

- In your new book *The Great Derangement* you talk about climate change denial and the inability that is being shown in creating change and introduce responsibility. While many climate change discussions agree to blame capitalism as a force of obstruction for change, you discuss how tightly capitalism is linked to colonialism. I kept thinking about the idea of 'climate justice', the idea that citizens of India and China would be getting the carbon footprint pro capita that the West has, our existence on the planet would be immediately threatened. How have we been able to deny this elephant in the room of justice so long?

A. Climate change is often framed as an economic problem, caused by consumption, production, distribution and the emissions that these processes entail – 'capitalism' in other words. The dominance of this framework may be a consequence of the fact economic ways of thinking have come to pervade every sphere of contemporary life. But in my view these economic framings of the issue frequently serve to mask other, equally important aspects of it, such as military competition, relationships of domination and subordination between and within countries, and indeed, the dynamics of Empire, broadly conceived. This masking happens at multiple levels and in many different ways. Consider, for example, the idea of capitalism as the principal driver of climate change – a view articulated by Naomi Klein and many others. The trouble is that capitalism is not one thing: we know now that East Asian capitalism for instance, was labour- rather than resource-intensive and that it had a much smaller ecological footprint than the version of capitalism that was prevalent in Britain and the United States. Yet, it was the Anglo-American version of capitalism that became dominant around the world – and this cannot be understood without considering the history of imperialism and global conquest. As for 'climate justice' it is increasingly clear that the powers-that-be in the world are determined to close the door on this issue: it was barely mentioned in the Paris Agreement.

- You say that politics are not going to do the job due to the very nature of the nation state that protects its citizens but fails to think about global responsibility. Thinking back about the period of the great derangement that we find ourselves in now, we might blame politics for our state of denial and inertia, but we will also be able to blame art. Art is these days occupied with identity politics and personal moral. I think this true for contemporary art also. Do you feel artists are complicit in trying to keep the status quo or just not understanding the set-up of the problem?

A. In the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, all the arts became increasingly centred on the human mind and the human sensibility, and increasingly decoupled from the material world. If you think of all the major literary and art movements of the past century you'll see that they all tended towards an increasing abstraction. Countervailing movements like 'social realism' etc invariably came to be marginalized and discredited. There were some major political factors in this, of course, like the ideology of the Cold War, but the cumulative effect, in any case, is that we have lost a sense of connection with our surroundings. Human-centredness in this sense seems to be largely an effect of 'modernity'. In other words, the very processes that pump greenhouse gases into the atmosphere seem also to blind us to the consequences by making us ever more closely focused on the human.

- Towards the end of the book there is a very interesting comparison between the style and wording of the Paris Climate Agreement and a document written by Pope Francis.

While the document of the pope is clear and straightforward, the analysis of the Paris Agreement points to a lot of techno-optimism, corporate wording and sentence constructions that make it very hard to understand, predicting its outcome. There are several other moments of literary analysis throughout the book, at a point I felt it might be a very useful analysis of the narrative that we are living in, maybe something like modernist-linear-progress thinking. Did I understand this correctly?

A. We are teetering on the edge of a new era in which many of our past habits of thought and practice have become blinders which prevent us from perceiving the realities of our present situation. Writers, artists and thinkers everywhere are still struggling to find the concepts and ideas that will make it possible to engage with the unprecedented events of this new era. But to discover such modes of engagement takes time – and that is exactly what we don't have.

- There has been a lot of talk in arts about the oceans being the final frontier to be colonized, and the ocean representing stories of failure and violence. These days our world is reflected in the ocean being a grey zone where dumping practices end up, and a looming deep sea mining business. The ocean as 'free enterprise at its freest' is probably an important backbone of the port cities that made the network of colonial trade, something that is beautifully described and illustrated in your Ibis Trilogy. Do you have any thoughts about the future of the oceans and how they will be, and should be, managed? Do you mind telling something about the relation between port cities, the ocean and colonialism, and whether you feel the character of port cities has changed over time after decolonisation.

A. Today the multiple crises of our world are becoming increasingly manifest in the oceans. There is, first of all, the issue of sea-level rise, which will displace many millions and swamp several island nations. Then there is the catastrophic environmental crisis of 'dead zones' and steeply declining fish stocks. One of the worst affected areas is the Bay of Bengal, which supports tens of millions of people. At the same time, oceans are being 'securitized' in unprecedented ways – and this process will only accelerate in the future. One reason for this lies in new forms of production, which now rely on complex supply chains requiring global co-ordination (or 'logistics'). These supply systems in turn need to be protected from disruption, so increasingly private companies are expanding into the domain of providing 'supply route security'. Today, the whole pattern of international trade is anchored to 'logistics cities', the first of which was Dubai. But this model is being copied around the world and it is creating forms of law and citizenship that are completely unprecedented. For instance, workers in certain logistically important ports may require security credentials from the US – even though they are citizens of other countries, and live on other continents. Needless to add, within these areas, workers have very few rights, because of so-called security concerns. These logistics hubs actually function like military outposts, with massive security around them. Some of them are even built in former prisons and military camps – such as the former camp Bucca in Iraq, which has now become Basra Logistics City.

- I just worked as a curator on a project in Norway, on the Lofoten islands. Lofoten is the only place on the Norwegian coast where oil drilling is not allowed since it would influence the ecology of the fisheries that are one of the richest in the world. Regardless of that fact, the right wing government is pushing to open the area for exploitation. We made an archive where facts about these type of decisions in Norway are mixed with scifi books with dystopian (and sometimes utopian) outcomes to give a hint of what might come if we follow the muscle movement, this kind of right wing extractivist reflex of the Norwegian government. The underlying line was of the exhibition was similar to the global one that that you discuss, in Norway it is the Sami minority in the North that suffers the most from the consequences of the Norwegian policies unfortunately. Do you think scifi can mean something for us today? What role do you think fiction can play to bring climate change into our imagination?

A. It is interesting that you mention Norway, because one of the most important books on climate change is Kari Marie Norgaard's *Living in Denial: Climate Change, Emotions, and Everyday Life*, an ethnographic study of a small Norwegian town. The inhabitants of this town (which is called 'Bygdaby' in the book) are wealthy, well-educated and politically conscious, with progressive views on issues such as migration and race. They are also extremely well-informed about climate change, which has impacted them directly in that it has affected one of their main sources of revenue – skiing and tourism. There is now less snow, hence fewer tourists. Yet in this town climate change is never discussed publicly and very rarely spoken of privately; nor are the people of the town, who are active on many political issues, at all interested in taking up this cause. What the book shows is that we cannot attribute inaction on climate change to ignorance (or 'denial'), or to a lack of education, or to political apathy. The most terrible thing about our present predicament, as the writer Roy Scranton says, is that *everybody already knows*. The problem lies somewhere else – perhaps, as you say, in our modes of imagining and thinking.

The French philosopher Jean-Pierre Dupuy writes: 'If we destroy nature is it because we hate nature? Of course not – we merely hate one another.'<sup>i</sup>

He may well be right.

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<sup>i</sup> Dupuy, Jean-Pierre, **Economy and the Future: A Crisis of Faith**, trans. M.B. DeBevoise, Michigan State University Press, 2014, p. 66.