

#SYNCHRONICITY

Designing Criticality in Climate Action

by THE WINTER OFFICE



MIRIAM CAHN, *HERUMLIEGEN/FREMDKÖRPER* (12.5.+13./16.6.2016)

Greta Thunberg's critique of schools and other learning institutions' uselessness in transforming politics, through the 'skolestrikker', like the Chicano 'walkouts' fifty years ago, is a vital return to civil disobedience as a planetary political tool to enact change. Repeating her message on multiple social media platforms, news cycles, and podiums, Thunberg made it clear: The scientific solutions that can help resolve climate change are already here, but the lack of political perspective and will from politicians is adding to the disaster. So if politicians will not transform around the issue of climate collapse, who will?

In considering the upcoming Global Climate Strike on 20th of September (2019) in NYC; we should ask hard questions in preparation of this forthcoming event. How do we converge existing climate change movements? Especially, to help establish a planetary strategy that would establish a transformative and regenerative Climate X and in the process diminish the Leviathans, Behemoths, and Maos now wrestling for the climate future of this planet. In this question, we wonder what would have been the case in earlier moments in history, now with political hindsight, had the Civil Rights Movement of the late 50's and 60's converged much earlier? Many have said solemnly that Martin Luther King died among trash and sanitary workers. We now know that he was moving the political struggle from race into poverty. His last articulations, given in *Where do we go from here, Chaos or Community?* of 1968 gave precise arguments around universal basic income, suggesting how the beneficiary would go on to create a new consumer, and in the process, abate poverty. However, the fight to desegregate the South of the United States, and the whole country for that matter (even decades later) has carefully segregated the issues of race and poverty and these have hardly been equated in the way we understand the civil rights movement in the USA today.

We now have several, if not many, climate change movements working at a global level. Some have

single issue platforms and others host a multi-verse of platforms. And yet, how do we design the critical in their climate action platforms to help these movements converge? Gain greater critical mass? And perhaps resist the tendency to create identities, which often get stuck in echo chambers, from them? We crucially need these movements, of course, they are a route to help transform societies, and more importantly, to compel them to introduce remedial measures and regeneration. In this sense, this classic question emerges, how do artists and designers take this moment to also converge with them and help them? Especially to help establish the communication of a matrix of issues that would gain closer toward convergence with other movements. In addition to helping to communicate with each individual subject (who these movements direct their consciousness-raising actions towards) on how to self-mitigate the climate crisis. Greta Thunberg suggests that politicians aren't doing anything, so the Youth will have to do it for them. This implies a scenario where we have to stop fearing the transformative power of Youth similar to the allegory in *The Children of the Corn* and instead design a crumb trail so that Hansel and Ghretel humanize the Witch, save the forest, and help establish Climate X.

So to which end does an event like the Global Climate Strike connect to the construction that will engage institutional, creative and cultural projects to take on mentorship and communication perspectives? Especially to design and implement future decolonial and environmental visions? While US-Ameri-

cans, along with far too many people around the planet have reasons still not to understand the actual meaning of 'rights' and its wider context of Civil Rights, we have a daunting task ahead of us in trying to disseminate even a concept such as the Rights of Nature.

This is a challenge to our visual communication of issues, which includes a new rendering of Civil Rights for Youth, the aesthetic representation of 'action and planning' from colonial art history into new and emerg-

ing design practices for the middle and high school students, and a general and interactive campaign to re-engage our sense of action in our jaded contemporaneity. Speaking of communication and aesthetics, a Fox News headline recently read "AOC accused of Soviet-style propaganda with Green New Deal 'art series'". Nevermind the misaligned reading by this news outlet. However, we wonder why the people behind these artboards felt that rehashing Works Progress Administration (President Roosevelt's Depression era social programs) aesthetics were the appropriate route to take? While the WPA stands as a historical model for how the United States can create a path toward social democracy. In retrospect, the WPA was mainly a program for unemployed men, retaining the legacy of racist and sexist institutions in the country without hesitation, and pegged without question to the carbon economy. The climate movements of today have made it clear that they do not want to go this route. So we need new images, new visualizations, new dissemination for how the critical in climate action could be communicated, illustrated, or diffused.

The Green New Theatre (GNT) and the more recent Red Deal (RD) are both examples of organizations looking for specific systemic and structural changes, with the latter founded by Indigenous people. The GNT is a multi-layered movement building tool that adapts for organizations and individuals at every level of production and provides a set of actionable principles for the arts field to adapt and evolve in the face of the climate crisis. This could be an example of a tool that works to make information

#globalclimatestrike #movementbuilding #ClimateX

work for these transitions to avoid communication slippages between various groups and individuals—if we know how to access it. Because it is not just a new language, but a new approach in the delivery of language for how we need to approach people to think about climate change.

There is still very little room for a critique of the whiteness of recent climate action, and less even more, of an adaptive strategy that puts to the front Indigenous approaches to climate change. Not forgetting that colonized and indigenous peoples of this planet have already experienced 1000 apocalyptic anthropocenes. Therefore, how then do we work with design information at this time in which intolerance thrives through climate activism? What is the advocacy in environmental justice that can work against this thing; which widens the gap between very little education and the resources we need to see the drive for the realisation of big scale ideas. To put it another way, after the strike, what kind of school will the kids get back to?

Convergence

The fourth episode of The Winter Office's podcast series *The Social Territories of a Warming World* [August 17th, 2019 at the Armory Center for the Arts in Pasadena, CA] recorded a conversation on the topic of convergence. This recording addressed the critical design element of climate action by bringing the people involved in building these movements, and where the central question was to consider the pos-

sibility for them to be working together; especially as they alter the popular imagination of movement on local and global scales. The session featured five members from Sunrise Movement (SR,US) and Extinction Rebellion (XR) and one member of Youth Climate Strike (LA). The individuals present were between 16 to 31 years old. Each spoke on the practice of climate activism or activating for people having trouble understanding the importance of having a position or role in this crisis.

To this question of global convergence, we asked the members gathered on August 17th, if within a timeline of 10 years, would this be a time for ideals? The energy they work with is possibly the best answer, and while their efforts and abilities to work together despite their different methods, strategies and identities are well intended. Convergence is still not a vision. So we ask everyone involved, now reading this, what about a greater strategy towards convergence?

Without taking into assumption that the coexistence towards local and global climate action politics is in synch with planetary goals toward Climate X. We bring this issue up now, not to spoil the energy, but to invigorate it and go beyond and against the history and current perception of what climate action entails. Convergence is the main and vital question and this also implies that the deschooling of the skolestriker should be further thought about as the driving element to achieve this new climate international.

1 *Climate Leviathan, A Political Theory of Our Planetary Future* by Geoff Mann and Joel Wainwright
224 pages / Verso, December 2017 / ISBN 9781786634290.

2 www.groundwaterarts.com/green-new-theatre.html

3 This statement is written on the basis of a conversation program and podcast series titled *The Social Territories of a Warming World* by TWO held and recorded live in Los Angeles over the summer of 2019. The invited speakers gathers around two specially designed tables at once artworks and functioning recording studios each installed at TWOs currently overlapping exhibitions in LA; *Table First Version*, 2019, installed at the Armory in Pasadena and *Table Second Version*, 2019 installed at 18St. Arts Centers, Airport Gallery in Santa Monica. The conversation program brings together local activists, organizations, institutional and political leaders, artists and academics, among others, to have conversations about non-ideal theories of art, collaborative design, and spatial justice in the 21st century city, especially in relation to new unknown social territories which will be emerging after climate change. The podcast episodes will be launched soon at thewinteroffice.net/podcast.html

4 The conversation was recorded live on the site prepared by TWO especially for this conversation around convergence in the form of the physical installation; *Flags (SUNRISE & EXTINCTION REBEL-LION MOVEMENTS)*, 2019, consisting of 28 rice paper flags featuring the logos of these two movements. The production of this installation earlier this summer we had invited several members from both movements to meet and collaborate to print each other's symbols at Metabolic Studio's silk-screen workshop in Los Angeles while engaging in the initial dialogue around their goals.

THE WINTER OFFICE [TWO] is an experimental artistic and professional work group generating advanced design solutions for this century's challenges of a sustainable urban infrastructure. The group consists of artists, curators, architects, designers, and social scientists, who are either based in or connected to Copenhagen. The Winter Office upholds a creative strategy concerned with blending and defining collaborations between art, architecture, social science and design. As a network and work group it also seeks design challenges in cultural, developmental, educational, and disaster-recovery infrastructure that is needed in urban, suburban, and exurban environments. Drawing on architecture, planning, and social science research, The Winter Office responds with initiatives that can express themselves both in art and architecture in favor of new uses for social/urban planning and design.

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