Why the Cultures of Climate Change need Climate Fiction

Gregers Andersen
University of Copenhagen, Denmark

As an increasing number of fictive depictions of anthropogenic climate change fill popular culture a reflection on what fiction can offer the contemporary cultures of climate change seems appropriate. Hence the paper will point to two functions intrinsic to what now goes under the increasingly popular term climate fiction or cli-fi. Drawing heavily on the work of French philosopher Paul Ricoeur, the paper will first state that there is a genuine need for fictions that take the new worlds made probable by climate science as their departure point, simply because fictions can help human beings cognitively adapt to new worldly conditions. Following up on Ricoeur’s remark that "the first way human beings attempt to understand and master the 'manifold' of the practical field is to give themselves a fictive representation of it", the paper will through examples demonstrate how climate fiction functions as a laboratory where potential options and modes of existence for the future are tested. Continuing from here, the paper will then go on to explicate how the emphasis on the aforementioned cognitive function in Ricoeur’s writings often appear alongside reflections on what Ricoeur calls the productive reference or the ability of fictions to create reality. Thus the paper will point to another more utopian function of climate fiction, namely as being a place where new modes of existence appear. The argument will here run as follows: since the contemporary climate crisis is also a crisis of the imagination there is a need for fictions that comes up with new lifestyles. In other words: climate fiction should not only be regarded as a laboratory, where new kinds of being-in-the-world are tested, but also as a place from where new cultural practices can potentially spring.

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*Presenting author