Welcome to the Acclimatize Journal. Here you will find texts written by professionals with different perspectives on climate change, sustainability and creativity.
Expanding conjunctions and climate change

The last decades are characterised by the fact that a radically new understanding of the human condition has been exposed. Firstly, that the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere does stand in direct relationship to the average temperature on earth. Secondly, that the trend of increasing amount of atmospheric carbon dioxide over the last century is due to human activity. From that point, the question often asked is how we should confront or engage with climate change as a societal issue. The entanglement of different spheres of human activity with climate change is what I call an expanding conjunction. As certain spheres of human activity are in themselves neither culturally nor politically connected to climate change, they must instead always be discovered, explored and connected through other human activities such as science, politics or culture.
Expansion is something spreading out or swelling, and conjunction means combination or connection. Conjunction is also the linguistic term for the words connecting parts of a sentence, such as and, or, for. Such words thus always carry a type of connection one way or another. We can see them in meanings concerning climate change, such as “climate change and politics”, “centre for climate science” or “aviation and climate change”. Thus, as we see such words relating to an issue, they are also traces of different conjunctions that have been made around the issue. However, to suggest that climate change is an expanding conjunction because we use those words would not be plausible. Rather, those words are an indication that climate change is being attached to other issues, and the actual expansion is about such other spheres, activities or actors being related to it.
To be more precise, I define expanding conjunction as a process in which an issue becomes expansively attended to by an increasing amount of actors, and/or linked to different spheres or activities in society. However, the conjunctions are not simply a number of added up attachments or actors “joining in” on the issue, but rather a much more contentious process. There are controversies, contradictions and opposing interests in climate change as an expanding conjunction – which is thus a conflictive process.

No domains or spheres in society are in themselves conjoined with climate change or the politics of climate change. They rather have to be politically engaged with or actively attended to by human action. Thus one may also be alert to the acts by which climate change expands, what forms they take and for what purpose. Different actors and activists will engage in acts of conjunction. Such an act is for example the strong movement in the US that connected the political issue of the Keystone pipeline to the climate issue. The planned pipeline was not necessarily connected to climate change politically, but as the activists were engaging in actions that confronted and related those issues, they also exposed the inconsistency of separating the Keystone pipeline from the issue of climate change.
Aviation is one of those domains that over time have been increasingly conjoined with climate change. As aviation and air travel is one of the fastest growing sources of greenhouse gas emissions, the aviation industry has been profoundly questioned and confronted. The conjunction of aviation and climate change has been increasingly accentuated by the often-recurring phrase; “aviation and climate change”; as one typical example of how an expanding conjunction is accompanied by a repeated thought or expressed problem.

However, the actual policy or regulation around aviation do not follow from the conjunction as such. Not only are greenhouse-gas related taxes or substantial regulations absent from aviation as a business, but air travel is also an evermore expanding industry.

The British activist group “Plane Stupid” has over the years strategically confronted this expansion of air industry. As the expansion of different airports in the UK have taken place or been planned, Plane Stupid have approached these plans by campaigns and direct action that emphasises the stupidity and contradictions inherent in the fact that UK in 2008 established a national climate change act which legally enforced reduced climate impact, while at the same time planned for expansions of airports.
Why should not airport expansions be incorporated or questioned according to the then newly enacted law, Plane Stupid asks. One of their actions in 2008 clearly demonstrates what I mean by act of conjunction, as Dan Glass, a 24-year-old Plane Stupid activist, ‘super-glued’ himself to Prime Minister Gordon Brown’s suit. Glass did this when he was in the state dining room at 10 Downing Street to receive an award that was traditionally handed out by the prime minister. At the moment of the handshake, Glass put his other hand, to which he had applied super glue, on the prime minister’s arm. As disruption ensued, he read the statements of people who would be negatively affected by the planned third runway at Heathrow airport, as well as testimonies from communities around the world already threatened and affected by current climate change. He said to the prime minister, regarding these testimonies, that “we cannot shake away climate change like you just can't shake away my arm".* Thus, one might say that he was then very concretely and materially involved in an act of conjunction.
Climate change has from the start been followed by confusion and conflicts, but also by different calls for unity and global solidarity. Just like Plane stupid acted for the radical but also consistent implications of climate politics and science, there are drastic conclusions and revocations to be drawn in culture, art and literature.

The understanding of climate change as an experience and issue among us; and about climate change as a political, social or cultural dynamic; is about those conjunctions being elaborated and explored. Many of the possible conjunctions are pending, and where climate change will take us in the future is uncertain. Even less sure is what different mobilisations and communal hopes that will be seen, as there are many different and often opposing interests around the issue. What will climate change signify for different social groups, social classes and in different parts of the world? Moderna Museet in Stockholm and the Acclimatize project, additionally expand the expanding conjunction of climate change, and will actively seek new acts of conjunctions being made.

* http://www.planestupid.com/content/plane-stupid-campaigner-superglues-himself-prime-minister-inside-number-10

© 2016 Moderna Museet