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The cultural politics of the Camp for Climate Action

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## **Direct climate action as public pedagogy: the cultural politics of the Camp for Climate Action (2005-2011)**

Discourse theory is employed to analyse the public curriculum generated through the Camp for Climate Action. This movement emerged as a germinal response to tensions within the dominant discourse on 'Climate Action' by articulating it into a broader history of civil disobedience and staging spatial interventions that ostensibly identified the 'root causes' of climate change. This generated learning opportunities over time for both activists and the wider public. However, this attempted redefinition of 'Climate Action' was threatened by coercive state action, which sought to link it with 'domestic extremism'. Tensions emerged between 'liberal' and 'radical' participants as the meaning of 'Climate Action' once again became contested. I conclude by exploring the implications of these tensions for the movement's pedagogical efforts.

**Keywords:** Camp for Climate Action; cultural politics; public pedagogy; climate politics; hegemony; discourse theory

## **Introduction**

Here I present an analysis of the cultural politics of the Camp for Climate Action (CCA) from its inception in 2005 to its metamorphosis in 2011. The CCA was a loose network of UK activists, who organised a series of highly visible occupations and direct action interventions, protesting against the so-called “root causes” of climate change. I interpret this as a form of “public pedagogy” (Sandlin, et al., 2010), which emerged through hegemonic struggle. As an orienting concept, I follow Ernesto Laclau’s and Chantal Mouffe’s (1987) seminal formulation of hegemony, which combines the insights of Gramsci with a critique of structuralism, in order to develop the position that agonistic encounters are the very condition of democratic politics.

Political theorist Chantal Mouffe (2005, p. 20) uses the term “agonistic” to describe a situation where the “adversary” is recognised as “a crucial category for democratic politics”. Where this is denied, “we/they relations” are understood to be “antagonistic”, in the sense that conflicting parties do not recognise the legitimacy of one another. The consequence of this is that politics is played out in a moral register, with democratic dissent depicted in pathological terms. In taking this position, I make the normative claim that climate politics must find space for antagonism as a condition for democracy rather than an obstacle to it. For readers seeking a fuller account of this stance, Machin (2012) has usefully explicated the more general concept of “agonistic green citizenship” in a previous issue of *Environmental Politics*. In what follows, I first explain why public pedagogy is a useful framing concept in the context of climate activism. Secondly, I explain the logic of hegemony. Thirdly, I describe my operationalisation of Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse theory. Following from this, I explicate the public curriculum generated through the CCA as it emerged over a number of years.

**Public pedagogy in context**

In the widest sense, public pedagogy is concerned with forms of education and learning occurring outside formal educational institutions. Sandlin *et al* (2011, p. 338) identify five strands of public pedagogy scholarship. The first strand is concerned with citizenship and democracy as a process of experiential learning. The second strand focuses on popular culture and everyday life as legitimate but ambivalent domains where such learning occurs. The third strand focuses on the educative potential of public spaces. The fourth strand focuses on the educational function of dominant discourses, and is overwhelmingly concerned with neoliberalism as a mode of “permanent education” (Giroux, 2010, p. 487) concerned with the reproduction of identities, values, norms and practices, “under the sign of the market” (Sandlin *et al*, 2011, p. 352). The final strand relates to social movement activism and public intellectualism. This strand is concerned with the learning opportunities generated by social movements, both for activists and the wider public (Clover & Hall, 2010).

Although this final strand is where my study is most obviously located, each connects in different ways to my study of direct action against climate change. Clover and Hall (2010, p.165) go so far as to contend that the wider public “have been learning about climate change because of the nearly thirty years of work done by activists and movements”. However, the curriculum that activists collectively generate is about more than climate change *per se*. Political arguments made about climate change are composites of other struggles over labour, social relations, cultural priorities, technologies and institutional arrangements. The dominant approach of Ecological Modernization (EM) frames climate change in such a way as to make the issue seem tractable through processes of “innovation and policy learning” where “rational and

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responsive institutions learn, adapt, and produce meaningful change” (Bailey *et al.*, 2011, p. 685). On the other hand, critics argue that:

[EM approaches] focus on efficiency and efficacy but have little to say about issues of social justice; they seem to be spatially contingent and to generate patterns of uneven geographical development; and they appear to recreate a neoliberal hegemony (Bailey *et al.*, 2011, p. 699).

The CCA addressed these critiques by linking climate change to wider political concerns. It contested the cultural project of neoliberalism by projecting a meaningful sense of the public self. The movement achieved this through citizen interventions in invented (claimed) rather than invited (offered) spaces, which highlighted the complex geographical contingency of climate politics, and brought associated issues of uneven geographical development out into the open.

As a forum for the study of grassroots responses to climate change, *Environmental Politics* has previously featured analyses of tensions both within the CCA and between the movement and the wider public (Saunders & Price, 2009; Saunders, 2012; Schlembach *et al.*, 2012). For example, Saunders & Price (2009) interpret Climate Camps as “heterotopic” spaces, manifesting tensions between reality and an “ideal self”. Schlembach *et al.* (2012) focus on the tensions between ideology and science and interpret Climate Camps as “post-political” spaces. I suggest that Laclau and Mouffe’s work on hegemony at least provides a broadly complementary theoretical framing to these articles and at best provides added theoretical clarity. Moreover, I use this theory to explicitly address the public pedagogical function of the CCA.

To date, the literature on public pedagogy has not addressed debates over climate change. I argue that the concept of public pedagogy is useful in this context precisely because a solution to climate change must involve a public renegotiation of

‘Western’ cultural values and social norms. Collective action provides the context for processes of messy learning occurring between the cultural politics of civil society and the political culture of the state. In short, public pedagogy emerges through what Gramsci termed hegemonic struggle (Gramsci, 1971, p. 350).

### **The logic of hegemony**

Gramsci (1971) viewed the institutions of civil society (e.g. public spaces, educational institutions, the media) as arenas of intellectual work and political learning, through which political alliances are formed. He termed this process of hegemony a “war of position”, through which elites sought to fabricate consent through linking their interests with the fragmentary “common sense” of different groups. To Gramsci, hegemonic power reinforced, and was protected by, the coercive power of political society. This relationship is important in the context of the CCA, because encounters with coercive power are educative insofar as they reveal its social organisation. This suggests that significant elements of activist public pedagogies may be regarded as “collateral curriculum” (Dewey, 1938), emerging through confrontational moments where consent has not been won.

Although the contingent construction of ‘the people’ was a fundamental concern for Gramsci, his aim was nothing less than to transform the particular claims of the working class into a “collective will that represents universal values or interests” (Howarth, 2000, p. 109). Laclau and Mouffe (1987, p.134) wished to retain the notion of the contingent war of position but sought to eliminate the essentialist notion of a fundamental social class. Thus, their understanding of hegemony is reconfigured from a question of instrumental alliance formation, to the very nature of politics itself. For these theorists, Gramsci’s “‘war of position’, is, strictly speaking, a logic of

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displacement of political frontiers” (Laclau, 2005, p. 153). It is important for me to explain this logic, because it informs my understanding of social dynamics underlying the CCA’s public pedagogy.

As links are established between the claims and interests of a growing number diverse actors, they become united under “*empty signifiers*”, so-called because the commonality of these actors is expressed only in terms of that which they oppose on the other side of a political frontier (Laclau 2005, p.131). However, because antagonism and indeterminacy are intrinsic parts of social life, political frontiers are unstable and may shift. Laclau (2005, p. 130) introduces the term “*floating signifiers*” to denote those particularistic claims whose meaning is ambiguous enough to realign political frontiers by appealing to interests on either side of them.

This floating dimension becomes most visible during moments of crisis where events cannot be represented by existing discourses (Laclau, 2005, p. 132). These moments of crisis are known as “*dislocations*”. Hegemony is thus played out between the indeterminacy of the ‘empty’ and the ‘floating’: whilst the empty “concerns the construction of a popular identity once the presence of a stable political frontier is taken for granted”, the floating dimension “tries conceptually to apprehend the logic of the displacements of that frontier” (p. 133). Below, I give an account of how I applied these concepts to the study of the CCA.

### **Research methods**

By operationalising discourse theory, I am interested in understanding historically specific conditions of hegemonic practice, rather than establishing empirical generalisations, or making objective truth claims (Howarth, 2000, p. 130). As such, the validity of my approach will be determined by the extent to which the reader is convinced by my application of this theoretical logic to the subject at hand.



My desire to study changes in discourse from 2005-2011 suggested the need to gather a large corpus of qualitative data by economical means. Secondly, my particular understanding of public pedagogy emerging through hegemonic struggle entailed the study of dialogical and recursive discursive practices. For these reasons, I developed an intertextual research model (Hansen, 2006) composed of curricular artifacts, including scientific papers, social movement ephemera, and newspaper articles. This textual analysis was preceded by ten face-to-face pilot interviews (conducted between 24<sup>h</sup> May and 11<sup>th</sup> June 2010) with UK climate activists, in order to better understand the construction of activist identity and identify potential points of overlap and rupture between radical and more liberal approaches. ‘Outward facing’ documents provided insight into the movement’s *intended curriculum* for the wider public. For this part of the corpus, I began with archived materials made available on the CCA’s website, and gathered resources from there through intertextual links. I also analysed the CCA’s archived press releases as intended curriculum for the wider public.

Despite the fact that actors in the CCA movement advanced some of their ideas into mass media discourse, power asymmetries and established journalistic norms made this difficult. Thus, as a source of social movement public curriculum, the popular press is particularly interesting as it continues to represent a primary arena for the shaping of hegemony in the UK.

I list and draw from the national, non-specialist quality press across the political spectrum in this article because this is where the richest material was to be found. Significant CCA activity occurred in Scotland, but was under reported in UK-wide titles, so I also included Scottish titles. Relevant news sources were accessed digitally through conducting LexisNexis searches using the search terms ‘climate camp’ or

‘camp for climate action’. Articles up to 2011 were considered because this was when the movement stopped organising large annual camps under the CCA moniker.

**Table 1** Number of articles covering the CCA in the national, non-specialist quality press. NB. All titles include Sunday editions if applicable.

<b>Newspaper Title</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>The Guardian</b>	1	34	40	118	15	22	<b>230</b>
<b>The Times</b>	3	15	5	63	5	10	<b>101</b>
<b>The Independent</b>	5	28	16	29	6	7	<b>91</b>
<b>The Telegraph</b>	0	16	6	15	5	1	<b>43</b>
<b>The Scotsman</b>	0	5	0	14	20	3	<b>42</b>
<b>The Observer</b>	1	5	10	16	1	1	<b>34</b>
<b>The Herald</b>	0	2	1	8	15	1	<b>27</b>
<b>Combined annual total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>263</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>568</b>

Movement internal debates (selected blogs, discussion threads and radical periodicals) allowed me to capture something of the activist praxis and capacity building over time. The main periodicals I consulted were Peace News, Red Pepper and Shift Magazine. This is important as it gives insight into the recursive and dialogical nature of discursive work between activists and the wider public discourse arena. The presentation strategy of selecting exemplars is partly a matter of craft in giving a convincing but empirically grounded account of the discursive logics at work in the CCA.

Using qualitative research software NVivo, my main concern was to trace the formation of the CCA as reaction to “dislocatory” events beginning in 2005. The coding process traced how the nascent movement established links to diverse actors, and

differentiated itself from actors and activities identified as being part of the “root causes” of climate change. My coding sought to identify how this emergent identity of ‘Climate Action’ was spatially, temporally and ethically constituted (Hansen, 2006) and how political frontiers shifted over time.

One limitation of my approach may be that too much weight is given to analysing collective identity understood as a textual reification, such that the discourse and framing activities of leaders and movement intellectuals is over-represented to the detriment of the local rationalities of the culture of activism under investigation. With this in mind, I suggest that this interpretation should be considered alongside existing accounts of the CCA, based on participant observation as well as in-depth interviews with participants (e.g. Saunders, 2012; Schlembach *et al*, 2012).

### **The public pedagogy of the CCA**

#### ***Redefining ‘Climate Action’***

As explained above, a dislocatory moment is one where events cannot be represented within existing discursive orders. It has been argued that the reality of anthropogenic climate change ‘dislocated’ the modern narrative of fossil fuel driven economic growth (Methmann, 2010). The effects of this dislocatory moment were apparent from 2005, whereupon there was a considerable upswing of UK media attention to climate change, driven largely by elite cues (Easton *et al*, 2011, p. 22). Much of this popular coverage was couched in a language of urgency and catastrophe. For example, in 2005 at the G8 summit in Gleneagles, Scotland, ex-Prime Minister Tony Blair proclaimed that “we have a window of only 10-15 years to take the steps we need to avoid crossing a catastrophic tipping point” (Risbey, 2007, p. 27).

The effect of this moment on the status-quo was diminished by state and corporate actors articulating the idea of ‘Climate Action’ into a discourse “built on

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globalism, scientism, an ethics of [economic] growth and [technocratic] efficiency” (Methmann, 2010, p. 369). In other words, climate change was portrayed as a ‘post-political’ global issue, which could be made more tractable through managerialist interventions. Moreover, this discourse argued invoked the urgency of climate change to argue that free markets in general, and the commodification of greenhouse gases more specifically, are the fastest and most efficient means of developing, delivering and distributing the resources needed for mitigation and adaptation (Descheneau & Paterson, 2011, p.671). The obvious weakness of this mainstream version of ‘Climate Action’ was that it had little to say about socio-cultural change and treated citizens as passive consumers who, at best, might ‘do their bit’ as individuals and households.

Moreover, it became increasingly clear that concrete proposals in many policy areas, particularly energy and transport, were at odds with the public rhetoric of alarmism. The first step of the CCA’s public pedagogy was to challenge this mainstream definition of ‘Climate Action’ by emphasising its contradictions to the wider public. In this way, the ‘floating’ (indeterminate) nature of ‘Climate Action’ was emphasised.

The germinal moment for this process was July 2005 in Gleneagles, Scotland, during public protests aimed at delegates of the G8 summit, when environmentalists, anarchists, and anti-war campaigners interacted at a temporary eco-village (Gee, 2011, p. 4). Here, educational workshops provided the platform to discuss climate change in the wider context of energy, poverty, debt, oil and war (Trapese Collective, 2007, p. 122). In this context, it was obvious that transnational capital was the “root cause” against which ‘Climate Action’ could be potentially redefined. From this point onwards, a three-step discursive logic – marked by temporal urgency; a rejection of state-facilitated technocratic and market-based solutions; and the need for collective

solidarity and self-efficacy – provided the rationale for the CCA (Shift/Dystopia, 2010, p. 6). Through a series of direct actions and occupations aimed at climate change exacerbating industries, the CCA typically generated learning opportunities, not only for participants, but for the wider public by making policy contradiction visible. This is exemplified below in this activist quote from a Scottish climate camp at an opencast coal mining project:

You have a wind farm on one hill and a coal mine on the other. I mean, make your mind up. The Scottish Climate Change Bill is the strongest in the world, and we are very thankful of that, but how are you going to achieve that if you expand coal mines and airports?" (McCracken, 2009, p. 8).

Once the ‘floating’ aspects of ‘Climate Action’ were made visible to the public, new interests and identities had to be stitched together around the notion of ‘Climate Action’. In order to do this, acts of resistance against polluters were linked with a common history of civil disobedience. This ‘war of position’ was both tactical and educational. ‘Climate Action’ was linked in public discourse with feminist movements, civil rights struggles, France 1968, the Diggers and Levellers, the Chartists, the Zapatistas, anti-road expansion protests in the ‘90s, to name but a few (e.g. Gee, 2011).

As history has demonstrated the legitimacy of many of these struggles – or perhaps more correctly, that struggle legitimates – so the CCA hoped to lend populist credibility to their own tactics, for example, by linking ‘Climate Action’ to this famous quote by Dr Martin Luther King Jr:

We who engage in non-violent direct action are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive (Gee, 2011, p. 4).

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Nevertheless, because tackling climate change implies reduced consumption, the limits of a narrative of austerity became hotly debated within the movement itself. As this anti-aviation protester put it:

The suffragettes wanted more of a voice, the civil rights movement was asking for more equality. Climate change is about asking for less and that's a real psychological challenge (Taylor, 2007, p. 8).

Thus, through drawing comparisons to the emergence of new social movements in 1968, the notion of intergenerational justice was used by both activists and journalists to mark a significant difference to the public between climate activism and its historical antecedents:

The protest pattern since 1968 has been of young people demanding an abandonment of limits and restraints, and a sober older generation lecturing them on the need for responsibility. Last week saw precisely the opposite. These protesters came here to protest against the disinhibited vandalism of their parents' generation (Hari, 2006, p. 27).

This war of position was important because politicians were struggling to realign the floating signifier of 'Climate Action' with the mainstream. For example, when UK Labour Party leader, Ed Miliband, called for a popular mobilisation on climate change, he engaged in this 'war of position', distinguishing "illegal aspects" from "peaceful campaigning" (Webb, 2009, p. 9). An activist responded to this perceived attempt to co-opt the movement, commenting that:

[P]eople aren't daft. They realise that the suffragettes and the civil rights movement didn't win by wearing rubber wrist bands - they won because they were broad-based and willing to take risks, if necessary breaking the law (McVeigh, 2008, p. 29).

Moreover, despite the influence of the British anti-roads movement of the 1990s and radical environmentalist networks such as Earth First! (Gee, 2011, p. 4), CCA activists framed their actions as part of a global ‘cosmopolitan’ identity, moving beyond the defence of ‘place’ that marked 90s activism (McVeigh, 2008, p. 29).

We’re standing on the shoulders of giants in terms of the 90’s activism against road expansion. But again, we’ve got to move on the narrative (CCA organiser, personal interview with McGregor, 29<sup>th</sup> May 2010).

With this in mind, between 2005 and 2011, the movement’s task was to unite a variety of contemporary actors in opposition to what was articulated as the “root causes of climate change”. Therefore, I treat the defining of these “root causes” as the second substantive dimension of the CCA’s public pedagogy.

### ***Defining the enemy***

It is confusing and frustrating to direct one’s ire at abstractions. Firstly, there is no one single event that reveals the unmediated reality of climate change. It is a statistical abstraction. Secondly, to attribute it to capitalism is merely to introduce another abstraction which itself requires explanation. For these reasons, the CCA sought to generate the kind of public pedagogy that radical adult educator Michael Newman (1994) calls “defining the enemy”. Newman argues that activist-educators must ask, “[w]ho are the people, what are the organisations promoting the reorganisation of capitalism? Where do they operate? Can we name them and do they have an address?” (Newman, 1994, p. 120).

The CCA sought to make particular nodal points of power, and the networked connections between them, visible to the public. The need for such ‘naming’ is related to a qualitative shift in global political economy to what Graham and Luke (2011) have called the “new corporatism”. Corporate assets are publicly owned, but controlled by a

custodial class, who – increasingly separated from actual human industry – have close relationships with the political class. Arguably, neoliberal public pedagogy functions by obfuscating these relationships, to the extent that a partial explanation – the market – is offered as an account of the whole. Through this “mass mediated public pedagogy” (Graham & Luke, 2011, p. 117), an equivalence is made between general national interest and corporate profit. Autonomous camps at power stations, airports and even financial institutions such as the Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) were used by the CCA as leverage points for highlighting to the public “the wider web of communities of interest directly involved in maintaining and profiting from capitalism’s destruction of ecosystems, landscapes, homes and livelihoods” (CCA, 2010, p. 8).

During a 2007 camp at Heathrow airport, London (opposing the proposed third runway), pro-expansion arguments were expressed by a coalition of businesses, trade unions and aviation interests, through a cost-benefit calculus. For example, the pro-expansion camp argued that although the potential plight of affected locals was unfortunate, “emotional” arguments were supplanted by the Government’s claim that Heathrow directly supported “the international competitiveness of London and the wider economy”, that aviation itself accounted for “200,000 jobs”, and that given the “5-10 percent annual growth” of air travel, the UK would lose out to “other EU countries”, “China”, and the “Gulf States” (O’Grady, 2007, p. 34). Ex-minister of state for climate change and environment, Ian Pearson, argued that economic development could be balanced with environmental considerations through bringing aviation into the EU Emissions Trading Scheme. Anti-Heathrow protest engaged in reactive arguments circumscribed within an assessment of the project’s economic merits (Griggs & Howarth, 2004). However, when the CCA became involved, it stuck to a simple argument around the contradictions between the UK Department of Transport’s plans



for airport expansion, and “the Department for Environment’s pledge to cut carbon emissions by 60 per cent by 2050” (Davis, 2007, p. 14). As the CCA made wider alliances with the anti-expansion coalition, the enemy was identified as the so-called ‘unholy trinity’ of the Government, Spanish-owned BAA (the owners of the airport), and British Airways. Through this hegemonic encounter, aviation and climate change became linked in public discourse.

The following year, in 2008, the UK energy company E.On was targeted during a protest camp against the proposed replacement of Kingsnorth coal-fired power station, in Kent. E.On spokespeople appealed in the press to populist “keeping the lights on” frames stressing “energy security”, affordability and techno-optimism (regarding the development of carbon capture technology) (Marriott, 2008, p. 32). In the press, the CCA drew recursively on these tropes, emphasising “climate security” over and above a concern for “shareholder return”, and highlighting the potential role of renewables in addressing the “energy security” (ibid.).

To take a step back, between 2006 and 2008, the CCA was almost exclusively preoccupied with opposing coal and aviation expansion, targeting local sites that were considered to be manifestations of corporate-state collusion and government hypocrisy. The CCA highlighted contradictions to the broader public, by connecting ‘Climate Action’ with policies on aviation and coal expansion.

*Post-2008*, the global financial crisis arguably narrowed media space for climate change, yet provided opportunities for climate protesters to articulate linkages between ‘Climate Action’ and anti-austerity politics. This happened in three ways: the crisis of finance capital caused by ‘toxic assets’, and the attendant popular suspicion of esoteric financial innovations, provided a discursive opportunity to frame carbon markets as the next ‘sub-prime’ waiting to happen (e.g. Taylor, 2009, p. 29); the frame of a ‘Just

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Transition' away from fossil fuels gained prominence as climate protesters sought to articulate linkages with workers' struggles and trade unions (e.g. Vestas solidarity working group, 2009); civil society research organisations such as Platform<sup>i</sup> produced public learning opportunities by researching the financing of environmentally destructive fossil-fuel projects, as taxpayer bank bail-outs prompted wider questions around the tensions between the ownership of assets and their control. RBS was identified by activists as being the biggest UK investor in climate change exacerbating projects:

The thirty oil and gas project finance deals signed [by RBS] between 2001 and 2006 locked in future emissions of 655 million tonnes over the next 15 years, more than equivalent to the UK's entire annual emissions (Minio-Paluello, 2007, p. 4),

Activists highlighted investment in projects "from West Africa to the Amazon rainforest, from the North Sea to the Middle East" arguing to the public that "if CO<sub>2</sub> molecules had corporate tags of responsibility, the atmosphere would be full of logos mingling with those of BP, Exxon and Shell" (ibid.). This "defining the enemy" was deemed to be all the more important since RBS simultaneously publicly celebrate the finance they contribute to renewables projects, yet remain coy about their fossil fuel investment portfolio, which has a far larger negative impact on climate change. As well as highlighting RBS' financing of E.On (who operate Kingsnorth), activists focused on its underwriting of 7.5 billion Canadian dollars in loans to multinational corporations (particularly ConocoPhillips) for the purpose of developing oil sands extraction in Alberta (CCA, 2010). Through "defining the enemy", activists highlighted a number of different spatial contingencies, with the consequence that they had to be adept at switching between different geographical scales. I move on to argue below that this was the third element of the movement's public pedagogy.

*Highlighting the spatial contingencies of climate politics*

The mainstream construction of climate change as a global problem created a powerful narrative that ‘we’ (individuals, communities and states) are all in it together. As a result, the spatial complexities of climate change and its relationship to processes of uneven geographical development were smoothed away. However, the CCA’s ‘war of position’ exposed these complex relationships as activists responded to scalar ambiguity inherent in their direct action interventions. The political scale of any given protest was not ontologically given, but emerged as a ‘learning outcome’ for activists, ambivalently positioned locals and the wider public. As radical educator Paolo Freire (1972, p. 90) once wrote:

People, as beings “in a situation”, find themselves rooted in temporal-spatial conditions which mark them and which they also mark. They will tend to reflect on their own “situationality” to the extent that they are challenged by it to act upon it.

Accordingly, the CCA’s ‘public pedagogy’, was keyed to a dynamic relationship between geographical contingency and social relations. For example, during a climate camp at London’s Heathrow airport in 2007, local campaigners trying to save their homes from the threat of runway expansion forged ambivalent alliances with direct action protesters, which generated mutual learning in the sense that interests and identities were redefined and questioned. For example:

Perhaps 83-year-old Ethel Bull is The Militant...She is one of the legion of locals from the surrounding villages...who have embraced the camp as one of the last ways to save their homes (Hari, 2007, p. 2).

Some local campaigners were wary of the confrontational approach and the “edgy” atmosphere between activists and the police (ibid.). However, as the CCA made wider

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alliances with the anti-expansion coalition, local MP John McDonnell acknowledged that “the climate debate has transformed the issue” from local NIMBY politics versus the national interest, to national parochialism versus global climate change (ibid.).

As another example, in July 2009, when 600 redundancies were announced at the Danish-owned Vestas Wind Turbine factory in Isle of Wight, a small solidarity climate camp established dialogue with trade unions and employees. The result was a more nationally bounded appeal to social democratic principles and green investment:

The government says it wants to create 400,000 green jobs. It should begin by saving these 600... The labour and climate-change movements must mobilise the maximum possible solidarity with their struggle (Vestas solidarity working group, 2009, p. 31).

Around the same time as this in August 2009, some CCA activists were preparing to blockade corporate lobbyists at the COP 15 climate summit in Copenhagen by forging alliances with a transnational coalition for climate justice. Simultaneously, climate campers at Broken Cross opencast coal mine in South Lanarkshire, Scotland, focused on the connections between the coal industry, pulmonary disease in local working class mining communities, and global climate change (McCracken, 2009, p. 8).

In summer 2010 at the headquarters of RBS in Edinburgh, activists protested against the bank’s role in fossil fuel finance. Here, a transnational coalition of UK activists and Canadian First Nations activists from Alberta, seized the political opportunity of banking bailouts in order to argue at a national scale that RBS was morally accountable to the public for its “destructive investment practices”, since it was “84% taxpayer owned” (e.g. Hari, 2010, p. 2). The salient point is that the political meaning and geographical scale of ‘Climate Action’, both for activists and the wider public, were learned through practical activity. In

what follows, I describe the final substantive component of the CCA's public pedagogy, which could be described as 'collateral' curriculum.

*The collateral curriculum of the CCA*

To some extent the resources of the CCA were diverted to contesting state suppression of the right to protest, through the courts and by the police. This side narrative really took hold in public discourse during the 2007 Heathrow camp. BAA attempted to take out an injunction forbidding their presence at Heathrow against the CCA and all affiliated with it, under the 1997 Protection from Harassment Act. In the end, only certain members of the direct action group Plane Stupid and the Heathrow Association for the Control of Aircraft Noise (HACAN) were formally issued with the injunction. This catalysed a narrative by which the CCA inadvertently became a "protest for democracy" and "against the attempt by BAA to stop people from agitating for a better world" (Monbiot, 2007, p. 25). In public discourse, this turned into a contest of freedoms and rights: the right to citizen 'Climate Action' versus the freedom of individuals to fly; the right to break the law (through direct action) to prevent the greater evil of anthropogenic climate change. In this contest, climate science was used by protesters as a legitimating factor.

From 2007, this collateral curriculum gathered momentum. A camp at Kingsnorth power station in 2008 was subjected to very heavy-handed and expensive policing. Liberal Democrat justice spokesman David Howarth MP publicly became a political ally of the movement, pushing for an inquiry into the policing of Kingsnorth. The moral cost of not taking 'Climate Action' versus the monetary cost of policing it became a recurring theme in coverage of CCA actions.

In April 2009, CCA activists at G20 protests in London were subjected to mass kettling and what was argued to be use of excessive force by police. Generally, policing tactics – including blanket stop-and-searches, police violence, detention without charge, sleep deprivation – became the subject of public scrutiny through the media. Moreover, the scale of both overt and undercover surveillance of CCA activists – particularly by Forward Intelligence Teams (FIT) and the National Extremism Tactical Coordination Unit – prompted high stakes learning for activists:

During the Climate Camp at Kingsnorth in 2008, I was violently arrested... You might presume that I'm some kind of violent extremist... However, my only crime was to ask my friend whether she could take a photograph of a cop who was not displaying an identifiable lapel number... I spent a lot of time sat in cells thinking about the events that had led to my being there, and how they could be challenged... The aim of FIT is to disrupt and deter protest through intimidation and harassment... Fitwatch was formed in response to this political policing... So we started blocking their cameras, publishing their names and photographs on our blog, and challenging their actions in courts and in the media (Apple, 2011, p. 18).

To the extent that the CCA was generating learning opportunities for the wider public, civil liberties featured highly. From 2007 onwards, controversial policing tactics were a feature of much of the movement's press coverage. For example, in the *Guardian* (arguably the paper most sympathetic to the nascent movement and its aims), 108 out of a total of 230 articles (47%) focused to some extent on the movement's relationship with the police. In the CCA's own press releases (n=49), 'police' and 'policing' were, behind the words, 'climate', 'camp', and 'action', the most frequently occurring words, suggesting that even the CCA's 'unmediated' outwards facing communications became dominated by policing.

This encounter with coercive power prompted dilemmas amongst CCA activists as attention was drawn from the real issues:

It's struggling with language and its learning as we go along... We really have to avoid that the story doesn't become the police [because] it narrows even more the space to have the systemic critique (Lewis, 2009, n-p).

However, it is important to state that this 'coercive' power was supported by the use of 'hegemonic' power in an ongoing 'war of position' over the definition of legitimate 'Climate Action'. The systematic surveillance and repression of direct action was partly justified by state actors who linked it with other political practices classed as 'domestic extremism'. Arguably, this became a public pedagogical trope against which the movement was forced to rally.

### **Tensions in the CCA's public pedagogy**

In light of this pathologisation of direct action, it is easy to understand why CCA activists operating in the space between facts and norms, used climate science to rationalise their actions. In public discourse, the justification for this approach was exemplified by the CCA's 'armed with peer reviewed science' slogan. Climate change academic and commentator Mike Hulme (2009, p. 33) responded publicly that they "were in fact armed with much more: a powerful vision of future Britain...[and] compelling ethical principles about the rights of the poor". This may be true, but as a climate activist explained to me during a personal interview:

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The world's most eminent scientists demanding that action is taken, gives us this kind of imperative for action; it's not just, 'I don't like the way that society is organised' or 'I'm not happy with the injustice of the system' ... Now you've got airport activists who are not [perceived as] this lunatic fringe (Climate activist, personal interview with McGregor, 1<sup>st</sup> June, 2010).

Thus, one of the main tensions emerging from the CCA's public pedagogy was between the rational and the pathological. This tension was clearly visible in media discourse across the political spectrum:

I recognise an undercover journalist from a right-wing newspaper. "This is terrible!" he says "I've been sent to find stories about drug-addicted layabouts and they're all nice people with PhDs." (Hari, 2007, p. 2).

Just as in mainstream definitions of market-based 'Climate Action', temporal urgency was employed to rationalise direct action:

[CCA activists] believe - and most scientific evidence backs them up - that inaction now will cost lives later. That time limit, and the enormous possible consequences of failure, applies to few other causes (Guardian, 2007, p. 28)

One of the most interesting ways in which this occurred was through court cases following from direct action. For example, in October 2007 six activists inspired by the upsurge in direct climate action successfully used the defence of 'lawful excuse' to damage property at Kent's Kingsnorth power station in order to prevent even greater damage caused by climate change. Publicity of the case provided the opportunity to build a 'broad church' of alliances and activists recruited sympathetic expert witnesses to turn the court room into a public lecture theatre in which NASA climate scientist Jim Hansen, Tory environment advisor, and an Inuit leader from Greenland, argued the case by connecting "20,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide emitted daily by Kingsnorth" - and the



wider global repercussions including species extinction, polar melt, and coastal flooding in Bangladesh and New Orleans (Vidal, 2008, pp. n-p).

In this context, climate activists were testing the validity of social arrangements through practices that force consensus-oriented rational discourse in the public sphere (Habermas, 1979). Although the courts are a good example, the principle of consensus-oriented deliberative democracy was inscribed into the organisational architecture of the camps themselves because the CCA was partially an offshoot of the non-hierarchical Global Justice movement. In fact, it could be argued that the CCA reflected a “fetishism of organisational form” based on “horizontality” and “non-hierarchy” (Harvey, 2012, pp. 125-126), typical of the radical Left. This is an important point, because to fetishise horizontality ignores the often tacit power relations that are constitutive of any political space.

Dramatic actions were often undertaken by a vanguard of activists, whose aims of ‘shutting down’ particular protest targets (mainly banks, power stations and airfields) came to be seen by some activist intellectuals as rhetorical. Consequently, the movement was threatened by an internal tension between liberals and radicals who expressed their concerns that in spite of having opened an exciting space to contest the status-quo, “action against climate change (whatever that may be)”, lacked a “sense of shared aims and values as a community of activists” (Anarchist Federation, 2009, n-p). Some activists responded to this by arguing that the temporal urgency of climate change requires shrewd political pragmatism. For example, this activist-blogger wrote:

[C]onsidering the timescale we don’t have the luxury of arguing over whose strategy is the best one. At the moment we’re in a quickly descending aircraft, and it’s “press every f\*\*\*\*\*g button on the dashboard” time (Anon., 2009, pp. n-p).

More committed ‘horizontalists’ saw such temporal arguments as a Trojan horse for forms of ‘green authoritarianism’. There was also a growing feeling that acts of ‘dramatic lobbying’ were pushing out less glamorous processes of community building with fenceline communities. On the whole, activists taking this position called for less “bravado and bluster” surrounding the potential of horizontally organised camps and less valorised kinds of everyday action (Basset, 2009; A Shifter, 2011; Ford, 2012). These tensions generated an analysis of the fetishisation of both *horizontalism* and *carbon emissions*, as protesters misidentified “root causes”:

The root causes of this crisis are not particular buildings, particular corporations, or particular politicians, but the wider social, political and economic structures within which we live, our cultural priorities, and the dominant ideologies of our time. It is a ‘battle of ideas’, and this movement needs to wade in with more courage (Archer, 2007).

Reflecting on the strategy of targeting emissions at source, some activist-intellectuals argued that “the central tenet of the notion of fetishism is to create equivalence; the idea that you compare different gases, different places and locality through an idea of carbon equivalence” (Shift Magazine, 2010). Moreover, in relation to the movement’s public pedagogy, activists argued that “[i]t’s not a question of teaching people in power about science...the fetish distracts your attention from the central relations that you need to talk about when talking about the climate issue; instead you focus on numbers and on things which begin to have dominion over you” (ibid.).

Essentially, these activists were making an important point: activist public pedagogies must be cognisant of what fossil fuels represent (good and bad) in terms of the rhythms of everyday life that people are ‘locked into’. The CCA attempted to embed

democratic and open structures in its organisation, but the ability and desire to attend a camp in the first place is differentiated along multiple intersecting axes of inequality.

### **Conclusion**

I have analysed the cultural politics of the CCA as a form of public pedagogy for activists and the wider public. I have argued that this public pedagogy emerged through a process of hegemonic struggle and that it had four aspects: redefining ‘Climate Action’; defining the enemy (“root causes of climate change”); highlighting the spatial contingencies smoothed away by mainstream constructions of ‘Climate Action’ and; a collateral curriculum emerging from attempts to delegitimise this version of ‘Climate Action’ by linking it with ‘domestic extremism’.

This signifier of ‘domestic extremist’ itself is arguably the product of a “unipolar world” (Mouffe, 2005); of a political system in which there is little room for ‘adversarial’ politics, instead making ‘enemies’ of those who find themselves excluded from post-political institutional arrangements. Given the historical pathologisation of protest, this created dilemmas for climate activists precisely because there are such strong grounds for using climate science to expose the irrationality of the status quo.

As far as internal dynamics were concerned, as the idea of ‘Climate Action’ expanded to include more actors, a number of tensions – radical (anarchist) versus liberal (state lobbying) approaches, participatory democracy versus pragmatism – became visible (also see Saunders, 2012; Schlembach *et al*, 2012) Nevertheless, these tensions were generative of praxis, from which movement intellectuals produced an analysis of the fetishisation of both carbon and ‘horizontal’ modes of organising. This was educative to the extent that it generated reflection upon situational privilege and the

limits of the symbolic appropriation of space. It also revealed crucial questions over the proper role of the state in tackling climate change.

I contend that although the CCA sent a strong message to the wider public about the need to redefine ‘Climate Action’ as a collective expression of citizenship, insufficient attention was paid to how people’s lived material realities exclude them from being able to participate equally, or at all, in such expressions of citizenship. Since the CCA nominally ceased organising in 2011, some activists have recognised that the ‘war of position’ around ‘Climate Action’ in the UK must find ways to address the intersecting dynamics of ethnicity, gender and class if it is to be effective in an age of austerity (e.g. Summer, 2011, p. 19).

The term “climate crunch” has been used to describe the current impasse in climate politics and policy (Street *et al.*, 2013). However, more than ever, marginalised communities are living through a ‘time crunch’ as they juggle the competing commitments of daily life. It follows that public pedagogies must ‘start where people are at’, emerging from the material interests, social practices and routines of everyday life that are enabled through emitting greenhouse gases. In the UK, there are instances of sustained dialogical learning between the scientists and activists who promulgate ‘climate’ discourse and various communities of interest, place and struggle, such as trade unions and communities addressing fuel poverty (Scandrett *et al.*, 2012). Yet such examples are fragmented and fragile. How they can be scaled up at the speed required remains an open question.

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<sup>i</sup> Platform is a London-based activist organisation that produces critical empirical research and educational resources on the oil industry. Their report “The Oil and Gas Bank” (Minio-Paluello, 2007), provided the empirical basis for CCA protests against RBS in 2009 and 2010.