

Cultural Relations Collection

Rethinking the unthinkable: what can educational engagements with culture offer the climate crisis?

Charlotte Nussey



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Foreword

The rapid changes currently affecting the Earth's environment amount to arguably the biggest story in human history so far – one that will affect every person on the planet.

The way we tell that story, the language we use and the people we engage will determine our success in minimising and mitigating its effects.

There is little dispute that action to avert catastrophic global heating is essential. But action does not take place in a vacuum. It is the consequence of data, calculation, reflection and the way in which concerned humans communicate.

So cultural relations, the art and practice of international communication as expressed through national cultural assets, has a vital (though largely unexamined) role to play.

As one of the contributors to this collection sums it up: 'Climate change is a crisis of culture.'

The study of cultural relations in the context of climate change – and perhaps more importantly, as a spur to action – is a young field, but one that needs to grow up fast.

This volume of essays commissioned by the British Council is an attempt to survey some of the thinking in the field. We've done this in partnership with researchers from a range of academic backgrounds and disciplines. These new and exciting voices had a brief to provoke and challenge as well as to illuminate – and their essays do just that.

The result is an excellent primer to a variety of approaches from a broad spectrum of authors – and subject matter from 'cli-fi' novels to the meaning of the climate strike movement.

The narratives of myth, religion and history fulfil our need to make sense of the world and our place in it. We urgently need to discover new ways to communicate our present predicament, but I believe all the cultural tools we need for the task are at hand.

The climate emergency has made a single interest group of all people on Earth. So, as well as being a moment of crisis and challenge, the period we are living through has the potential to be a time of unity and common purpose. In that fact, I find great hope.

Advancing as one global community to solve a challenge that is simultaneously paralysing in its enormity and impossible to imagine in its ultimate consequences, has never been attempted before. But that shouldn't stop us trying. Nothing else has ever been so important.

Kate Ewart-Biggs OBE
Interim Chief Executive, *British Council*

The Climate Connection Cultural Relations Collection Special Edition

The following essays are part of a special edition of the Cultural Relations Collection and part of the Climate Connection. You can find out more about the Climate Connection at www.britishcouncil.org/climate-connection

You can find this special edition and other essays in the Cultural Relations Collection on our website at www.britishcouncil.org/research-policy-insight/research-series/cultural-relations

An obtuse triangle: the nexus between digital skills, soft power and climate change mitigation in Georgia

Jessica Gosling

Emergencies, emergences, engagement: cultural relations and climate action

Carlia Figueira and Aimee Fullman

Empowering a world without fossil fuels: a crisis of culture

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Rethinking the unthinkable: what can educational engagements with culture offer the climate crisis?

Charlotte Nussey

Introduction to The Climate Connection Cultural Relations Collection Special Edition

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Three years ago, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), an international body that brings together the world's leading climate scientists, published what is commonly referred to as the 1.5°C Report, in which for the first time ever the authors set an implicit deadline for decisive climate action. The report recommended reducing global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 45 per cent by the year 2030, or in other words limiting the warming of the atmosphere to 1.5°C compared to pre-industrial levels (IPCC, 2018). Beyond the 1.5°C threshold, report authors warned, lies a world marked by 'long-lasting and irreversible' risks for our ecosystems and societies alike (IPCC, p. 36). This unprecedented clarion call for action was the IPCC's attempt to underscore the seriousness of the global climate emergency and galvanise support for aggressive GHG emission reductions at the international and national levels.

Some climate activists have found hope, or at least a silver lining, in the global COVID-19 pandemic, suggesting that reduced economic activity would dramatically curtail carbon pollution (Balch, 2020). The year 2020 did see a decrease in that respect, but not by as much as was expected (Tollefson, 2021). And while calls for 'building back better' have grown in recent months, the general sentiment is that once the virus is brought under control, economic activity will rapidly rebound along with GHG emissions. Not only that, the virus is also said to have had negative effects on climate action. Travel restrictions caused by the pandemic have made it difficult for members of the global climate governance community (governments, NGOs, international organisations, business, etc.) and for activists to meet in person and work together towards more ambitious climate goals. The

postponement of COP26 in Glasgow to November 2021 is a case in point. Meanwhile, virtual meetings do not seem to be as effective as in-person gatherings (Evans & Gabbatiss, 2021).

That said, with or without a global pandemic grounding most flights and making face-to-face interactions impossible, the world's leaders have over the last three decades sought – with very mixed results – to build consensus around who should reduce their emissions, by how much, by when and at whose cost. In 2015, the Paris Agreement was hailed by some as a break to this impasse, though critics rushed to point out that the treaty had no punitive mechanisms and relied on voluntary contributions by states (called nationally determined contributions, or NDCs). Indeed, the world is currently on track to limit warming to about 2.4°C above pre-industrial levels, a far cry from the 1.5°C goal advocated by the IPCC and most environmental organisations, and that is based on national governments' pledges and targets rather than tangible progress (CAT, 2021).

It is clear that we need an unprecedented level of international co-operation to tackle the climate emergency. However, this co-operation can and should come in different iterations; effective collaboration of governments at the national level may not be sufficient to avoid the irreversible changes the IPCC warned of in the 1.5°C Report. What is needed is a global ethic of care and responsibility for the planet – a cultural change that would enable climate action in all facets of social life.

That is because climate change knows no borders and affects the world's cultures just as much as it affects our natural environments.

There is no single human or non-human on Earth that will be unaffected by the changing climate in one way or another. There is certainly some awareness that 'we're all in this together' among global leaders. After all, the Paris Agreement did away with categorising nations into those historically responsible for GHG emissions and the rest (Annex-I and non-Annex-I countries). Even the motto of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – 'leave no one behind' – has an unequivocally cosmopolitan ring to it.

That said, even though we may well all be in this together, we certainly are not equal. Different people will experience climate impacts based on where or who they are – seen from this perspective, climate change is a major socio-economic and political disruptor that can exacerbate global and local inequalities, deep as they already are. This is one of the main concerns of climate justice scholars and activists, who argue that, among other things, we need to refocus the climate debate and action towards those on its frontlines – historically marginalised communities and individuals, and countries that are disproportionately exposed or vulnerable to climate impacts despite having done little to cause it.

This is where the role of cultural relations becomes crucial. While there is no universally supported definition, cultural relations can be said to refer to 'interventions in foreign cultural arenas with the aim of enhancing intercultural dialogue and bringing about mutual benefits connected to security, stability and prosperity' (Gillespie et al., 2018, p. 5). Writing during the height of Cold War tensions, JM Mitchell (1986, p. 1) argued that cultural relations possessed great potential for fostering global stability and that 'alternative

forms of international relations' lay beyond traditional diplomacy. Three decades on from the end of the Cold War, the importance of cultural relations in managing and mitigating global issues is more important than ever. It is difficult to imagine developing a global ethic of planetary care without intercultural dialogue and shared environmental and social values among the world's powerful.

However, cultural relations involves a range of actors and institutions beyond just governments, which has always set it apart from cultural diplomacy (Mitchell, 1986, p. 2). Recently, cultural relations has been harnessed in relation to a range of different issues and fields of study. There has been a 'cultural turn' in international development (Singh, 2019), English language assessment has been approached through the lens of cultural relations (O'Sullivan & Patel, 2019), and the continuing global COVID-19 pandemic has raised debate as to the implications of a shift from physical to digital cultural relations (Kerr, 2021). Despite the noted need to consider the role of culture and creative approaches to addressing climate change (Gabrys & Yusoff, 2012), efforts to address the climate emergency have seldom been considered from the vantage of cultural relations.

These emerging perspectives suggest that cultural relations has the potential to foster mutual understanding, trust and co-operation in the field of climate action. Whether rooted in exchanging global citizens' lived experiences of climate change or promoting cross-cultural co-operation in raising climate awareness and ambitions, cultural relations offers many ways to positively contribute to our planet-wide struggle to contain climate change and its impacts. However, precisely because climate change is riddled with international and

sub-national inequalities in terms of who caused it and who will be affected by its impacts, cultural relations must remain an explicitly reciprocal activity between equal partners (Gillespie et al., 2018). Cultural relations is different in this regard from soft power or cultural diplomacy, the pursuit of which can be problematic, and accused of evincing neo-colonial undertones. A cultural relations approach that is guided by principles of trust, reciprocity and equity – an approach embodied by climate justice – can act as a vehicle for sharing knowledge and experiences of climate impacts and injustices.

The six essays to follow exemplify how this can be achieved and reflect on the role cultural relations has had in shaping climate change discourse, activism and praxis. We now turn to these insightful contributions.

Overview of essays

In their essay on cultural relations and climate action, Carla Figueira and Aimee Fullman argue for the need to avoid distant, apocalyptic visions of climate change. Instead, they suggest telling ‘better stories’ about where we want to go and the sort of world we want to live in. They argue that cultural relations, and cultural relations organisations, can play a vital role in shaping this new framing of climate change. Figueira and Fullman discuss emerging ecosystems of care, bolstered since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, and how a caring paradigm can be linked to cultural relations, with its focus on expanding shared knowledge, understanding and trust. Further, their essay argues that cultural engagement serves as a useful point of participation in climate action, focusing on the greening of cultural relations organisations, diversifying cultural engagement interventions, elevating programme evaluations and learning by

design. They argue that cultural relations is an underutilised resource in addressing the climate emergency, and cultural relations organisations have an important part to play.

Charlotte Nussey considers the ways in which educational engagement with cultural relations offers lessons for the climate emergency, including new ideas and ways of talking and listening. Like other essays in the collection, Nussey argues that the climate emergency cannot be addressed by technical responses and innovations alone, but requires a socio-cultural response, inclusive of culture and education. The essay suggests three important connections and shifts in knowledge that are needed in (higher) education relating to the climate emergency. These are:

1. the need to break down hierarchies of knowledge and ways of knowing
2. the need to create deeper, transformative and non-extractive relationships between higher education institutions globally
3. new links between higher education institutions and the societies they are part of, ensuring that the former learn from the latter.

To better make these connections, Nussey proposes four interconnected mechanisms, drawing on intercultural engagement: art as anticipatory memory, language matters, protest as pedagogy and just participation. The essay spotlights the work of the Transforming Universities for a Changing Climate (Climate U) project, which shows the important ways that higher education institutions in the Global South contribute to tackling the causes and impacts of climate change. This example highlights the important intersections that are taking place between activism and scholarship, and touch on culture, education and climate justice.

Chloé Germaine Buckley and Benjamin Bowman discuss the School Strike for Climate, the global movement initiated by Greta Thunberg in August 2018. Rather than consider the strikes as a protest movement for a large-scale shift in climate policy, they suggest viewing them as a form of global cultural exchange. They highlight the role of three themes to make this case:

1. the role of young people's positionalities in building relationships and global solidarities
2. young people's repertoire beyond attempting to shift climate policy into wider civic activity such as intergenerational care or mental health support
3. the functioning of the strikes as a polyphonic 'text' that invites dialogue, incorporating a multitude of voices in a variety of forms.

In their essay, Buckley and Bowman interpret the efforts of young people not only as a protest against the world as it is today, but as a process that envisions the world as it could be, with all the struggles that come with bringing this view into being. The authors draw on a range of materials produced by young people, from informal protest signs to songs.

Sam McNeilly argues that climate change cannot be overcome by technological developments or engineering advances alone, because it is in fact a crisis of culture. McNeilly addresses the relative failure of communicating climate change and roots his work in the 'energy humanities' – an emergent field of scholarship concerned with the impact of the dominant forms of energy on a given society. He argues that effectively communicating the climate emergency requires increased attention to what drives it: the culture of fossil fuels. McNeilly argues

against a simple replacement of fossil fuels with renewables, in favour of an ethical energy transition that involves also understanding and transforming existing cultural practices. Cultural relations can serve to ensure justice is central to shifts away from fossil fuels, and in making this point, McNeilly draws on a variety of cultural outputs, including American naturalist novels, the diary of environmental activist Ken Saro-Wiwa, and the photography and documentary work of Edward Burtynsky. As a post-fossil fuel world still exists in the realm of the imaginary, McNeilly posits that cultural and artistic forms offer opportunities to imagine routes to a just transition and a different kind of world.

In her essay on climate knowledge in the digital age, Nina Schuller invites the reader into the world of the web. As she argues, new communication technologies may be a double-edged sword – stretching outwards and bringing people closer together or being used as a vehicle for promoting certain interpretations and imaginings of the world over others. Schuller explains how digital encyclopaedic knowledge is created and moderated, using Wikipedia as a case study. She notes how our knowledge of climate change is subjected to the politics of translation on the web, with certain interests holding more influence by virtue of digital access and colonial legacies. In this context, Schuller discusses how non-Western knowledges often give way to Eurocentric epistemologies, despite some efforts by media giants like Google and Wikimedia itself to rectify this inequity. The politics of climate knowledge production on the web (and the cultural relations embedded in and shaping this process), Schuller argues, have important implications for global climate action. If generated in a top-down manner, climate knowledges and discourses can contribute to

'disinterest, disengagement and disaffection' at the local level, complicating our prospects for mitigating and adapting to the impacts of climate change.

In her essay, Jessica Gosling discusses the 'obtuse triangle' of unusual suspects: climate change mitigation, soft power and digital skills, using the nation of Georgia as a case study. She argues that digital skills, which she sees as 'vital instruments of soft power', are of crucial importance for building a low-carbon economy and prosperity in the south Caucasian country. Gosling argues that given that climate change is a global emergency, the exchange of information and technology between different cultures and regions of the world becomes crucial for climate mitigation. More specifically, she notes that combatting climate change will require solutions and connectivity afforded by digital and entrepreneurial skills which may not be sufficiently funded and developed in some regions of the world. A related concern here is the unequal access to digital education which limits opportunities for some people to effectively participate in the rapidly digitalising economy and benefit from the wealth that it generates, not to mention being able to engage in discussions on desirable climate change mitigation strategies. Gosling discusses these linkages based on interviews conducted with Georgian experts with regard to the creative industry in the country.

Taken together, the authors of the essays in this collection demonstrate how cultural relations can contribute to the goal of more equitable, intercultural climate action. They offer insights into diverse facets of society, economy and culture and how they can be mobilised for our common good. Our contributors represent different career stages – PhD students, postdoctoral researchers, lecturers and professionals – and different academic and professional disciplines, embodying the diversity of perspectives needed to combat the climate emergency, and do so before the deadline set by the scientists at IPCC.

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Rethinking the unthinkable: what can educational engagements with culture offer the climate crisis?

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Introduction

A woman sits on the ground, leaning against a pine. Its bark presses hard against her back, as hard as life. Its needles scent the air and a force hums in the heart of the word. Her ears tune down to the lowest frequencies. The tree is saying things, in words before words.

The Overstory (Powers, 2018, p. 3)

This essay is prompted by the intuition that climate change is a crisis that is ‘unthinkable’, one that is also ‘a crisis of culture and thus of the imagination’ (Ghosh, 2016, p. 9), that requires ‘words before words’ and learning to listen differently. The aim of this essay is to explore these ideas, reflecting on ways that educational engagements with cultural relations might offer new forms of thinking about, talking about and listening to concerns around the climate crisis. The essay argues that climate change requires more than technical fixes. As a crisis caused by human interactions, values and behaviours, it requires a socio-cultural response that draws on both education and culture and the connections between.

In writing this essay, I am writing from the perspective of the Global North, where I myself live and work, and am concerned with climate justice not only in terms of those in so-called ‘developing countries’ which are already experiencing the impacts of the climate crisis, but with addressing the behaviour of and turning analysis towards ‘polluter-elites’ who are also the focus of climate justice campaigns and critiques (Newell, Daley & Twena, 2021). The examples in this essay of activism from the Global South are drawn, in part, from conversations with colleagues in

the *Transforming Universities for a Changing Climate* study, which looks at university responses to the crisis through locally generated climate actions, and so tend to focus on the Pacific and Sub-Saharan African context, where our study is based. As such, they are not intended to be exhaustive, but to signal some of the kinds of powerful activism and scholarship that reflect on education, climate justice and culture.

Connecting culture, climate change and higher education

The international higher education space is a particular site of cultural dynamics and production. This essay aims to build on the kinds of analysis offered in Singh’s essay for the Cultural Relations Collection, which explored the cultural turn in international development and argued for the value of participation and links between cultural voice, agency and well-being (2019). Educational institutions, by their nature, are sites of intercultural exchanges and the (re)production of social norms. They are part of systems, linked to both other forms of educational institutions and society more broadly. This is particularly true of universities, through which both ideas and people travel. Higher education institutions both reflect and shape the societies in which they are embedded.

There is no question that education plays an important role in understanding and addressing the climate crisis. But the intransigence, indeed increasing urgency, of the crisis raises important questions about the relationship between education and climate change, and demands that we ask what kinds of education. Higher levels of education do not necessarily correlate with climate action:

the global population is currently at the most 'educated' it has ever been, but simultaneously the nearest to environmental breakdown (Komatsu, Rappleye & Silova, 2020).

'Knowledge' is neither neutral nor universal – 'highly educated' people can be both climate scientists and climate sceptics (Oreskes, 2010), and there are multiple pathways through which higher education can impact on the socio-ecosphere, both positively and negatively (McCowan, 2020).

Higher education institutions themselves are implicated in the production of emissions, directly, in terms of the mobility of their staff and students (Shields, 2019), but also indirectly, through the ways in which they engage and critique (or not) the foundations of climate change knowledge production, and the relationship with capitalism, extractive industries, and colonial structures and histories (Facer, 2020). For some academics, the focus in universities on the acquisition of knowledge rather than the promotion of wisdom represents a betrayal of humanity (Maxwell, 2021). In a similar vein, Green argues that we need 'less talk, more walk', and makes the case that climate scholars need to:

- engage in radical scientific analysis which gets to the root causes of the problem
- be explicit about the real-world implications of findings
- engage broadly both within and outside the academy (Green, 2020).

Universities and educational systems play a significant part in setting up the kinds of extractive and carbon-heavy structures which are responsible for the crisis (Hickel, 2020).

Educational institutions are also shaped by how we understand the climate crisis itself. The dominant focus on limiting and reducing emissions, and numerical targets of limiting temperature increases beyond post-industrial levels, has led to a focus on education as a technical exercise of expertise. Technical fixes are founded on a fundamental belief that more knowledge about climate change will lead to better responses (Nightingale et al., 2020). The most significant of these is forms of geoengineering in which scientists act as what Hamilton has dubbed 'earthmasters' (Hamilton, 2013). Supported by philanthro-capitalists such as Bill Gates who argue that the crisis is 'avoidable' rather than already in process, and with buy-in from politicians in the Global North, these ideas continue to gain traction and to shape educational policies and practices. A recent interview by the US Climate Envoy John Kerry, in which he emphasised the paradoxical 'reality' that 50 per cent of the reductions to reach net zero will come from technology that does not yet exist, is just one example.¹

Against this technicist framing of both the crisis and the educational solutions, a socio-cultural understanding takes us in very different directions. Understanding the problem in this way helps us to see how our response to the crisis is shaped by 'everyday' practices, grounded in wider cultural, political and material contexts that influence behaviour change (Nash et al., 2020). It asks how knowledge is received, and how the emotions which adhere to climate change can limit, constrain or promote climate action, which has significant implications for educational institutions (Ojala, 2012). Asking how the crisis and its impacts are embedded in socio-political

1. Available online at: www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/may/16/half-of-emissions-cuts-will-come-from-future-tech-says-john-kerry (accessed June 2021).

structures and cultural practices requires the full range of academic disciplines, not just the 'hard' sciences (Leal Filho, 2010; Reimers, 2021). There is a distinct and significant absence of the social sciences, however, in the climate change field: since 1950, only 0.12 per cent of all research funding was spent on the social science of climate mitigation (Overland & Sovacool, 2020). But beyond a question of discipline – and interdisciplinary connections – there are deeper questions to be asked of what kinds of universities, and how 'knowledge' and 'culture' within universities, educational systems and societies more broadly are conceived.

Within the work of decolonial thinkers who theorise higher education, aspects of the relationship between knowledge and culture, and their relationship with the ecosphere, help to frame this essay. A range of this work aims to understand the value of intercultural exchanges, and the expansion of the university from a single, monolithic understanding of 'knowledge' to a pluralised 'ecology of knowledges' (Santos, 2014, 2018). In the context of colonialism and structural inequalities, a 'monoculture of knowledge' is the 'most powerful mode of production of nonexistence ... turning modern science and high culture into the sole criteria of truth and aesthetic quality respectively' (Santos, 2014, p. 172). 'Culture', if not understood in terms of pluralities and multiple forms of knowledge, can become a way to exclude, delegitimise and oppress. Within ecologies of knowledges, culture is understood as neither fixed nor unitary, but instead incomplete, of reproduced in the space between interactions, 'translated' in 'empathetic interactions' (Santos, 2014, pp. 212–36). Engagements with cultural expressions of climate change that privilege marginalised and historically excluded

voices can work to expand the bases of our knowledge, a step towards a 'transformation by enlargement' (Hoppers & Richards, 2012) in which concepts of 'education', 'development' and 'knowledge' are challenged, flattening hierarchies to give plurality of insights and deepen the tools for diagnosis (Odora Hoppers, 2015).

In this way, climate change might become something other than the 'unthinkable'. A pluralised understanding of climate change instead offers a way to unpack boundaries between the global (often framed in terms of emissions) and the local (often seen in terms of impacts and adaptations), and to reflect on the relationships between different forms of justice (Schlosberg, Collins & Niemeyer, 2017). Common themes of affiliation, loss and the hope of regeneration start to emerge, across dichotomies of so-called 'developed' and 'developing' contexts. These different representations of climate change and our shared humanity have the potential to offer a step towards a new frame in which to educate, of what Mbembe calls *planetary* – a consciousness of the unity between human society and the Earth and 'of the entanglement of nature and society' (Mbembe, 2019).

Rethinking the unthinkable?

Inspired by this work, I want to argue that education in general, and higher education in particular, needs to build three different kinds of connection and epistemic expansion that relate to the climate crisis.

The first is within higher education institutions, particularly across 'hard' and 'soft' sciences, or between social sciences and humanities, breaking down hierarchies between different forms of knowledge, and different ways of knowing.

The second is between higher education institutions, allowing for deeper and transformative forms of partnership that do not entrench extractive forms of relationships in which the Global South is positioned as a peripheral site of research or indeed vulnerability, while the Global North positions itself as the producer of knowledge, without recognising and interrogating the historical and contemporary complicity in causing the problems which it is now setting out to 'solve'.

The third is between higher education institutions and the societies in which they are embedded. Drawing on a range of thinking from Latin America, Santos usefully calls this 'counter-extension' (Santos, 2006), in which the university learns *from* the community, counter to views that construct educational spaces as the sole site of knowledge production.

In this essay, I therefore suggest four potential mechanisms of connection that draw on intercultural engagements with the crisis, and which aim towards recognising the structural and colonial histories and contemporary instantiations of the crisis in ways that may help us to think differently. Each of these are educational in the sense that they represent forms of intercultural encounters which can happen within and between educational institutions and formal and informal spaces of learning in broader society. These four mechanisms of connection are artistic, linguistic, activist and participatory forms of intercultural exchange. Each of these four forms is related to each other, as the essay will show.

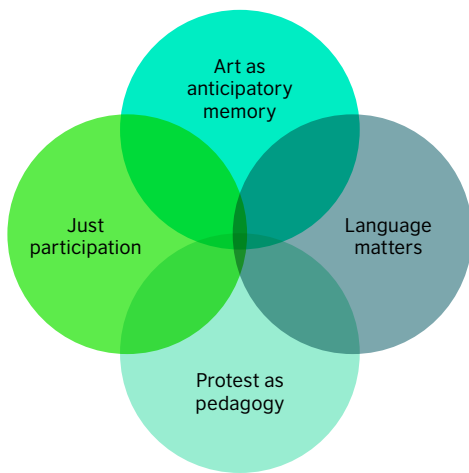


Figure 1 Four potential mechanisms of connection

Art as anticipatory memory

It is bad, the news. Bad news as it always was, forever, but worse. More relevant. That is what you don't want, we realize. What no one ever wanted: for the news to be relevant.

The End We Start From (Hunter, 2017, p. 20)

These words voiced by the nameless narrator in Hunter's novel, set first in rising waters in London in 2031 and then in a migratory journey to escape the flood, highlight one of the central paradoxes about climate change: while for the majority of those in the Global North the news does not (yet) feel 'relevant', it is simultaneously true that 'we knew what was coming all along' (Hunter, 2017, p. 63). It is a mark of inequality that those who are the most able to hold the effects of climate change at a physical and temporal distance from themselves are also those who are most responsible, and who should be tasked with forming the solution.

Artistic representations of the crisis such as Hunter's, however, perhaps offer a way to bridge the physical and temporal distance which is seen as one of the most intractable characteristics of the climate crisis. Core themes of the climate crisis are discernible from novelistic representations of the crisis, including floods, droughts and displacement, food insecurities and deep inequalities, in which the boundaries of the 'safe operating space for humanity' (Rockström et al., 2009) have been breached, and characters' lives are played out in precarity and loss. Often set in near-futures that allow reflections back on the crisis, novels such as Hunter's deploy the 'art of anticipatory memory' (Craps, 2017) that allows for both humans and non-humans to scrutinise in advance the impact of our future actions (Plate, 2017). As Jeanette Winterson writes in *The Stone Gods*, these universes become a 'memory of our mistakes' (Winterson, 2007, p. 67). Streeby calls this 'speculative fiction' – allowing authors not only to play with time but with science itself, and in doing so revealing some of the contradictions of approaches to the crisis which rely solely on techno-fixes, and which mask the socio-cultural dimensions of climate change and its impacts (Streeby, 2017).

The increasing prevalence of novels such as Hunter's represent a cultural shift. In 2016, Amitav Ghosh wrote that the absence of climate change from literature represented a 'Great Derangement', in which forms of art and literature were drawn into 'modes of concealment' that failed to communicate the depth, severity or immediacy of the crisis (Ghosh, 2016, p. 11). But in the few years since, even Ghosh himself has addressed this concealment – reflecting in an interview

that we have started to live 'in an age where the improbable is becoming the probable'.² His 2019 novel *Gun Island* represents these improbabilities – a 'strange journey' (Ghosh, 2019, p. 3) of displacement that blends myth and historical fact to make links between the crises of the present and those of the industrialising past. Other works which deal with ecological breakdown also focus on blending myth and temporality, such as the novella *Tentacle* (Indiana 2018), in which a colonial past is blended with a dystopian future where the oceans are lifeless, exploring how extraction and self-interest repeat over time. A third type of novel that deals more implicitly with the crisis questions modes of 'development' that break down communities and place-based culture and connections, as well as damaging ecospheric balance, such as Patricia Grace's *Potiki* set in a Māori community in New Zealand besieged by 'dollarmen'.

So how, then, do we learn from these cultural representations of climate change in art and literature? One way is to reflect on the educational impacts of art itself. Socio-cultural artefacts and texts can themselves be seen as raising awareness: arts for communication can be both 'educational or instructive' and 'catalyse a process of reflection' (Capstick, Hemstock & Senikula, 2018). Speaking to concerns raised in the introduction to this essay that education represents a slow change to an urgent problem, research has also found that artistic evocations of climate change not only translate to shifts in individual behaviours and practices, but have also been shown to evoke an emotional response that translates – at least in the short term – to increased support for climate policy (Klößner & Sommer, 2021).

2. Available online at: chireviewofbooks.com/2019/09/18/the-uncanniness-of-climate-change/

This has implications for pedagogy at all levels of education systems, as well as speaking to a need for deeper recognition of informal forms of learning about the crisis. The importance of work which bridges the walls of the 'ivory tower' to learn from and with artists is further evident in projects such as Cape Farewell, a longstanding initiative that aimed to create a different 'language' with which to understand climate change, hoping to unpack some of the data-heavy and technical vocabularies used to describe the crisis. Beginning with a collective travelling to the High Arctic in a 100-year-old schooner, artists were brought together with scientists not merely to illustrate but to produce new ways of seeing and experiencing climate change (Buckland, Gray & Wood, 2017).

Language matters

While the 'language' of climate change can be understood in terms of breaking down distinctions between numerical data and visual communications of the crisis as the multiple projects of Cape Farewell aimed to do, it can also be understood more literally, in terms of the words available to us to describe the challenge.

In some contexts, social distance from climate change translates into the absence of language. The language that we use to frame and describe the problem – or the absence of any language at all – can contribute to the problem itself. In the UK, different analyses have revealed the absence of climate change: whether in the very low prevalence of references to climate change in popular

television shows³ or in the ways in which words for everyday nature are disappearing from children's vocabularies, as 'acorn' and 'bluebell' are replaced by 'broadband' and 'blog'⁴. There are significant educational impacts to these everyday absences: how can we co-learn about phenomena that are missing from our everyday discourse? Developing curricula to support the integration of climate change into schools and universities, fostering positive change and ensuring that these toolkits are open access, as the British Council has done,⁵ are useful first steps.

Social distance through language can also be understood as a direct question of translation, particularly in multilingual settings. Research in Kenya and Nigeria, for example, has highlighted that climate change information is most commonly shared in English, resulting in multiple layers of disadvantage for rural populations who are both excluded from the linguistic capital afforded by speaking English and the most likely to be subject to the impacts of climate change (Ageyo & Muchunku, 2020; Olatumile & Tunde-Awe, 2019). This is in contexts of high linguistic diversity: while in Kenya more than 50 languages and dialects are spoken, in Nigeria the number is more than 500. Research such as this calls for more of these languages to be represented in spaces and artefacts of climate change communication and education.

Decolonial linguistic theory has taught us, however, that the power of language should not be understood in terms of direct translation, but also in the ways in which

3. Available online at: wearealbert.org/editorial/subtitles-to-save-the-world/

4. Available online at: www.theguardian.com/books/2015/feb/27/robert-macfarlane-word-hoard-rewilding-landscape

5. Available online at: www.britishcouncil.org/climate-connection/get-involved/resources-school-teachers

language is a bearer of socio-cultural concepts (Wa Thiong'o, 1992; Bhabha, 2004; Santos, 2014). An intercultural decolonial lens asks not only that information on climate change be present and literally translated into indigenous and marginalised languages, or that climate change is represented on curricula. It also demands that we ask how climate change is being (re)produced in indigenous knowledges and how that is represented in language. This requires a deeper engagement with the socio-cultural products of language, asking, for example, how indigenous knowledge and indigenous linguistic rights are interlinked,⁶ and how they speak to both climactic changes and to humanity's relationship with biodiversity (Cámara-Leret & Bascompte, 2021).

Protest as pedagogy

Linguistic and indigenous rights and knowledge, as well as the ways in which art can inform and shift debates at both individual and structural, policy levels have some clear implications for pedagogy, as I have signalled in the discussion so far. But the third mechanism of connection that I want to consider focuses more radically on the ways in which educational institutions can engage with protest, as an active form of intercultural exchange, hybridity and debate.

In relation to the mitigation of climate change, it is a common concern that educational solutions are too long term for an urgent question. This is particularly true of those

which begin in schools, seen as training the next generation for an inter-generational crisis which is already happening. It is also increasingly being argued, however, in the higher education space, in which concerns are being raised that a current (implicit) theory of change which suggests that teaching, learning and research activities will translate into future actions is equally on too slow of an impact timescale (Gardner et al., 2021).

Declarations of a climate emergency by higher education institutions represent one kind of advocacy, as do the specific plans to mobilise resources for environmental and sustainability curricula, and action-oriented research that academics set out in this collective commitment⁷. Work to set out how this looks for universities in the UK can be adapted to context and equally apply to universities in other countries and contexts, as well as working as guiding principles for education at all levels of the systems, particularly around calls to:

- redesign the day-to-day operations of institutions to reduce emissions, nurture biodiversity and adapt to the impacts of a changing climate
- reinvigorate the civic role of institutions
- reshape knowledge structures to address the interdisciplinary complexity of the climate change
- refocus the educational mission of institutions to support students to develop

6. Research in Tuvalu has highlighted, for example, the ways in which indicators of climate change exist within indigenous communities, in which indigenous knowledge systems are communicated through language. See: [youtu.be.KhEOVbJ2Xxo](https://youtu.be/KhEOVbJ2Xxo) (accessed June 2021).

7. UNEP (2019) Higher and Further Education Institutions across the globe declare Climate Emergency. Press release. Available online at: www.unep.org/news-and-stories/press-release/higher-and-further-education-institutions-across-globe-declare (accessed May 2021).

the emotional, intellectual, and practical capabilities to live well with each other and with the planet (Facer, 2020).

While a range of work calls for engagement with academics around the impacts and implications of university-produced knowledge, there is also an important second dimension to the protest as pedagogy model which reflects on the ways in which social movements are disrupting the academy. This includes the ways in which protests, including but not limited to youth protests such as the Sunrise Movement, Extinction Rebellion or #FridaysForFuture school strikes, raise deep questions for how climate change is taught by (or indeed missing from) formal and informal educational spaces (Klein, 2020; Lowan-Trudeau, 2017).

In this 'beyond business as usual' model for educational institutions and systems, there is a need to engage at multiple scales, recognising the local, national and regional specificities of climate change, and recognising the agency of social movements and actors. These processes can link back to questions of how artistic representations can claim agency and shift policy, which can be enhanced by educational engagements. Moments of protest around the UN Climate Summits can be a useful source of instruction. Raising the profile of the impacts of climate change on the Maldives in 2009, for example, the signing of a national commitment to carbon neutrality by the president and his cabinet in an underwater meeting has raised awareness of the 'slow violence' that climate change represents (Nixon, 2011), while not falling into stereotypes of portraying nations as either developed/developing, or failing to recognise

simultaneous vulnerability and active agency. Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner's activist-poetry at the 2014 UN Climate Summit equally raised the profile of small island developing states,⁸ emphasising the ways in which Pacific Islanders have been witnessing and experiencing local climatic changes long before it became 'scientifically' measured (Suliman et al., 2019). These individual moments can be complemented by recognition of the pedagogies entailed in broader movements, such as the Green Belt Movement in Kenya, in which trees to commemorate women who had been environmental activists flourished into a movement to plant trees, and protests against deforestation that were shaped by constructs of gender and political nationalism (Ebila, 2015; Maathai, 2008). These moments and movements embed climate change closely into communities and situate the crisis within overlapping crises around inequality and exclusion, linked to intersecting inequalities around place-based, ethno-linguistic, racialised and gendered identities.

8. Available online at: kijiner.wordpress.com/2014/09/24/united-nations-climate-summit-opening-ceremony-my-poem-to-my-daughter/

Just participation

Closely related to the ways in which universities, and academics within them, can engage with questions of power, protest and intercultural exchanges that recognise linguistic and artistic representations of the crisis are a set of research theories that flesh out how exactly we might do this. Broadly captured under the umbrella of participatory action research, this set of approaches asks how research, including climate-focused research, can draw on non-hierarchical methodologies to trouble the 'traditional' power relationships between 'researcher' and 'researched', or between 'donors' and 'target/beneficiary' communities. These kinds of research approaches specifically recognise diversity, foreground marginalised voices and aim towards empowerment (Manzo & Brightbill, 2007). Grounded in a long history, particularly in Latin American contexts, around popular forms of education and knowledge co-production (Fals-Borda, 2006; Freire, 1970), meaningful participatory research asks 'whose knowledge counts?' as well as 'who decides?'. Adaptation policies are culturally informed, shaped by how communities respond and adapt to climate-related risks (Adger et al., 2013). But inequitable stakeholder participation, or adaptation that is delivered in ways that are 'top-down', risks worsening socio-cultural vulnerabilities, both to climate change and to broader inequalities (Eriksen et al., 2021). This means moving beyond 'consultation', which can reinforce power hierarchies along gendered, racialised or caste-based lines, to a shift in working that allows communities to drive their own agendas, through locally led adaptation (McNamara et al., 2020). Meaningful participation requires not only

that methodologies are grounded in local cultures and with respect for local practices, but further that local ways of knowing and being are recognised (Nabobo-Baba, 2006, 2008; Lagi, 2015). In the educational context, this means drawing on participatory principles to support different forms of learning within systems, including critical pedagogies, building relationships of solidarity and trust, and shaping supportive institutions (Climate-U, 2021). Participatory research methods can reshape both the relationships within institutions and forms of connection between institutions and the societies in which they are embedded.

Conclusion

The calls for universities to be conceptualised differently speak to in-depth transformations of the ways in which universities are structured, in which knowledge is understood and through which voices are heard. The examples raised here suggest some ways in which these changes can engage with socio-cultural productions – linguistic, artistic, activist and participatory, summarised in Figure 2 below.

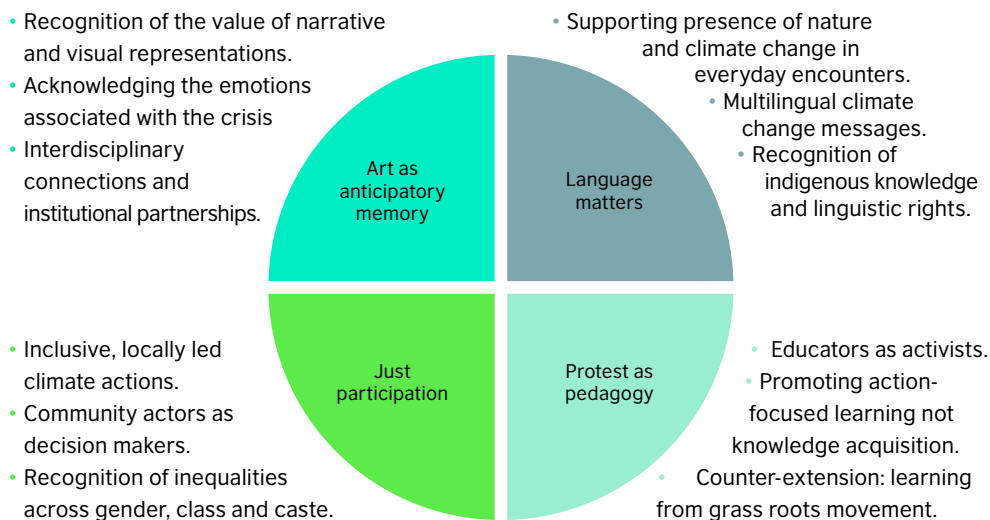
But as the essay has suggested, and as many argue, if these engagements are only tokenistic, they will not be of the scale required for educational institutions or for societies to deeply transform, or to speak to the climate crisis. Understanding that incremental change

is not sufficient, and that we need strategies to radically un-imagine the present, displace our understandings of what ‘normal’ is, and challenge existing paradigms, is the vital work of now (Newell, Daley & Twena, 2021).

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Figure 2 Linguistic, artistic, activist and participatory productions



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Concluding remarks to The Climate Connection Cultural Relations Collection Special Edition

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The 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) will take place in Glasgow, the ‘second city’ of the British Empire, and be hosted by the UK, the birthplace of the modern fossil economy. This moment therefore provides pause for looking back at the historical roots of the current global climate emergency. Since 1995, with the notable exception of 2020, the COP has provided a vital opportunity for global leaders and decision makers to meet and deliberate on how to jointly govern our common atmosphere. Yet the COP is much more than just a gathering of high-profile figures. The deliberations and decisions made at the COP are a result of and testament to the commitment of thousands of people – scientists, public servants, administrators and others – who are hard at work behind the scenes in between the annual COP meeting. After all, there is only so much progress that can be achieved during the two weeks that the COP tends to last. The biannual Subsidiary Bodies meetings and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) process are perhaps the clearest examples of these crucial interactions constantly taking place in the background. These backroom meetings, conversations and exchanges of information between state delegations, international organisations and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Secretariat all depend on mutual trust, understanding and observance of certain rules. In essence, they are cultural relations.

Similarly, it is not only public officials and diplomats that gather at the COP. The global climate is too important to be left to state governments and international bodies alone. That is why each COP invariably spurs a blossoming of civil society activity both in the

run-up to and during the conference itself. Marches, workshops, meetings, sit-ins and ‘die-ins’, speeches and many other forms of civic engagement (and sometimes disobedience) are offered during various side events and alternative summits organised by the likes of the Climate Action Network, 350.org, the Indigenous Climate Network, the Climate Justice Alliance and Extinction Rebellion. These bring together activists, academics, policymakers, business leaders and other members of the public, often with the explicit goal to further the principles of climate justice and human rights. These, too, are cultural relations.

What this means is that global climate governance is actually underpinned by cultural relations. If we want to address the planetary emergency of our atmosphere, we will need to rely on cross-cultural exchanges to foster mutual trust and understanding – not just during COP meetings, but throughout the next decade or so, which according to the IPCC will be absolutely crucial in determining the extent of irreversible changes to the Earth’s climate system. In other words, we argue that the climate emergency is, in many ways, also a cultural emergency. It is a common misconception that the deployment of technology, funding and science will do the trick to solve the climate conundrum. In reality, these are just tools at our disposal – cultural relations can help us use them both more effectively and equitably.

Indeed, the sticking points of global climate negotiations – beyond the usual and more technical bickering over access to funding and technology – have long been about the historical responsibility of certain countries for emitting the bulk of greenhouse gases. These countries, like the UK, are

predominantly in the Global North, meaning that international debates often descend into arguments over the compensatory or corrective measures these countries should take given the disproportionate effects of climate change impacts on countries in the Global South. The right to development of many countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Pacific is seen as a *sine qua non* for their governments, while leaders from the Global North insist that this development must be rooted in sustainability rather than focused on economic growth alone (which is not to say they do not often pursue this latter strategy, themselves). From this complicated dynamic emerges a picture of global inequality, not simply as part of a North–South divide, but also within regions and countries. With these inequalities, climate justice emerges as an important goal for making international climate governance more legitimate and effective.

The question this collection of essays has tried to answer is: how could cultural relations contribute to solving the seemingly unsolvable impasse when it comes to addressing the climate emergency? If, as we argue here, the success of the UNFCCC at least partially depends on the extent to which cultural relations can foster a climate [sic] of trust and mutual understanding, thus helping to resolve the issues of global climate injustice, then the arguments found in this collection's six essays can point us in the right direction towards resolving the thorny question of climate inequity and injustice. Below, we tease out how each of them does so.

Carla Figueira and Aimee Fullman's contribution approaches issues of justice in at least two different ways. First, they argue for cultural relations and co-operation that are

'fair, inclusive and diverse', recognising that national cultural institutes often carry colonial or imperialist baggage that needs to be openly recognised and addressed. This does not only refer to issues of climate change. The authors invoke the global COVID-19 response as an example that lays bare the long-standing inequities between wealthy and poorer nations when it comes to access to financial, technological and cultural resources. Seen in this way, the pandemic offers a lesson on how not to address a planetary crisis. Second, Figueira and Fullman touch on the issues of intergenerational (climate) justice, observing that much of the climate change programming in the West is aimed predominantly at young people, whose lives are bound to be most impacted by climate change in the long term. However, they caution against a limited, unidimensional strategy of this kind and instead argue for a holistic approach reflected in diverse audiences, geographies, types of engagement, and programme and partnering models (Fullman, 2012).

Nina Schuller stresses both the importance and the potential of digital technologies for promoting equal participation in creating our 'shared imaginings' of a sustainable world. More specifically, she places emphasis on the issue of knowledge making and translation as it relates to climate discourse, trust, knowledge and action. Similar to the insights by Figueira and Fullman, Schuller recognises the importance of building trust upon which, as suggested by a number of studies, the acceptance and use of climate knowledge is predicated. Yet, the author also points to the unequal politics of translation and knowledge production, with corporations based in the Global North, like Wikimedia, as well as some national governments holding disproportionate control over what kind of

climate knowledge is accessible on the web, and how it is translated. This kind of digital or data colonialism reduces epistemic diversity and undermines the intercultural trust necessary for effective global climate action.

Closely related to these insights, Jessica Gosling underscores the value of digital skills in mitigating climate change. It is hard to imagine a global co-operative effort to address the climate crisis without different parties being able to use communication technologies in an equitable manner. However, Gosling observes that digital competencies and access to new technologies are far from evenly distributed among nations. This is particularly problematic for developing or rapidly industrialising countries, where these skills and resources are not only vital for enabling their meaningful participation in global climate governance, but also act as one of the foundations for building economic and social prosperity. Gosling also notes that a climate-just future requires all citizens to be able to 'have more of a voice to articulate their wants and needs' – an ability for which, in this day and age, digital skills are of crucial importance. Thus, she concludes by emphasising the vitality of education, including digital education, entrepreneurship and soft skill development, for realising the commitments enshrined in the Paris Agreement in an equitable manner.

Charlotte Nussey highlights the important connections between climate justice, culture and education. 'Culture' can be used to exclude or oppress when not understood in terms of multiple forms of knowledge, while cultural expressions of climate change that centre historically excluded and marginalised voices can serve to increase our collective knowledge, flatten hierarchies and challenge taken-for-granted categories. Nussey highlights the way in which cultural and artists' acts of protest, from the work of artist-poet

Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner to the Kenyan Green Belt Movement, help embed climate change within communities and highlight often-intersecting forms of inequality and exclusion. This echoes the work on intersectional climate justice and argues that climate justice is also a matter of racial justice, gender justice and others.

The essay by Chloé Germaine Buckley and Benjamin Bowman speaks directly to issues of climate justice given its focus on the Youth Strikes for Climate. As others' essays have highlighted, climate justice as presented here and by young people is intersectional, drawing links between the climate emergency and racism, colonialism and patriarchy. For Buckley and Bowman, the climate strikes are a global conversation, and this conversation is concerned with dissent, solidarity and justice. The climate strikes, read as cultural exchange, allow young people to listen to one another, share experiences and uphold each other's voices. As for what is next, Buckley and Bowman argue that people, including adults in power, should engage in dialogue with youth, who will ensure that justice is at the centre of efforts to address the climate emergency.

In his essay on the emergent energy humanities, Sam McNeilly convincingly argues that cultural relations can help ensure that individuals, communities and institutions place justice at the centre of global efforts to transition away from fossil fuels. Much of the work that McNeilly draws on, such as the writing of Ken Saro-Wiwa, speaks to, or actively calls for, environmental or climate justice. In the essay McNeilly suggests possible ways to move towards a future free of fossil fuels, but cautions that the shift to renewable energy is itself not inherently just, rather it must be won. Like other essays in the collection, McNeilly stresses the importance of education, in this case in the democratic, and just, energy transition.

As we have shown above, questions of equity and justice in cultural relations are interwoven into all the essays in this collection. Authors have pointed to issues of intergenerational justice, the intersection of culture, politics, education and technology, different levels of access to education and other resources among and within nations, and the unequal nature of climate knowledge production itself. What emerges from these contributions is an extremely complex picture of what we know, how we think about and how we co-operate to solve the climate emergency. There may be many challenges ahead, but the authors and editors of this collection share the hope that cultural relations, if done the right way, can help foster a global ethics of care for the planet and all its people.

While the G7 Summit held in the UK in June 2021 saw reaffirming goals of reducing global warming, it also failed to reach climate finance targets needed by countries in the Global South, those at the sharp end of climate change's impacts. COP26 will be an occasion to do better than that. Regardless of what happens behind the closed doors of COP negotiation rooms, we can be certain that the vibrant cultural exchanges between different people and cultures held in Glasgow this November will continue to foster the inclusive and diverse cultural relations we need to address the global climate emergency.



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