permission in 2004, in 2009 he finally performed the act and subsequently cast a glass brick out of the window shards moulded on the clay, which has since been acquired for the university's art collection.

Judith Butler, in relation to precarity, also speaks of its relation to acts of translation and she brings in Spivak:

The practice of translation (which is something other than an assimilation to mono-lingualism) is a way of producing—performatively—another kind of 'we'—a set of connections through language that can never produce a linguistic unity... This is why Spivak tells us that translation is the experience of the impossible (which is not the same as saying that there is no translation). The point is to negotiate the right to speak, and to make sure that the voiceless are given a right to speak. And yet, this obligation cannot be the same as supplying or imposing that voice. An impossible and necessary bind, but also the model for a collectivity that does not presuppose sameness.⁴

³ *Alterations* was a project space motivated by art and research developed within the condition of free-time. A year long series over 2010, the project tested out interventions and proposals for new exhibition formats. A review of one project is available at <http://eyecontactsite.com/2011/01/thinking-about-the-films-of-peter-watkins>

⁴ Judith Butler, 'Performativity, Precarity, and Sexual Politics', lecture given at Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 8 June 2009, available at <http://www.aibr.org/antropologia/04v03/criticos/040301b.pdf>

² See <http://www.adamartgallery.org.nz/thefuture/>

How do you work with ficto-criticism and do you see it as an act of translation? Do you locate your work in fiction to circumvent sameness?

JT

Ficto-criticism was something I was introduced to by the American Cologne-based science fiction writer Mark von Schlegell around 2009. For me it was a technique to employ as a way to bring forth the writing process in the exhibition. Furthermore, I use ficto-critique to think about material and arrive somewhere else through the passage of the essay. Ficto-critical writing has fallen in and out of academic favour throughout the past twenty years, still superseded in humanities and creative writing programmes by the two poles of the traditional academic essay or more abstract experimental works. For me, it sits somewhere between life-writing, authorial pursuit, and self-discovery in experimentation. It is a way of producing *performatively*, as you mention, with regards to Butler and Spivak. What interests me here is how the performative in a written text, or some described individual process, can be brought back to the collective to enliven or heighten an experience. As of late, crucial issues around environment or political ethos have become axes for me in this kind of writing.

A good example for prompting ficto-critique would be something like these two associative processes and images from the newspaper: this morning I opened *El Pais* to discover that in one of the driest places on the planet, the Atacama Desert in Chile, a historical rainfall had moved through the entire region earlier in the year, which led to catastrophic flooding, but also provided water for flower seeds that had lain dormant for years. Pink mallow flowers now pepper the land in full bloom, alongside 200 other native plant species. As a result, Chile expects over 20,000 tourists to visit the desert to see the flowers. In parallel, earlier this month sinking water levels in one of Mexico's largest rivers, the Grijalva, resulted in the emergence of an ancient church from the first half of the 16th century. It's not the first time a drop in the reservoir has revealed the church; record low water levels unveiled it in 2002. It was founded by Spanish colonisers during the reign of Charles V, and was in public use until the 20th century, when a dam was built near it in 1966, and the surrounding

area went under water. Locals also expect tourists to visit the region to see the unearthing of this church.

The documentation of these weather related events takes us directly to precarity and recent waves of tourism related to climate change dynamics. An exercise would be associating these two images into a scenario, at once critical and epistemic, as a way to break down the image (in writing) in order to reconstruct it, on the basis of the paradoxical traits it already portrays. I'm not sure how far all of this goes to describe translation according to Butler. Of late, one of my main priorities is to open up areas of knowledge and speculation which stem from considering one's relationship to a world in flux.

What I do isn't entirely embedded in fiction, but entangled in the realities of 'The World in Which We Occur' (here I'm nodding to the title of the series I co-curated with Margarida Mendes for the XII Baltic Triennial). I'm curious about your own way of channelling translation or performativity through your curatorial and editorial work with artists to the likes of Michael Stevenson or Richard Frater. These artists held exhibitions curated by you, one at Portikus in Frankfurt and the other, at your curatorial hub, the Adam Art Gallery at the Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.

LP

The project with Michael Stevenson transformed the building of Portikus into a camera obscura. Based on a text by a Borgesian renaissance writer José de Jesús Martínez, *Teoría del Vuelo (The Theory of Flight)*, the exhibition became a single flickering image that operated as film in its rawest state. The image that the lens was transporting from the heights of the building to its exhibition space was quite literally an object of flight and in-flight. An aeroplane. In an attic. On an island. River Main, Frankfurt. The island is also a bird sanctuary.

What was performed during this exhibition was an ambition for the image to distil a theory, and a belief in the image's autonomy as a carrier of memory. It was a photograph, it was also a live-feed; light dependent and altering due to the time of day. The institution also altered its opening hours according to the sun. The front door

A Life of Crudity,		Vulgarity,		and Blindness	
DATE	SUNSET	DATE	SUNSET	DATE	SUNSET
28.09	19:10	21.10	18:22	11.11	16:47
29.09	19:08	22.10	----	12.11	----
30.09	19:06	23.10	18:18	13.11	16:44
01.10	----	24.10	18:17	14.11	16:43
02.10	19:02	25.10	18:15	15.11	16:41
03.10	18:59	26.10	18:13	16.11	16:40
04.10	18:57	27.10	18:11	17.11	16:39
05.10	18:55	<i>clocks shift back</i>		18.11	16:38
06.10	18:53	<i>1 hour</i>		19.11	----
07.10	18:51	28.10	17:09	20.11	16:36
08.10	----	29.10	----	21.11	16:35
09.10	18:47	30.10	17:06	22.11	16:34
10.10	18:44	31.10	17:04	23.11	16:33
11.10	18:42	01.11	17:02	24.11	16:32
12.10	18:40	02.11	17:00	25.11	16:31
13.10	18:38	03.11	16:59	26.11	----
14.10	18:36	04.11	16:57	27.11	16:30
15.10	---	05.11	----	28.11	16:29
16.10	18:32	06.11	16:54	29.11	16:28
17.10	18:30	07.11	16:53	30.11	16:28
18.10	18:28	08.11	16:51	01.12	16:27
19.10	18:26	09.11	16:50	02.12	16:27
20.10	18:24	10.11	16:48		

Exhibition can only be viewed during daylight hours

opening and closing affected the image. The exhibition extended into a book project on Stevenson's practice, focused on his relation to literature and speculation, designed with Nuno da Luz. We named it *Introduction*.

Last year, Richard Frater and I presented a public instalment of 'Living Cities 2009-' at the Adam Art Gallery. Film-related in process and in production timeframe, the presentation, although based on a 16mm film shot in 2009, translated documentary into a series of sculptural placeholders (fragmented film elements of mise en scène, image, sound, apparatus). Positioned across two different sites, the gallery and a living room, the exhibition addresses its location Karori, a suburb of Wellington city.

This hilly suburb hugs an inner city bird sanctuary that is also a place of tourism. The project considered the promotion of the 100% pure, clean green image of New Zealand and also the sanctuary's particular ambition to return its patch of land to a state of 'Zealandia', a time of pre-settlement when this island was full of native bird life. The birds, specifically the native parrot Kaka, are regenerating through the efforts of the sanctuary, yet as they develop and fly outside of its bounds they are threatened by ever-increasing suburban surrounds and the contaminates to be found there, particularly through the past use of iron roofing. Yet not entirely victim to this violence of development, Frater's project also offered a consideration of the autonomy of the Kaka, and how it also incribes and adds another view to the city and its ecology of images.

Frater's ongoing project 'Living Cities' and its broader framework is based on the essay of the same name by Steve Hinchliffe and Sarah Whatmore, which proposes that a city's multiple viewpoints might be better reflected in a non-representational geography. They suggest what is called for is a 'mapping more attentive to movement than to fixity', one that 'articulates the spatialities of networking rather than of territory in the Euclidean sense.'⁵

A link to be made between these projects was the translation of a text into a 'performing' image, non-static, non-representational, that carries another subjectivity if you will, and is very much in the world. This performing image is effectively defined by its situation: weather-dependent, altered by the changing conditions of the site, interfacing between analogue and digital networks, acknowledging worldviews and the changeability of image states. In the work I do I wish to develop and expose abstraction as an ethical and active contribution towards ecological thinking, in which ecology is not only viewed as an issue but also as a modality registering the interconnectedness between the world we live in and the world we make.

Your projects, as much as they speak about consumption and contamination, they also seem to act as an embodiment of thought which then performs, spores, proliferates, quite literally from the making of cheese to the more recent discursive situation 'The World in Which We Occur'.

JT

My work with cheese, like other materials or substances I'm engaged with as units or derivatives, has a back-story. It is not your usual cheese. It is essentially an effort to make a trace in cheese. A traumatic trace (in cheese form) made from a herd of dairy goats that were afflicted by psychosomatic effects as a consequence of a violent European windstorm that struck France in 2010. Named Xynthia, the storm struck the coastal region of France on February 27th and 28th, flooded over 50,000 hectares of land and killed 47 people. The storm surge combined with a high tide and large waves caused flood defences to fail along the coast from the Gironde near Bordeaux to the Loire Estuary—coastal dikes that date back to the Napoleonic era which were originally built to protect agricultural land. However, with the increasing urbanisation of the Atlantic coast in the past 30 years their primary purpose has changed.

Goats are sensitive creatures. They are affected by minute environmental disturbances related to sound and movement. So visualise this storm combined with other factors, in this case helicopters swarming and surveying from above post-storm, and

imagine the kind of environmental stress that implies for them. What was mistaken for a bacterial infection was a Mycoplasma. Mycoplasmae are slow-growing microorganisms, members of the mollicute family, and are characterised as infectious agents, somewhere between a virus and bacteria. They are known to cause serious and often fatal illness in goats. Their symptoms include the decrease in milk production and mastitis, as well as respiratory issues. Conducting first hand research, I became immediately captivated, and as a response to a commission tied in with my research group at SPEAP (SciencesPo Experimentation in Arts and Politics, a social sciences/artistic research group led by Bruno Latour in Paris)⁶ looking at disaster induced displacement, I took the opportunity to research, write, and film around bacterial displacement. Even further, I learned to make cheese from their milk. Nervous cheese.

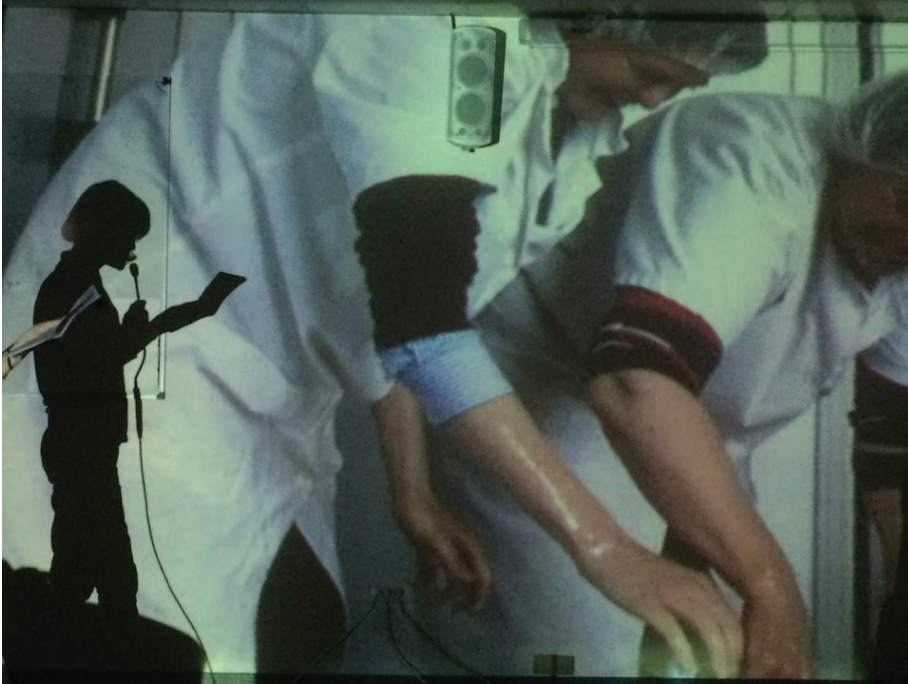
The writing inspired a film-lecture with these axes:

- Avatar Udders (the experience of the goats and sci-fi treatment of the mycoplasma opportunistic pathogen)
- The pathos of bacteria (energy and disjunction, metabolics, the lactic process under the influence of stress)
- The Moon is made of black cheese (different body forms, newly displaced forms)
- The cheese stands alone (ontology of cheese)

I also worked with cheese in Tinos, Greece but that was geared towards collaborating with a community of cheesemakers on the island who taught me about austerity and the ways of the land through cheese. Later, I presented an installation titled *The contingency of cheese* at 'Time Flies Like an Arrow, Fruit Flies Like a Banana,' an exhibition curated by Valentinas Klimauskas in the summer of 2015 and held at the Cultural Foundation of Tinos. Cheese is pretty fascinating to me as an entity in itself and from the experience in Vendée, I've been able to angle it in different ways.

'The World in Which We Occur', on the other hand, embodies the performative as public presentation. It consists of live phone calls with various thinkers who each speak in turn, via telephone, to an

⁶ See http://www.artandeducation.net/school_watch/reassembling-art-pedagogy-pragmatism-inquiry-and-climate-change-at-sciencespo-experimentation-in-arts-and-politics-speap/



Jennifer Teets, *Avatar Udders*, film lecture (prototype), held at Sciences Po Experimentation in Arts and Politics, Paris, 2014.

audience seated in an auditorium. Together with my amazing comrade Margarida Mendes, a curator from Portugal, I led four sessions in Vilnius at the XII Baltic Triennial. There were fifteen speakers total, each session lasting over ninety-minutes. Contributors posed questions of relevance to 'the world in which we occur,' a phrase borrowed from pragmatist philosopher John Dewey. In asking their questions, the speakers addressed topics relating loosely to ecology and climate change. The Dewey quote comes from *Experience and Nature* (1925): 'The striving of man for objects of imagination is a continuation of natural processes; it is something man has learned from the world in which he occurs, not something which he arbitrarily injects into that world.' The passage calls attention to the process and sources of learning. In his later work, *Art as Experience*, Dewey contends that a sustained experience of thought can be said to possess aesthetic power by virtue of being pervaded by consummated emotion. I was heavily invested in Dewey across 2013/2014 as a direct influence of Latour. I made a reading of this seminal text from the rooftop of a Venetian Greek dovecote located in Tinos that later was made into a film.

I'd argue there is also a level of discrepancy in the cheese and 'The World in Which We Occur' namely because there is a sense of obfuscation I privilege in their presentations (nervousness as taste, live voices without interaction or faces). There is so much more to say about the cheese and 'The World in Which We Occur' in terms of embodiment, but the general aim lies there.

In your editorial and writing work, have you introduced fiction or some other kind of trigger within a group of artists to see how it ricochets back to the exhibition? How does it translate?

LP

I approach this from both angles. A text, or more often the act of writing, is a reference point from which the exhibition then becomes another narrative take, one predicated on spatiality and assemblage. The trigger in this process, even if singular—often found in text—unfolds as an idea for an exhibition that as a medium is plural by nature, offering multiple pathways into receiving information and where information is considered multi-registered; data and sense.

Inversely, currently I'm co-editing with London-based Alex Davidson a publishing venture in which the exhibition is a starting point for the production of new art writing. The journal is called *Next Spring*. It is an occasional series of essays published in the spring of either the northern or southern hemispheres. It bridges geographical sites and local discourses. It considers ecological thinking and encourages writing about art by departing from the artwork's atmospheric effects, which may then lead to other subjects and ideas.

For the first issue, three women writers, coincidentally all of whom I met in Paris, including yourself Jennifer, are responding to artists' projects that occurred in the south (this format will be mixed up dependent on the editorial interests, environmental changes, and what are determined as pressing, systematic issues for the discussion of art). Distance is a productive generator for the journal and used as provocation that in allowing for discrepancies, gaps, and differences, may bring the ideas discussed by the work and in the writing all the more closer. This call to translate and the emphasis on the writer to construct a parallel reality to the exhibited artwork is admittedly performative, yet seeks 'the experience of the impossible...also the model for a collectivity that does not presuppose sameness'. How this series may take another translation and return back to an exhibition modality remains open but is certainly a possibility of interest.

What aspects of other's works are you departing from in the projects you produce? Did 'Theater of Negotiations'⁷ inspire, even for its faults? How involved with you be in the forthcoming Paris summit?

JT

I have a different appreciation of 'stagings' and the fictional constraints that the real can offer. While reviewing the 'Theater of Negotiations', an *e-flux* Live Coverage written in collaboration with my colleague, theorist/art historian Vincent Normand,

7 Make it Work/Theater of Negotiations was a conference hosted by SciencesPo Experimentation in Arts Science and and the Théâtre Nanterre-Amandiers, and led by Bruno Latour from 29-31 May 2015. For further information see <http://www.cop21makeitwork.com/make-it-work/> and <http://conversations.e-flux.com/t/live-coverage-speap-bruno-latour-s-paris-climat-2015-make-it-work-may-29-31/1795>

we asked, what is explicit in the climate negotiation simulation? Does this simulation offer more mystification than explanation? What is the tension between dramatisation and representation in Latour's work? What kind of counterpoints does the simulation offer that are relevant to the big issues to be teased out in the real conference? The reason we asked these questions was because these kinds of tensions are pivotal in the conceptual divisions of the Anthropocene, which disorganises historical systems of producing of conceptual divides, and the role of representation in their naturalisation. The most inspiring constituencies offered at the 'Theater of Negotiations' were the introduction of non-nation states to the level of states, which is a very relevant addition to these discussions.

I'm not directly involved in the Paris summit nor the ArtCop21⁸ circle, yet I will participate in the 'Blackmarket for Useful Knowledge and Non-Useful Knowledge'⁹ taking place on November 21st at the reopening of the Musée de l'Homme, which joins over 180 'experts' to engage in conversations around scale and the Anthropocene. I'll converse about (and taste) cheese, as a micro narrative of climate change impact.

Recently I organised 'The Pump' at the Royal College of Art in London, again working with Valentinas Klimasauskas. The show is based on British conceptual artist John Latham's multiple points of timespace, and ecological considerations of sculpture and event making. Keeping in mind the artist's preoccupations with time, space, and energy, we thought it could be meaningful to think of curatorial tools, such as the metonymy of a pump, that would help artists and writers engage with the conceptual considerations of his 1969 work 'The Big Breather', which was a big bellows that inflated and deflated daily as a way to simulate the tides in response to the gravitational pull of the moon. We invited artists to conceptually and metaphorically investigate the pump as an artistic trope. This exhibition will grow into another exhibition in 2016 at different locations in London and in collaboration with Arts Catalyst.

8 See <http://www.artcop21.com/>

9 The list of experts and subjects is phenomenal and offers a vast portrait of our times. You can read more on it here: http://www.formsofcouncil.org/fr/productions/401_blackmarket_for_useful_knowledge_and_non_knowledge_no_18_on_becoming_earthlings

Drowned Church

It seems that progress can cover up the past; that we can say, this will be useful and that will not. In my own time I have seen the passing of traditions I don't know how to mourn. Midnight Mass with my Grandmother; the one man in the family qualified to officiate at Rosh Hashanah; Grace. What had been, in times past, a deep-layered accretion of beauty and shame, duty and absolution, became in my generation merely a sprinkle of blessings and colour.

In Mexico in 1966 they dammed a valley and drowned a church, 400 years old. For forty-nine years the church stood beneath the surface, a tracery of cut-out stone holding the water apart from itself. Lake fish flitted through the vaulted windows. Weed instead of flowers. The High Church ritual of water moving, slow as incense.

The dam leaves no trace of its interruption by the stone, just the water reaching infinitesimally higher at every point on the shore. In drought times, in these times, the dam's water not so much recedes as stops arriving. As the outflow continues—as the molecular loosening of evaporation goes on—the refuse and leavings of a drowned valley rise. Tree trunks slimed with fifty years' submersion. Boots, boats, bottles, shoes and wrappers, bags, tricycles, cars. And the church, its worked stone piercing the water's sinking hood, spire and facade, windows and doorways rearing up as the water retrenches. In this new light, the weed lies down and dies, the living body of the water church gives up its movement; stands exposed in the uncompromising, engulfing air.

Anna Livesey

Paul S. Adler is Professor of Management and Organization at the Marshall School of Business, University of Southern California. He began his education in Australia and moved to France in 1974, where he received his doctorate in Economics and Management. Before arriving at USC in 1991, he was affiliated with the Brookings Institution, Columbia University, Harvard Business School, and Stanford's School of Engineering.

Bjarki Bragason is an Icelandic artist. He studied at the Iceland Academy of the Arts, Universität der Künste in Berlin, Germany, and completed his graduate studies at the California Institute of the Arts in Los Angeles in 2010. He is currently on the board of the Living Art Museum (Nyló), an artist run institution and collection in Reykjavík, and alongside his practice is engaged in teaching and various collaborations.

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Novel (Continuum, 2012) and *Narrative Care: Biopolitics and the Novel* (Bloomsbury, 2013). He is the editor of *Parrhesia: A Journal of Critical Philosophy* and the critical theory/philosophy section of the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, and a member of the boundary 2 collective.

Ryan S. Jeffery is a filmmaker living in Los Angeles, California. He received a BFA from Lewis & Clark College, an MFA from the Film and Video Program at the California Institute of the Arts, and studied at the Universität der Künste in Berlin. Jeffery's work focuses on how political, cultural and economic structures are imprinted in the physical landscape.

Amy Howden-Chapman is an artist and writer, originally from New Zealand, currently based in the USA, where she received an MA from California Institute of the Arts. She is a co-founder and editor of The Distance Plan.

Anna Livesey's first collection of poems, *Good Luck*, was published in 2003. Her second collection, *The Moonmen*, was published seven years later in 2010, and she is working on a new manuscript for 2017. She lives in Auckland, with her partner and two children.

Biddy Livesey is an artist, writer and researcher living in Auckland. She is currently a student at SHORE and Whāriki Research Centre, based at Massey University.

Anna Líndal is an artist and researcher based in Reykjavík. She works primarily in video and installation. Infinite Next is an ongoing research project in collaboration with Bjarki Bragason. Líndal and Bragason's practices share an interest in geological and human time, the impact of cultural activity on the environment, and the materialisation of history in built and natural structures. Anna studied at The Slade School of Fine Art, London.

Veronica Olivotto is a climate change adaptation specialist and urban sociologist focusing on climate governance, adaptive capacity and decision making. She holds a Masters in Urban Management and Development from the Institute for Housing and Urban Development Studies (IHS) and degrees from Edinburgh University (UK) and the University of Milan (Italy). Previously she worked at the Scottish Institute of Sustainable Technology (SISTech) at Heriot-Watt University (Edinburgh, UK). <http://cargocollective.com/veronicaolivotto>

Laura Preston works with artists to produce books, essays, events, and exhibitions. Her collaborative projects focus on re-visioning spatial and ecological matters through visual abstraction and art writing. Curator-at-Large for the Adam Art Gallery, Victoria University of Wellington, 2013–, Preston

was Guest Curator at Portikus, Frankfurt am Main, 2012. Her writing has been published in various contemporary art journals including *Artforum online*, *frieze*, and *Reading Room* (Auckland Art Gallery). Preston works for Sternberg Press in Berlin while developing a structure for a differing, updated, and ecologically minded aesthetics through the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna.

Jennifer Teets is a researcher, curator and performer based in Paris. She is known for her research on cheese, mud, and terra sigillata—their transitioning towards materiality and entity, and their ability to become something else when put in an exhibition or an essay.

Nina Tonga is Curator Pacific Cultures at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. She is a doctoral candidate in Art History at the University of Auckland. In 2014 she curated 'Tonga 'i Onopooni: Tonga Contemporary', the first exhibition to focus exclusively on the work of artists of Tongan heritage living in New Zealand.

John Vea is an Auckland based artist who works with moving image, sculpture and performance, predominantly focusing on Pacific migration to New Zealand. His solo exhibition,

The Distance Plan would like to thank the following:

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