



David Buckland, *Pregnant Woman*, 2008:  
The shadowy form of a pregnant woman is projected over black Arctic ice – an image loaded with the danger of trapped carbon, but conveying the full potential of our planet's future generations.

## THE FUTURE IN PRACTICE

THE STATE OF SUSTAINABILITY LEADERSHIP 2012



# A simple and undeniable truth

**David Buckland**



UNIVERSITY OF  
CAMBRIDGE

PROGRAMME FOR  
SUSTAINABILITY LEADERSHIP

# A simple and undeniable truth

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Storytellers, CS Lewis said, carry meaning in a way that rational truth-tellers cannot. "For me," the novelist wrote, "reason is the natural organ of truth; but imagination is the organ of meaning. Imagination, producing new metaphors or revivifying old, is not the cause of truth, but its condition."

A pregnant woman is projected onto a glacial wall of ice in Greenland high in the Arctic. The woman's body and mind are nurturing the growing foetus within her body, it is probably her primary focus and soon a new life will be born. Within 20 years, when the baby is grown into an adult, the glacial ice of the high Arctic will have largely disappeared. The baby has been nurtured, but have we abandoned any notion of care for its habitat?

For the past 12 years, the Cape Farewell project has embedded climate scientists with artists, writers and film-makers to address what has been described as humanity's greatest challenge: anthropogenic climate change. The two intellectual tribes of scientists and artists have been surprised at the closeness of their shared quest to define how we can comprehend the complexities of the climate



David Buckland is a designer, artist and film-maker whose works have been exhibited in numerous galleries worldwide. He has published five books and two monographs of his work. In 2001 David Buckland created and now directs Cape Farewell project, bringing artists, scientists and educators together to collectively address and raise awareness about climate change. The works generated by these endeavours have led to a range of outcomes, including two major internationally-touring exhibitions, the publication of several books, and the production of two films. [www.capefarewell.com](http://www.capefarewell.com)

challenge. Both have benefited from each other's ambition to envision a cultural shift that could lead towards sustainable societies.

The scientific evidence is clear: our climate is changing at an unprecedented rate, and in damaging and potentially irreversible ways. Yet even as we witness the impact of 'crazy weather' (droughts, floods, storms) on food production and habitat, and watch it place



David Buckland, *Baby on Ice*, 2008

additional stresses on global health and economies, it seems that both the media and public debate have become quieter on the issue of climate change. The larger collective will is to simply ignore the proverbial elephant in the room.

The urgency isn't being communicated successfully enough to provoke the real change in our societies around the globe which is needed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and mitigate climate change. Our resistance to engaging with change is baffling, in the face of the extreme weather events and other disturbances across our planet. Anthropogenic climate change threatens us all with an uncertain physical, social and economic future, so why are we not engaged in sorting out our future?

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Perhaps cultural approaches can succeed where the hard facts of science have failed. So far, Cape Farewell has made seven expeditions into the Arctic aboard the 100-year-old Norwegian schooner, *Noorderlicht* (Northern Lights); one expedition to the Andes and the Amazon; and one to the Scottish Western Isles. Each of these journeys allows the diverse expedition teams – scientists, artists, creative thinkers – to examine how anthropogenic activity is affecting our habitat.

“The pressure of our numbers, the abundance of our inventions, the blind forces of our desires and needs are generating a heat – the hot breath of our civilisation. How can we begin to restrain ourselves?” wrote novelist Ian McEwan, after visiting the melting Arctic ice on a Cape Farewell voyage. “We resemble a successful lichen, a ravaging bloom of algae, a mould enveloping a fruit. We are fouling our nest, and we know we must act decisively, against our immediate inclinations. But can we agree among ourselves?”

### **The story of Cape Farewell**

The initial aim of Cape Farewell was to create a different language of climate change with which to engage the public. Over 140 arts-based practitioners have taken part in these voyages, collaborating with more than 45 scientists to challenge the central question of our time. This international effort includes people from China to Mexico, bringing distinctly different cultural sensibilities to the story of climate change's causes and impacts.

The wide range of material produced is testimony to the success of this enterprise, including exhibitions (such as at the Natural History Museum and Royal Academy of Arts in London), films (such as the BBC's *Art from the*

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*Arctic*, and *Burning Ice* for Sundance Television, USA) and writing (including McEwan's novel *Solar*). Since the project began in 2001, the creative climate language has now been established, and in Europe the public now accepts the fact of climate change. The lens of the Cape Farewell project has shifted from looking at causes to mapping solutions.

The story of the cure of rabies provides a striking metaphor. Doctors resisted this deadly virus by doggedly defending the nervous system as it is attacked, and, in so doing, broke the resistance of the virus. What if, instead of trying to climb the mountain and produce an all-encompassing global treaty on climate change, we used the already existing tools at our disposal?



2010 Arctic Expedition, Svalbard

At the UN climate meeting in Copenhagen in 2009, which ended in disarray, there was a parallel conference of C40 city mayors taking place in Copenhagen's town hall. The world mayors were gently competing over their success in meeting existing carbon reduction targets of 6 per cent, 8 per cent, or 10 per cent via two-year programmes. Their visioning was cultural, and their solutions were tailored to local ambitions and processes of delivery. Each of their citizens could imagine and take pride in their city's achievement; each collectively drove down their city's carbon emissions.

Cape Farewell was there as a guest of Mayor Miller of Toronto, the C40 cities president. He saw just how powerful a role the cultural sector could play by creating stories and film to provide vision for the cities' inhabitants. By motivating them, it became possible to accelerate the process of change. Then the failure of the UN conference cast a dark shadow over all climate discussions. The vested interest groups and political agendas resistant to change spread a fog of confusion across the conference and worldwide. Since then, atmospheric carbon levels have continued to rise, global habitats continue to be degraded, and food and water security issues threaten developing countries.

### **What next?**

Hurricane Sandy has just swept through New York, and the climate stories once thought to be apocryphal now have a human dimension. The seas have deluged great tracts of subways, and 40-storey business hubs have had their basements flooded to street level – not a catastrophe in itself, until you consider that all the computer equipment and power was housed underground, and the business machine has ground to a soggy halt. New York has provided individual stories of a global-scale event.

What we need now is human-scale solutions to

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David Buckland and Amy Balkin, *Discounting the Future* (Ice Texts series), 2010

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global concepts. A two- or four-degree rise in global temperatures scares the hell out of the knowledgeable few, but remains without meaning to most. The numbers just seem to be empty figures, without the possibility of inspiring the imagination.

We have the means to fix the problem. Technological solutions for clean energy are sitting on the shelf, but need a trillion-dollar investment to make them productive. This is the scale of investment required to create a level playing field with the oil and coal industries, and make clean renewable energy cost-equivalent. Reaching for these new technologies requires an investment in, for example, DC cabling and 21st-century smart grid technology, which will unlock the creative design and 'liquid society' to establish a whole new economy – creating new employment, new social values and new economic models. Unlocking the desire for a sustainable future is probably more about imagination than reason;

it is about the messy human condition that motivates change.

Legally, there is a 'golden bullet' which would solve the problem: a global price on carbon in the region of £200 per ton. If we adopted this, energy delivery would initially be less efficient, and it would be hard work to keep on track until equilibrium is re-established. This would also need a vast creative drive, to establish the nurturing and protection of our habitats – not just as an individual burden, but as the collective condition.

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## Climate as culture

*"... What if, on the basis of that, The world as we know it changed its matter of fact...?"*

**Lemn Sissay, poet**

Can it be done? Unlikely by a single unilateral agreement for sure, but what if Europe, the USA and Brazil (plus other allies) declared a decree, binding in law? What if imported goods and raw materials were carbon-taxed to accommodate the cost of cleaning up the mess made in production?

Just imagine the cities of the 1840s: a mire of human waste and disease, until a few wise minds proposed ripping up the streets and substructures to put in place drainage and waste management at enormous cost. It took 10 years of human toil and citywide mess to eradicate typhoid and gastric disease, to remove the unimaginable smell and human excrement, to create tree-lined avenues and parks. We are in a similar place today. Carbon dioxide, methane, and other atmospheric pollutants are no less dangerous to humans

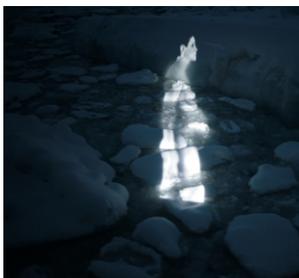
than the diseases which have mostly been conquered in the 'developed' world. We need to clean up our act for the sake of our children.

The climate challenge is about human activity and civilisation. It is about framing climate as culture. According to Elizabeth Straughan of the Institute of Geography and Earth Sciences in Aberystwyth, "What... Cape Farewell... makes clear is that although the arts and humanities have much to say in regard to climate change, this is by no means a direct translation of climate science, nor is it the articulation of a warning with regard to human activity. Rather, this is a creative response that makes vivid a complex, often paradoxical, sensual and emotional engagement with environment. And this is precisely the terrain on which hearts and minds are won."

Over the past four months, the Cambridge Programme for Sustainability Leadership has published a range of essays, each providing new vision, ideas and pragmatic solutions. Each underlines the urgent need for engagement and how we can achieve results with the tools and economic structures we already have in place. Each essay has allowed Cape Farewell to showcase an artist's work, bringing fresh thinking by realising something tangible: a photograph, sculpture, or story. It is clear that we need both the thinking, and the feeling: to reframe public engagement, we need creative solutions in every sense. We need to win hearts and minds in order to achieve change.

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**The State of Sustainability Leadership** is CPSL's annual thought leadership report, delivering insight and challenge from our world-wide network of business leaders, policymakers and academic experts. This year's edition, to be published in full in December 2012, is focused on the theme of business and the long-term – what leaders can do to understand and shape the future. CPSL is an institution within the University of Cambridge's School of Technology. [www.cpsl.cam.ac.uk](http://www.cpsl.cam.ac.uk)



CPSL is proud to be working with Cape Farewell, which works with artists and scientists on a cultural response to climate change. [www.capefarewell.com](http://www.capefarewell.com)

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