Climate Health/care: A Low Carbon-points Pedagogy

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Keywords: healthcare, climate emergency, ecologies, post-colonialism, feminism

Positionality. As three creative and humanities practitioners, teachers and theorists, we propose a climate health/care pedagogy to engage with the intersections of design and health. Our approaches range from creative-biological methods, to narrative, creative writing, photography, micro-histories and instrument making as means to speculate on the existence of different people, animals and places of health, the biosocial, and the way that technology configures contemporary health anxieties. We use these tools to reflect on the state of the thesis "curriculum" at the UK institutions where we collectively teach, the Sheffield School of Architecture, University of Sheffield, the Royal College of Art, and the Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL.

MOVING AWAY FROM A SOLUTIONIST APPROACH (WE WON'T SOLVE THE CLIMATE CRISIS).

In his series of podcasts The end of the world has already happened, aired on BBC Radio 4 in 2020, philosopher Timothy Morton explains one of the main challenges in theorising the anthropocene: the video game logic.[1] There is a certain mentality, he states, often white, often middle class, often male, which rolls up its sleeves, sits down and goes—right, let's bloody solve the climate emergency.

In fact, in architectural pedagogy, we all recognise the urgent need to solve the problem. A raised awareness of the ecological crisis has motivated the emergence of numerous, ongoing pedagogical engagements, and an equal number of petitions and manifestos calling for urgent action to address the deficiencies of our curricula. These calls often coincide with a sense of urgency, to provide immediate 'tools' and develop specific 'strategies' to solve the emergency before it is too late.

It is therefore controversial to operate on the assumption that, most likely, there is little we can do to solve the climate emergency. And doing so has given rise to a form of cynical denialism in many governments and climate deniers. We believe, however, that there is a need for a sober acknowledgement of the magnitude of the challenge ahead of us, and the realisation that we will need to learn how to live and operate in a situation over which we have little control. In this paper we also set out how that form of living and operating can be done actively, whilst avoiding teleological and technocratic solutions.

STAYING WITH THE TROUBLE – THE TROUBLE AS GENERATIVE

Whilst recognising the gravity of our situation, we speak from a place of resistance to all-encompassing, utilitarian, efficient, and heroic pedagogies. We resist the adoption and handing down of methodologies that simply decarbonise buildings or make our products "greener", in favour of a mode of transformative potential, of building knowledges and ways of caring. Like Donna Haraway, we are convinced of the need to 'stay with the trouble'[2] and accept that the so-called climate emergency cannot be solved, and also that it is not new—it is a much bigger set of issues entangled with colonial, exploitative practices that extract value from world resources and peoples.[3]

In this ethos for a slower reflection on the long tentacles of climate change, we argue for an understanding of the way that our designed world has ill effects on the health and wellbeing of humans and non-humans. Climate and health, as well as racial and social justice, are intertwined.[4] We understand health as the fundamental exchange between humans and other species, between organisms and their environment. We believe that understanding our exchanges with the animal (including human) and plant world needs to come from a place of care and empathy.[5] Even veganism has its climate and species impact: the growing of avocados, for example, requires the removal of countless tree and animal species from the growing area; it requires irrigation and exhausts water sources.6 We therefore believe that the climate crisis is not the problem, but the result of a historically unfair relationship that sees others, and their plants, animals and landscapes, as resources to exploit and benefit from. All over the world, the asymmetries in these relationships are borne by the less privileged, both those that labour and those species that are removed, marginalised or impacted upon, making the cartographies of ill health coincide with those of wealth distribution.
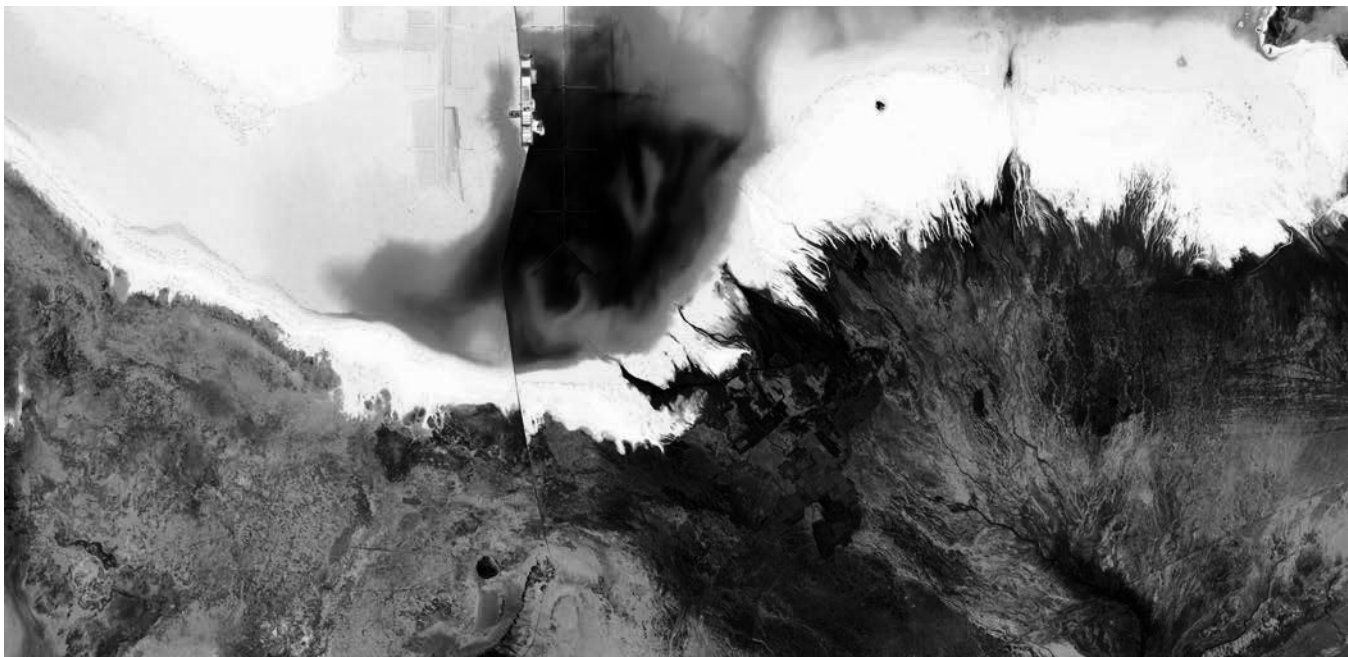
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Figure 1. Lithium mine in Salar de Uyuni, part of the Lithium triangle on the Bolivian side. "Salar de Uyuni - Bolívia" by Coordenação-Geral de Observação da Terra/INPE is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0

Our approach, which we call Climate health/care, does not score (m)any points but instead aims to address the way that climate change affects populations unequally, especially those that lack agency: people of colour, migrants and refugees, the homeless and certain species of animals bear the brunt of the emergency, whilst the elite are protected by wealth, mobility, and the guise of a high carbon point score. Staying with the trouble means recognising that while certain natural environments are disappearing, our built environments—urban spaces, homes and healthcare settings—are often poorly conceived, positioned and constructed; not only in the way they 'capture' carbon emissions or 'absorb' them, but in how little they do to protect those most at risk of flooding, weather disasters, poor health and mental distress. The root of our lack of climate resilience can be located in our hierarchical attitudes to the planet, which prioritise humans over non-humans. Our obsessions with point systems and carbon capturing is not a sign of our concern with the planet, but evidence of the priority we give to human concerns and needs over other species. Our anthropocentric approaches fail to recognise and hence undermine the nuanced ecologies we inhabit. We eradicate other life forms at our peril.

THE HEALTH/CARE LOCATOR: A PROPOSAL

Rather than giving 'solutions to a problem' we propose climate health/care as a means to navigate climate health justice. In doing so, and drawing on approaches and theory such as Anna Tsing, Hélène Frichot, Jane Hutton and Donna Haraway, we propose a generative matrix meant to create chance-encounters, to take us into territories where we would have rarely strayed.[7] The method is aimed at opening up possibilities. It should be

understood as cartography[8]—a mapping and tactics to navigate and understand a complex, interconnected situation.[9]

A first precedent is the tactic of Dérive, used by the Situationist International to explore the city beyond the familiar paths and spots we carve for ourselves. We use it to understand the potential to understand and 'stay' with the trouble by bringing new theories and methodologies to intersect with each other in controlled chance encounters. In addition, there is a wealth of creative work that has used chance as generative. Brian Eno and Peter Schmidt use generative chance in their 'Oblique Strategies', the set of cards with vague instructions that are meant to break creative impasses. The design studio SUPERFLUX do something similar for their 'BioSuperstition Project' by putting together a set of playing cards where they define speculative scenarios for biodesign. The cards are meant to paint a possible future in broad strokes, giving participants a starting point for conversation.

Our generative matrix, which we call the 'health/care locator' is articulated into three columns holding potential topics, methods and references which we give to students setting out on their thesis journey. Students are encouraged to use the matrix as a combinatorial game. By starting with a game of approaching the thesis as a combination of potential tactics, theories and topics, we hope to encourage discovery and wonder. For example how could considering the work of bell hooks through photography help us in dealing with material justice? What new framings of empathy and care would an approach based on instrument making and the work of Rosi Bradotti offer? Some of these combinations might seem random or

nonsense at first, fundamentally incompatible even, but we believe that all combinations of method, theory and topic can offer genuinely important insights in locating ourselves with regards to a practice of caring for climate change.

There is also a feedback mechanism in the health/care locator. There are no starting or ending points but a series of relationships that recombine and reconfigure as they are needed. This is a method to work/transverse the meta and micro/local level. Akin to the way mycelium grows rhizomatically underground to support mushroom colonies above, the approach becomes a mode of research in itself, which grows and feeds the original matrix.[10] It is important to stress that the matrix is not instrumental. It is not a 'solution bank', as matrices are often used in so-called 'design thinking'. Instead the matrix is a cartographic exercise, a way of navigating the climate crisis propositionally rather than finding 'solutions' to it. It is a tactical way to create provisional maps to open up, branch out and assess a highly complex situation. It seeks climate care and justice over climate solutions.

USING THE MATRIX AS EDUCATORS

We believe the health/care locator has the potential to act as a generator. The ability to link ideas, methods and topics can be very valuable for our students as they start sketching out and understanding their way around their thesis at the outset. But it can also be used to find a way out of an impasse—for example when a thesis project has been defined too narrowly or too broadly at the outset. As educators, the matrix is extremely useful as a way of opening up conversations and encouraging students to explore beyond the immediate and obvious. It aids and structures conversations and can be the basis for students mapping out their thesis parameters and potentials. We have experimented with students developing what they take from the matrix as a manifesto for the trajectory of their own work.

EXPANDING THE METHODOLOGY

By its very nature, the health/care locator lends itself well to, requires even, reconfiguration and expansion. A key aspect in designing and using the matrix as educators is in curating and developing the list of topics, references and methods. As we
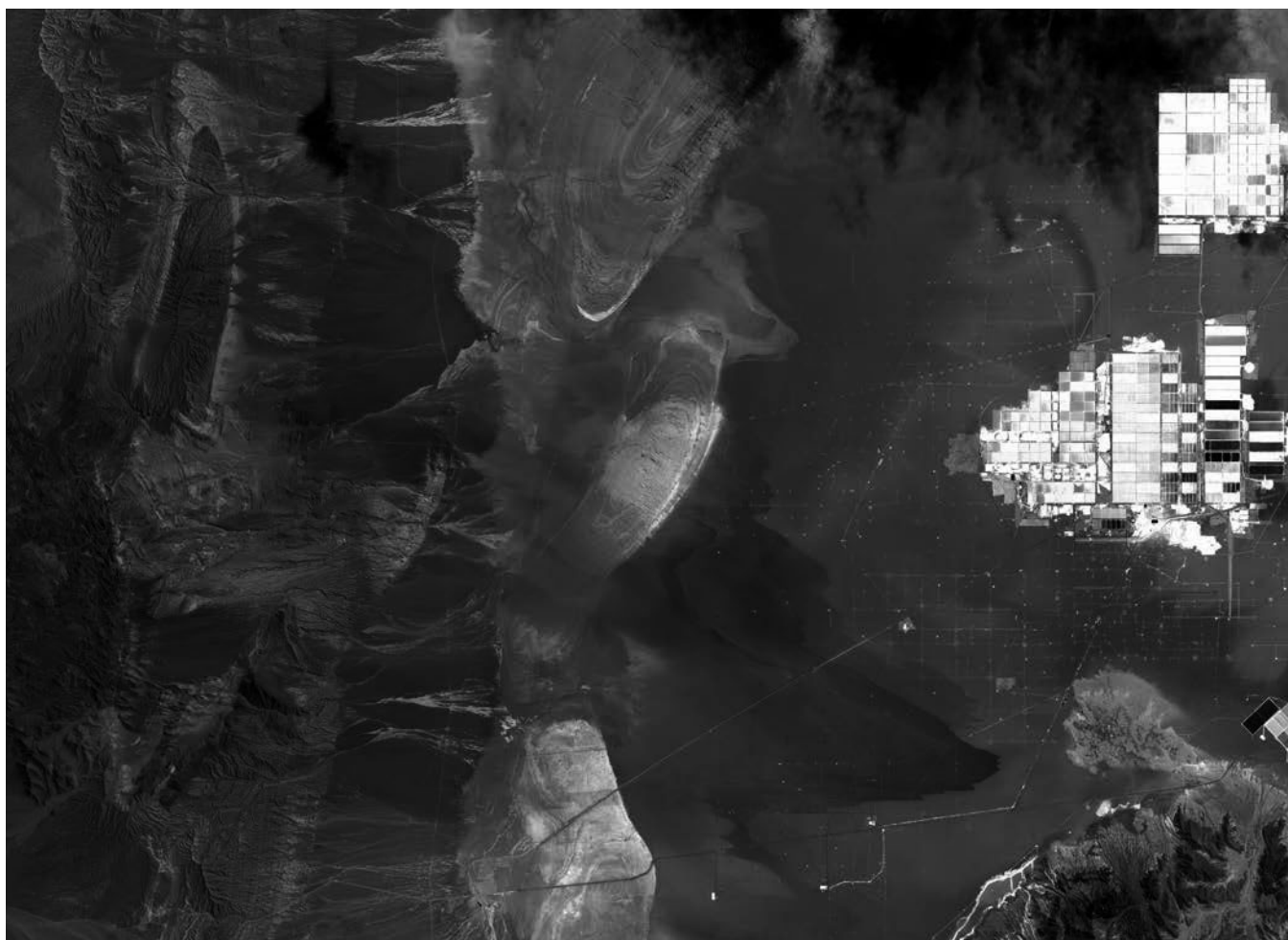

Figure 3. Aerial view of the Salar de Atacama, part of the Lithium triangle on the Chilean side. "Salar de Atacama, Chile" by Coordenação-Geral de Observação da Terra/INPE is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0

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soil
health
post-human futures
empathy / care
inter-species ecologies
decolonial climates
new materialism
aesthetics (objects and senses)
fuel
food
violence
infrastructures
ghosts and monsters
material justice
geographies of exposure
Collective Futures
Multi-species design
Activism
Water futures
Agency
Space colonisation/decolonisation
walls/borders
coal
Rewilding

storying
photovoice
love letter
prototype
photography
survey drawing
experiment
oral histories
manifesto
walking
collaboration
instrument making
(bio)material probes
Dérive
scenario building
Ikebana
cartographies
comic
Tarot cards

Donna Haraway
bell hooks
Jane Rendell
Peg Rawes
Meike Bal
Naomi Stead
Helene Frichot
Agnes Denes
Anna Tsing
Gloria Anzaldua
Karen Barad
Timothy Morton
Susan Sontag
Madeleine Akrich
Bolivar Echeverria
puig de bellacasa
Rosi Braidotti
Manuel DeLanda
Bruno Latour
Renata Tyszczuk
Elke Krasny
Joan Tronto
Jennifer Bloomer

Figure 4.

put together this initial prototype we faced the dilemma of what we should include. With our own diverse and interdisciplinary backgrounds, were we aiming to create a coherent list? Was there a logic to the ideas and authors we are proposing? Or are we deliberately aiming to create a list of diverse ideas? Maybe even contradictory ones? The questions we face now include how we keep using and updating this list. Should we continuously review and add new topics? Can the students review and amend the matrix as they finish their thesis? Should the matrix develop into another form: a pamphlet, book or curricular document?

We propose that the methodology can expand on itself. We imagine using it with altered rules of the game — to compare the ideas of three authors and diffract the result through the methodology of walking, for example. We would like to understand it more as a map, and evaluate its different tactical potentials.

CONCLUSION

As an overall method, we are interested in the way the health/care locator allows us to open up possibilities and to understand the climate crisis through the myriad connections it has with the key issues of health and material justice. Our approach is more specific though—we believe that the climate crisis is intimately linked to health interactions. The climate crisis is difficult to understand and navigate because it cannot be easily located—not because, as some sun-tanned politicians would have us believe, it is a hoax—but because it is so deeply interwoven with long standing issues of racial, material and environmental justice. At the core of these we can find health interactions and, for us to truly develop a sense of kinship with other humans and non-humans, we need to concentrate on the way that all bodies relate to each other and their landscapes and the way that these interactions have beneficial or harmful effects.

There are both opportunities and challenges involved in our approach. Opportunities include the cultivation of long-term, slow approaches that place care at the core of their agenda. By placing our attention on health interactions, we facilitate a reflective maintenance of the planet for all those that inhabit it, rather than one-off, short term solutions that purport to fix the problem without creating institutional or structural change. But there are also challenges connected to the context we operate in. Universities are keen to adopt the very methods we challenge with instant green agendas, and quantifiable quick climate actions. Our methods are often seen as marginal and unquantifiable. Yet, this is the role of the arts and humanities, to create an arts and humanities turn that provokes important conversations and insights into the intersections between climate, race and social care and justice—a foundation to critique old, entrenched systems and suggest new narratives and stories.

ENDNOTES

1. Timothy Morton, "The End of the World Has Already Happened" (London: BBC Sounds, 2 January 2020), https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000cl66.

2. Donna Haraway, Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

3. The work of philosopher Olúfẹ́mi O. Táíwò offers a good overview of the intersections between colonialism and the climate emergency. See: Olúfẹ́mi O. Táíwò, "Climate Colonialism and Large-Scale Land Acquisitions", C2G, 2019 <https://www.c2g2.net/climate-colonialism-and-large-scale-land-acquisitions/> [accessed 21 July 2021]; Olúfẹ́mi O. Táíwò, "Identity Politics and Elite Capture", Boston Review, 2020 <https://bostonreview.net/race/olufemi-o-taiwo-identity-politics-and-elite-capture> [accessed 21 July 2021].

4. Other perspectives on climate colonialism, especially in Africa, can be found at: Walter Rodney, How Europe Underdeveloped Africa (London: Verso Trade, 2018); Eduardo Galeano, Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent (New York: NYU Press, 1997).

5. A more philosophical exploration of the perils of individualism and the antidote of tentacular thinking can be found in: Donna Haraway, "Tentacular Thinking: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene" <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/75/67125/tentacular-thinking-anthropocene-capitalocene-chthulucene/> [accessed 21 July 2021].

6. The issues of health provision, wealth distribution and risk management are intertwined. Work produced under the umbrella term of 'climate justice' documents the way that exposure to waste is aligned to wealth distribution, where poor, often migrant communities bear the side effects of industrial production. The same is true of exposure to chemicals that, although not thought to be toxic, their safety is still under scrutiny. For a sample of this vast field, see: J. Tom Boer and others, "Is There Environmental Racism? The Demographics of Hazardous Waste in Los Angeles County", Social Science Quarterly, 78.4 (1997): 793–810; Peter C. Little, "Environmental Justice Discomfort and Disconnect in IBM's Tainted Birthplace: A Micropolitical Ecology Perspective", Capitalism Nature Socialism, 23.3 (2012): 92–109; Anna J. Willow, "Clear-Cutting and Colonialism: The Ethnopolitical Dynamics of Indigenous Environmental Activism in Northwestern Ontario," Ethnohistory, 56.1 (2009): 35–67.

7. Crucial to an understanding of how space, race and class intersects with health is the historical account edited by Gregg Mitma, Michelle Murphy and Christopher Sellers in: Gregg Mitman, Michelle Murphy, and Christopher C. Sellers, Landscapes of Exposure: Knowledge and Illness in Modern Environments (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

8. The issues at stake in climate justice are important not only because of the significance to present day communities, but also because the injustices in risk exposure are most likely to be replicated in distributing the costs of adapting to a changing climate. See, W. Neil Adger et al., Fairness in Adaptation to Climate Change (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT press, 2006); James K. Boyce, Sunita Narain, and Elizabeth A. Stanton, Reclaiming Nature: Environmental Justice and Ecological Restoration (London: Anthem Press, 2007); David Enrique Cuesta Camacho, Environmental Injustices, Political Struggles: Race, Class, and the Environment (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1998); Javier Auyero and Debora Swistun, "The Social Production of Toxic Uncertainty", American Sociological Review, 73.3 (2008): 357–79.

9. On care see, "For All I Care" series of podcasts presented by Nwando Ebizie with contributors https://baltic.art/for-all-i-care; Joan C Tronto, "Architecture and Care," in Critical Care. Architektur and Urbanism for a Broken Planet, ed. Fitz, Angelika and Elke Krasny (Boston: MIT Press, 2019).

10. For example see, Angela J. Lederach, "'The Campesino Was Born for the Campo': A Multispecies Approach to Territorial Peace in Colombia", American Anthropologist, 119.4 (2017): 589–602 <https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.12925>.

11. See Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, Heather Anne Swanson, Elaine Gan, and Nils Bubandt (eds.), Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2017); Hélène Frichot, Creative Ecologies: Theorizing the Practice of Architecture (London: Bloomsbury, 2018); Isabelle Doucet & Hélène Frichot, "Resist, Reclaim, Speculate: Situated perspectives on architecture and the city," Architectural Theory Review, 22:1. (2018): 1–8.

12. Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," Feminist Studies, 3 (1988): 575–599; Jane Hutton, Reciprocal Landscapes: Stories of Material Movements (London: Routledge, 2019).

13. And here we are thinking of Michel de Certeau's difference between "strategy" – technocratic, top down and all encompassing – and "tactics" – bottom up, participatory and embodied: see Michel de Certeau, "Walking In The City," and "Spatial Stories," in The Practice of Everyday Life (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 91-102, 115–130.

14. We take our understanding of cartography from the methodology used by Rosi Bradotti in her 'nomadic thought': 'A cartography is a theoretically based and politically informed reading of the process of power relations. It fulfils the function of providing both exegetical tools and creative theoretical alternatives, so as to assess the impact of material and discursive conditions upon our embodied and embedded subjectivity' in:

15. Rosi Braidotti, Nomadic Theory: The Portable Rosi Braidotti (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 4.

16. Anna Tsing, The Mushroom at the End of the World (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2015).