Humanizing the Climate Change Urgency

A Critical Reflexion on *Our Symbiotic Life: An Exploration of Interspecies Relations*

By Adèle Bédard

This essay by Katja Budinger and Frank Heidmann explores a project created by them with a design fiction technique. It is portraying 4 scenarios of a futuristic world with possible outcomes of the climate change issues on individuals' lives. This project really does a great job at humanizing the climate change urgency and could be a great approach to make people realize the impacts of climate change in their lives. Two main points makes this project very effective for me. The first one is that they do not impose a specific scenario, rather exploring many possible outcomes. The second one is that the implementation of these scenarios stay familiar to the intended audience.

This project explores four main scenarios: harmony, invasion, on demand and bottle garden. Each of them explores a way that humans are adapting to climate change, in accordance to current issues in the world. *Harmony* reflects on the good side of democracy and collaboration between people in situations of crisis, *Invasion* on mass agriculture and nationalism as a political stand, On Demand on making nature a consumer goods and social media, while Bottle Garden explores the theme of inequality and how will the world restructure. All of these scenarios are illustrated with concrete prototypes involving plants and they are very related to the individual human, or the human within the small group, rather than to the collectivity, as we traditionally approach this topic.

Even if the project was mainly intended to make people realize about the many different issues that this climate change crisis could be bringing, it can also lead to a possible change. In fact, the way of presenting these solutions make a statement on how to act if we want the real future to have an enjoyable outcome. However, I feel like this is made a bit too clear. In fact, we realize instantaneously that the first scenario is good, and the others are bad. This could probably be more nuanced and still have a great impact. Nevertheless, it is interesting to have a scenario which is "good" when talking about climate crisis, because we often don't have much hope when it comes to climate change. Since we already feel the effects of climate change, like the increase in temperature, the melting ice or the increasing natural catastrophes, we feel like it is too late for us to act. However, according to NASA, it is not too late yet. They mention that there is two ways

that we must deal with climate change: stopping it, be reducing the amount of pollution emitted, and adapting to it, for the changes that have already happened. This second part is not something that we often pay attention to, but it is showcased very well in this project. By showing multiple ways in which people adapt to climate change, at an individual level, it portrays a realistic portrait of the situation.

The fact that this project is also situated in the near future, with familiar technologies, helps people to resonate with it. One of the main reasons why people do not feel that concerned with climate change is that it is not something that is affecting them at the moment. "The biggest problem with climate change may be that it's not happening fast enough. Americans see climate change as a distant threat, and people underestimate the odds that seemingly distant threats like climate change will hurt any of us personally (Kahneman & Lovallo, 1993)." By creating scenarios that are familiar in some way help the audience to feel impacted with them. It makes them feel like it could be them, in just a couple of years. This differs slightly from the science fiction approach that is often used to demonstrate the consequences of climate change: by representing a catastrophic utopian world. This is even known as a distinct genre: climate fiction, abbreviated as cli-fi (Arguedas Ortiz). It helps the viewer understand the future consequences of the climate change crisis. This project would enter in the cli-fi category, but at an individual stage. It relies more on slight changes in the everyday life, but that evoke a larger problematic. Some problematics that are also commonly understood, because they are based on current problematics, like democracy, protectionism, consumption or inequalities. Therefore, it makes people relate to these different scenarios and be able to imagine their extends. Having concrete examples prototyped help also people to direct their thinking to a certain aspect, makes a starting point for a larger process.

To conclude, this project makes effective use of design fiction to represent small parts of a possible world. It makes people realize how the climate change issue can affect them personally, while making them reflect on concrete paths to explore to adapt to this change.

Works cited

Arguedas Ortiz, Diego. "Can imagined futures of drowned cities and solar utopias help us grasp

      the complexity of climate change? Diego Arguedas Ortiz takes a look." *BBC*, January 15,

      2019, http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20190110-how-science-fiction-helps-readers-

      understand-climate-change

"Is it too late to prevent climate change?" *NASA*, December 4, 2019,

      https://climate.nasa.gov/faq/16/is-it-too-late-to-prevent-climate-change/

"Why Don't We Care More?" Climate Chat, December 5, 2019,

      http://www.theclimatechat.org/why-dont-we-care-more