

## Searching for Solutions: Humanizing Climate Narratives in an Age of Global Change and Connectivity

Global climate change has been a major issue of concern and political debate in the US and internationally for over 20 years, marked notably by the Kyoto Protocol in 1992. While politically-fraught contention still surrounds the rhetoric of how climate change is discussed, from a scientific perspective, the physical mechanics by which greenhouse gases raise atmospheric temperatures have long been documented and understood. Due to their molecular structure, gases, including CO<sub>2</sub> and methane, capture and reradiate infrared photons, and as these gases accumulate in our atmosphere, heat that would otherwise leave our biosphere is trapped.<sup>[1]</sup> It is also not a subject of scientific controversy that such greenhouse gases are mined and released by human activities like industry and agriculture, and that they are continuing to rise to the highest levels experienced in our atmosphere in over 800,000 years.<sup>[2]</sup> No human, scientist or otherwise, can predict the future with certainty, but evidence has mounted to indicate climate change is occurring, and even the most conservative projections of continued climate change indicate major consequences for life on earth. In the words of the environmentalist and author Bill McKibben, “Global warming is not some distant problem waiting to appear, some hypothetical trouble we should start preparing for. The world is already changing with deadly speed. Every time we burn coal and gas and oil, we send carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, and now that carbon dioxide is trapping enough heat to create a new planet.”<sup>[3]</sup>

The need for a response is pressing as climate change becomes increasingly an issue of social consequence. The international NGO Oxfam has found that levels of famine are worsening in already financially impoverished regions as a result of climatic change and unpredictability. They report that roughly 26 million individuals have been forced from their homes and regions by climate change and project that “200 million people may be on the move each year by 2050 because of hunger, environmental degradation, and loss of land.”<sup>[4]</sup> The reality of global climate change thus far is that though emissions are generated disproportionately by wealthy and industrialized nations, ecological challenges have fallen disparately to the world’s poorest populations. Political scientist and environmental policy scientist Frank Biermann draws from several large government studies to caution, “climate change could ‘seriously exacerbate already marginal living standards in many Asian, African and Middle Eastern countries, causing widespread political instability and the likelihood of failed states’ ... migration... will be ‘uncontrolled and generate significant social and economic impacts... States and cities that are unable to cope are likely to seek international humanitarian assistance of unprecedented scale and duration.’”<sup>[5]</sup>

Humanity might already be in the process of facing monumental difficulties including huge populations of dispossessed people, international chaos, or perhaps a plan for global governance which will help mitigate major disasters, and ideally, curb their magnitude. International conferences aimed at slowing or halting climate change have occurred, but significant action has been absent or inadequate, lagging far behind evidence and demand in the opinion of experts.<sup>[6]</sup> This is exemplified by the longtime refusal of the US and other primary polluters to ratify a major international effort to confront carbon emissions, the Kyoto Protocol, a disagreement that has been categorized as “an impasse between rich and poor nations.”<sup>[7]</sup> While the 2015 UN Paris Agreement demonstrated unprecedented international solidarity to lower carbon emissions,<sup>[8]</sup> recent changes in leadership in key carbon contributors like the US and Britain threaten to undermine or undo this hopeful development.

Within academia, a new geological epoch called the Anthropocene has been proposed to contextualize climate change and other contemporary human-driven planetary changes within deep time. While the idea had some predecessors, the Anthropocene as such was first introduced by chemist Paul Crutzen and biologist Eugene Stoermer in 2000, and has since been widely studied and theorized within and beyond the sciences.<sup>[9]</sup> By acknowledging a departure from the 10,000 year-plus Holocene epoch that characterized modern, agricultural human history, the Anthropocene seeks to capture the contemporary age as a dawning geological period threatening substantial changes to “earth’s ecological assemblage as a whole.”<sup>[10]</sup> The Anthropocene squarely defies narratives that would deny the existence of wide-spread, irreversible climatic change, and underlines other global changes including oceanic acidification and widespread extinction events. Inherent in its naming—“The Human Epoch”—is the indication that these changes are intrinsically linked to human activity. By extension, proposing this new epoch forcefully overturns philosophical and political thinking that conceives of social and natural realms as separate or autonomous entities. In *Socionatural Relations in the Anthropocene*, Manuel Arias-Maldonado discusses the implications of this new epoch within a historical survey of changing conceptions of “nature” and its relationship to man. His wide-ranging work shows that our present biological and environmental status as summarized by the hypotheses of climate change and the Anthropocene “are arguably the most fruitful examples of...new ‘cooperation through dialogue’ among the sciences.”<sup>[11]</sup> He also asserts the deep and irreversible entanglement of social and natural systems that characterizes our time, despite deeply entrenched traditions of dualistic thinking stemming from philosophers including Descartes; Arias-Maldonado urges us to confront “the *relation* between the cultural and the material,” as much of what is evidenced in our worldly reality clashes with widely held beliefs.<sup>[12]</sup>

Today, we are faced not just with the challenge of trying to address carbon emissions but also the human consequences of environmental changes already underway, and in the face of widespread indifference and denial. These complex, vital and urgent issues, while still demanding rigorous scientific study, belong also to the work of artists and scholars who help to shape the narrative of how we conceive of and feel about climate change, how we conceive of ourselves as humans, and how we conceive of our capabilities to act cooperatively and altruistically. An issue already affecting the so-called “third world” should become the concern of privileged nations before the necessity of mass-migration requires it. Only a world-wide response can address this global occurrence. Limitation of major discussions of climate change to the scientific and political realms, along with forces like bipartisan divisions and economic loyalties within major responsible nations like the US have resulted in little to no policy change or collective action. A new approach is required that constructively brings together the challenges of those dramatically affected by climate change, the abstract emotional distress of those already concerned, and the minds of those ignoring these issues.

This article aims to illustrate the powerful need to grow a populous translocal community connected through an awareness of the Anthropocene as it dawns. Translocalism reframes the effort to think about and react to climate change from the abstractions of “the world” to a collection of communities, in which one’s specific locale (of culture, activity and familiar or knowable people) is connected and related to many other specific locales within and across national boundaries. The massive population upheavals climate change portends endanger the continuation of contemporary nation-states, and social formations adapted to the Holocene may be mal-adapted for the Anthropocene. Regardless of future circumstances, a reliance on government-led proposals and actions has not yet proved sufficient for creating significant change in the acquisition and use of materials that contribute to atmospheric carbon levels. I propose that there is great potential to begin an alternative discussion and movement that might grow, harness and

direct the energy and action demanded by the challenges of climate change through translocal performances. Considering the current modes of global connection, I propose that this translocal effort to confront evolving matters of climate justice and environmental responsibility occur through a web-based social media platform dedicated to creativity and communication. I begin by discussing how, from a philosophical, historical and cognitive perspective, performance can spur societal and governmental action through the generation of emotions, narratives and altruistic acts. Next, I seek an understanding of how previous efforts to address climate change through performance in different media have both succeeded and failed in generating empathy and community. Finally, I propose an aspirational blueprint that attempts to generate effective altruistic action through an Internet-based community. The aim is to move thoughtfully from older to newer to possible future media formats of representing and understanding this particular concern, with the understanding that creative input is needed as much as edification.

Perhaps confronting global upheaval with creativity and media seems like an incongruous and unrealistic proposal from the outset. Yet concern about climate change has not yet coalesced into a powerful mass movement on political or civil fronts in part because representations of it have produced nearly as much division and debate as action. In her book *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice*, the philosopher Martha Nussbaum illuminates myriad instances of how the arts' appeal to emotional connection and understanding has played essential roles in organizing significant and sustainable progress in national and international issues. Her basic premise is that the structures and habitual practices of societies are predominately shaped by emotionally significant narratives, and that love, defined as "a delighted recognition of the other as valuable, special, and fascinating" is the key emotion which produces sustained movement toward optimally equal and just systems.<sup>[13]</sup> Analyzing art and speeches, Nussbaum articulates how many historically monumental actions were enabled by narratives that informed public emotions, ideals and norms through performance. How we respond to global climate change is inextricably connected to how we think and feel about the crisis, and history demonstrates the importance of public performance to creating a shared emotional context that shapes belief.

In a discussion of performance, ethics and history, theatre scholar Bruce McConachie explicitly compares the challenges of global climate change today to the work of the American Abolitionist movement.<sup>[14]</sup> McConachie shows how the success of the latter depended upon performances of narratives, including sermons, the speeches of Frederick Douglass, and Henry Ward Beecher's practice of staging reverse slave auctions. Such performances produced public emotions of sympathy for the lives of slaves and were crucial to the movement's eventual political effectiveness. This emotional investment helped to create a widespread willingness to undergo tremendous economic and mortal sacrifice during the Civil War. McConachie's parallel emphasizes the fact that our current ecological crisis is also a matter of social justice, in which inaction has and will cause devastation to human lives. Further, it validates the possibility of a social willingness to withstand short-term economic losses for the long-term good (as, for example, oil companies and their associates would be required to do in countering the trajectory of climate change). McConachie includes a discussion of some extant efforts to create a performance-based response to activities and emotions pertinent to climate change, and writes that the Internet may be the most appropriate medium for addressing such a large-scale issue.

If the challenge and approach broadly outlined seem daunting, Kitcher's *Ethical Project* gives substantial reason for optimism by providing evidence for the prehistoric evolution of humanity's now inherent capacity for altruism (acting against one's own interest for the good of others). Kitcher argues that

cooperation and egalitarianism born of a behavioral and cognitive ability to empathize—to take the perspective of others—conferred greater survival success to our ancestors than to those who behaved primarily with indifference or hostility.<sup>[15]</sup> Therefore, the human ability to relate to one another with compassion or to act altruistically is a genetic inheritance that does not need to be created wholesale in our efforts to act pro-socially in the cases of climate justice. According to Kitcher’s model of human cognition, societal failures to meaningfully confront climate change do not reflect an inherent inability to care about the welfare of others, but the peripheral positioning of this concern with regard to a given social group. Geographic distance from populations being most affected by climate change now or temporal distance from future generations who will suffer later can relegate climate change to the periphery. Fortunately, personal identification with the significance of others is not difficult to achieve. According to Nussbaum, just focusing attention on strangers (as in listening to a news story) can generate an appreciation of their importance, at least in the short term. McConachie draws attention to one cognitive basis for this reality: mirror neurons create the same neuronal activity in a human viewing intentional movement as does the movement in the brains of the viewed. These movements include emotionally involved facial expressions; so, for instance, the experience of seeing someone smile is cognitively similar to smiling. It stands to reason that simply but persistently focusing on the social plight that global climate change is creating will trigger the predisposed tendency to feel compassion for other human beings, identify empathetically and act with altruism. Performance’s activation of empathy and emotions through attention to others and storytelling has historically contributed to justice and progressive change, and can be effective in the case of climate change.

Of course, performance has already been deployed to address this global crisis. The most well-known example is the 2006 documentary film, *An Inconvenient Truth*, an effort to educate global viewers about climate change and a call to redirect human action with greater environmental responsibility. This film brought the discussion of climate change to public attention and succeeded in familiarizing many with the issue. On an emotional register, however, the film may have unintentionally contributed to dividing public opinion, particularly in the US. Compassion and love are not the only emotions to which humans are predisposed. Nussbaum describes how the capacity for disgust, genetically reinforced through its benefits to survival throughout history, has been redirected socially as an intuitive defense against our mortality. She describes “projective disgust” as a powerful emotion that underpins systemic inequalities like racism, sexism and homophobia, in which groups of “others” are designated and defined by an association with the gross (bodily fluids and odors, for example) in order to reinforce a psychologically comforting separation for individuals from their own bodily and mortal nature. Along with the related emotions of shame, fear, and envy, disgust counters sympathy and involves the separation and “othering” of individuals in a psychologically satisfying way.<sup>[16]</sup> These constructions of human emotion and behavior can contribute to a widespread phenomenon that Jonathan Haidt has termed “groupishness,” which, like altruism, is a part of humanity’s genetic heritage because of its ability to confer success to individuals loyal to a specific group in cases of competition over evolutionary history.<sup>[17]</sup>

*An Inconvenient Truth* is emphatically centered on Al Gore, who narrates the film and is the visually dominant figure throughout. The film documents a presentation about the science and ramifications of global climate change which Gore made throughout the world, interspersed with narrative segments about his upbringing, family and political career, including personal photographs and scenes of his daily life. In situating its call to action intimately within Gore’s life, the story becomes as much an account of climate change as one man’s mission to stop climate change in the face of widespread opposition. For people who never saw the film, the very premise—Al Gore advocating for climate change awareness—reinforces

and may have helped generate the notion that climate change belongs to the American Democratic Party's agenda, or that it is an interest of the wealthy and powerful. This construct is highly susceptible to the hard-wired reactions of groupishness (along political lines) and of envy (which Nussbaum writes is directed toward people perceived to have more status or wealth),<sup>[18]</sup> both of which disrupt compassion and create a sense of difference and exclusion. The centrality of this political figure seems to have promoted the human tendency to groupishness in some, widening fissures along class and party lines, and may have inadvertently helped de-universalize an inherently global issue. This is not to dismiss the significance and successes of this film in bringing attention to climate change, but an attempt to understand its potential limitations so that future efforts to create performed narratives might be more or differently effective in promoting compassion and united action around the issue.

The potentially problematic narrative structure of *An Inconvenient Truth* is related to its media structure as a movie. Director Davis Guggenheim's decision to blend climate change information with Gore's life story drew from the reality of Gore's committed activism, capitalized on his notoriety, and satisfied generic expectations of the feature movie format for a dramatic plot and engaging emotional and character through-line, while the film in turn provided publicity and accessibility for the content's message. However, political polarization around climate change also suggests the major potential flaw of positioning climate change as the message of any single authority. The trouble is not Gore, but the ease with which a message about ecological responsibility can be dismissed or corrupted when it is closely associated with any one person.

The media landscape has changed significantly since 2006, as the Internet has become a sophisticated, central tool for accessing information, entertainment and communication, and (where computers and web-connectivity are affordable) a primary focus of attention. Social media use among Internet users, for example, grew from 6% of those over fifteen years of age in 2007 to 83% by 2011, 1.2 billion people worldwide.<sup>[19]</sup> Although film remains an important and massively popular medium, its accessibility to both viewers and creators through the Internet and related technologies has broadened immensely and its formats have diversified. As the Anthropocene reshapes our existence at an accelerating rate, new media dissemination forms have transformed communication.

Within the realm of video, the key Internet platform is YouTube, which was launched in 2005 and became the third most trafficked site on the Internet in 2011.<sup>[20]</sup> While technology and cultural theorist Johanna van Dijck defines YouTube as essentially an alternative to television that maintained many of the same technologies as TV, she states that it departs from traditional audio-visual media in significant ways. Specifically, she highlights the "novelty of having users upload self-produced or pre-produced audiovisual content via personal computers from their home to anybody's home—that is, networked private spaces."<sup>[21]</sup> YouTube enables the translocal distribution of professional and amateur productions by users to users, who have freedom to explore this eclectic and ever-expanding collection at will.

A key to understanding the nature of the Internet interface generally is the flexible multiplicity of choices available to the user. Cultural studies scholar Berteke Waaldjak summarizes this element of the Internet experience: "Several new media scholars ... stress the importance of the metaphor of the plurality of windows, enabling a less defined subject position: the user can see and relate to several things simultaneously, alternating between immediacy and hyperimmediacy, between transparency and opacity, between immersion and distance."<sup>[22]</sup>

Film primarily creates an immediate, immersive experience for the viewer through sustained attention to a linear narrative. The Internet video, conversely, is one of countless subjects of attention simultaneously available to Internet users, who can dissociate from that narrative and alternate or recalibrate their attention to multiple subjects as desired.

A consequence of YouTube's free-to-all upload capabilities in the "multiple window" environment has been the proliferation of shorter-form videos whose formats, consumption and use can depart radically from movie media. Van Dijck describes short form "snippets," videos of less than ten minutes, as "resources rather than as products... meant for recycling in addition to storing, collecting, and sharing... posted on video-sharing sites to be reused, reproduced, commented upon, or tinkered with. [Snippets] function as input for social traffic and group communication or as resource for creative remixes... touted as typical of YouTube's content." [23]

Individuals and organizations working to combat climate change have utilized YouTube and short-form snippets. Frequently, the resulting videos are documentaries aimed toward viewer education and engagement, not unlike *An Inconvenient Truth*. Due to their shorter form and reliance on cost-free YouTube dissemination, however, they are much more efficiently and cheaply produced than a full-length film and can respond quickly to of-the-moment events in climate and climate-related action.

One illustration of such communication comes from 350.org, a grassroots organization aimed at combating climate change and founded by environmentalist Bill McKibbin. 350.org has posted several videos on the UN conference that culminated in the Paris Agreement. The short form alleviates the pressure to produce a strict "beginning, middle and end" narrative with specific character development, but 350.org videos still work to generate emotional engagement and promote empathy between viewers and the people depicted. In their one-minute YouTube snippet, "Global Climate March- Solidarity and Resilience," piano music and text overlay photographs and video of climate activists who gathered worldwide on the eve of the global summit in early December, building rhythmically to those who gathered and performed protests in Paris despite security measures prohibiting a large-scale march after the local terrorist attacks on November 13th. [24] The text describes the images of shoes that thousands of would-be protestors laid out symbolically in the streets where the march had been scheduled to occur. The same technique documents indigenous people leading a prayer for victims of climate change and terrorism outside of the Bataclan, the nightclub center of the lethal attacks just weeks before. Portraits of protestors of different genders, ages and ethnicities in various emotional states appear throughout, communicating the presence and power of resilient and cooperative resistance to inaction. This video promotes a sense of inclusive empathy in the viewer through both its written narrative and its diverse images of human faces, whose wordless expressions of joy and sadness cue emotions through the spectator's mirror neurons. The presence of varied visual social indicators and an absence of specific narrative information about the subjects are conducive to enabling widespread identification without providing fodder for envy (wealth or position) nor leaving wide room for disgust: viewers of most ethnicities, ages and gender can visually identify with someone portrayed, so the collective "subject" of the video is fairly invulnerable to body-focused projective disgust, which would group the protestors as "others." The juxtapositions of a contemporary lethal terrorist act and the impending threats of climate change to human lives eloquently cast climate policy as an issue of basic justice, especially in regard to the equitable valuing of human life. By implying a connection between the atrocities committed against indigenous communities, the sudden violence of the 2015 Paris attacks, and lethal weather events linked to climate change, this video imbues climate issues with the combined emotional impact of major

historical and very recent tragedies— and with a related sense of urgency. Certainly, the groups documented are not impervious to disgust or rejection. For example, some viewers might react with “groupish othering” and rejection of the subjects because of their status as protestors. However, the shared emotional event of the Bataclan shooting is a powerful framework for promoting a broad coalition. Nussbaum notes the power of tragedy and public grieving in promoting a shared sense of human vulnerability conducive to empathy and, eventually, shared hope.<sup>[25]</sup> This video also creates a narrative of empowerment by demonstrating the mourning and persistence of marchers in a wide and unified effort against tragic and preventable death. In addition to potentially activating an inclusive emotional significance in viewers, the video promotes viewer hope and involvement, concluding with a written message to “share this video” on social media outlets.<sup>[26]</sup>

The snippet “Video On Climate Change,” also available through YouTube, deploys some of the same tactics as “Climate March,” particularly in focusing on a diverse selection of people expressing concern about climate change. This video was produced by Oxfam, a grassroots charity organization to combat world hunger that was founded in Great Britain after World War II, and has since expanded internationally. In this video, the subject is climate change in the context of agriculture, where increasingly unpredictable growing seasons and extraordinary weather events are threatening food quality and availability. The video combines instrumental music, the voice-over of a poem about climate challenges, tracking landscape shots of flooded and drought-dried environments, and testimonials regarding climate change from female farmers and organizers in the Philippines, Bolivia, Zimbabwe, and the UK.<sup>[27]</sup> The women attest in their native languages (subtitled in English) to observations of climate change in their communities and fields, and discuss their perspectives and efforts to rally support and promote sustainability.

More so than 350’s video, Oxfam’s is representing a specific demographic. Conceivably, a viewer could react in self-protective, projective disgust by categorically “othering” the female farmer/laborer subject; diverse languages and localities, coupled with the topic of the universal need for food, could also promote a sense of inclusive relevance for the viewer. Summarizing the challenges brought by climate change in the stories of specific people creates an emotional narrative and visual capacity for connection through mirror neurons with suffering individuals. The focus on personal stories invites viewers to consider the video subjects, and increases their potential for significance to the viewer (without, of course, universally guaranteeing it.) This enables empathy, the painful recognition of another’s trouble, and in turn, the desire for altruistic participation, specifically prompted as the women discuss climate change as a shared responsibility. The tragedy of hunger and hardship, like the tragedies in 350.org’s video, is used to create a connecting acknowledgement of human vulnerability that is converted into hope. The music and poem begin somberly, as the women discuss their difficulty, and become more uplifting with the entrance of trumpets and the stanza “join the chorus, let’s make a difference,” as the women are shown smiling and educating others, demonstrating their hope and determination. The conclusion is a frame that promotes a specific campaign by Oxfam to bolster Europe’s role in growing food and a specific gateway for people to mobilize their altruistic desires. This video relies less on a linear narrative structure than those discussed previously, imaging people’s homes and daily lives rather than events, and presenting mood motifs based in empathetic sadness and the relief of hope.

A particularly effective dimension of this video is how the geographic distance between the selected subjects illustrates the shared difficulties these climate events have on people from varied continents, cultures and economies. This reinforces the truly global impact of climate change and creates a sense of a

translocal community that may motivate action. The word “global” has more complex meanings in a social context than in its geographical use. Mass media and communication scholar Fabienne Darling-Wolf writes that the lived reality of globalization exists predominately as bidirectional influences between local communities. The model of globalization Darling-Wolf wishes to promote pushes against the dominant theory of hegemony subsuming local differences, though she acknowledges an imbalance of influence linked to economic inequity. Simultaneously, local groups (villages, towns, subsets of cities) take in information, culture, even climate change itself, and process them with their own tools and ideas. Forces like Western culture and climate change are widespread, but they manifest in experiences, interpretations and reactions that are hybrids of the particular characteristics of that instance of influence (a certain imported fashion trend, or a specific abnormal weather event) mixed with local characteristics and values. Still, understanding a culturally globalizing world and even the capacity to imagine it are dependent on representations: “the notion of the global would not exist, at least not in its current form, without the media.”<sup>[28]</sup> In Oxfam’s snippet, the vision of the global is defined by what Darling-Wolf refers to as “local-to-local links,”<sup>[29]</sup> achieved here through interwoven images and narratives of small farmers and farming communities. The video maps a global reality of specific, unique and kindred communities. Darling-Wolf writes that translocalism is the ideal mode for understanding ongoing cultural globalization in which “we can learn from both the differences and similarities between contexts about the nature of larger processes of globalization.”<sup>[30]</sup>

This approach is significant in the context of climate change because it promotes the inclusion of diverse political actors and ideologies representative of the global action and/or the policy at stake, and shifts away from Western hegemony embodied by US leaders alone. A global discourse about climate change and possible responses that perpetuate the dominance of Western hegemony can be highly divisive, according to Heather Smith. She observes that constructions in which “global” is understood “as a means by which to externalize the environment, deny the local and provide a sense of distance and detachment... as a solution as embodied in multilateral processes that are state-centric” have allowed the wealthy and powerful to “deny responsibility” and have alienated communities of would-be participants in confronting climate change.<sup>[31]</sup> A video like Oxfam’s may appeal to communities that are resistant to endorsing any global action for fear of western hegemony by instead illustrating a translocal vision of the global—connectivity through shared experience and causes resulting in cooperation rather than cooptation under one dominating authority.

Critically, both Oxfam and 350.org’s videos, while arguably promoting greater empathetic inclusivity and more diversified visions of community, are professional products curated by large organizations with their own influence and authority, and could themselves generate political, class or ideological differences and groupish opposition. YouTube is also available to individuals outside of the audio-visual production professions, however, and the climate justice advocacy and education videos available on that site present a greater plurality of producers and tactics than there is room to discuss. They include theatrical, animated and humorous approaches to climate change, conducive to a broad range of cognitive and emotional experiences. For instance, in comedy and political satire particularly, projective disgust, envy and shame are used to promote positive change. Internet videos demonstrate the ability of such “negative” emotions to reinforce groupishness and solidarity conducive to climate justice when they are directed toward ecologically irresponsible corporations and leaders (see Stephen Colbert, Trevor Noah or The Young Turks for examples). Such techniques in performance could be particularly important to the public’s role of holding governments accountable for the promises of the Paris Agreement. Other YouTube videos and websites instruct viewers in how to behave with ecological responsibility in their own lives and consumer

choices to reduce their carbon footprints.[\[32\]](#)

One can safely suppose that the mission of finding a perfect video which is universally effective in motivating every individual viewer to care about climate change and to altruistically act with greater ecological responsibility is *not* possible. However, there is an inherent ability of performance forms to generate interest, empathy and altruism, and a diversity of performance modes are crucial in making this issue resonate with larger, more diverse audiences. Audiences that respond by distancing themselves from one depiction of climate change or “othering” its concerned spokespeople could be moved to empathy or altruism by another depiction. Yet audio-visual content is still a product for consumption, and motivating a change in viewer perspectives is only a small first step toward reigning in carbon emissions, or ameliorating the effects of climate change. Myriad psychological tendencies underpin an avoidance of climate change as a topic; George Marshall outlines these in his book, *Don't Even Think About It: Why Our Brains Are Wired to Ignore Climate Change*. He argues that even among populations that accept climate change as a serious and human-driven threat, silence about climate change remains common among individuals and private sentiments rarely translate into action.[\[33\]](#) Among his conclusions is that concerned people need to personally engage this issue in their lives and social circles. Active participation and input are required to maintain and spread growing empathy and environmental responsibility, to generate innovative approaches to combating emissions and their ramifications, and to build a committed translocal community prepared to respond with meaningful support in the case of, say, mass migrations of climate refugees. This requires a dialogic and dynamic interface.

The Internet is already dominated by social media platforms conducive to exactly such personal and dynamic interaction. As Dijck notes, social media websites enable the creation of media content by users, and the exchange of this content between them. Social media has become a “new online layer through which people organize their lives” and it “influences human interaction on an individual and community level, as well as on a larger societal level, while the worlds of online and offline are increasingly interpenetrating.”[\[34\]](#) Social media websites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube itself have come to define communities for a growing number of people. There are limitations to using one's personal social media to disseminate or promote any activism. “Sharing” 350.org's Climate March video with one's Facebook friends, as the video prompts viewers to do, may help attract some attention but only continues a mode of essentially passive, if good-willed, media consumption. Besides this, personal social networks connect people who predominantly share one another's cultural and social context in most cases and do little to broaden the message into new, differently-minded communities. Furthermore, these established sites, because they are the means by which active users “organize their lives,” are already rife with information spanning wide ranges of relationships and interests. The multiple window phenomenon of divided and ever-shifting attention is intrinsic within the structure of Facebook where one's “shared” climate video might appear in juxtaposition (and competition) with an amusing cat video, news of a friend's wedding, and a video concerning a different cause or protest. In short, dominant social media websites are neither the ideal platform for concentrating interest nor for generating action.

A new social media platform uniquely dedicated to bi-directional communication about global climate change, environmental responsibility, and altruistic support for climate change victims could create a dynamic, innovative and effective contribution to climate justice and preparedness. Given the increasing inter-disciplinary academic awareness of the level of flux in which our planet and societies are mutually entwined, and the great uncertainty inherent to this upheaval, such a forum would seek to provide a transnational ground for a citizenship of the Anthropocene, unified in empathy, creativity and action,

whatever the Anthropocene comes to be. I believe that such a site, drawing from the user-sharing formats of existing platforms but filling an uninhabited niche, could rally interest and would meet a demand for active involvement and community around these issues. While highly effective organizations already exist, their websites function primarily in the one-way production of professional media and static information. When US Internet users search “climate change” on Google, the most ubiquitous search engine, the current top results are all within the scientific and informational realm, and represent an important but limited perspective that does not present dynamic opportunities for involvement. In *A History of Communications*, Marshall Poe differentiates the Internet from the audio-visual form as being dialogic rather than monologic, and having a structural tendency towards egalitarianism, pluralism, and individualism, all elements conducive to this ideally cooperative yet diverse translocal global community.[35] Yet scholars have attested that Internet media is not necessarily very “new” at all, and most of the easily searchable media associated with climate change demonstrates this in essentially providing virtual versions of traditional media (books, movies, etc.). The structural possibilities and connectivity of the Internet could be utilized to greater effect in confronting the major issues of the Anthropocene.

The website platform proposed might include existing media representations about climate justice as a foundation for generating interest, empathetic investment and educational information. Primarily, however, it would encourage users to express and interpret their lived, local experience of global climate change. Inviting creative forms like video, photography or writing, this site would act as a global canvas for envisioning climate change on a specific and human scale. It would aim to create an investment in and outlet for the personal stories and ideas of people in their confrontations with climate change and the Anthropocene as experienced by individuals. These could conceivably range from video of live plays or performance art about climate change to documentation of one’s thoughts or activities (gardening, farming, etc.) coming from anyone compelled to share. Like contributions, contributors could span a vast range of demographics and experiences, from people displaced from their homes by extreme weather events to comfortable urbanites discussing practices by which they work to engage in environmental responsibility. The diversity created by this non-professional content would provide still more dimensions for empathetic effectiveness and alternative modes of legitimacy, which are potentially challenged in the case of organizational or political productions. Presenting scientific research beside the lived experiences and observations of a Bolivian farmer, for instance, could have a synergistic effect in generating interest, while providing a dedicated platform where each user might feel heard. YouTube, as discussed, is open to user generated content, but the vast majority (over 80%) of users are strictly passive consumers.[36] Presumably many of these passive users have not felt empowered or motivated to generate content. The existence of a dedicated portal would provide inspiration, motivation and an audience for people concerned with climate justice, and hopefully draw new involvement through the egalitarian diversity of input and representations. While technological (in)availability would have major ramifications for the proposed platform’s content, the German statistics aggregator statistica.com estimates the current number of smartphone users globally at around two billion and rising, [37] a tremendous number of potential users across the globe who could access and submit text, photo and video (or any medium they are compelled to use). All media creations and participation would be encouraged. An altruistically-inspired game designer, for example, might provide a dynamic virtual world for better understanding climate change through an experimental manipulation of energy-use scenarios in a way that could engage and educate visitors. The central guiding principle would be a lack of limitations and specific directives. The guiding purpose of the platform would be an open invitation for individuals to create their own forms and shape their own narratives, to transform isolated personal experience of confusion, fear, or frustration

through some concrete public contribution.

Creativity is conducive to the formation of meaningful community; one can easily imagine how the exchange of new, expressive works might engage and connect users to one another in a powerful emotional camaraderie around a historically divisive and often privately-kept concern. Localism entails immediate visibility, direct contact and personal relationships between citizens, while translocalism is communication and contact between locales of different regions and nations, a globe-spanning network built from nodes of tangible, meaningful, collaborative communities. The website platform would exist to enable a translocal network of novel and non-commercial consideration of climate change as a social issue, and as a tool to encourage unmediated engagement and discussion within peoples' non-virtual lives and localities. The broad invitation to create would (ideally) inspire open performances and public theatre, sparking avenues for education and empathy in live audiences, beyond the virtual platform and its economically restricted accessibility or ideologically-specific appeal. The Emergency Circus, a clown group that travels internationally to play and perform comedy with refugee families and other dispossessed groups, publishes video documentation on YouTube; it is just one model for creative performance action that breaks from the economic limitations of Internet-based activism, specifically relevant in the case of climate refugees. The proposed network would be conducive to a rhizomatic increase in ideas and inspirations, undercutting the dominant capitalist-driven notions that limit climate activism to consumerist choices. A benefit of a new platform is that existent forums like Facebook and YouTube conform to the interests of commercial sponsors, a distorting factor that would ideally be absent in the proposed site.

Discussion boards in a diversity of languages would allow for dynamic conversation and debate in which new ideas might be innovated and shared, and personal connections and relationships might be forged. Despite the obstacle of language differences, the site would define its mission in translocal terms, and would hopefully attract a diversity of people given the global influence of its cause. In time, perhaps multi-lingual contributors and translators would enable increased cross-cultural communications. Through person-to-person international communities, one can imagine the formation of significant, material support in case of climate catastrophes. Were climate change to radically alter environments globally, the translocal community could conceivably form a base-line plan of action and communication resource in emergencies. The website might also allow for collaborative efforts to keep governments in check regarding protocols like the Paris Agreement; already, voluntary scientific observation teams gather to collect data for a diversity of ecological projects and this model could be easily formed to fit an active citizen team invested in climate accountability. Simultaneously, this platform would likely face difficulties, potentially including website promotion, user activity like "trolling," submission of scientifically unsound information, or evolving through curation into another static authority. The primary defense against these challenges would be dynamic openness to user suggestions and ideas. This proposal is speculative, a gesture toward how this global crisis might be networked between localities, and an optimistic argument that they ought to be because pluralism and empathy are powerful tools.

2016 was the hottest year on earth in historical record (breaking the records set by 2015 and 2014), while the span of global sea ice was at a near-record low.<sup>[38]</sup> Environmental transformation has serious social consequences that are unfolding all the time; a recent report shows that terrorist groups including ISIL and Boko Haram have begun using climate-related natural disasters and resource shortages in their recruitment and control tactics.<sup>[39]</sup> While some people face dire realities like food and water shortages, large populations of developed nations live in frustrated anxiety about evolving climate change.

According to a recent Gallup Poll, an increasing majority of Americans across political groups “worry” about climate change either a fair amount or a great deal.<sup>[40]</sup> Yet the US government is in talks to abandon or scale back its commitment to the Paris Agreement.<sup>[41]</sup> We must put our concern to use, push beyond the isolation of anxiety, support one another, amplify public will, and develop and coordinate practical strategies. We cannot wait for a grand solution and perfect resolution of this crisis. We are all citizens of this new epoch, the Anthropocene, and there can be no better focus of our attention and creative power than the dynamic global crisis of climatic disturbances to our geographies and subsistence. We must connect with one another to communicate and innovate approaches on individual and community levels, and to help one another take responsibility in our individual actions, through a translocal network that thrives on the limitless diversity of human perspectives provoked by climate change. This is an open-handed offer to anyone motivated and able to act on this proposal to please do so, in collaboration with me or independently. The more individuals who publically share their investment and dedication to acknowledging and confronting climate change, the better – and there is no time to waste!

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