

Book Review

Shelley Streeby (2018) *Imagining the Future of Climate Change: World-Making Through Science Fiction and Activism*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press. 168 pages.

Although nowadays ‘imagining’ the future of climate change seems like an uncomplicated task, it took a long time – to be exact, decades – for scientists, writers, artists and thinkers to prove how enormous the problem is and to draw attention to other aspects of climate change (e.g. its’ influence on economy, culture, education) as well.

In recent book, Shelley Streeby invites us to understand the history of climate justice activism through sci-fi stories so that we can learn about how the imagination of climate change and the activism overlap and how these possible scenarios can be lessons in ‘the art of world making’. In Streeby’s book, indigenous people and people of colour are in focus, as in the author’s own word ‘Their stories and movements—in the real world and through science fiction—help us all better understand the relationship between activism and culture, and how both can be valuable tools in creating our future.’¹

Shelley Streeby is a literature and ethnic studies professor at the University of California, San Diego. The author is also the director of the Clarion Science Fiction and Fantasy Writer’s workshop; as mentioned in her biography, she was a science fiction fan ever since she started reading. Streeby’s enthusiasm towards science fiction led to this book combined with the author’s research topics of American Studies and Critical Ethnic Studies. And while interdisciplinarity is not just a recent trend in environmental studies, including science fiction literature certainly is. Streeby’s aim is not only to present the climate change – and the climate change movements in general, but rather to introduce the diverse world of activism, which exists not only in real life but also in fiction. Through the demonstration of the key players of the American climate movement the goal of the author is to explain why our world’s future is dependent on understanding the relationship between activism and culture.

The book is divided into four sections along these aims: three chapters and an introduction, and each chapter is about the same length. ‘Introduction: Imagining the Future of Climate Change’ introduces us to the most important concepts and theories which are later discussed in the following chapters and gives a historical overview of the American climate change movement and politics. Chapter 1, ‘#NoDAPL: Native American and Indigenous Science, Fiction, and Futurism’ presents how digital technologies and social media can be in favour of mobilization and activism, even against global oil companies. In the second

¹ See <https://literature.ucsd.edu/people/faculty/sstreeby.html>

chapter, 'Climate Refugees in the Greenhouse World; Archiving Global Warning with Octavia E. Butler', Streeby demonstrates why Butler's work, especially in the 1980s and 1990s was extremely important in understanding climate change as a slow disaster, and presents how Butler engaged in race, class and gender while discussing global warming problems. The last chapter, 'Climate Change as a World Problem: Shaping Change in the Wake of Disaster' through the work of *adrienne maree brown*, Streeby emphasizes how important a role indigenous people and people of race have in imagining the future of climate change not only in the history of climate movement but also in the forms of culture. While the book title would indicate an international overview of imagining the future of climate change, if we look at the brief description of the chapters, it may become clear that this book is in fact – not surprisingly, knowing the author's background – rather an American overview. This, of course, does not detract from the value of the book, especially if the reader has a freer expectation to read it and even if the title does not necessarily express what is in the book.

The ambitious aims of the author are presented in the Introduction and that provides the reader knowledge on the analytical framework; it also familiarizes them with definitions and a brief history of climate change. Streeby from the very beginning reaches out to the authors of the science fiction literature and introduces the concepts they use in connection with climate change. In parallel to the emerging science fiction literature, Streeby presents the history of climate movement and climate politics in the United States. The advantage of this chapter is that it provides a comprehensive science fiction book review that navigates the average reader to a completely new world. However, if someone who is more interested in the subject of climate change takes the book in their hands, they may soon lose interest as the chapter is concise and requires background knowledge in science fiction literature. Nonetheless, the brief history of climate change is a fascinating part of the introduction, especially for non-Americans, as it demonstrates the most significant events in the field of climate change in American politics. But the greatest strength of the introduction is the enormous archival overview that Streeby provides the reader. The author's knowledge on both climate change history and science fiction is unquestionable and the love for the subject permeates the reader as well.

With the first chapter, we immediately jump in time to today, where the author discusses through the American perspective how the development of technology affects climate movements. The example of the Standing Rock Lakota Nation and other Lakota, Nakota and Dakota citizens against an oil pipe is a symbol of how native Americans and people of colour benefited from the use of social media and modern journalism, and how these digital technologies could be helpful for future climate movements and activists. While we could comprehend their success as a utopia, according to Streeby this was not the case. We are now actually living the utopia that was imagined by several science fiction authors in the past. With the example of the anti-pipeline movement, #NoDAPL, the author takes the reader back in time again to present the history of the Native American resistance. Even though this is again a very American-specific issue, it can serve as

a lesson to many of us who find our voices unheard in the fight against climate change due to cultural, race, class or gender issues.

The second chapter is dedicated entirely to Octavia E. Butler's work, whose main message was that humanity needs to change the way they living to prevent the Earth from the ecological catastrophe. It is clear for the reader (and it is explicitly confirmed by the author) that the chapter serves as a compliment for Butler's work and ideas. Butler was one of the first climate change intellectuals who not only inspired many activists and artists with her work but was also able to vocally critique the American climate politics. In the Parable novels, Butler 'imagined' and predicted how destructive the future will be and how climate change will become a major world problem. Butler also raised attention on the role of education, as she advised: 'we might instead start preparing people for the climate changes to come, partly by changing the ways we educate'. (Streeby, 2018: 100.) In this chapter, Streeby again proves the extraordinary amount of research and data processing which was involved the preparation of this section. But while Butler's impact on the environmental and climate movement is inevitable, the chapter would have benefited from other imagined climate scenarios from similarly significant authors. For the reader, Butler's vision could have been reinforced if the author had also provided real-life cases where Butler's predictions were realized. Without such cases, this chapter remains a fully detailed overview of Butler's work but free from criticism.

adrienne maree brown, whose work is presented in the third chapter is known as a successor to Butler. What makes brown's unique is how she includes social and cultural issues into the climate change movement, and how she highlights important issues such as the proper use of media or education in the people of colour and indigenous communities. brown is not 'only' the voice for young Americans, she also works together with them to teach direct action, which is 'central to the creative and future-shaping work brown does with youth and other movements' (Streeby, 2018: 114). The example of brown's work acts as a closure of the book, as this is where the problems discussed so far come together. Namely, climate change and social-cultural justice issues. As Streeby quotes brown: 'If we want to bring new worlds into existence, we need to challenge the narratives that uphold current power dynamics and patterns [...] explores current social issues through the lens of sci-fi; conscious of identities and intersecting identities; centers those who have been marginalized; is aware of power and inequalities; is realistic and hard but hopeful; shows change from the bottom up rather than the top down; highlights that change is collective; and is not neutral – its purpose is social change and societal transformation' (p. 120).

This quote represents the core message of Streeby's book: with the help of science fiction literature it provides a future possibility for the reader who wants to fight against climate change and for climate justice. The whole book can be seen as an overview of book recommendations, and on the other hand, it can be considered as a summary of possible suggestions for the climate movement. While the intention of the author is valuable and transparent, the selection of the discussed authors is arguable, as non-Americans are under-represented. The

presented future imaginations of climate change are not contested as Streeby accepts the authors' arguments without questioning. All in all, this book is a great example of why interdisciplinarity is crucial in environmental studies and researches and how the sometimes underrated genres can serve as examples in such global problems as climate change. Streeby's well detailed research can be interesting for both activists and scientists, and especially for someone who is interested to learn about the climate justice movement in the United States of America.

ESZTER MÁTYÁS

CENTRAL EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY

[Matyas_Eszter-Eva@phd.ceu.edu]

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