

Imagining livable climate futures: Using speculative stories/fiction for counterfactual world-making

Matt Adams & Nick Wood

Plan: Let's Break Dystopian Fatalism

- Margaret Thatcher (1980) re capitalism: THERE IS NO ALTERNATIVE (TINA)!
- Yet Chimamanda Adichie (2009) warns of: *The Danger of a Single Story*:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9lhs241zeg&vl=en>
- Susan George (2001): *Another World IS Possible*.
- So How Do We Build a Better World?
- Plan: 1. A shared BETTER (not Brave!) NEW WORLD building exercise
- 2. 10min overview: Research into building new futures (Matthew)
- 3. 10min overview: Reading SPECULATIVE FICTION (SF) for new futures (Nick)

Building a New & Greener World by 2040

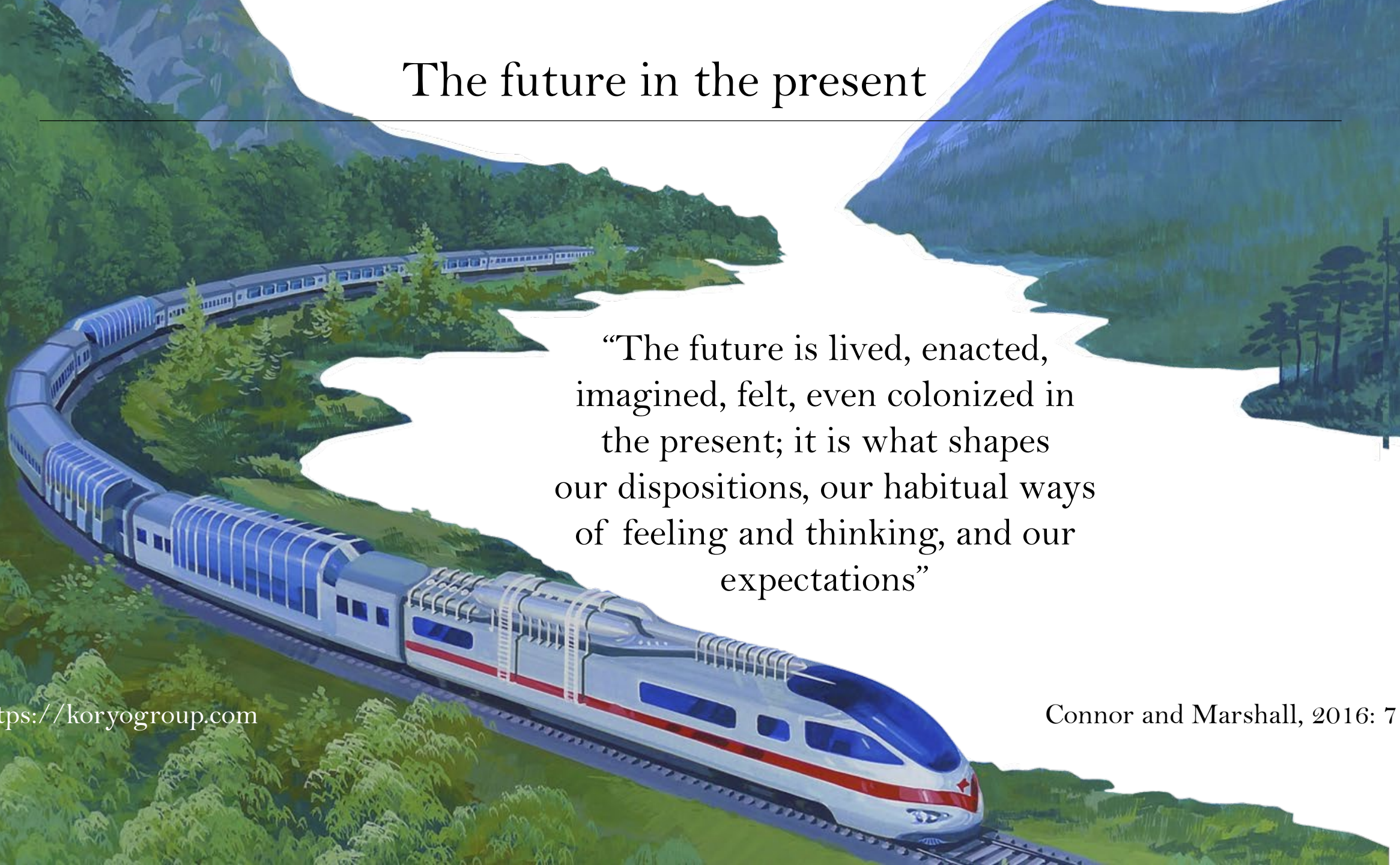
- Room breakouts for small group exercise.
- Agree one big concern that is central for you right now, re world/climate
- What one POSITIVE change would you like to see for this issue, by 2040?
- Imagine 2040 & change desired has happened – 1. **What does this look like?**
- Write/draw/represent this new and better world. (15 minutes) GOAL
- **2. Discuss Steps to Get There?** (Activating/Guiding Changes-> Mapping Paths to a Kinder New World) What are the costs of this? What are the benefits? (10 minutes)
- 3. Feedback/Discuss (10 minutes)

Break Out Exercise

- Agree one big World (Climate) Concern
- Imagine Big Positive Changes on This-> Almost (re)solved by 2040!
- 1. What does this look like?
- Write/draw/represent this new and better world. (15 minutes) GOAL
- 2. Steps to Get There? (Activating/Guiding Changes-> Mapping Paths)
- What are the costs of this? (Good Change is NEVER easy!) What are the benefits? (10 minutes)
- Matt: *Futures*

The future in the present

“The future is lived, enacted, imagined, felt, even colonized in the present; it is what shapes our dispositions, our habitual ways of feeling and thinking, and our expectations”



narrative foreclosure

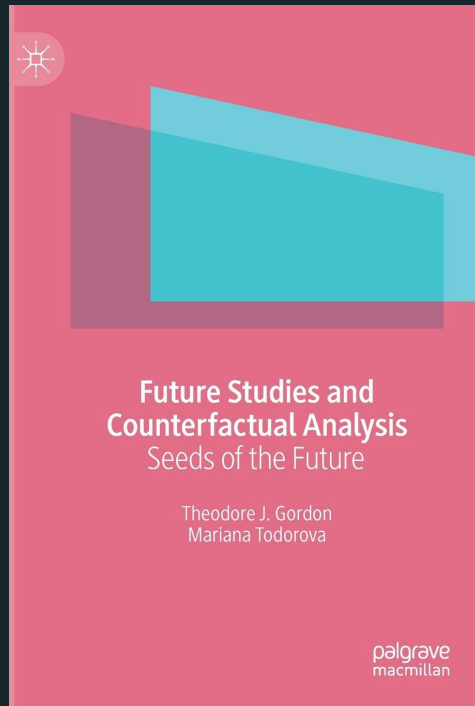
- ‘While the focus of social life is narrowing down to the present, the futures we create on a daily basis cast ever longer shadows’ (Adam & Groves, 2007)
- Parallel narratives – ‘business-as-usual’ and ‘apocalyptic’ anti-future teleological narratives (Randall, 2007)
- Fatalism, inescapable futures – narrative foreclosure
- Hope?

‘it seems easier to imagine ‘the end of the world’ than a far more modest change in the mode of production, as if liberal capitalism is the ‘real’ that will somehow survive even under conditions of a global ecological catastrophe’

(Žižek et al., 1999, p. 55).

Counterfactual histories

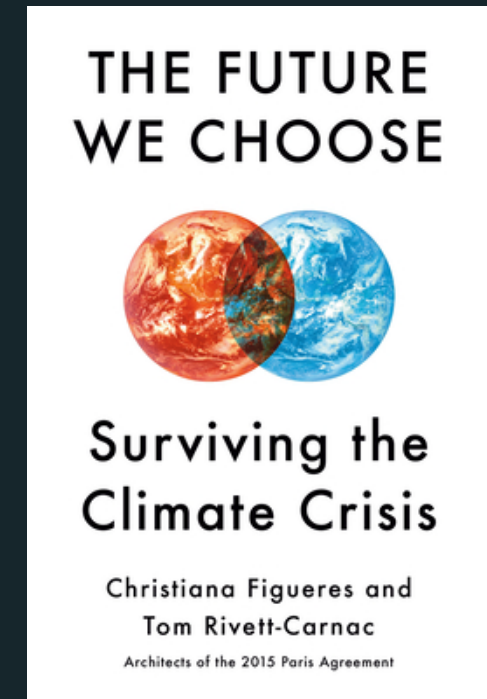
How would history have been different had \mathcal{Y} happened instead of X ?



Counterfactual futures

How would the future be different if \mathcal{Y} had happened, or if \mathcal{Y} happens, instead of X ?

Todorova & Gordon, 2017; Todorova, 2015



Constructing counterfactual futures





Carnage (BBC, 2017)

*I have written and directed a film
about veganism. I'm sorry.*

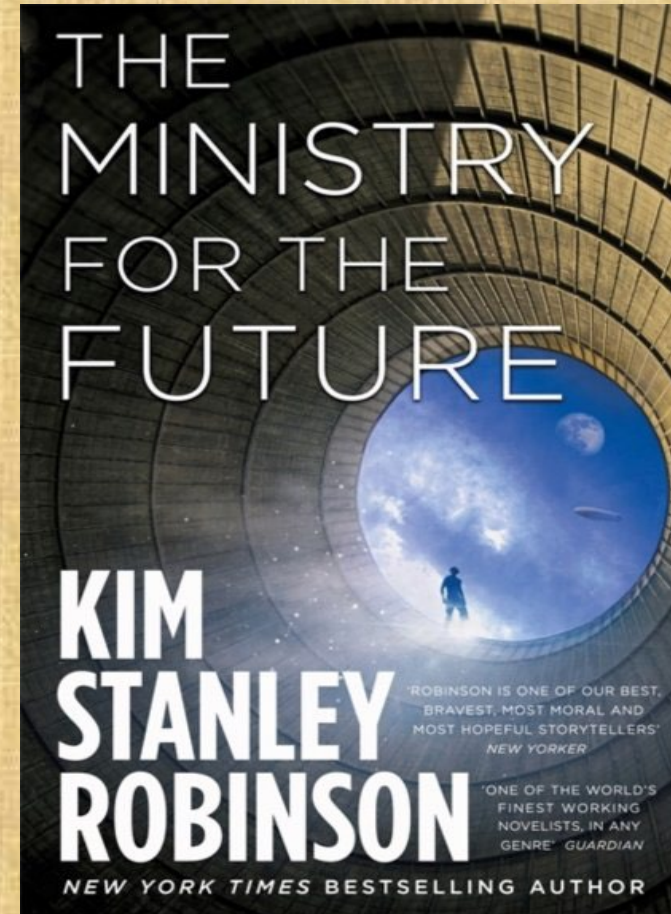
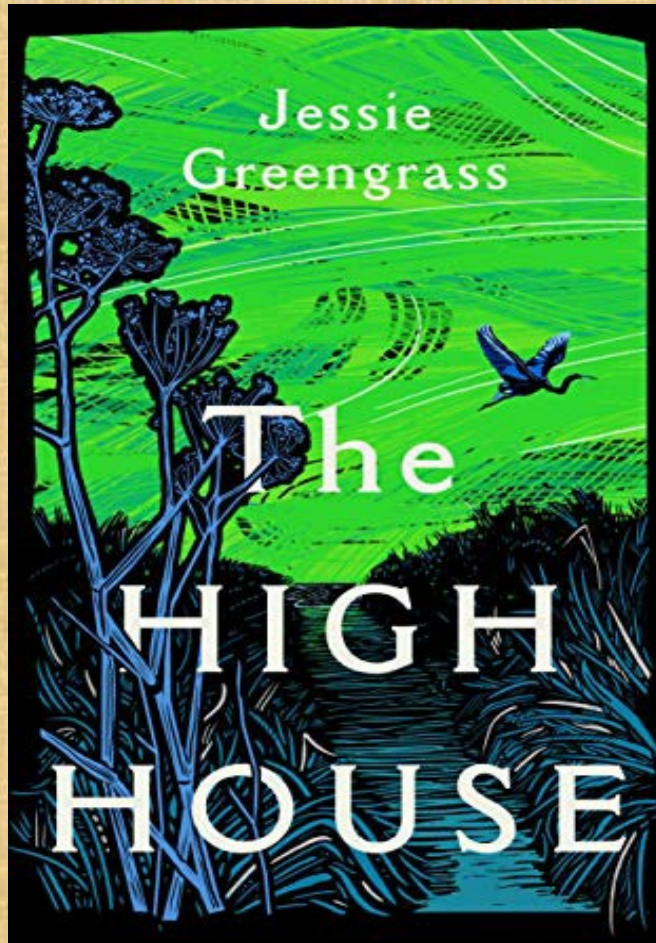
Methods & practices in humanities & the social sciences



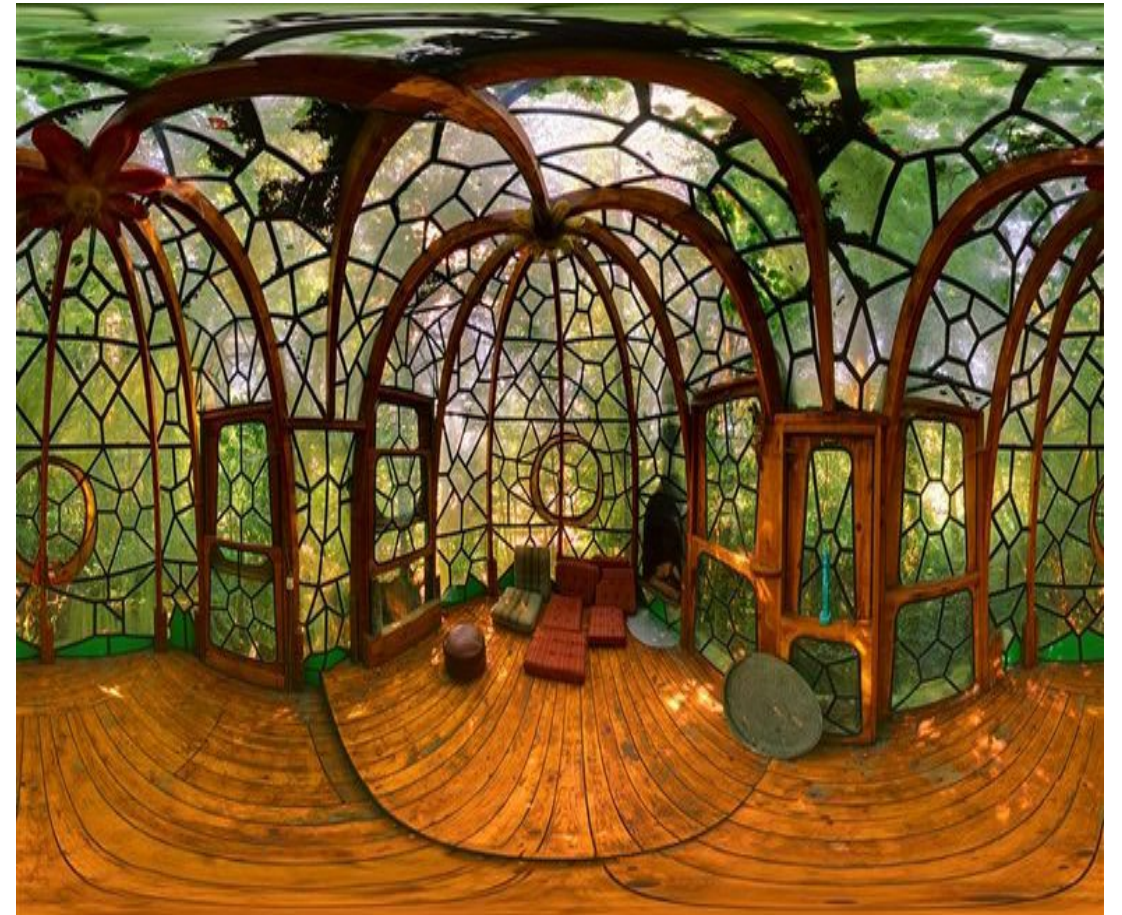
“an important step to propel transformative change is to nurture our capacity for imagination and use this to re-think taken-for-granted worldviews that might otherwise prohibit alternative ideas to emerge”

(Hilgren et al. 2020, p. 120; see also Light, 2019)

Speculative Fiction (SF): Imagination...



...And Desire. What do We WANT To Be?



Desired Futures & Deep/Radical Adaptation

- **Jem Bundell** (2018): <https://jembendell.wordpress.com/>
- Resilience: what do we value most to keep and how? (*The Earth who holds us, our animal cousins, each other...*)
- Relinquishment: what do we need to let go of so as not to make matters worse? (*Not just fossil fuels, but privileges & inequalities...*)
- Restoration: what could we bring back to help us with these difficult times? (*Indigenous/erased knowledges: **Mzwakali**, 2021*)
- Reconciliation: with what and whom shall we make peace as we awaken to our mutual mortality? (*The Earth, all 'others'...*)

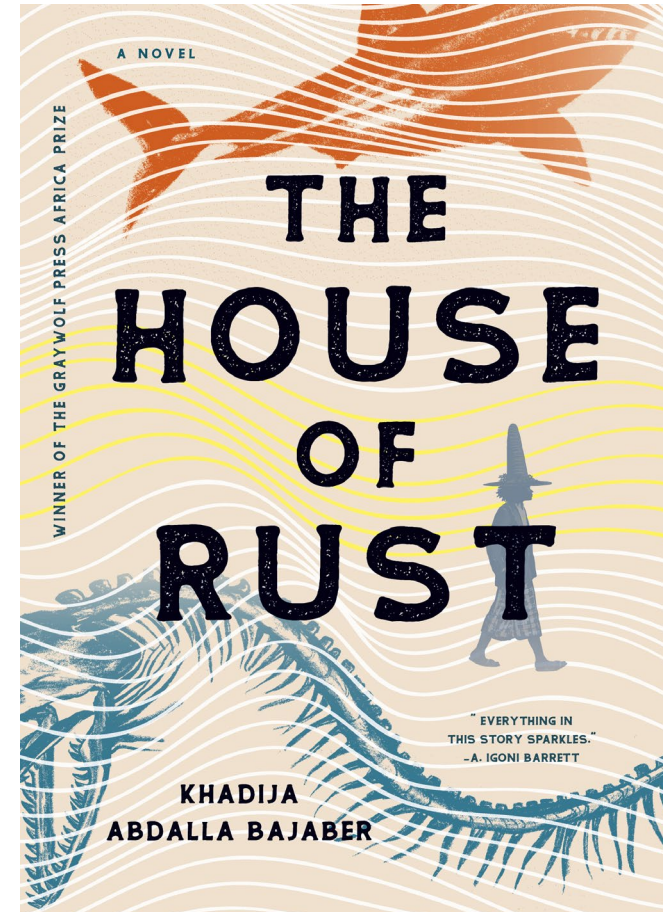
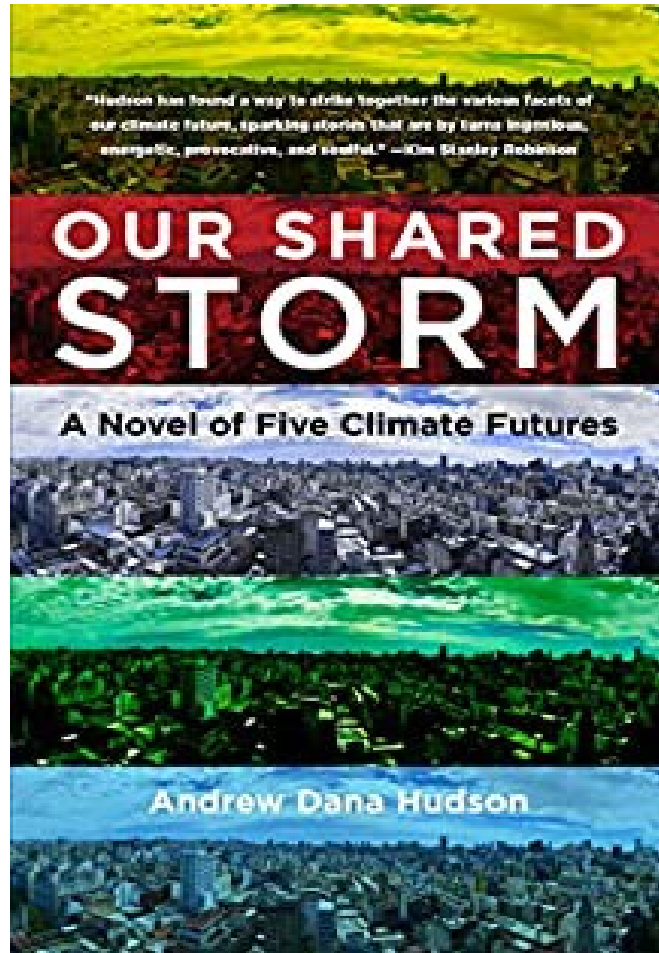
Examples of Cli-Fi (Dan Bloom); Solarpunk

- JG Ballard (1964). *The Burning World/The Drought*.
- Frank Herbert (1965). *Dune* series. (Excellent recent movie.)
- Ursula K. Le Guin (1972) *The Word for World is Forest*. Etc...! Lots of her work!
- Octavia Butler (1993). *Parable of the Sower/Talents*. (MAGA)
- Margaret Atwood (2003). *Oryx & Crake* series.
- Current Solarpunk/Hopepunk/Ecopunk -> Our Changing Climate (OCC)
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=twGcjDnOb_U
- Octavia Cade (2021) *The Impossible Resurrection of Grief*.
- Becky Chambers (2021). *A Psalm for the Wild-Built* . (Hugo SL)
- Catheryn M Valente (2021) *The Past is Red*. (Hugo SL)
- Cwen (Alice Albinia, 2021) (Orwell shortlist) and **The End of Men:**
https://www.theguardian.com/books/2022/may/25/sandra-newman-female-utopian-fiction?CMP=Share_AndroidApp_Other

African Climate SF

- Global Eco-Fiction: **Dragonfly** <https://dragonfly.eco/>
- Nnedi Okorafor (2014) *Lagoon*. Hodder & Stoughton.
- Gavin Chait (2017) *Our Memory Like Dust*. Transworld.
- Nick Wood (2020) *Water Must Fall*. **In a d(r)ying world, who gets to drink?**
- Alistair MacKay (2022) *It Doesn't Have to be This Way*. Kwela Press.
- Tlotlo Tsamaase (Botswana): <https://artistsandclimatechange.com/2021/03/18/wild-authors-tlotlo-tsamaase/>
- Oghenechovwe Donald Ekpeki (Nigeria): <https://artistsandclimatechange.com/2022/04/30/wild-authors-oghenechovwe-donald-ekpeki/>
- Chinelo Onwualu (Nigeria): <https://csi.asu.edu/tag/chinelo-onwualu/>
- Dilman Dila (Uganda): <https://www.greatexhibitionroadfestival.co.uk/event/carbon-deli/?backto=whats-on> (Great Exhibition Road Festival: 18th/19th June.)

Fact and Further Fiction from 2021/22



Indigenous Climate SF (Grace Dillon)

- 1) White Earth Nation **Anishinaabe Louise Erdrich's** *The Future Home of the Living God*
- 2) Cree Nation **Harold Johnson's** novel *Corvus**
- 3) Australian First Nation **Claire G. Coleman** (Indigenous LGBTQAI2S+)'s novel *Terra Nullius*
- 4) Australian First Nation **Alexis Wright's** *The Black Swan: A Novel*
- 5) Lipan Apache Nation **Darcy Little Badger's** most recent 2021 novel, *A Snake Falls to Earth* (not only climate justice as a book but also exposes a character called Nightmare and his Knights who are clearly extreme white supremacists and further grapples with interspecies communications and species mass extinction)
- 6) African-American and Pueblo Nation **Rebecca Roanhorse's** *Trails of Lightning* and the sequel *Storm of Locusts* also engage in a future world that has experienced extreme climate change
- Last slide/word, given: **SFU**: Located on the unceded traditional territories of the Squamish (Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Úxwumixw), Tsleil-Waututh (səlilwətaʔt), Kwikwetlem (kʷikwəʔəm) and Musqueam (xʷməθkʷəy̓əm) Nations.

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- Zalasiewicz, J., Williams, M., Steffen, W., Crutzen, P. (2010). The new world of the Anthropocene. *Environment Science and Technology*, 44, 2228–2231.
- Žižek, S. (2009). *First as tragedy, then as farce*. Verso.

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