

Dis-Anthropocentric Performance

The Climate Lens Playbook

*Una Chaudhuri with members of Climate Lens*¹

Considerations of climate and performance increasingly evince a tone of emergency. Sounding the alarm makes great sense, of course, but it also risks smuggling in some other things with it, as emergencies often do: biological panic and biopolitical controls; techno-messianic fantasies and militaristic tropes (“the war on climate”). The polarized public discourse of the present adds further distortions, obscuring shared existential realities. Recognizing the intersection of social inequality and global inequity with environmental suffering is vitally important. So is recognizing — and naming — the ideological foundation of all systems of domination: anthropocentrism — the toxic belief that one species stands apart and above all others and as such is entitled to use the world as a pool of resources to be tapped, drilled, stripped, extracted, molded, altered, and utterly remade to serve unlimited human desire. By contrast, a dis-anthropocentric, ecospheric ideology and art practice seeks to partner with the more-than-human world, and to do so in the full acknowledgment that our species has changed the planet in profound ways. There can be no Edenic “going back” — what we have to practice now are the *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet* (Gan and Tsing 2017).

The misrecognition that undergirds our ruinous extractive modernity resembles Capgras syndrome, a rare neurological condition in which familiar people — one’s own family members and friends — appear to be fake, unreal, robotic. In our case, the kin we fail to recognize — and whom we relegate to unreality — are all the species, landscapes, and geophysical forces with whom we share this planet. This profoundly alienated and alienating delusion, manufactured and sustained by the profit motive, obscures the recognitions and the alliances needed to achieve a world of multispecies thriving. To undo anthropocentrism we must refuse its hierarchical and centralized systems, its disembodied and alienated epistemologies, and its fictions of authoritative intellectual mastery from a synoptic God’s-eye view.

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Figure 1. *Power to the Porous*. Multispecies thriving calls for a commitment to making all our boundaries softer, including the body's boundary of skin. (Courtesy of Dear Climate)

The “Climate Lens Playbook” is an ongoing, open-ended, multithemed, and open-source catalog of strategies for making dis-anthropocentric performance. The principles articulated in the playbook reflect and support the kind of art that is more interested in understanding and unraveling the ideological roots of ecological crisis than in offering so-called solutions to the so-called problem. The problem-solving model is based on the idea of progress, which is complicit with so many histories of domination and dispossession. The world is not ours to solve. If we are lucky, it may once again become ours to belong to and thrive in, but only if we learn to do so alongside the countless other species and forces that share it with us, the same species and forces that Eurocentric modernity has—over the past few centuries—redefined as either dead matter or consumable biomass.

In response to the terrors of climate chaos, the Playbook imagines a program of speculative world-building (performance) aimed at disabling the anthropocentric impulse—the automatic presumption of human exceptionalism—that underlies our extractive modernity. The *Playbook* offers ideas for imaginatively partnering with the ecosphere to heal the myopia and alienation that lethally distorts the relationship between humans and the countless life forms and forces with whom we share the earth.

The Climate Lens Playbook

1. Practice literalism. End the tradition of turning everything into a symbol for human life.
2. Occupy science. Befriend facts and factoids. Enrich theatre with the bristly nomenclatures of the natural sciences.
3. Yes to vastness, and yes also to the infinitesimal. Toggle between the Big Picture and Reality-at-Hand, however tiny; and between Deep History and the Here and Now. Do the Scalar Slide.
4. Practice glocality: intense focus on our localities, but with global eyes in the back our heads, scanning for interrelatedness and beaming signals out to other localities—consciously, urgently.
5. Loosen your epistemologies. Don't believe everything you think.
6. Flatten your ontologies. Everyone and everything are invited in.
7. Unflatten your geographies. What happens here doesn't stay here. The Far Away folds right onto the Right Here. Make plays with pleated places.
8. Take all animals seriously, not just human ones. Also plants, including weeds, nettles, hemlock... Also, minerals, rocks, currents of all kinds, clouds, winds, and other atmospheric forces. Also, bacteria. Especially bacteria.
9. Disaggregate the human. Who drives the carbon economy? Who profits? Who suffers?

10. Don't worry about working up empathy. Sympathy's all you need. Feeling *for* others is just as powerful—and less anthropocentric—than feeling *with* others.
11. De-sentimentalize “Nature.” Keep the awe, lose the “Awww!!!” Forge new affective pathways to the nonhuman—beyond sadness, guilt, and fear. Invite in humor, anger, joy, irony, sarcasm...
12. Stand alongside our fellow species like a breathing exercise, to open up space in our cells for epistemologies of the biosphere that our bodies currently don't hold, or ones we need to re-ignite. Physicalize awe.
13. Congregate, coalesce, flock, swarm, meet, and greet. But also: disperse, disseminate, distribute, scatter, and spread.
14. Biology over psychology, geology over sociology, creaturely life over lifestyle.
15. Invent plans as well as plots; tell times as well as stories; write worlds as well as plays.
16. Create theatres of species life; fill the stage with the Earth. (www.climakazemiami.org/the-climate-lens-1)

Reference

Gan, Elaine, and Anna Tsing, eds. 2017. *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.