CLIMATE AND CULTURE

Multidisciplinary Perspectives on a Warming World

How does culture interact with the way societies understand, live with and act in relation to climate change? While the importance of the exchanges between culture, society and climate in the context of global environmental change is increasingly recognised, the empirical evidence is fragmented and too often constrained by disciplinary boundaries. Written by an international team of experts, this book provides cutting-edge and critical perspectives on how culture both facilitates and inhibits our ability to address and make sense of climate change and the challenges it poses to societies globally. Through a set of case studies spanning the social sciences and humanities, it explores the role of culture in relation to climate and its changes at different temporal and spatial levels; illustrates how approaching climate change through the cultural dimension enriches the range and depth of societal engagements; and establishes connections between theory and practice, which can stimulate action-oriented initiatives.

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Foreword

LESLEY HEAD

It is widely recognised that we need to shift some very big cultural frames – the importance of economic growth, the dominance of fossil fuel capitalism, the hope of modernity as unending progress – to deal adequately with the climate change challenge. Cultural research, with its focus on in-depth qualitative methods, deals with some apparently very small things, at the scale of the everyday. The importance of cultural framings in understanding climate change impacts and response is now widely recognised (McCright and Dunlap 2011; Adger *et al.* 2013; Crow and Boykoff 2014). Showing how such scales of analysis are connected, for example by illuminating common sense or taken-for-granted understandings and practices, is an ongoing challenge for such research. Bringing cultural research into political analyses provides important insights into why our high-carbon world is so entrenched, and identifies windows of possibility (Bulkeley *et al.* 2016: 3).

This book makes diverse contributions to these debates from diverse disciplines. I summarise those contributions here under five themes. Further, the book comes at a time when there is a sufficient body of cultural research on climate change to enable a level of meta-analysis (Head *et al.* 2016). Comparisons, connections and generalisations between a multitude of in-depth studies are now possible. The new insights from this collection are no longer just good ideas in the wind but are underpinned by sufficient critical mass to give them weight and gravitas. I conclude with three such insights.

Showing How Concepts Matter

Whether it is the concept of nature itself, or component parts such as wilderness or invasive species, concepts always matter in human relations with the wider world (Castree 2015). Concepts both reflect and reinforce particular understandings and associated behaviours and governance practices. Sebastian Vincent Grevsmühl (this

volume) starts with the concept of climate/*klima* itself, using the famous Humboldt map as a turning point and showing how the concept of climate became global because it was visualised in this way. As he argues, even old maps look familiar because the zonal division of regional climates is deeply enshrined in the Western geographical imagination. But the concept of climate that we now understand, as a statistical representation of long-term weather patterns, has shifted from an earlier understanding of *klima* as the 'habitable world'. If those climates and zonal divisions are now 'becoming migrant', as Grevsmühl puts it, what does that do to our wider geographical imaginations and notions of habitable worlds?

Documenting Variability

Cultural research has always been good at documenting variability, with obvious relevance to how different cultural groups approach climate change or any other environmental issue. Documenting diverse environmental knowledges, and understanding how the environmental cultures of different community sectors might intersect, helps identify and articulate potential environmental conflicts. Much more work can be done to understand the role of cultural diversity in relation to climate change response, and migrants' perspectives have been virtually ignored in climate change research (de Guttry *et al.* 2016: 11). Cultural research also throws light on cultural capacities and resources that might be otherwise understood as vulnerabilities or deficits (Gibson *et al.* 2013; Correa-Velez *et al.* 2014).

Julio Postigo (this volume) shows how these issues can be understood temporally by examining adaptive responses to changing climates in a particular region over time, while also emphasising that climate is not a stand-alone phenomenon experienced separately from other socio-economic processes within society.

Allison Ford and Kari Marie Norgaard (this volume) show this variability through four different contemporary social groups: explicit climate denialists, implicit climate denialists (which is most of us), urban homesteaders and Karuk indigenous people. But they go further in showing how such variability matters and what it means for the bigger picture. This chapter builds on Norgaard's earlier work on climate change scepticism and denial as significant phenomena requiring cultural analysis, and on climate change emotions as socially structured, rather than experienced only by individuals. Ford and Norgaard provide what they call 'meso-level' connections between broader structures of society and the everyday. The example of the 'dropping out' urban homesteaders, who maintain a strong cultural valuation of the individual, shows how the individualisation of emotions such as anxiety, despair and guilt can impede more collective approaches to climate change alternatives.

Indigenous peoples are prominent in the cultural literatures on climate change, partly because a number of groups, particularly Arctic ones, are at the 'front line', as Igor Krupnik (this volume) puts it. It is important that, in learning from indigenous examples, we do not generalise too quickly, but instead maintain the focus on the specific contexts in each case. In discussing the Karuk example in northern California, Ford and Norgaard remind us that indigenous groups are already in the catastrophe that began with colonial dispossession. In this sense climate change is not a new interruption but a continuation of 'colonial violence that already interferes with preferred, traditional relationships between human communities and the environment'. In a parallel with Postigo's argument, climate change is not understood or experienced as something separate and anomalous from other parts of life. Astrid Ulloa's chapter (this volume) provides a useful review of studies in the field, also reminding us how many of them are outside the English-speaking world.

Krupnik's decades of research in Alaskan rural communities provide important insights into the 'visible, massive and indisputable' changes in the northern Bering Sea over that time frame. In particular, the increasingly poor quality of ice gives hunters no place to go for good winter hunting but creates new opportunities for whaling. As noted in other research, the interruption and rearrangement of relationships between different phenomena give rise to 'strange things' being noticed and discussed, for example birds in the middle of winter. Krupnik notes that people are actively discussing these changes, seeking explanations and solutions. Climate change 'is pushed into the realm of village talk', as he puts it – normalised and woven into the fabric of everyday life. Outcomes are diverse, with both shrinking and growing communities in the region.

In an important parallel with a number of Pacific countries (Farbotko and Lazrus 2012), Krupnik shows how people in Alaska resist the academic casting of them as victims, have strong adaptive capacities and want assistance with very specific things from government. This study among others shows the importance of longitudinal research in the ethnographic tradition, providing fine-grained analysis of spatial and temporal variability. This documentation of what is happening in the recent long moment has great potential for connection to archaeological or historical comparators, a point I return to below.

Understanding Environmental Norms and Practices

As the examples above show so well, understanding cultural differences facilitates understanding of what stands for common sense and normal behaviours and how these came to be.

Chapters 2 and 3 provide important further examples via their historical analyses. In showing 'how the prediction of future climate has always involved a

struggle with complexity and uncertainty', Martin Mahony, Gabriele Gramelsberger and Matthias Heymann (this volume) provide important historical perspective on scientific uncertainty and what they call its domestication. As climatology became global and increasingly dependent on modes of computation, ideas of what constitutes certainty and uncertainty in good science also changed. This study has obvious relevance to the present, when much of the cultural politics of climate change denial is framed around these same concepts. The chapter also gives us pause to reflect on the claim on the future that we stake with different predictive capacities and ideas of prediction.

Reframing Human–Environment Relations: Exposing Alternatives

If Western modernity has framed human–environment relations in particularly destructive ways, cultural framings from different places and times offer a range of cultural resources in the necessary reframing. Peter Daniels (this volume) makes a similar argument in relation to Buddhism – that we can draw inspiration from it to do less, consume less and enhance our connectedness with the natural world.

Georgina Endfield and Lucy Veale's (this volume) discussion of the TEMPEST database provides a fascinating example here. The database builds an archive of extreme weather histories in the United Kingdom through detailed weather information contained in personal diaries, letters and papers, all of them understood carefully in their context. It is clear from the rich examples provided that people were very aware and expressive of their more-than-human lives and the ways they were embedded in a system of strong more-than-human agency (something becoming lost in modernist understandings of climate). There is an interesting juxtaposition between this chapter and Krupnik's chapter with regard to the way in which extremes can be both absorbed and normalised in an everyday sense, while also being seared into individual and collective memory. Endfield and Veale argue that 'these narratives and stories have great potential to engage people in weather and climate issues, the history of place, and to improve "weather memory"'.

John Clammer's chapter title 'Back to the Future' explicitly raises the question of how past practices might help us in the future. This is not just a question of maintaining tradition or continuity from the past, but potentially something more transgressive. *Satoyama* – a Japanese term for a mosaic of different ecosystem types and socio-agricultural organisation in which humans are symbiotically embedded – provides an example of a mixed agro-ecological integrated system that can also be imagined for the future. Clammer argues that this is not just an empirical example of climate responsible lifestyles or systems, but that it also throws out theoretical challenges.

He explicitly challenges the notion that such small-scale systems are too small and fragile to provide viable models of the future, reminding us that fossil fuel economies are also fragile – we just do not acknowledge them as such. As I and others have discussed in different contexts, such apparently small-scale experiments provide important candidates for survival. For Clammer, *satoyama* and similar systems simultaneously (i) are among the best candidates to 'survive a collapse of the fossil fuel–based economy', (ii) represent a culture of transition as well as exemplar practices and (iii) are not only resilient but 'actually generative, bringing fertility back to both nature and community'. This is a very important argument, echoed elsewhere, that prefigures the next theme.

Identifying Cultural Resources and Thresholds for Change

Resources for imagining alternative ways of doing things can emerge from unlikely places. Increasingly they emerge not from existing governments or institutions but from more diverse scales of governance and from small experiments. Encounters between different ideas and practices occur during the migration process, particularly from the global south to global north (Carter *et al.* 2013; Head *et al.* 2018). Practices undertaken for non-environmental reasons can have environmental benefits by reducing consumption (Maller and Strengers 2013; Waitt and Welland 2019). Migration provides a unique opportunity to disrupt the status quo by throwing light on practices taken for granted; see, for example, Klocker *et al.*'s (2015; Waitt *et al.* 2016) work on car ownership.

Arts practice has long been important in helping communities imagine other worlds. Ciara Healy-Musson's (this volume) 'thin place' is one such emergent experiment. Using the concept of a thin place as a 'marginal, liminal realm, beyond everyday human experience and perception, where mortals can pass into Otherworlds', Healy-Musson describes a gallery experiment in which ancient and contemporary world views are interwoven. As she describes it, Thin Curating is very much a pragmatic intervention in the world rather than an attempt to reveal the world. Her example is also very place-based: in Carmarthen, an economically deprived area with a rich animist history. The theme of considering relationships to place as encompassing both continuity and change is enriched here by a revival of the archaic and the use of visual culture.

The question of social transformation is also addressed by Susanne Moser (this volume), who takes climate change communication beyond its traditional discussion point of communicating science to considering what it tells us about how to communicate the transformative imperative. Moser's ten characteristics echo themes that have been brought out in the preceding chapters, including 'naming

and framing the necessary change', 'orienting towards the difficult' and 'fostering generative engagement'.

Karen O'Brien, Gail Hochacka and Irmelin Gram-Hanssen (this volume) also address the issue of how to create a culture 'for' transformation. Their useful review of different theories of cultural transformation arises out of the insight that there is a need for greater understanding of relationships between individual and collective change (or stability). However it is understood, culture can be both a barrier and a catalyst for transformative change, and cultural change of different types may be beneficial or detrimental for climate change action. The teaching experiment cCHALLENGE documented in this chapter is particularly interesting because of how it gets students to reflect on the process of change involved in taking environmentally friendly steps for thirty days.

Conclusion

The value of a good edited book is in the potential for the whole to generate more than the sum of the parts, for the juxtapositions and conversations between chapters to provide new insights and frame action differently. Perhaps the most exciting dimension of this book – and the way the whole may generate more than the sum of the parts – is in the juxtaposition of examples from different times and places. This goes well beyond a way of documenting cultural variability but starts to take us towards examining alternatives and how we might get there. To my reading, the whole of this book generates three such insights.

First, to summarise the findings of the transformation chapters, we have come a long way (apparently) from a simple notion that climate change transitions are simply about communicating the science in a more effective way, as if received by a rational body politic who will act accordingly. There is now a much fuller understanding of the cultural framings within which different individuals and groups receive and process new and challenging information. This is well understood by the vested interests who have sought to distract attention from themselves by fostering a public sphere in which explicit climate change denial seeks to continually engage the science on the extent to which debates are settled. It is surely past time for most of us to waste no further time trying to convince this minority, but instead to focus on enacting alternative ways forward. As many of the chapters here explicate so well, and as O'Brien and colleagues are teaching their students, these ways forward involve sophisticated understandings of how culture and power are entwined at scales from the individual to the societal. That some useful points of intervention and agency are unexpected or surprising provides grounds for hope.

Second, the different temporalities in the book show that historical perspectives on climate change are now far more sophisticated than the simplistic framing of 'learning lessons' from the past, a framing embedded in linear time with primitivist views of the past and progressivist views of the future. Instead, we can look for kinship across time and space, as a number of chapters here do. Leaving behind (a linear linguistic framing itself!) historical narratives of progress and collapse, we can imagine much more interesting juxtapositions in which, for example, medieval standards of living and disease risk combine with smart phone availability. Or we might imagine how future everyday talk of weather and climate involves a continuous undercurrent of how to cope with extremes and the resources to do so. In this way futures connect to conversations that have occurred for thousands of years. Healy-Musson's 'thin places' concept, as a means to crack between different temporalities, is immensely powerful.

Third, the (also powerful) concept of cultural resources has risks of being extractivist, and we need to be attuned to these risks. Healy-Musson's attempt to return 'the multi-layered nature of their sacred past' to communities raises the question of how we might do this when the past is not shared or is shared in a way that is premised on dispossession, such as in the settler colonial context. To consider the past, or any other cultural dimension, as a resource should immediately alert us to questions of power. To go beyond, and to seek a process that is dynamic and dialogical, will take careful attention. It must be done with deliberation.

I commend this collection to the reader and congratulate the editors for bringing it all together.

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