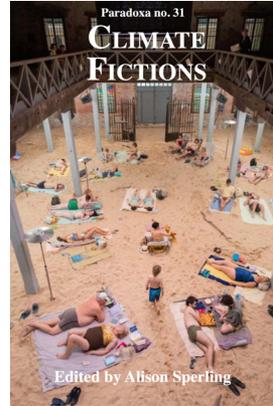


Climate Fictions: Introduction

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Just Another Day at the Beach

Sun & Sea (Marina), the title of the exhibition at which the cover photograph was taken, was a fiction from the start. Held inside an enclosed warehouse and located a few kilometers off-site from the main grounds of the 2019 Venice Biennale, the performance featured neither sun nor sea. Conceived of and executed by artists Lina Lapelytė, Vaiva Grainytė and Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė, the Lithuanian Pavilion was an opera staged twice-weekly on an indoor constructed stretch of sand. At any given time there were twenty or so performers—



couples young and old, a family with a young child, a solo-beachgoer reading a magazine¹—lying spread across the sand on towels, or reclining in beach-chairs. Wearing bathing suits and applying sunscreen, performers basked in artificial light, singing what the artists call an “ecological libretto.”² If you were willing to wait in line in the wilting Venice summer heat for three hours, once inside you would stand above the beach on the second floor, watching the opera from a square balcony with a large opening in the middle through which to view the performance below.

The pavilion, winner of the prestigious Golden Lion award for best international participation, stages the end of the world as just another day at the beach. Impending ecological crises manifest themselves as vacationer’s mostly bourgeois complaints (e.g., the “Wealthy Mommy’s

¹ For a more detailed discussion about race in this performance, see my interview with the artists, pp 47-54.

² Copies of the text of the libretto were hung around the balcony for spectators to follow along; they were also on sale along with a pressed vinyl recording of the opera as one left the pavilion. In short, the performance was packaged and marketed as an object that was enjoyable or as an experience one would want to remember, or to repeat, a perhaps interesting element to consider in relation to the discussion of the supposed “function” of climate fictions.

Song”) interrupted by occasional, explicitly “philosophical” self-awareness that points to the balance struck in the performance between despair and playfulness:

Is it not a comical even grotesque situation:
 Ancient Persia, China, India –
 Some of the oldest civilizations in the
 world.
 A thousand years went by and we are
 Lying here on the beach,
 Snacking on super sweet dates imported
 from Iran,
 Playing a game of chess invented by
 Indian Brahmins,
 Wearing swimming suits made in the
 factories of China –
 Is this not a parody of the Silk Road?
 (*Sun and Sea Libretto*, “Philosopher’s Commentary”)

Julia Halperin has written that the opera is about the laziness that, in effect, brings about the end of the world: “Not with a bang, but with something much more human: resignation, self-absorption, laziness. As the pavilions’ organizers note, ‘contemporary crises unfold easily, softly—like a pop song on the very last day on Earth’” (Halperin).

Sun & Sea is undoubtedly a climate fiction. As an immersive performance hingeing entirely on fictionalized climate and overtly reflecting on climate change, *Sun & Sea* mobilizes the beach itself as a contentious, ecologically-specific site. Predominantly white vacationers sing of sipping piña colodas while bemoaning the death of the Great Barrier Reef, worry about the changing tides, and remark on the strange hue of the water and its “acidic waves” (“Siren’s Aria”). The beach is both a site of leisure and extreme precarity; beaches are particularly affected by the effects of climate change not only because those changes endanger delicate nonhuman ecosystems, but because they also threaten human populations around the world that live in close proximity to and depend on the ocean for their livelihood and culture.³ *Sun & Sea* draws your attention to these imbalances without having the effect of didacticism; the tone is melancholic but lighthearted. It is perhaps the complexity of

³ For a forthcoming example of interdisciplinary thinking on the beach, see Hannah Freed-Thall’s *The Beach Effect* (Columbia University Press), which examines the modernist seashore as a precarious commons, zone of ecological transience, and site of queer encounter.

affective responses that the performance piece engenders that renders it provocative in the context of this introduction to *Climate Fictions*.

Sun & Sea provides a fitting introduction this issue titled “Climate Fictions” because it usefully demonstrates the plural sense of “fictions” that I will address in this introduction.⁴ While the performance draws attention to its fictional status as a construction and as an artwork, it also goes to great length to simulate the real. Performers are encouraged by the artists *not to act* but to simply do what they would normally do on the beach, an already impossible set of instructions for beachgoers who are not actually on a beach: how does one enact a fiction precisely by not acting? In addition to drawing attention to the very category of a climate “fiction,” *Sun & Sea* reminds us of the fictions that many of the beachgoers, as well as viewers, might tell themselves in relation to climate change (“Everything will be OK,” “I’m not responsible,” “It won’t effect me,” “I’m doing my part,” even “climate change is a natural process” or “not real,” etc.). The work therefore appropriately sets up an issue on “Climate Fictions,” which deliberately attends to the slippage between fiction as a category or as a mode of representation, and fictions as the lies or fabrications that continue to enable and animate climate change and environmental politics. Lastly, pluralizing “fictions” is a way of opening up the issue to new modes of theorizing climate fictions that exist beyond the boundaries of the novel and beyond questions of genre, where climate fiction scholarship has so far largely resided. This brief introduction will point to some of the major contributions of the developing field of climate fiction studies, and then suggest new paths along which we can continue to explore the relation between climate and fiction across media and technologies, methodological approaches, and disciplines.

Cli-fi

This issue of *Paradoxa* follows recent scholarship in the environmental humanities on the literary origins and expressions of “climate fiction,” at least since the term’s arrival on the popular and academic scene. Climate-change fiction, climate fiction, cli-fi, or in this introduction also denoted as CF, was coined (and since championed, now policed) by blogger Dan Bloom in 2007, and popularized by a retweet from speculative fiction author Margaret Atwood in 2012. Climate fiction has since been the subject of numerous scholarly works as well as popular

⁴ Thanks to Adeline Johns-Putra for helping to me clarify this point in her comments on an earlier draft.

and widely read publications in *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, and *National Public Radio*, the latter of which especially inquires after CF's ability to effect real planetary change, and how.⁵ Climate fictions take many forms, ranging from realism to the science fictional, apocalyptic scenarios to utopian fantasies. The category is notoriously difficult to describe: What must a work have in order to think of it under the banner of climate fiction? What role must climate change or climate science play in a work, and at what scale or temporality must a work operate, in order to be considered climate fiction? And what does it *matter* (outside of publishing and marketing considerations) to name a work as climate fiction—does it charge it with a certain environmental-political potential to enact real change, as J.K. Ullrich asks in *The Atlantic*: “Can Books Save the Planet”?

Significant academic scholarship in literary studies has been published in the last decade on the questions that are raised by climate fiction, and that might all be considered together according to three primary and layered concerns: (1) CF's status as a (sub)genre and its relationship to SF and to science and technology; (2) the modes of representation of the complexities of climate change (primarily in the novel); and (3) CF's efficacy or potency, what Derek Woods calls its “ecological function.”⁶

Certainly one of the most discussed aspects of climate fiction has been its relation to genre. The term cli-fi is derived from its derivation from sci-fi, indeed most climate fiction scholars trace CF to Ursula Le Guin's *Lathe of Heaven* (1971) or Arthur Herzog's *Heat* (1977)⁷ in the decade following the conclusive scientific identification of the rapidly increasing warming effect of rising carbon dioxide levels and other greenhouse gases

⁵ See, for example, Angela Evancie “So Hot Right Now: Has Climate Change Created a New Literary Genre?” *National Public Radio* (2013), “A Look at the Growing Genre of Climate Fiction” *Scientific American* (2013), the online discussion page titled “Will Fiction Influence How We React to Climate Change?” from *The New York Times* (2014), J.K. Ullrich “Climate Fiction: Can Books Saves the Planet” *The Atlantic* (2015), or more recently Kathy Waldman “How Climate-Change Fiction, or ‘Cli-Fi’ Forces Us to Confront the Incipient Death of the Planet” *The New Yorker* (2018).

⁶ I'm grateful to Derek Woods for sharing with me a work in progress, which has influenced my thinking here, “Genre at Earth Magnitude: A Theory of Climate Fiction.”

⁷ It is outside the scope or interest of this introduction to give any comprehensive list of climate fiction novels. Exhaustive research and excellent analysis of hundreds of (primarily) novels can be found in the work of foundational CF scholars cited throughout including Adeline Johns-Putra, Adam Trexler, Axel Goodbody, Andrew Milner, and J.R. Burgmann. See also Stef Craps and Rick Crownshaw, eds., “The Rising Tide of Climate Change Fiction”, *Studies in the Novel*, Volume 50, Number 1, Spring 2018.

in the atmosphere.⁸ Many scholars have persuasively demonstrated the ways in which climate change fiction is inherently tied to climate science and thus does not really emerge before the 1970s. Andrew Milner and J.R. Burgmann have claimed that CF is a sub-genre of science fiction, relating primarily to the SF selective tradition. They propose that writers of CF “articulate a structure of feeling that accords centrality to science and technology ... normally climate science” (*Short Pre-History*, 5); “cli-fi is ... above all a *science* fiction” (“Short Pre-History” 20). Andrea Whiteley, Angie Chiang, and Edna Einsiedel also point to the category’s relation to science: “Climate fiction ... is particularly interesting because it is a cultural response to mostly scientific and policy discourses” (Whiteley et al, 28). For Axel Goodbody and Adeline Johns-Putra, “Cli-fi is ... characterized by a mix of factual research and speculative imagination” (9); it is “not a genre in the scholarly sense” (1) but borrows from and embraces elements of already existing genres, and Matthew Schnieder-Mayerson has written that CF is “more a category than a genre” (“Climate Change” 312). Rebecca Evans would perhaps agree, writing that “cli-fi is not a coherent genre but rather a literary preoccupation with climate futures that draws from a wide range of genres” (95). And Caren Irr has written of both Trexler and Kate Marshall that they insist that climate fiction “is not a development within a particular tradition but rather a direct, multigenre response to the narrative challenges ... [of] the geological age increasingly known as the Anthropocene.... Climate fiction, by their account, largely renders national and generic traditions irrelevant” (Irr, 4).⁹ Whether or not one considers cli-fi a genre, sub-genre, or category, its relation to SF is crucial to its emergence and is a relation explored throughout this issue.

Responding to publications that lament its attachment or that otherwise attempt to detach cli-fi from SF—including Amitav Ghosh’s position (equally lamented by SF scholars) in *The Great Derangement*—Pawel Freluk has argued that there is in fact a lot at stake in the rightful claiming of climate fiction as a form of SF.¹⁰ He writes: “Whether labeled climate fiction, fiction of the Anthropocene, eco-fiction, or any other of a handful

⁸ Though climate science and the discovery of the effects of greenhouse gasses on the atmosphere were identified as early as the 1820s by Joseph Fourier and studied throughout the 19th century by John Tyndall, Svante Arrhenius, and others, global warming as an effect of greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere is largely acknowledged in climate fiction scholarship as not entering public consciousness until the 1970s.

⁹ See Kate Marshall. “What are the Novels of the Anthropocene? American Fiction in Geological Time.” *American Literary History*, 27:3, Fall 2015, pp. 523-538.

¹⁰ For the full cluster of responses, see “‘What’s in a Name?’: Cli-fi and American Studies” Extended Forum, Ed. Susanne Leikam and Julia Leyda, *Amerikastudien/ American Studies*, 62:1 (2017).

of names in circulation, the prominent majority of texts dealing with climate change, anthropogenic warming, and catastrophic weather are really science fiction (SF) ... by and large, climate fiction *is* science fiction” (125). For Frelik, the disavowal of SF¹¹ in both climate fiction popular criticism and academic scholarship which does not recognize or acknowledge SF as a conceptual predecessor to CF has significant consequences, including the ways in which it presents the narrative of the Anthropocene and of climate change as a “recent and stand-alone development” (128). This particular danger is one that has been recognized more broadly of the Anthropocene and the ways in which climate change is historicized by Françoise Vergès in her reading of Dipesh Chakrabarty’s seminal 2009 essay “The Climate of History: Four Theses.” Understanding the changing climate as a *crisis* is what Vergès identifies as a form of presentism that ignores the “deeper history and create[s] the illusion of an organic and undifferentiated universal humanity” (Vergès, online).

In other words, building on Frelik, tracing a genealogy of CF (and what counts as CF) activates questions not only about genre, but in doing so also about racial and class politics that are crucial to understanding cultural responses to climate change and the Anthropocene. If part of Vergès’ critique of Chakrabarty is that the universalizing of “humanity” incorrectly distributes accountability for climate change to *all* humans (rather than largely white men colonizers who bear more responsibility), it also ignores the ways in which, in Matt Huber’s words, “climate change is class struggle”.¹² Huber writes: “Although working class and environmental politics are often thought of as separate, both forms of politics face the same enemy: capital” (online). This issue thus also aims to examine the ways in which climate fictions do, or should, account for the history of what Ruth Wilson Gilmore has called racial capitalism¹³ and the ways in which “climate has always been a project for colonial powers” (Weizman 12).¹⁴ Following this discussion, it is

¹¹ For examples of this kind of disavowal in which SF is not credited or acknowledged as a forerunner to CF, see Rodge Glass, “Global Warning: The Rise of ‘Cli-fi’” *The Guardian*, May 2013, and Rebecca Tuhus-Dubrow, “Cli-fi: The Birth of a Genre”, *Dissent Magazine*, Summer 2013.

¹² Matt Huber, “Climate Change is Class Struggle.” *Jacobin*, 12.19.2019, <https://jacobinmag.com/2019/12/on-fire-naomi-klein-review-climate-change>.

¹³ See Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s forthcoming book on which she has been delivering several public talks of late, *Change Everything: Racial Capitalism and the Case for Abolition*, Haymarket Books, 2021.

only natural that *climate fiction* must also remain up for debate: what exactly are the defining elements of climate fiction—climate science or the transatlantic slave trade?¹⁵ Acidifying oceans and warming temperatures or environmental racism, or decades of divestment from communities of color? Can a work be one of climate fiction that does not take the history of capitalism, colonialism and enslaved peoples as central to its story or its study?

Climate change compels us to reconsider the political underpinnings of our understanding of the world, and therefore also the writing and reading protocols used to narrate it. In one of the first academic articles on climate change fiction, Johns-Putra and Adam Trexler write that climate change might itself require new engagements with literature: “familiar notions such as setting, place, and nature—mainstays of environmental literary criticism—are being revisited and renovated in response to climate change and climate change fiction” (186). They argue that in the field of ecocriticism, where a sizeable percentage of scholarship on CF emerges, “nature, landscape, setting, and place [have] been inimical to the development of a critical method for understanding both the complexity of climate change and the formal innovations of literature as it represents this complexity” (192). Milner and Burgmann have suggested a move away from traditional literary critical techniques of close-reading climate fiction in favor of what they call a “world systems approach” informed by Franco Moretti’s method of distant reading (Milner and Burgmann, “Climate Fiction: A World System’s Approach” 26). Trexler’s later monumental work *Anthropocene Fiction* broadens the discussion of climate fiction to think instead about Anthropocene fiction and fiction in the Anthropocene, suggesting that literary authors have had to rethink the construction of the novel in response to climate change. He writes that “[i]nstead of fiction being read as attempts to seize the arbitrary meaning of climate change, or as literary representations of scientific representations, climate change novels are best understood *as a*

¹⁴ This is a quotation cited by Françoise Vergès in “Racial Capitalocene: Is The Anthropocene Racial?” which she traces back to a citation in McKenzie Wark’s, “Climate & Colonialism,” Publicseminar.org, <https://publicseminar.org/2015/11/climate-colonialism/>, November 5, 2015. See also Eyal Weizman, Fazal Sheikh, *The Conflict Shoreline: Colonization as Climate Change in the Negev Desert*, Steidl Gerhard Verlag, 2015.

¹⁵ For more on the relation between the Anthropocene and the history of the slave trade, see Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, Duke University Press, 2016, in which she writes of that “antiblackness is pervasive *as* climate” (98) and Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*, Combined Academic Publishing, 2018.

force that interacts with climate change, remaking what we know about the climate and the novel at the same time (Anthropocene Fictions, 35, italics mine). Johns-Putra and Trexler have respectively argued that the sheer complexity of climate change puts pressure on fictional narratives to better represent complex systems, deep temporalities, and spatial scales that fundamentally change the ways in which narratives are both written and understood. Of interest to both has been the ways in which climate change fiction has begun to explore climate change as not only a “meterological or ecological crisis ‘out there’ but as something filtered through our inner and outer lives.” They continue: “In this way ... climate change asks for innovation, demanding plotlines and characterizations that participate in the global, networked, and controversial nature of climate change” (Trexler and Johns-Putra 196).

The question of how climate change is represented or has failed to be represented is central to a number of the essays in this collection, as are the ways in which ecocriticism must rethink its relation to the fictions about the increasing intensity of the effects of climate change.¹⁶ The current projection of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change¹⁷ of a 1.5° Celsius global increase in temperature above pre-industrial levels is predicted to occur between 2030 and 2052 if temperatures continue to rise at the current rate. The effects of this level of global warming as a result of climate change are significant and include biodiversity loss, numerous risks associated with rising sea levels, increasing extreme weather events, and many other changes. The questions asked of CF are particularly tied to speculations regarding *real* scientific data and *actual* planetary concerns about the effects of climate change. Woods examines this relationship by arguing that climate fiction’s claim to serve a real ecological function deserves careful attention. Responding to a piece by Sarah Holding in *The Guardian*, Woods writes: “So climate fiction’s [supposed] purpose, whatever its social effects, is ultimately to contribute to the Earth system’s equilibrium.” He goes on, “[c]limate fiction thus has the strange and seemingly unprecedented status of a genre *causally coupled to the Earth’s climate*” (forthcoming). His argument is that this coupling necessitates a paradox wherein “*climate fiction ... promises extrapolative realism in the content of individual novels and films, but does so in the constitutive and paradoxical presence of a goal that would prevent such future climates from materializing*” (Woods, italics in original). I include Woods’ argument because this negative feedback loop provocatively asks whether the effectiveness of climate fiction’s

¹⁶ See Timothy Clark, *Ecocriticism on the Edge: The Anthropocene as a Threshold Concept*, Bloomsbury, 2015.

¹⁷ <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/chapter/spm/>.

purpose would undermine its form. It echoes Trexler's notion above that climate and the novel are involved in an exchange of meaning-making and a dialectic of redefinition. Though some essays in this collection do claim that the works they examine lead to a heightened planetary awareness and thus to the possibility that readers may learn to be better Earth-citizens and thus have a positive effect on actual Earth systems, others warily remain in doubt.

Climate Fictions

This issue challenges the position that literature, and especially the novel, is the most "appropriate" form through which to engage climate change. Leading scholars of climate change and Anthropocene fiction have argued that the novel form is distinct in its abilities to capture and confront the complexity of climate change. Schneider-Mayerson has written that "the staggeringly complex problems of the Anthropocene are appropriately represented, deconstructed and understood through a medium that demands sustained engagement" (312). Trexler has likewise written that the novel (in comparison to non-fiction, documentaries, or Hollywood films) has the specific formal capacity to "interrogate the emotional, aesthetic, and living experience of the Anthropocene"; he emphasizes the "real agency of atmospheric agency and the novel" (*Anthropocene Fictions* 6). And Trexler has worried that a media studies approaches to climate texts could turn climate change "into a discourse or a series of representations" (6).

By including a number of media studies and other non-literary studies approaches to climate fictions, the essays and dialogues in this issue of *Paradoxa* respond to this worry as a provocation. If climate change is too complex to be represented, then even the sustained engagement of a long-form artistic form like the novel (Schneider-Mayerson) is of course also insufficient. The question of sustainment is therefore explored through various other forms of climate fictions that are presented here.

A simple gesture—pluralizing "climate fictions"—is thus an attempt to draw attention away from the novel so that we might interrogate its privileged position in the study of climate fiction, as well as to ask what it might mean to think of climate change fictions outside of genre. Shelley Streeby has recently written that cli-fi has excluded movements, certain speculative fictions, and most importantly, "futurisms of Indigenous people and people of color" (4). She therefore views her book-length study¹⁸ of social movements and activism, as well as other cultural forms such as film, music, video, and performance as "going

beyond” cli-fi. This issue of *Paradoxa* aligns itself with her position by aiming to be more inclusive, but unlike Streeby does not yet yield the organizing principles that circulate around the category of climate fiction. In agreement with Stephanie LeMenager, this issue likewise takes the position that cli-fi “ranges across media, including digital, television, film, short fiction, the novel, and memoir” (LeMenager 361). By pluralizing “fictions” therefore, the hope is to partially cast aside the attachment that climate fiction has in other scholarship to category, genre, or sub-genre of the novel in order to open up more capacious relations between climate change and the fictive, the imaginative, the speculative, the fake or the falsified.

“Climate Fictions” thus includes in its responses to the fictions of climate change various productions that attempt to capture certain extraordinary systemic and scalar complexities that confront us in the Anthropocene, as well as studies of the ways in which climate change manifests in the banal and the ordinary, what LeMenager calls “an assault on the everyday” (379). In addition, this issue includes analyses and examples of cultural works that think this relation not in a totalizing or world-building mode in which the novel might operate, but in sometimes fragmented, incomplete, or focused intensities that the novel may be incapable of accessing. While many of the essays presented here do engage with literature and the novel in ways that will continue to be crucial to the study of CF, others continue to broaden our scope of climate fiction to include film, video and board games, even climate modeling itself under the banner of climate fictions. In addition, the fourteen invited dialogues between visual and performance artists, poets, and art-activists specifically are thinking the relation between climate and fiction in their poetry, visual art, performance, game design, dance, fiction, experimental film and video, and activism towards climate justice. In part because climate change looms as one of the most pressing urgencies of the contemporary moment, climate fictions demand treatment beyond traditional forms and beyond the ways that academic criticism alone is capable of responding to. The dialogues also attend to what many have identified as a gap in climate fiction and in climate fiction studies of the work of queer, transgender, disabled, Black, Indigenous, and people of color. The effects of climate change disproportionately affect these marginalized groups of people and yet their voices are arguably the least heard and the least referenced in climate fiction studies.

The essays were submitted in November of 2019 in response to an open call for papers that Pawel Frelik and I had publicized earlier that

¹⁸ Shelley Streeby, *Imagining the Future of Climate Change: World-Making Through Science Fiction and Activism*, University of California Press, 2018.

Spring. Each essay then went through a rigorous double-blind peer review process that lasted through the Spring of 2020. During this time, I curated the artist dialogues by inviting conversations with writers, artists, and activists whose work challenged the notion of climate fiction and the primacy of the literary as a way of engaging climate change in the arts. Following perhaps a queer impetus to challenge the “appropriate” forms of climate change fiction, the invitations solicited the work of artists with sometimes more meandering improprieties, leading to more intimate and focused conversations on specific works and investments related to environmental issues. The result is a widely diverse set of fascinating and surprising connections between art and climate change, as well as crucial insights that reveal the many ways in which climate change is bound to innumerable forms of oppression due to colonialism and extractivism, environmental racism, homophobia, and ableism. The dialogues therefore help us to think about gaps in our understanding of climate fiction(s) for which the novel may somehow be “inappropriate,” even complicit perhaps in processes that lead to climate crises. This issue boasts the perspectives of writers and artists from across the United States and Canada, Lithuania, Taiwan, The Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Poland, Colombia, the U.K., Australia, Brazil, Turkey, and Indonesia—by no means an exhaustive mapping, but one that helps to think climate fictions both as global phenomena while also reflecting on differences across highly localized contexts. It is my hope that reading the dialogues and essays together may help us continue to respond to questions such as for whom or for what is climate a fiction? In what ways is climate change itself a fiction? What do different modes of fictionalizing climate or the effects of climate change produce different effects and possibilities? How are climate and climate change only and already fictionalized through simulation, story, and other forms of speculation? In what ways then are fictions embedded in the cultural understandings of climate change? Following Trexler, what pressures does climate change put on artistic forms in addition to the novel that might require a complete rethinking of form?

This volume is organized by three groupings: Simulation, Narration, and Speculation. This structure helpfully points to three dominant foci, or three possible forms of the fictive that emerged in both the dialogues and the essays, and which puts them into provocative conversation. Part I, “Simulation” opens with dialogues that underscore climate fictions as technologies and performance, both live and digital forms of embodiment. These dialogues help us to think through climate fictions in game-play or digital renderings, or in gestural, aural, or performative acts. The artists and writers speak together about how race, indigeneity,

and gender and sexual difference continue to shape ongoing struggles with violence, colonialism, and extractivism that are at the root of these climate fictions. The essays that follow continue to theorize forms of simulation including climate modeling, music, or games, expanding what we think of as climate fiction and interrogating media outside of the novel.

The second grouping, “Narration,” collects works especially focused on narrative and story. The dialogues reveal the different ways in which constructing fictions and re-constructing historical narratives can be crucial to certain populations struggling with the uneven effects of climate change due to long histories of varying forms of oppression based on where and when they are writing about (Indonesia, Aboriginal land in Australia, the GDR for example). The essays that follow largely focus in on one literary work, an important form of climate fiction criticism and scholarship, which allows for the drawing out of complexities of how climate change is represented and operates with the sustained attention that the novel form allows. But they also add to our understanding of climate change narratives by re-opening the debate about when climate fiction can be said to begin, as a number of these texts are either about proto-climate change fiction¹⁹ or indeed from much earlier periods. Though existing scholarship largely denies that climate fiction could exist before climate science, two of the essays here challenge anew whether it is possible to think climate fictions as detached from climate science, and ask what dangers or possibilities might this present.

Part III, “Speculation” is certainly a category in which many of the essays and dialogues in this collection could have been included, as many of the authors, artists, and activists here work towards climate justice. But here the dialogues are perhaps more explicitly focused not only on futures that have not yet come to pass, but also on a kind of engagement with the past that rebuilds and nurtures memories of climate-changed places or species as itself a speculative and artistic practice. The essays that conclude the volume point especially towards texts that theorize apocalyptic, utopian, anti-utopian, and dystopian approaches to climate speculation routed through racial and gendered exploitation and their relation to ecological devastation.

Schneider-Mayerson has recently written that “in the very near future, almost all literature will become a form of what we now think of as climate change fiction, defined broadly” (Schneider-Mayerson, “Climate Change Fiction” 318). It is possible that the more climate

¹⁹ For a discussion of “proto-climate change fiction” in the 1960s and focused on the work of J.G. Ballard, see Jim Clarke, “Reading Climate Change in J.G. Ballard,” *Critical Survey* 25/2 (2013), pp. 7-21.

change comes to dominate the fictions and imaginative realms in the future, the already unstable category of cli-fi may prove to be overly capacious. Some essays in this issue usefully take the term “cli-fi” as a central question or problem. But the issue as a whole worries less about cli-fi as a category and more about the ways that climate fictional works interrogate inter-related histories and systems at work in a changing climate, as well as about how the fictions we tell ourselves also shape the climate. The writers and artists represented here therefore put pressure on how climate fictions might offer not (only) set of formal or aesthetic qualities, but a relationality that will continue to animate climate-related cultural productions as well as the future of climate change, in crucial, and still largely unpredictable ways.

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