

All our futures? Climate Change, Democracy & Missing Public Spaces

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How do we talk in helpful ways about the relationship between climate change and the future?

The simple story we are being called to tell about climate change:

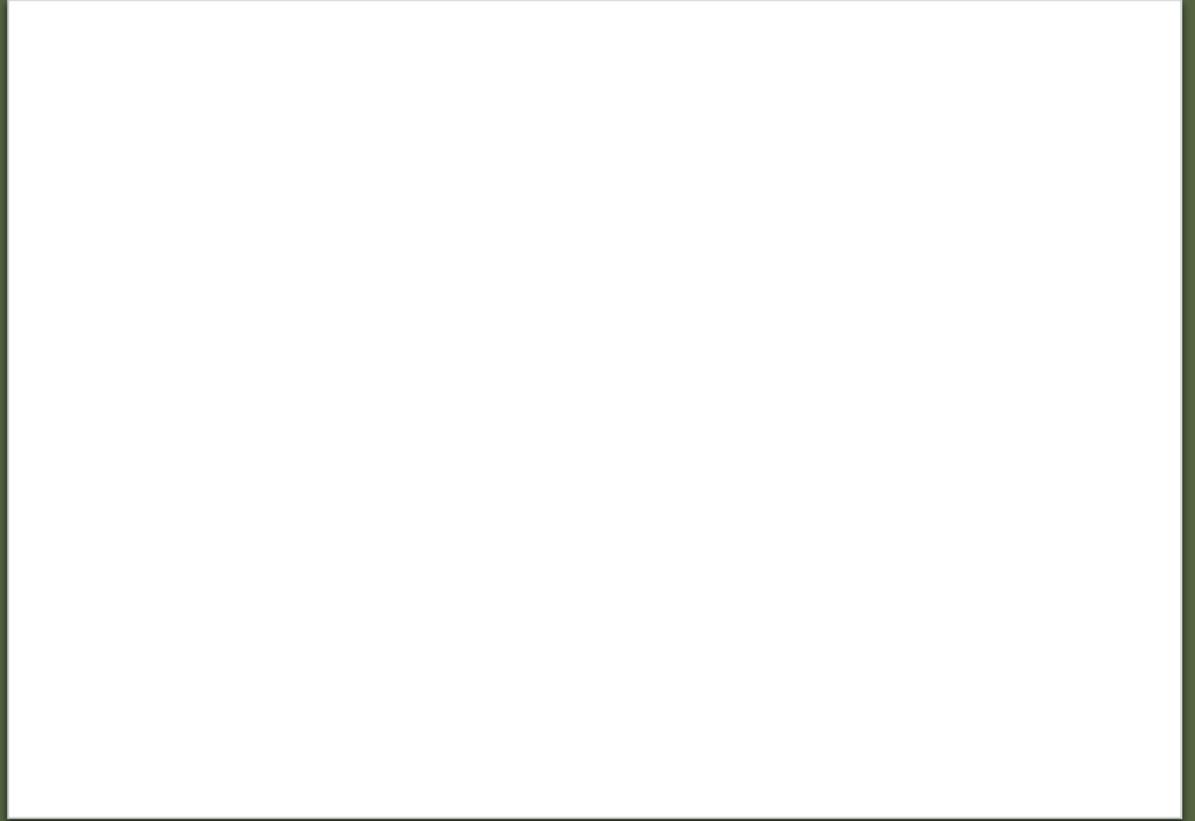
Restate that we have an emergency, that we have 12 years to get carbon emissions down, keep fossil fuels in the ground, and mobilise as if it were a war, if we are going to hit the Paris climate targets

- Is Climate Change a unique story about the future which means that we put aside our critical faculties?
- Is there an inevitable relationship between the situation as defined by scientific observation and some of the technocratic propositions being made?
- Who and what is framing a language of inevitability?

Are there different ways of talking about climate change and the future that doesn't *either* fall into a language of inevitable technocratic solutions *or* that simply wishes away climate change as another neoliberal/socialist conspiracy theory?

- explore the problems with current climate change narratives,
- propose a set of principles that might underpin a different sort of public conversation in this area, and
- propose some alternative approaches to talking in and with publics that we might want to begin to develop instead.

1. Current Climate Change Narratives



A language of prediction and probability

Carried out
on the
terrain of
science

With a
shadow
narrative of
apocalypse



New future victims offer
choice between panic and
action

Problems with this talk

- PTSD Dreams – constantly locate us ‘in front’ of and ‘outside’ climate change
- Focus on science, not politics, values, economic and social choices
- Reifies human agency – we can fix this
- Binary – either ‘climate change happens’ or it doesn’t
- Has not succeeded on its own terms – we are way off the Paris target

Thinking that 'something must be done' about climate change and actually beginning to think with and through the sorts of futures that might emerge *in democratic ways* are very different things

- The narratives that have characterized ‘phase 1’ of the climate change debate are not productive for getting our heads around ‘phase 2’
- Phase 1 = working out the climate science (clearly some work needs to be done in many places)
- Phase 2 = working through the choices that face us and the decisions we need to take about how we organize societies reframed as part of a ‘lively planet’.

- How else do we have a conversation?
- Some ontological shifts that might be useful
- Some practices that might help

2. Ontological Assumptions/Principles of Reality

Climate change as process not
event, verb not noun

The processes of changing climate involve social, material, economic and cultural actors and demand new active democratic processes

Reality is modal – different conditions trigger different dispositions in actors, different realities are possible

Reality is unfolding not finished...

Our agency is interdependent,
and our knowledge is not total

The stories that we tell – and that
we pay attention to – shape our
reality *as much as our science*

An ethics of both limits and possibility, of creativity and attentiveness to the new, is required

Understanding and living well with a changing climate will require the creation of radically democratic publics

Summary

- Climate change as process not event – verb not noun
- The processes of changing climate involve social, material, economic and cultural actors and demand new active democratic processes
- Reality is modal – different conditions trigger different dispositions in actors, different realities are possible
- Reality is unfolding not finished
- Our agency is interdependent, and our knowledge is not total – we are not Gods
- The stories that we tell – and that we pay attention to – shape our reality as much as our science
- An ethics of both limits and possibility, of creativity and attentiveness to the new, is required
- Understanding and living well with a changing climate will require the creation of radically publics

A side note

The risk of the sudden switch

- From acceptance of 'the science'
 - To a rapid pivot to disaster capitalism and technocentric solutions

The time is very urgent, we have to slow down
(Bayo Akomolafe)

- Slowing down, convening spaces to think, talk, work, open up new possibilities takes courage - in the face of your psyche shouting at you that you need to just make the disaster go away. But it is necessary
- The question is – how to do this well?

3. Convening Publics

Tribunal on the Rights of Lake Vättern

Sigtuna Foundation, May 2019

The Earth Rights Tribunal

- Treats climate change as an ongoing multi-layered, multi-species process
- Attendance to the realities emerging
- Opens up the latent dispositions of the legal system
- Prefigurative Practice
- Working as part of and with the beings of a lively planet
- Reconfigures existing elements into new relations

Citizens Assemblies

- Intentionally diverse publics – randomly selected
 - Expertise and knowledge invited in – but not reified
 - Knowledge tempered by moral and judicial judgement
 - Potential for developing ‘political judgement’
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- See also ‘The art of hosting’, Utopia as Method, Deep Democracy

- Political friendship is not mainly (or not only) a sentiment of fellow-feeling for other citizens. It is more importantly a way of acting in respect to them: friendship, known to all, defines the normative aspirations. One doesn't even have to live one's fellow citizens in order to act toward them as a political friend. There is a very easy way of transforming one's relations to strangers. We might simply ask about all our encounters with others in our policy, 'Would I treat a friend this way?' When we can answer 'yes' we are on the way to developing a citizenship that is neither domination nor acquiescence. When the answer is no, we have not escaped our old bad habits. In an excessively partisan age, with a culture riven by distrust, we more than ever need to cultivate this sort of virtue

- (Danielle Allen, Aurora Forum, 2008, Stanford University)

See also **Amy Hosotsuji and Samhita Misra's work on deep democracy**

What makes a good conversation?

- Not just the **quality** of the conversation
- But the **structure** of conversation – who can participate?
- And the **consequences** of conversation – who benefits?

Structuring the conversation

- Assembling diverse communities of conversation is not simply about 'open invitation' it is about the intentional, hard, logistical process of creating the conditions by which people and more than human others are actively enabled to be in the conversation and to participate with confidence.
- This means attention to who is doing the childcare, paying the time, organizing the travel, doing the translation, offering food, and when, where and how the conversation is happening
- This means working with process time – with the processes with which our problem is entangled – processes of child reading, transport systems, employment and historic inequalities

Attending to the consequences

- Not all groups will be satisfied with the outcome of discussions as we decide how to intervene in a changing climate
- We will likely ask some groups to make sacrifices
- Failure to take care of sacrifices, failure to respect and acknowledge these produces resentments too familiar today
- Patterns in sacrifice need to be attended to – are the same groups being asked again and again to give up what they need? Are they structured along familiar historic lines of inquiry?
- What new emergent realities are we producing and how do we take care of those who are asked to give up their needs as a result?

To conclude

In other words, we need to create conversations driven not by fear of the apocalypse, but by the mature understanding that we now have to do the hard work of inventing, together, **even with those who we don't like**, different ways of **living in a new reality that is already and always in process**, and of **taking care of those** who are asked to set aside their interests to make these new realities liveable for all.

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