

## Activist Devices and the Art of Politics

In the previous chapter, we started to explore how action on climate change has been able to escape the strictures of bureaucratic knowledge practices by wending its way into ecological show homes. Turning our attention to how climate change becomes present in these houses, we saw how electricians, builders, householders, and architects have found ways of being drawn into climate politics, positioning what I called the vernacular engineer as a climato-political actor. For those working closely with houses, intimate understandings of material properties have become politicized as they have become aligned with global climate imaginaries. Vernacular engineering as a political practice of responding to climate change entails more than just mathematical or haptic intimacy with materials and their properties; it is also a means of creating a form of relating and knowing whose relevance is framed by its effects beyond the local settings within which it is experienced. Bringing intimate material knowledge into relation with global processes gives this knowing an invigorated capacity to travel to new sites, inform policies, and crosscut the distinction between private

domestic spaces and public demonstration through blogs, consultancies, demonstrations, or home visits.

That action on climate change has appeared in Manchester in this engagement with these houses signals something of a shift from where action on climate change might usually be thought to rest. While I have explored why policy makers and politicians might find thinking like a climate challenging, the lack of effective action by policy makers has conventionally been remedied by those who have made it their explicit aim to bring climate change into politics through climate activism. So far these climate activists have made only occasional appearances in my discussion of the challenges of climate change for practices of governance in the city, but if we are to understand how climate thinking is enabled or challenged by other forms of thought, then we must attend not only to how bureaucrats struggle to bring climate into politics but also to how those who speak for the climate manage to do so, and with what effects. In this chapter I turn my attention to the activists themselves and to the practice of activism as it relates to climate politics.

Looking at the practices of people who consider themselves activists or describe their practices as activist, but whose actions look somewhat different from what we might usually associate with activism, demands that we extend our understanding of the way in which climate change might be said to be political. This is an important step toward understanding what climate change might do to the practice of politics more generally. For what we find when we listen to the activists working in this site of climate politics is that the activities that constitute climate activism go well beyond those that might usually be associated with public protest, campaigning, and the interventionist techniques of new social movements. This suggests that there is something about climate change that requires activists to open themselves up to alternative practices of intervention.

To explore this extension of activism, I argue that we have to expand, analytically, what we might understand as political action. Just as thinking like a climate required expanding what we thought of as thinking, so too does looking at how climate change affects politics require that we expand our understanding of what politics is and how it occurs. For as we accompany these activists, we find ourselves moving away from the usual sites and practices of protest and into other kinds of activities that in other times and places have often been criticized for their antipolitical effects (Barry 2001). By rethinking what might have been cast as antipolitics as politics, however, I suggest that we can gain insights into forms of practice

that are refashioning climate thinking and turning it toward the ends of social change.<sup>1</sup>

## The Manchester Climate Monthly Website

I first met Marc Hudson after giving a talk on my research at a workshop on green cities at the University of Manchester, just after beginning my fieldwork. Marc rushed up to me after the talk and told me that I had to talk to him, that he knew where “all the bodies were buried” and that he had so much to share. He pointed me, in the first instance, in the direction of a website and blog that he had set up and was running with freelance journalist Arwa Aburawa. At the time the site was called Manchester Climate Fortnightly, and it would later become Manchester Climate Monthly. The site was an activist device, a way of providing a running commentary on what the council and steering committee were doing about climate change. On the website Marc would regularly report on his use of freedom-of-information requests to demand information on whether council officers were sticking to their targets and claims. Marc and Arwa also published commentaries on climate change policy failures beyond Manchester and on the problems with the impenetrability of academic publications about climate change; interviews with climate scientists, activists, and academics; and ongoing critiques of all three groups. The website was a font of information, as was Marc himself, who came to be an important person in my research; his wealth of knowledge about the people, documents, and policies related to climate change was crucial for orienting me within the local and more extensive social networks around climate change policy and activism.

Marc, however, struck something of a liminal figure in climate change discussions in the city. Although passionately committed to the cause of climate change, his persistent and unremitting critical stance on every aspect of climate change policy and practice meant that he was often kept on the fringes of institutional climate change activities. He would regularly turn up at events and would post frank, critical reports on those events, raising issues about the content, organization, and social dynamics. People found him difficult to include as he would constantly shed an unapologetically critical light back on their activities. He was rarely invited to more formal meetings between the universities, the council, and businesses, such as those I talked about in the first half of the book.

Marc's exclusion from these meetings is interesting because it points to some of the unmarked lines of exclusion at play in the politics of climate. His exclusion came in the context of a great deal of effort on the part of policy makers to be inclusive. The development of climate change policy was explicitly collaborative because it was driven by an awareness that in order for it to work, it would have to reach beyond local institutions like the council and become a plan for "the whole city." When many different people told me about how the original *Manchester. A Certain Future* (Manchester City Council 2009a) strategy had been created, they stressed repeatedly how they had convened workshops, set up working groups, and collectively produced the document in an attempt to incorporate different viewpoints. During the time of my research, a "refresh" process to update the strategy once again deployed the same collaborative structures of workshops and meetings with a wide range of "stakeholders." In 2018, when a regional mayor was appointed in Greater Manchester and announced he would be holding a green summit to address climate change in the city-region, once again the summit was organized around a series of "listening events," which were open to the public and structured so as to collect as wide a range of opinions as possible.

And yet, at the same time, the language of inclusion marked less visible exclusions. Although one of the most vocal and active of the people I met working on climate change in the city, Marc was not allocated a ticket to the Mayor's Green Summit (we commiserated when he found out I was not allocated a ticket either!). In 2019 I did attend the second annual summit (Marc chose not to) and spoke to others who worried that the event was just reproducing a "green bubble." Marc was very aware that he was not the only one experiencing exclusion and recognized that exclusion was produced not so much intentionally but by the very form that sociality in the climate community took. In an attempt to make more explicit some of the unmarked exclusions and silences of climate change action that he had been critically documenting on his blog for years, Marc began to collate material on class and race in climate change activism. In 2019 he published an interview on his website with Sharon Adetoro, a non-white-presenting female environmental activist from Oldham (a town in Greater Manchester) who had become involved in the youth climate strike movement.

This book does not systematically analyze the racialized or class-differentiated side of climate change politics in the United Kingdom—others have done this elsewhere, and it would be a different book if this were its focus. Nonetheless, I want to quote from this interview in order to highlight how Marc's incessant and ongoing critique of the everyday work

of thinking like a climate points to something important about marginalization that goes beyond his own experiences as an activist. In the interview, after talking to Sharon about her involvement in the climate strikes, Marc asked her whether being BAME (Black, Asian, and minority ethnic) or coming from a mixed-heritage background had presented any special challenges for being involved in environmental issues. This was Sharon's reply:

My children are white presenting, I am not. The Environmental movement is heavily white and middle class. Both of which we are not. There is an uncomfortableness about entering that space. Especially when there is no one within that space who reflect you or your concerns, and/or do not have your shared experience. You only have to look at major environmental organisations and NGOs in the UK and from the top down there is a very heavy white presence, ok, who am I kidding they are majority white. It is one of the main reasons I have stayed on the periphery of the Environmental movement, as I see it very much detached from my reality as a Black working class woman or even how those intersectionalities work together within the movement, let alone being concerned with the issues that face communities within inner city areas, which tend to be areas with high concentration of Black and brown POC [people of color] where there are very few green spaces, air pollution reaching drastic levels—clean air zones never touch these communities nor are they campaigned for.

...

So the catch 22 situation of the Environmental Movement being predominantly White is not always because Black and Brown faces are staying away because they are not engaged within the environmental movement, it is also because they are being erased from it—pushed to the fringes. It is this kind of erasure that is endemic and still needs addressing. However the more those with Black and Brown faces stay away, the more that other Black and Brown POC don't see it as a space for them. In all honesty I cannot totally disagree with them. . . . I could go on but racism within the Climate Movement is a whole discussion within itself, is far reaching and something that needs to be tackled within each organisation. There are bodies of work out there addressing allyship. A simple google search will bring up articles and books etc. So I feel that when people say how can I be an ally? How can we make the movement more inclusive for POC? I have to reply with "do the work," because you are asking me to come up with solution to problems that are not mine.

But from where I am sitting not many are willing to do that because it means really looking at the structures of organisations and what their foundations are based upon and no one least of all non POC in the movement want to hold a mirror up to themselves and how they contribute to racism within it. Because the work is not pretty. So instead when I post within my groups or ask questions on this issue I get crickets! Silence! Maybe because to others the issues I post about are seen as side issues in a movement that is predominately White but to a POC they most definitely intersect with the movement at large.<sup>2</sup>

While I do not go into the politics of race or class as it plays out in the practice of thinking like a climate, this chapter's account of climate activism and that activism's own incorporation into or exclusion from institutional ways of acting on climate change offers some insights into how climate action is formed and conceived in ways that might reproduce unmarked silences. I do not go so far as to analyze how technocratic and activist practice enacts lines of exclusion along class, race, or gendered lines, but in what follows I do pay attention to the everyday concerns and tensions involved in participation, collaboration, friendship, and partnership, attending to how these terms are mobilized as methods to tackle the problem of climate change in ways that hint at some of the reasons why not everyone is equally able to participate in the injunction to think like a climate and in the political arrangements it has begun to call forth.

## Climate Activism

During the mid-2000s in the United Kingdom, the more radical end of climate politics found expression in an annual event called the Camp for Climate Action, colloquially known as Climate Camp. Running from 2006 to 2011, Climate Camp was a collective of activist organizations that attempted to create a social movement around climate change by highlighting the unethical nature of businesses and developments that were responsible for high levels of carbon emissions. Members of Climate Camp did this through annual protest camps that were set up outside high-carbon-emitting businesses. These included camps against proposals for a new coal-fired power station at Kingsnorth in Kent, a camp that aimed to stop the construction of a third runway at Heathrow airport, protests outside the London carbon exchange, and a camp outside the headquarters of the

Royal Bank of Scotland (Saunders 2012; Schlembach 2011; Schlembach, Lear, and Bowman 2012).

Climate Camp had strong links to the global justice movement and also to the antiroads protest movement that had appeared in the United Kingdom in the 1990s under the banner “reclaim the streets” (Russell 2015). According to insider accounts of the Camp for Climate Action, the idea for the camp was formed at an antiglobalization protest meeting at the G8 summit in Gleneagles in 2005 (Russell 2015). It was based very much on anarchist, leftist, and anticapitalist principles, which were being reoriented in this context toward the question of how to tackle climate change.

Coming from the new social movement tradition, the formation of the Camp for Climate Action was self-reflexively radical and framed as a direct opposition to the established expertise of government and business, calling into question, as one observer put it, “the ‘truth’ or the ‘logic’ of capitalist growth.”<sup>3</sup> This form of oppositional protest deployed the techniques of direct action as a way of cutting through the technocracy of expert evaluations and cost-benefit analysis. Climate change, with its basis in a political and economic system sustained by many of the same technocratic devices that had already been critiqued by antiglobalization movements, was in many respects an ideal target for antiglobalization protestors, particularly when their focus was big oil businesses, banking, and extractive industries. Direct action, moreover, promised to do what more bureaucratic, conciliatory approaches to carbon reduction had failed to do, shifting the problem of climate change from dry assessments of proportional responsibility and the classificatory games of carbon accounting onto a more public, oppositional, and hopefully effective footing.

However, when advocates of direct action shifted their attention from antiglobalization to climate change, they also shifted the basis of their own rationale from a position based on more than a century of work by Marxist and left-wing political thinkers to a position itself based on a technoscientific truth—the truth of global climate change. Indeed, one of the criticisms that has been made of Climate Camp is that it, more than other forms of direct action, relied unquestioningly on the expertise of scientists and the black-boxed facts of climate change (Schlembach, Lear, and Bowman 2012).

The unfolding consequences of a reliance on scientific fact as the basis for political action have led some to describe the ambitions of this self-consciously radical practice of climate activism as “postpolitical” (Schlembach, Lear, and Bowman 2012; Swyngedouw 2010a). While antiglobaliza-

tion movements have called for revolutionary transformations in systems of power and a philosophical reconsideration of assumptions about ownership and the control of resources, Climate Camp's central message was that carbon emissions needed to be reduced. Following from the findings of climate science, these arguments were often pragmatically directed toward particular businesses, practices, or individuals rather than entailing a broader systemic form of critique that might include critique of the science of climate change itself.

Here, then, it appears that what I have called *thinking like a climate* was challenging not only the practices of bureaucrats and policy makers but also the basis of radical politics. Indeed, Raphael Schlembach and colleagues, following the work of Eric Swyngedouw, have gone so far as to suggest that climate activism should be considered not as the critical edge of climate change politics but as an example of the way in which climate change consistently operates as a postpolitical problematic.

Swyngedouw (2010a, 2010b, 2011, 2013) argues that climate change is a perfect example of what has come to be known as the space of the postpolitical. Swyngedouw suggests that, far from leading to a strong ideological project of social transformation, climate change, as an issue of public concern, fails to have a programmatic vision of social change and therefore cannot be described as a political project in the conventional sense. This is in spite of the fact that some of the more politically engaged climate scientists claim that mitigating climate change will require nothing less than a wholesale reorganization of our society (Anderson 2012; Anderson and Bows 2011). Swyngedouw argues, in contrast, that the current politics of climate change merely reproduces dominant systems of social and economic organization. For Swyngedouw, most programs of environmental transformation rest on the idea that “we have to change radically, but within the contours of the existing state of the situation—effecting a ‘distribution’ or ‘partition of the sensible’ in Rancière’s (1998) words, so that nothing really has to change” (2010a, 219).

This analysis, however, is problematic in relation to the way in which I am approaching the political impetus that climate change brings to the table. Rather than seeing activism that works on the basis of thinking like a climate as postpolitical, I suggest, in contrast, that climate activists are operating in a space where the question, “What is to be done?” is particularly pressing.<sup>4</sup> The critique of climate activists as postpolitical rests on an understanding of political action that is framed by an epistemological register that pits ideological politics oriented toward social transformation against

technocratic expertise. When it comes to climate change, critics are right in pointing out that climate activists are deeply entangled with technocracy. However, approaching their actions from the perspective of thinking like a climate rather than from a dematerialized view of political thought creates the possibility of seeing that this entanglement is not about a narrowing of politics but rather an opening to a version of the political that is capable of incorporating the communicative capacities of nonhuman and human forms by attending to the way they are described by science. Rather than seeing a commitment to carbon reduction as defusing or reducing the possibilities for responding to climate change “politically,” then, I suggest that this form of attention in fact creates new avenues for activism that do not necessarily look like an ideology-based form of politics but rather like one that finds in the forms and patterns of climatic relations an alternative form of critical thinking that enacts what we might call, following Gregory Bateson ([1972] 2000), a negative rather than positive ideology. Here we find a way of doing activism that deploys an approach to politics that is responsive rather than programmatic but that in being so is no less political than the more familiar, programmatic politics that has been more broadly characteristic of political activism.

### Alter-activism

In a bar near the university that is popular with academics and students I am sitting talking to Marc Hudson. Marc’s bike helmet, his coat, and the dripping rain cover from his rucksack are in a pile beside us, creating puddles on the floor, while two pints of beer sit ready to be drunk on the table in front of us. As Marc begins to dry off, he starts to elaborate for me the role he sees activists as having played in climate politics in the city.

During the mid-2000s Marc, like many other climate activists, had been involved in Climate Camp. In 2006 he had been at a protest at the Drax power station near the city of Leeds in the north of England, and more recently he was involved in a climate camp at Manchester Airport. However, as our conversation goes on, it becomes clear that these initial examples of direct action are not really what Marc wants to talk about. Indeed, the more we speak, the more outspoken he becomes in his criticism of direct action and its capacity to bring about any kind of meaningful change, talking of what he calls the “smugosphere” of self-satisfied activists who have failed to hold themselves to account in terms of considering whether they

have really made a difference in the fight against climate change. In contrast, the form of activism that Marc is more interested in telling me about is not a story of being chained to railings, or being arrested by the police, or experiencing the communal spirit of a climate camp, but rather a story of a quieter, if no less insistent form of activism played out through work with documents, meetings, council chambers, and committees.

About halfway through our conversation, Marc begins a description of a document that he was involved in writing in 2009, called the *Call to Real Action* (Manchester Climate Forum 2009). This document was the work of a group of “activists and concerned citizens” who had been appalled at the weak and ineffectual nature of another report called the *Call to Action* (Manchester City Council 2009b), which had been produced by a London-based consultancy group, Beyond Green, for the city council. In response to the council-commissioned document, a coalition of activists had put together the counterreport.

That climate activists were doing activism by creating documents that imitated official documents is intriguing in itself, but this becomes doubly intriguing when we consider the observation made in chapter 5 that those in councils and NGOs who were producing strategies and documents often worried that they were becoming “stuck in strategies.” If action was the solution to the limits of knowledge produced by thinking like a climate, then what should we make of the fact that activists, who should have been the experts at climate action, were deploying documents and other bureaucratic processes as a way of achieving their intended ends? To explore this, let us turn to consider the documents themselves.

The original, council-commissioned, consultancy-produced *Call to Action* was a fifty-two-page PDF report rendered in a neat color scheme of a lilac blue and white and fronted by a plain blue cover with the simple title *Manchester Climate Change: Call to Action* (Manchester City Council 2009b). This report had been divided into six sections, which addressed in turn the challenges of climate change, the opportunities it offered, the spatial level that the report was addressed, the “capacity building” that would be needed, “catalytic” actions that could be pursued, and hoped-for outcomes. Written in bureaucratic language, the report was aspirational, explicitly articulated as a response to the 2006 Stern Report on the economics of climate change (Stern 2006), and its central message was that tackling climate change was the best way of ensuring the future economic prosperity of the city of Manchester.

In contrast, the *Call to Real Action* (Manchester Climate Forum 2009) provided a fascinating performative inversion of this original council re-

port. The use of the term “real” in the title of the *Call to Real Action* itself was telling, implying from the outset that the counterdocument was to be read as a critique of the kind of action implied in the council’s report. One person involved in the counterreport recalled that one idea had been to call it the “Call to ‘Alternative’ Action,” but this was decided against because of the association that “alternative” would evoke: “They’ll think you’re a special interest group and that you’re into eating lentils.” The reference to “real” action allowed for the aims of the original report to be upheld while also implying that it fell short in its own answers to the challenges it raised.

The *Call to Real Action* offered a response to the commissioned document and was structured around a large number of concrete proposals for actions that the city and the council could do to begin to tackle what this document termed the “spectre haunting Europe and the world” (Manchester Climate Forum 2009, 7). Written not in bureaucratic language but in a much more affective tone, the document deployed and reoriented terms used in the original document to make suggestions of things the council could do. It began with references to the predictions of the IPCC Fourth Assessment Report from 2007 (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2007), citing “hard evidence” from all around the world of climate change and its effects and including a foreword by Kevin Anderson of Manchester’s Tyndall Centre. This scientific evidence was set alongside the economic and international context and led to several suggestions of what the council could do to start to tackle climate change: The council could “run a cartoon contest for the best explanations of climate science” (Manchester Climate Forum 2009, 8); they could “provide funding and space for a community-led ‘teach-in’ program of events in the second half of 2009, enabling Mancunians to understand the UNFCCC process and its importance” (12); they might “cap emissions at Manchester Airport. MAG can set an annually reducing cap on the CO<sub>2</sub> levels from the flights that it facilitates. It will be up to the airlines how they can accommodate this regulation” (31); and less contentiously, they could “implement a city ‘switch off’ campaign following in the footsteps of Sydney, Australia. All shops and offices that are not being used at night to turn off their lights” (49).

“Real action” was performed not only in the content of the document but also in its form. The *Call to Real Action* was, like the original, published as a PDF. However, those putting together the *Call to Real Action* were concerned that the PDF format was inaccessible to automated text readers and would not be picked up by search engines, so the counterdocument was also published in Word format and online in HTML in an attempt to ensure

its accessibility. Here attention was paid not only to the communicative efficacy of the document's content but also to its capacity to operate as an indexical sign (performing an awareness of the politics of access) while also being an iconic sign (mimicking the shape, look, and form of the council's report).

The methods by which the document was put together also enacted an activist intervention by performing a mimetic critique of the means by which the original report was constructed. The first report made much of the importance of participation and cocreation in its text, but, at the same time, it had been written behind closed doors by experts who were not environmental campaigners and who had no evident relationship to Manchester. In contrast, the *Call to Real Action* played on the call in the original for "collaborative" ways of tackling climate change by deploying an overtly collective method of writing, whereby the authorship was distributed across a group of people, the process of writing was documented, accounts of meetings were uploaded onto public websites, and a public launch was organized that was open to anyone interested. Even the launch was structured as a meeting that would gather more insights, and after the launch a series of meetings were organized to enable ongoing discussion and the incorporation of new ideas. The activist report, then, was not just a plan laying out a potential future but an action in its own right. The activist plan mobilized the affordances of the form of the council plan but reworked the form so as to reveal the mistake of believing that a plan's orientation toward the future could be divorced from the limitations imposed by the conditions of its production.

The *Call to Real Action* was produced entirely by volunteers in just six weeks. This meant that when the progress of the original report was being discussed by the council within its meetings, the counterdocument was also circulating; to the satisfaction of many who had been involved in putting it together, it, along with the original, made its way onto the agenda of a Communities and Neighbourhoods Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting. A document from July 2009 that was put together in advance of the meeting and posted on the council website reads, "Amongst other topics, members of the group have discussed the Call to Action, the *Call to Real Action* (a document written by interested individuals in response to the Call to Action) and most recently, discussions have centered on the development and production of a Climate Change Action Plan for Manchester, which will be completed in time for the Copenhagen summit in December 2009" (emphasis added).<sup>5</sup>

The *Call to Real Action*, then, an activist document with qualities that referenced the form of formal reports, managed to find its way onto the agenda of the local council. Written in a form that both mimicked and parodied the original, this document was put into circulation not to do the same work as the original but to create a rupture in a process of decision-making based on what were seen as poor recommendations and a fantasy of formal and official expertise. As one activist put it, the intervention was not a direct attempt to make a change but more an intervention that would “approach the problem obliquely. . . . This year they will probably ignore the report. Next year they will ignore the report. They year after they might say oh, look at the interesting ideas we have come up with—and will take all the credit for some of the ideas that have been written into the report.” Getting the report into circulation and recognized was a significant success. It was there at the beginning of murmurings about a climate change action plan, the document that would later become *Manchester. A Certain Future* (Manchester City Council 2009a). Moreover, this activist document seemed to have gained the capacity to shift an agenda, to introduce new terms, to provide new ideas, and to help bring the science of climate change into view as a matter of politics. It had been part of a move to bring climate numbers into spaces of governance and, once there, had been incorporated at least in part into more formally sanctioned local government policy. But how had it been able to do this?

## Openings

First, the document would not have been able to move into these spaces were questions not already being raised within the offices of government about how to “do things differently.” The experience of aporias and end points in administrative practices described in earlier chapters often revolved around a sense that things “had to be done differently,” albeit with the terms of what the difference would be remaining unclear.

To work out the parameters what doing things differently might look like, meetings were regularly convened by local government officers with the aim of incorporating ideas about how to bring about a different future for the city. On a December day in 2014, two years after my main period of fieldwork in the city, I was invited back to the council for one such meeting, this time about Manchester’s low-carbon economy. I was looking forward to hearing how things had moved on from the discussions I had previously been involved in about the 41% reduction in emissions and total

carbon footprinting, but as I sat down and began to listen, I found myself pulled straight back into a familiar series of refrains: “climate change is the responsibility of everyone in the city”; “it’s not about having a public sector approach to the problem”; “[we] want to get away from the idea that the council comes up with an idea, does some consultation and then goes to delivery”; and you’re all here today because “we want to hear from you,” but this isn’t consultation, because “the problem with consultation is that everyone ends up pointing their finger at the council.”

The ten people in the room had been invited to the meeting as the council was putting together their next strategic plan, and those working on environmental issues were concerned that the idea of a low-carbon economy should be represented in that plan. The idea of a low-carbon economy had found its way into a regional climate change plan at the end of 2011, something of a coup given the focus on technology, jobs, skills, and growth in urban development plans in the city since the 1980s, which a low-carbon economy potentially challenged. Since arriving in this plan in 2011, the low-carbon economy had remained one of the four pillars of Greater Manchester’s work on climate change, which, as the chair of the meeting recapped for us, were (a) a 41% reduction in carbon emissions, (b) culture change, (c) preparation for climate change, and (d) a low-carbon economy. While the first three topics were by now being dealt with by various working groups, the low-carbon economy topic was proving difficult to pursue, partly because, as the chair of the meeting put it, “no one really knows what precisely it means to have a low-carbon economy.” This meeting was an attempt to gain some clarity by initiating a discussion among a mix of attendees who came from different institutional positions: the local council, the chair of the Manchester: A Certain Future steering group, representatives of an economic think tank, someone from an environmental charity, and someone from the university.

The meeting opened with the observation by the council officer chairing it that the discussion had to be seen as something other than consultation, and this sentiment was reiterated as the meeting proceeded. First, some consultants were invited to provide an example of one model of development that Manchester could pursue in a rather disorienting, rapid-fire PowerPoint presentation about high-density building. As discussions and questions proceeded, it seemed that the actual content of this presentation was less important than the need to find terms that could be transferred from the conversation in this room and could take up their place in strategy documents. What the local officers needed was a narrative, sup-

ported by evidence, that they could insert into a strategy that would be able to normalize ideas that, in other respects, fundamentally challenged the dominant notion that economic growth should be the central aim of the city. A document needed to be crafted that would not simply provide a plan for future action but would activate and multiply future possibilities for thinking about the city and its economy. What was being attempted was less a formal process of planning than an incipient attempt at what was sometimes termed “culture change,” using the form of the strategy to effect this change.

How, then, did the officers expect that culture change within bureaucratic practice might be brought about? Consultative meetings like this worked first through an appeal to the promise of experts to provide justification for what would otherwise be seen as controversial solutions. Framing the meeting as a forum of “experts” whose presence was sanctioned in part by people’s institutional affiliations, however, had the effect of excluding others who were not deemed experts. So, in this instance, a representative from the environmental campaign group Friends of the Earth came as an activist expert, but others who were more associated with the practice of direct action described above were not invited and were at times explicitly excluded from such forums.

With “expertise” thus assembled, in the meetings themselves it seemed, however, that the content of the expertise was not that important. Experts were transformed in these meetings from providers of knowledge into trusted individuals whose presence could be used to legitimize the introduction of new languages or terms into the documents through which bureaucratic processes were enacted.<sup>6</sup> Demonstrating that experts had been involved in discussions would give strength to strategic suggestions and show that the political process had been participatory, democratic, and collaborative. This could be seen in the kind of language used to describe those who participated in these kinds of meetings. While they were occasionally referred to as experts, it was much more common for participants to be described in these kinds of council-led meetings as “stakeholders,” “strategic partners,” and “critical friends.”

## STAKEHOLDERS

There are at least two identified origins for the term *stakeholder*. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, one meaning of *stakeholder* is derived from a gambling setting, where the stakeholder was a neutral person who

held the “stakes” or bets that others had placed until the race was finished, or *stakeholder* can mean the holder of a part of a business, a meaning that a *New York Times* article traces back to the act of putting a stake in the ground in the moment of claiming frontier land.<sup>7</sup> These provide a strange history for a term that has come to take on a rather different meaning in spaces of governance, where the stakeholder is neither a neutral bystander nor the owner of a situation but rather someone who is defined as having a vested interest in a particular process or activity. In Manchester’s climate change mitigation activities, it was in the work of establishing what the contours of the collaborative city should be that the idea of the stakeholder was most clearly invoked. Stakeholder engagement—the most commonly discussed idea of collaboration—has parallels with the notion of participatory development that has been discussed widely in critical literature on the organizational practices of international development (Green 2010; Jensen and Winthereik 2013). With stakeholder engagement, the idea is not only that intervention is supposed to be democratic (representative democracy) but that, because a problem like climate change is distributed across a population, responsibility for the problem also has to be distributed. This is not so much about ensuring benefits for communities as about ensuring what was locally termed “buy-in.” It is not about something like cultural property rights, where communities will be able to define the benefits that accrue to them, but rather a way of dealing with the extension of neoliberal ideas about who or what should govern and how, where people not only have to be responsible for their own outcomes and futures but also have to be made individually responsible for a collective outcome. Here it is no longer the collective that is responsible for the individual, but the individual becomes responsible for the collective.

*Stakeholder* was a way of describing, then, how relationships that were already in place could be understood to constitute a sphere of action. At the same time, the term *stakeholder* was an open category that indicated those individuals and organizations that were not as yet involved in the practices of carbon reduction but might be involved in the future. It was simultaneously a description, an invitation, and a potentiality.

## STRATEGIC PARTNERS

The term *strategic partner* was more specific than the general idea of the stakeholder. “Partnership working” was usually invoked to describe the necessity for different institutions to develop a *modus operandi* that would al-

low projects to take place that would not have been possible without this organizational form. As we saw in earlier chapters, one of the key challenges that local government officials felt they were facing in climate change mitigation was where the funding would come from to produce interventions that would bring about reductions in carbon emissions. At the time of my fieldwork, local authorities were facing significant cuts to their budgets that were causing huge layoffs, and Manchester City Council was particularly badly affected. The central government's funding for Manchester City Council between 2011 and 2015 was cut by £250 million, leading to a reported loss of some two thousand jobs.<sup>8</sup> These budget cuts left those working on climate change issues particularly vulnerable. People frequently mentioned that at this rate the council would be left with only its statutory obligations by 2020. With carbon reduction no longer a statutory obligation for local authorities, people feared that the limited resources that currently enabled local authorities to pursue climate change mitigation in the city would be rapidly eroded (as they indeed were).

Partnerships thus offered one way in which local authorities could make things happen without the substantial resources needed to make concrete interventions. The small amounts of money that were won from central government were tendered out to charities or organizations with capacity or expertise and the analytical skills to provide an understanding of what needed to be done. Deals were made with private suppliers to provide their services for free in exchange for the publicity they would gain by being exposed to the whole of the urban population. Relationships were fostered with housing associations that were able to access central government funds through initiatives that were targeted to help people on low incomes. This was also the context within which university researchers found openings to establish collaborative relationships with local authorities and their partners. Funds established within UK universities to ensure that research could be shown to have an impact were identified as another resource that could be utilized to enable action on climate change.

#### CRITICAL FRIENDS

The final term that was used, and the one I found most intriguing, was the idea of the critical friend. Unlike “partnership working,” which was oriented largely toward finding institutional arrangements that would support projects and activities that could not be financed from within local authority budgets, the idea of a critical friend was a means by which some of the

problems with a term like *collaboration* were addressed. While collaboration was being pursued as a necessary way of dealing with a problem like climate change, it was not seen as unproblematic. For example, disquiet was often expressed by those invited to these kinds of meetings about establishing working relationships with people who were understood to have different interests and understandings, and a realization that partnerships might have to be made with organizations whose own interests and intentions were potentially at odds. Ensuring the right level of criticality was key—hence an observation made by a number of people I spoke to that the collaborative and participatory form of a city steering group to deal with climate change was really a “stab vest” to stop the council from being directly attacked or blamed, as an earlier quote suggests.<sup>9</sup> The idea of critical friendship similarly demonstrated an acknowledgment that political alliances were not expected to be consensual. However, while a critical friend is different from an ally, it is also different from an enemy. A critical friend is expected to provide critique but without fundamentally undermining the shared project of which they are a part. The use of the term *critical friendship* pointed, then, to the recognition that culture change would require careful work in bringing external ideas (criticality) into a sphere of trusted and safe relations (friendship).

This was not always an easy process and sometimes led people to feel compromised in their work. Bob, one of the people involved in climate activism in Manchester, spoke, for example, about how he had to negotiate a quite senior role he had with Manchester City Council, working within disability services, with his activist practices. Having worked previously for the council sometimes made activism somewhat difficult as he was both an insider and an outsider. He did not see himself as alone in this, mentioning several people involved in activist groups who were also involved in council work. Bob termed many activists working in the council “closet left-wingers.”

Although events such as the low-carbon economy meeting appeared at first sight to be a democratic process of creating a kind of discursive agora within which different expert views could be evaluated and discussed, in practice these meetings entailed exploring the potential that these subtly different kinds of collaboration might hold for making careful and incremental changes to policies. If activists found it at times difficult to make claims on these meetings on the basis of their sanctioned expertise *as activists*, being as we have seen in part defined by their opposition to established ways of knowing and doing, they could, however, make claims on the par-

ticipatory and collaborative ambitions of this form of participatory governance as a means of achieving the shared ends of creating a climate future that satisfied both local social concerns and global environmental change.

### Collaboration as a Tactic

Let us return, then, to Marc and our conversation about activism, to see how activists were responding to these ideas about a low-carbon economy or green growth through an attempt to replay a politics of collaboration. The *Call to Real Action* was just one moment, if a significant one, in a longer and complex story of activist interventions. Around 2010 a group made up of some of the same people who had written the “real” call to action had come together under the umbrella of a new organization called Steady State Manchester that aimed to challenge the ongoing commitment to promoting economic growth. If the *Call to Real Action* was a direct response to the *Call to Action*, Steady State Manchester was an activist attempt to shift proposals for a green or low-carbon economy for the city away from a narrative that assumed economic growth and ecological sustainability were compatible and onto more awkward and difficult discussions about what a postcarbon, postgrowth Manchester might look like. The steady-state project was an attempt to provide a different, much more radical response to the challenges of the interconnected ecosystemic relationality of climate change than was provided by the carbon footprinting approaches we saw in chapter 3.

Although I am using the term *activists* to denote people with a particular stance toward climate change, who often used the term to describe themselves, the activists were not a unified group. Rather, those who might refer to themselves as activists or as engaged in activism were an uneven and distributed collection of people with different politics, interests, and preoccupations. The attendees at one of the steady-state meetings were indicative of the kinds of people involved: Marc, whom I’ve already mentioned; John from Manchester Cycle Campaign; and June and Brian, who were involved in another climate change group called Climate Survivors that June described as “not being a bit like this” and being much more “cakes and salsa.” Then there is Michael, who doesn’t have a “place” to situate himself but is interested in technical solutions “to enforce change,” currencies, and new systems of voting; James, a “bored” PhD student who is here to see what this is all about; Simon, who studied cell biology at the university

and wants to know more about steady state; Leanne, who works on a community magazine; Derek, who is retired and is living through the “best time” of his life; Sam, also retired and a member of the Green Party; and Bill, another member of the Green Party. If activities like the *Call to Real Action* or Steady State Manchester helped create the sense of there being a community of activists that was united by a left-of-center politics and an ambition to bring about social and environmental change, people were also very aware of what divided them, not least because of different institutional affiliations to the Green Party, the Constituency Labour Party, or Friends of the Earth, or indeed an anarchist avoidance of any formal, hierarchical political organization. Nonetheless, in spite of these differences, the group did have some level of social uniformity in being highly educated and predominantly (though not entirely) identifying as white and middle class.

The Steady State Manchester group discussions revolved around attempts to explore a range of alternative ways of thinking about how to build a sustainable city. These went far beyond the Stern Report, or the other findings of environmental economics, in rethinking the very idea of growth as the basis of urban planning. Critical of what they termed in one working paper “the secretive elite deals” (Burton 2016, 13) that were seen to have characterized the “overall economic agenda” (13) of the city, the steady-state group sought to gather evidence, produce recommendations, and actively petition local government to take seriously the idea that a growth-based strategy for economic development was completely ecologically unviable.

Driven by the requirement to attend to the ecological systematicity of climate change in a way that acknowledged the entanglement of ecological systems and social systems, this group drew on the work of various well-known authors, including critical and ecological economists such as Serge Letouche and Herman Daly, and also on concepts and practices taken from case studies of collaborations with people from the Global South. These included the Pachamama Alliance: a set of workshops drawing on Achuar experiences to support sustainability, social justice, and spiritual fulfillment; another was the consideration of a tree-planting scheme called the Kaoma Environmental Restoration Initiative, which is part of the Green Belt Movement in Kenya, which was seen to have helped to tackle corruption and also raised awareness of colonialism; another was a project on food sovereignty in Cuba; and yet another explored the potential of bringing insights from initiatives to support women in the governance of forests in India to the Manchester setting. Here the contours of climate change

were informed by the IPCC but were not structured by scientific data in the same way as council activities. It was clear to the participants in the steady-state group that climate change was caused by excessive economic growth and the exploitation of the planet. On the basis of this realization, these other ways of thinking and acting on environmental issues were being explored so as to support the move toward a revaluation of economic practices and relationships and a critical reassessment of the model of growth that lay at the basis of Manchester's development plan.

Although enacting an activist ambition for radical change, like the *Call to Real Action*, the call for a steady-state economy was not, however, completely at odds with activities and discussions already taking place within the council. One of the councillors, Neil Swannick, mentioned earlier as having been very central to raising the profile of environmental concerns within the council, had already been working at a European level with a group who were looking at how to replace the standard measure of GVA, which is used to calculate the value of economic activities of cities and to compare cities to one another, with a more ecologically sensitive measure. Members of the green team in the city council often talked about the need not just for incremental change but for a more fundamental culture change in the city, and there were even employees of the city council who went to the steady-state meetings.

The activist mode of thinking like a climate seemed to provide something different from the conditions of possibility for action available within the institutional setting of bureaucratic planning. This was not articulated explicitly but was played out in the way in which activists organized themselves in relation to the problem of climate change. Just as the *Call to Real Action* report performed a critique of closed forms of knowledge making, so too were the steady-state meetings decidedly different from the invitation-only meetings of the city council or the various advisory boards and steering groups that had begun to appear to deal with the plans for tackling climate change and discussing this low-carbon economy. The steady-state group mobilized the language of participation and refashioned it in such a way as to performatively cast into relief the democratic limits of current ways of making decisions. Steady-state meetings, as with the meetings where the *Call to Real Action* document was brought to life, were open to anyone who wished to attend. People made their own tea and coffee, or made it for others, and discussions were organized on PechaKucha/open-space principles where there was no single agenda to be discussed but the possibility for new messages and ideas to be brought into the discussion.

In place of PowerPoint presentations that demonstrated the facts of climate change to a passive audience, it was more common to find meetings organized around small-group discussions that were then recorded on flip-chart paper. Knowledge was treated as provisional, situated, and emergent, and, importantly, so were the actions that followed.

The form that the meetings took was not only a critique of the language and policies of local government but also a performative critique of the means by which policy was made. In particular, meetings focused around a recognition of the need to call out hubris and recognize multiple knowledges in the face of a problem like climate change. In a working paper written by one of the leading members of the steady-state group, many of the recommendations focused on organizations' structure and political process. This included suggestions such as "councils as facilitators and catalysts for community initiative, rather than as its controllers" (Burton 2016, 14); "universities as citizen resources, open to all, offering free and low-cost consultancy to non-profit and small-profit initiatives, courses on environmental, economic and political literacy, and pursuing a research agenda that is at once locally responsive and internationally reputable" (15); and "the National Health Service and its institutions, in addition to a much more local procurement strategy, supporting a wide programme of community-based enterprises and activities that promote, good diet, better housing, exercise, connection to nature and waste reduction as an integral part of its employment package" (15).

While activists, like council officers and other more institutionally located individuals, invoked the language of participation as a mode of social organization appropriate to thinking like a climate, the activists seemed to do so with a different vision of what the effects of action would be and how they would add up. Actions were not mapped but elicited, not measured but enacted. One activist I interviewed who had been involved for over twenty years in the environmental movement in Manchester, and now saw himself as having moved, like many of his friends, into a more professionalized job, explained how he still saw himself as a climate activist. Having told me how he had come to activism from a training in climate science, he reflected on how he understood his activism, telling me, "We target where things are happening on the ground," "try to retain that radicalism," and "try to influence." Sometimes, he told me, climate activism can take on a bit of a millenarian character, slipping into a kind of belief where complexity is erased and "an imperative to action takes over." While he expressed concern over whether this was counterproductive to tackling climate change,

he later reflected that since he had first learned about climate change as a student, “I have always had this sort of feeling that we are sort of doomed. But we have to act anyway. And that makes acting more of a sustainable thing. It is a long slog, and you have to keep doing stuff. But if your given is that you’re going to fail, then if you do anything that’s great! Anything above zero is good.”

This activist mode of thinking like a climate was very distinct from the accountability-focused work of the local authorities. While still driven by a form of climate revealed by the science of climate change and the patterning of material relations that the science of climate change evidenced, the implications of thinking like a climate unfolded very differently in activist practice. Nevertheless, the boundary-crossing propensities of ecosystemic relationality, in which people and environments were revealed to be entangled in category-defying ways, created an opening for the language of participation and collaboration to be invoked by both officers and activists. It was this overlap between the language of participation and collaboration used by those working in local authorities and the use of the same terms and concepts by activists that created a kind of hinge via which activism could be pivoted into the otherwise oppositional halls of power.

## Performing Participation

On a warm June morning, I accompanied the steady-state group in an exercise that was precisely this kind of performative response to the invitation to be part of democratic participatory politics. The event was a meeting of the economic scrutiny committee of the city council. Scrutiny committees are formal council meetings where local government proposals are discussed by councillors and officers. Manchester City Council describes its scrutiny committees as “a process that ensures that decisions taken by the Council and its partners reflect the opinions, wishes and priorities of Manchester residents.”<sup>10</sup> “Scrutiny,” the description goes on, “acts as a ‘critical friend’ to decision makers, supporting decision makers to ensure that their decisions are being carried out properly and sometimes recommending alternative or additional courses of action.”<sup>11</sup> Notes are prepared by council officers in advance of the meeting and are both made available online and printed out and displayed in the entrance to the town hall. Minutes of the meeting are published online afterward. Transparency, openness, and participation are all key principles that inform the overt function of these meetings.

However, although they are open to the public and the materials are available online, thus enacting a degree of transparency, these meetings are attended by only a very small number of the general public. As someone who had lived in Manchester for fifteen years, I had never heard of these meetings before embarking on research with the council, and neither had others I spoke to who were not linked to the council or actively involved in local politics. When I did attend, in the context of this collective decision to participate in democratic politics, my experience was less one of feeling included in democratic processes than a visceral sense of the capacity of form—buildings, language, documents, and process—to re-create a divide between decision-makers and the general public.

#### THE GATHERING

It is about 8:30 a.m. when members of the steady-state group begin to arrive in the lounge-bar of a Wetherspoons pub next to the town hall. Bikes are locked up, and helmets stowed away as people come into the pub, looking for fellow steady-staters, greeting each other, old friends saying hello and new faces being introduced. Papers are spread across the table, including a printout of a draft report entitled *Grassroots Steps to a Greener Fairer and Steady State Manchester* and a crib sheet that Marc has put together with all the names and photographs of the councillors so people will know who they are looking at when in the room. As everyone arrives, they are given a sticky label to write their own name on. Eventually there are about twenty people in the group, a mix of ages from people in their twenties to people in retirement and a mixture of men and women. Everyone is dressed practically and casually—there are no suits and ties.

A couple of people are talking about the previous day's news story on the front of the *Manchester Evening News*, which, beneath an architectural image of gleaming glass skyscrapers, had announced a "New Masterplan to Take Manchester into the Future" by becoming a world city, when the town hall clock strikes 9:00 a.m.<sup>12</sup> This is our cue to move, as the meeting itself will start at 9:15 promptly. Led by Marc, we decamp en masse from the pub to the Neo-Gothic corridors of the town hall building opposite. Marc has attended scrutiny committee meetings in the past, so we follow him down to the debating chamber where the meeting is being held. The debating chamber is a grand, wood-paneled room, with a large square of desks that takes up about two-thirds of the space. Facing the back of the

square of desks are several rows of chairs: a spectator gallery where the public is given space to sit. The fifteen of us sit down on these seats, but we are invited forward to fill any spare gaps at the table, blurring what seemed at first sight like a relatively clear boundary between the observers in the public gallery and the politicians around the table.

That the members of the steady-state group are invited to sit around the table not only is an attempt at inclusiveness but also points to the liminal place that the group holds as both members of the public and participants in council processes. A report produced by the steady-state group is one of the things that is being discussed in the scrutiny committee meeting. Richard Sharland tells the room that in response to the activist report, he has “turned to experts” and invited a local think tank to respond to the demands and recommendations of the activists. The expert, it turns out, is an economist who outlines a pragmatic vision for a low-carbon economic future for the city. The more conventional view that the economist presents of economic growth through jobs and skills is not well received by either the activists or the councillors assembled around the table. Indeed, by the end of the meeting, it is the activists’ demands, rather than the mainstream analysis of the economist, that the councillors vote to be taken on board as part of council policy. The only one of the activists’ recommendations that is seen as too difficult to address is one that asks the council to reconsider its policy toward the city’s airport.

The involvement of these activists in this council meeting was a fascinating example of how environmental politics was operating through practices that I have termed elsewhere “inclusion without incorporation” (Knox 2018b). Activist politics oriented to counteracting climate change was not, I argue, postpolitical but rather an instance of doing politics and socially relating in a manner appropriate to the form of thought that is climate change. In her book, *In Catastrophic Times*, Isabelle Stengers comes to a similar conclusion in her exploration of how to act in response to Gaia in ways that are not *programmatically* but, as she terms it, “not-barbaric.” Stengers argues that what climate change demands is not a blueprint, or a plan, but rather a “desperate need for *other stories*.” These are not ideologically driven utopias, that is, “not fairy tales in which everything is possible for the pure of heart, courageous souls, or the reuniting of goodwills, but stories recounting how situations can be transformed when thinking they can be, achieved together by those who undergo them. Not stories about morals but ‘technical’ stories about this kind of achievement, about the

kinds of traps that each had to escape, constraints the importance of which had to be recognized. In short, histories that bear on thinking together as a work to be done” (2015, 132).

In exploring why it made sense for climate activists to be doing activism by deploying the form of documents, the language of collaboration, and the organizational practice of democratic participation, I suggest that seeing it not as driven by ideology but rather experienced as “a work to be done” is helpful. This demands that we go beyond a critical or cynical analysis that sees these tools as instruments of the dominant power on the one hand or a fixed ideology on the other. Instead, I suggest that by seeing them as devices that support a practice of “thinking together as a work to be done,” activism can be repositioned as political albeit in a moment where the relations and practices that count as political are themselves being transformed.

### Activism as Propositional Politics

I am suggesting, then, that activist practices that have been criticized as being postpolitical can more fruitfully be looked at as a way of doing politics that requires us to rethink what the political is. Politics here is not a demonstration to an external other (Barry 2001) based on a position of certainty but rather a *proposition* that emerges from thinking with the ecology of signs that constitutes climate change. This is not so much a politics that is addressed to an external audience *but a politics that others are invited to become part of*.

In *Leviathan and the Air Pump*, Steven Shapin and Simon Shaffer (1985) illustrate how science and politics became separated out on either side of a great divide—the air pump with its vacuum creating the “facts” of science, the audience creating the space of politics that sanctions those facts. The mimetic document or the steady-state meeting, in contrast, aimed to emplace those objects and people that allow themselves to be confronted by and challenged by anthropogenic climate change and its unfolding form into the sites of politics so as to invite political actors to account for themselves in relation to scientific propositions about climate change in ways that are more immediate, more responsive, and less calculated or hubristic than the strategy or the plan. This was not, then, a case of the uncontested facts of science shaping a pared-down version of politics but instead an illustration that activism that “thinks like a climate” is a form of politics

whose appropriate form, at least in Manchester, was to create an *invitation* for people to join in a process of opening themselves up to climate change as itself an emergent and patterned process of representational unfolding. To say that climate change is unfolding is not to say that anything goes or that any future is possible. It is to recognize that the form of climate change, like the form of the Amazonian forests that Eduardo Kohn describes in *How Forests Think* (2013), unfolds according to certain redundancies that give that unfolding a pattern. Just as changing the depth of a riverbed changes the flow of a river, allowing vortexes to appear or disappear, so too changing interactions among different forms of life—people, microbes, trees, and fossilized life in the form of oil and coal—has the potential to change the ecology of signs out of which climate change is made.

When activism becomes oriented to questions framed not by a utopian ideal of social transformation but rather by the form of climate change re-represented through climate models, it is tempting to critique such activism for having been evacuated of politics. However, as I have tried to argue here, such critiques work with a completely different understanding of the role that science is playing in many of these practices from the one I am arguing for in this book. Rather than seeing science as standing for one side of a settled divide between science and politics, I have argued that activists are incorporating science here, both in their protests outside power stations and in their use of mimetic devices of climate action, as an index of human-induced climate change that I conceive in this book as a “form of thought.” The representations of climate science are approached here not as symbolic, linguistic constructions, from whose meaning political decision-making and action proceed, but are rather treated as the patterned effect of what Kohn (2013, 39) terms “an open whole”—a relational, emergent process that demands relational, emergent responses. In the mimetic practice of document creation and committee attendance, what we find is an activism that aims to move from an oppositional politics that frames the invitation to participate in climate in terms of an angry demand to one that frames that invitation as the actions of a “critical friend” (albeit at times rephrased as a “*very* critical friend”). We might recall here Francisco Goya’s painting *Fighting with Cudgels* that I mentioned in the introduction. Here the fight turns from one between human actors in a social domain—activists versus politicians—to one where both now share the fight with a third position, that of a changing climate.<sup>13</sup>

Returning to the activists’ use of documents, then, I suggest they are not just *imitations* that play on the divide between activist and bureaucratic or

consultant expertise but are in fact devices that enact a climate-induced politics by bringing into relation the form of climate and the form of the bureaucratic document. The ecosystemic, boundary-crossing form of climate change here opened the way for a popular language of collaboration, participation, stakeholders, and friends to bridge the divide between oppositional activist politics and institutional planning. This particular quality of climate thinking was key to enabling climate change to be carried into the more conventional spaces of politics, with a view to changing them. The mimetic devices deployed by climate activists might therefore be seen as an alternative kind of climate thinking than footprinting, carbon budgets, and scenario building. Instead, they offered a way of doing climate thinking by translating ideas, terminologies, and languages about climate change with the aim that they might be incorporated into political discourse. Rather than the image of the protestor and the state on either side of a barrier shouting insults at one another, what climate thinking impelled these activists to do was to create a form of action that interpellated the state with activists in an attempt to shift socionatural entanglements into a new register as themselves political.

*Collaboration* is not just a buzzword, then, about the latest form of democratic governance but rather offers a particular way of pointing to a recognition that bureaucratic officers and “experts” do not have a monopoly on defining climatological futures. Not dismissing activist practices as post-political but rather attending to them as a climatological form of politics offers us a way of looking at how, as anthropogenic climate change challenges bureaucratic practice, it also creates openings for new ways of doing oppositional politics that go beyond the “rule of experts” but also beyond the resistances that this rule implies (Mitchell 2002). This is not a reduction of activism to sanctioned scientific fact but rather a recognition that to be able to speak for climate, politics cannot but be played out in relation to representations—from hurricanes and wildfires to numbers, statistics, and “facts”—by expert-amateurs who work with their own tools to re-present the terrain of climate action.

This attention to this kind of activism that might not look at first sight like activism shows how climate politics operates in an uncertain landscape that does not easily oppose experts and activists but brings together both qualities in the shared project of the interrogation of the emergent patterns of matter that are climate change. The document takes on the form of the report; the protestors take on the form of the meeting in order to participate in it, printing out a crib sheet, learning to be like the councillors; and

friends become critical in order to inhabit someone else's position without being the same as them.

With activist practice no longer being a counter to that of mainstream experts, this opens the way for activists to be producers not only of action but also of new kinds of knowledge and new kinds of objective facts. As we saw in the vignette above, this has its own potential for exclusion and distinction—a potential of which people involved in this area are becoming more aware. We began to see the emergence of this new kind of knowledge appropriate to climate thinking in the work on houses, where vernacular expertise about buildings became newly valued when put into circulation as the outcome of an experimental response to the more generic abstract problem of global climate change. In the next chapter, I look at what happens when activists attempt to respond to climate change by reframing sociotechnical infrastructures through intentionally activist practices of technical intervention. Here numbers and measurements reenter the picture, now not as devices that contextualize the global landscape of climate action, but rather as technical tools that help bring the materiality of global climate change into the heart of the ebb and flow of everyday life.