Climate Fiction@UCA (Cli FI @UCA)

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Anticipating climate change and imagining new trajectories: resources in Climate Fiction?

How to represent the effects of climate change? How to show the multiple possible refractions (social, economic, political, etc.) of such a phenomenon with planetary consequences? And above all, how can they be seen in a way that is perhaps more sensitive than scientific work such as that of the IPCC? There is indeed another way of anticipating: that of the imagination and science fiction. The latter has an advantage: the future is almost its favourite territory. And, precisely, an issue as massive as climate change strongly pushes us towards another relationship to time and in particular to the future.

For climate issues, as for other subjects, science fiction can be a heuristic tool and a support for reflection, as work in the humanities and social sciences has begun to show. Science fiction is a mode of representation, carrying stories, images, symbolic content, etc. But it can also be taken as a mode of problematization and a mode of exploration. It even has a relatively new branch that has developed in recent times. The expression "cli fi" (a contraction of "climate fiction") is increasingly used to designate (or even reinterpret) works that depict, to varying degrees, effects or issues relating to climate change.

Imaginaries obviously play an important role in the way in which communities apprehend the issues of their time. These fictions make it possible to both experience and experiment, that is, to feel and to put to the test. By definition, science fiction productions construct varieties of imaginable worlds by varying different ranges of parameters. What does it mean to live in a world with degraded, even almost untenable, ecological conditions? What does having to or not being able to adapt mean for individuals, communities, organizations, environments, etc.? These forms of thought experiments, elaborated in fictional frameworks, indeed show the conditions that human communities could encounter and they thus provide the setting to help perceive the efforts necessary for the latter to achieve a form of resilience. These are also hypotheses that are, in a way, tested in these fictional laboratories. One of the rare places where we can see "future generations" live, act and organize themselves (and for good reason) is science fiction and its imaginary constructions. It is a way of trying to describe how it would be possible to inhabit the worlds in preparation. And even, for certain stories, with a strong evocative power.

These fictions draw attention to the multiple dependencies in which humans find themselves (for everything related to living environments). In *Climate Fiction and Cultural Analysis. A New Perspective on Life in the Anthropocene* [1], Gregers Andersen argues for example that climate

fiction should be seen as an essential complement to climate science, as it makes future modes of existence visible and conceivable in worlds not only deemed probable by science, but which are scientifically anticipated.

Notably, the dominant tone is hardly optimistic. Most often, the visions proposed are inclined towards a marked anxiety suggesting an apocalyptic horizon. Indeed, when it comes to its own planet, the human species as a whole seems to have come dangerously close to what should have been the limits, and the question now may even be whether the situation is close to a point of no return. Maybe to the point of fearing a condition like the "Condition Venus". This is the scientific hypothesis that serves as a terrifying and nightmarish spectre in the novel *Greenhouse Summer* by Norman Spinrad: it represents an irreversible outcome, risking plunging human communities into a world made difficult to live in by generalized warming. In the novel, the catastrophe has not yet taken place, but its anticipation becomes sufficiently convincing to come to sharpen conflicts between interests (economic and political in particular) which are all the more clearly revealed.

Thus, science fiction experiments with the conditions of living together. In the context of climate change, the relative comfort that has accompanied decades of economic growth is no longer guaranteed. Is this type of cultural production likely to feed "eco-anxiety" or to build ways to appease it? What will be left alive? Fiction can participate in an imaginary of general catastrophe and feed it. The important related issue, however, is how not to remain fatalistic. In fact, there seem to be more climate dystopias than optimistic fictions on the subject, which is hardly surprising as the change initiated seems inevitable. The variety of possible situations on a planetary scale is rendered more frequently among authors whose culture is not directly Western (see for example *Bangkok Wakes to Rain* by Pitchaya Sudbanthad).

Fiction is also a way of transcribing aspirations to change a state of the world, in this case by giving them shape in hypothetical futures, likely to maintain some hopes. Some stories allow us to explore other paths than those leading to complete collapse. This is what the American writer Kim Stanley Robinson tried to do, for example, through various novels. What social and political organization will it be necessary to find? How will this reorganization be able to absorb climatic drifts without producing new injustices? Will we need even more ambitious institutions than those that are currently trying to be put in place? The fictional framework makes it possible to include original institutions (compared to a present or past state) and to test their functioning: an international agency which could play the role of a «Ministry for the Future» for example, like the one imagined by Kim Stanley Robinson and whose mission would be to defend future generations and the forms of life present on the planet. Or, with the same objective, a carbon currency ("carbon coin") to have an alternative financing circuit in the fight against climate change. In this case, the novel is a way of expressing the author's concerns and exploring a range of imaginable options.

Is it possible to find solutions other than technoscientific ones (such as geo-engineering could be, as the ultimate solution)? How is it possible to imagine a world without cars for example, or at least one in which their place is significantly reduced? Solarpunk fictions, in the process of becoming a subgenre in their own right, try to show societies operating on different principles, first in the technologies and energy resources used, but also in their guiding values, which are more egalitarian (including in relationships with other species), more cooperative and less

profit-oriented.

Can these fictions encourage reflection on all these issues, or even elicit certain forms of reaction or commitment? We can hypothesize that this kind of fiction is also useful for collectively building an ethics of the future. It will be interesting to follow the role they take on in a world whose climatic conditions, and even ecological conditions more broadly, are likely to change significantly. The mass of future uncertainties raises many questions, and it is also these that science fiction metaphorizes through its stories. As Carl Death says: "Climate change is altering how the future is imagined." Could future fictions be anything other than climatic fictions?

Reference

1. *London, Routledge, 2019.*