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Critical Reflection —
Our Symbiotic Life: An Exploration of Interspecies Relations

CART 360: Tangible Media and Physical Computing

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Our Symbiotic Life: An Exploration of Interspecies Relations by Katja Budinger and Frank Heidmann focuses on how every living being is intertwined from an environmental perspective. The text explains how we depend on each other within the ecosystem. The main goal of this study is to find causes and consequences of climate changes within our interdependent relationships through design fiction. Design fiction is scenarios that help to find plausible futures for the ecosystem. It gives more insights into the ecosystem and reduces the topic's complexity. Different types of socioeconomic contexts explored in these scenarios are called *Shared Socioeconomic Pathways* (i.e., *SSPs*). These methods led to four main paths: *harmony*, *invasion*, *on demand* and *bottle garden*. Many scientists and activists spread these possibilities regarding the planet's future and humanity. However, the actions taken by politicians and big corporations do not save the planet. The promising advancements, the denial of the politicians regarding climate changes are factors that might lead humanity into a not-so-happy path.

Agreements in *COP26* show some advancement in politics regarding eco-conscious actions, leading to the *harmony* scenario. *SSPs* scenarios focus on three main factors: a socioeconomic framework, the current technology trends and the relationship between humans and plants. These possibilities will help to find solutions to climate change. The *SSPs* use five of these factors: demographic, human development, economics, lifestyles, policies, institutions, technologies, environments, and natural resources. The *harmony* scenario focuses on sustainable technologies like autonomous and sufficient self-driving landscapes. This idea arose due to the eco-conscious citizens and their will to save the planet. Some ecological advancements happened during the *COP26* (i.e., *26th Conference of the Parties*). *COP* is a global climate summit that brings every country to discuss the possible actions regarding climate change.¹ This year, multiple measures have been taken. More than 100 countries have joined the coalition to reduce 30% methane gas emissions by 2030.² Global Methane applies to countries that account for half of the worldwide methane emission and 70% of global GDP (i.e., gross domestic product).³ An agreement on phasing down the use of coal was made during the summit.⁴ A pledge between the United States and China has been completed.⁵ This collaboration agrees to produce more clean energy, mitigate deforestation, and reduce methane emissions. The target of reaching 1.5 Celsius degrees by 2030 was

¹"What is a COP?," UK Presidency, UN Climate Change Conference UK 2021, accessed December 3, 2021, <https://ukcop26.org/uk-presidency/what-is-a-cop/>.

² Emma Newburger, "What the COP26 climate conference really accomplished," *CNBC*, November 16, 2021, <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/11/16/un-cop26-climate-summit-what-was-accomplished.html>.

³ "What the COP26."

⁴ "What the COP26."

⁵ "What the COP26."

strengthened.⁶ These actions could lead to a more positive future and make the happy path happen. However, these changes are not as significant as they appear to be.

This lack of action by the leaders shown during the summit proves there is still a long way to go, leading to either the *invasion*, *on demand*, or the *bottle garden* scenarios. The *invasion* scenario describes the survival war between species. Certain species will use technology for their own needs. This idea comes from the rise of nationalism and protectionism in various countries and the overconsumption of natural resources. These visions enter in conflict with the cohabitation nature of plants. The *bottle garden* scenario is based on global inequalities. High-income citizens will access technological development and food. Lower incomes will have difficulty feeding themselves and will tend to upcycle and repair their material possessions. Teenagers will insulate themselves into digital universes. Species will struggle to survive through continuous climate changes. It will be a collaborative survival. The *on demand* scenario explains the use of plants as accessories rather than considering them as living beings. This tendency is due to consumerism, individualist social values, and their faith in geoengineering as the problem-solver of climate change. During *COP26*, the agreement on coal was softened. At first, the countries agreed on phasing out coal and inefficient subsidies for fossil fuels. However, China and India (i.e., big coal consumers) insisted on changing the term to “phasing down.”⁷ This change slows down the process of reducing pollution. The deadlines on certain decisions are not tight enough. Keeping the golden rule of reaching 1.5 Celsius degrees is not enough anymore for all the work the world needs to do.⁸ Indigenous communities call back the decisions taken during the summit. The communities called out the regulated global carbon trading market.⁹ This trading market allows countries to meet their environmental objectives partially. These green energy projects like biofuel monocrops and hydroelectric dams are linked to environmental destruction and even displacement, arbitrary arrests, and murder making them unethical and illogic resources.¹⁰ This exploitation could sequester lands, forests and rivers used by Indigenous and local communities.¹¹ These exploitations do not guarantee a massive drop in gas emissions. Critics explain this offset the gas emissions rather than cutting them. Indigenous communities are often put aside during environmental negotiation when 80% of the biodiversity is in their territories.¹² Around a thousand

⁶ “What the COP26.”

⁷ “What the COP26.”

⁸ “What the COP26.”

⁹ Nina Lakhani, “‘A death sentence’: Indigenous climate activists denounce Cop26 deal,” *The Guardian*, November 16, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/nov/16/indigenous-climate-activists-cop26-endangers-native-communities>.

¹⁰ “‘A death sentence’.”

¹¹ “‘A death sentence’.”

¹² “‘A death sentence’.”

activists have been murdered after the Paris accord due to defending lands from polluting projects.¹³ The creation of carbon sink through reforestation and afforestation might threaten livelihoods, food security, traditions of Indigenous communities and small farmers for the sake of tree planting.¹⁴ This solution is not wrong, but this will only change an issue to another. The 30 by 30 initiative will cause the most significant displacement of the population to conserve 30% of the planet's lands and seas.¹⁵ *COP26* agreements threaten Indigenous communities by fossil fuel companies and climate crisis. Many are worried that richer polluting countries will obstruct any help for communities already victims of climate change.

The comparison between the *SSPs* and current situations shows the importance of *SSPs* in the take of action regarding climate change. These different perspectives help define and start a concrete dialogue within the population. However, the population depends on the high leaders to make more significant changes, but the results challenge humanity's future. Their indifference and ignorance become worrying and dangerous.

¹³ “‘A death sentence’.”

¹⁴ “‘A death sentence’.”

¹⁵ “‘A death sentence’.”

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