

Climate Change Futures and the Imagination of the Global in *Maeva!* by Dirk C. Fleck

*Antonia Mehnert
University of Munich*

So stellt der Klimawandel den Prototyp der Problemszenarien einer globalisierten Welt dar: Keine Entscheidung bleibt in ihren Folgen auf das Lokale beschränkt, aber umgekehrt gibt es keine transnationale Institution und schon gar keine Weltregierung, die das Problem in globaler Perspektive angehen könnte. (Leggewie and Welzer 35)

The German social scientists Harald Welzer and Klaus Leggewie consider climate change as a herald of the challenges involved in governing an increasingly globalized world. They observe that even though local and national decisions ultimately affect the environment beyond national borders, there is no transnational institution that deals with issues related to climate change on a global scale.¹ As long as governments continue to follow only their own national agenda and no transnational “supra-legislation” is enacted to control activities that cause global warming, multi-nationals and national industries alike will continue to emit greenhouse gases at an accelerating rate. Recent world summits such as the COP15 in Copenhagen or the COP16 in Cancun in 2010 have failed to achieve a post-Kyoto international agreement that includes such transnational restrictions. And actions taken to mitigate CO2 emissions will for now remain voluntary and localized at the city, regional or state level.²

Even though many environmental activists would point out that small-scale actions are better than no actions and ultimately do have a global impact, the famous slogan in environmental politics “think globally, act locally” may not be adequate to the issue of climate change. Not only does this slogan start out from a rather arbitrary definition of the “local,” it also neglects that an overemphasis on a sense of place might be outdated at a time of global connectedness, which may prevent us from envisioning alternative perspectives. As literary scholar Timothy Clark elaborates, “to focus solely on individual behavior and consumer choice risks projecting the crisis as the result merely of bad shopping or lifestyle decision, evading deeper engagement with those national and global structures of economics and forms of government that are ultimately more

¹ In order to avoid repetition I am using the terms climate change and global warming interchangeably. However, I am aware of the discussions evolving around the term “global warming” for a phenomenon that will not only lead to an increase in temperature but also to other climatic changes.

² During the conference of the parties, which takes place once a year, members of the Kyoto protocol and other actors surrounding the climate change discussion come together in order to discuss climate change mitigation measures. The event serves as the decision making body of the UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change).

responsible” (136). He thus echoes scholars such as Welzer and Leggewie but also Anthony Giddens, who advocate for the necessity of introducing a global politics of climate change, a vision of multilayered governance which stretches from smaller governing units such as the city to the national level and beyond and aims at multilateral responses. Accordingly, another dimension might be added to the slogan: “Think globally, act locally, regulate transnationally.”

In addition to challenges of global governance, climate change also creates a crisis of thinking or imagining that distinguishes it from other environmental problems. While the effects of former eco-catastrophes were often clearly visible locally in the form of mine tailings, nuclear disasters, and toxic waste sites, for example (though their causes often accrued from international market pressures), the effects of global warming seem hard to grasp. How do we think about something as intangible and invisible as climate change, which does not dramatically affect our lives immediately but may possibly do so some time in the future?³ And if we cannot perceive the effects, why should we act on them? Social psychologists have called this wide knowledge gap between the familiar preoccupations of everyday life and the abstract future of a climatically changed world “future discounting,” and Giddens has dubbed it “Giddens’s Paradox” (Giddens, *The Politics of Climate Change* 2). Moreover, graphs and abstract simulations by climatologists have so far not succeeded in illustrating the problem in a way easily grasped by the general population and translated into everyday life. Instead, the complexity of the issue has led to confusion and uncertainty about those data.⁴ In her analysis and critique of abstract expert images in climate change discourses, Birgit Schneider elaborates on the problems of perception as well as of scale:

People observe daily weather changes, but they do not perceive climate—something which is, according to its modern definition, a statistically created abstract object of investigation with a long-term assessment period. Furthermore, people can only experience local weather, but not the global effects of climate change, which would require no less of them than to perceive the world as a whole.⁵ (82)

Schneider points to the extreme difficulty of representing something as elusive as climate change and dwells on the insufficiency of abstract climate models to represent this invisible global crisis. Ultimately, neither natural scientists nor anyone else knows

³ Referring to “our lives” I am speaking from a mainly urban European perspective without wanting to neglect the fact that a great part of the world population is already experiencing the effects of global warming.

⁴ In his insightful analysis of the difficult relationship between science and environmental policy, Daniel Sarewitz explains that instead of a lack of objectivity we are actually suffering from an excess of it. We need to acknowledge that there is no “right or wrong” scientific statement but that the “truth” lies within a spectrum of subjective positions (90).

⁵ My translation. Original in German: “Menschen nehmen täglich Wetterereignisse wahr, nicht jedoch das Klima, das in seiner modernen Definition ein statistisch erzeugtes, abstraktes Forschungsobjekt in Langzeitperspektive ist. [. . .] Zudem können Menschen immer nur einen lokalen Ausschnitt des Wetters erleben, nicht jedoch die globalen Auswirkungen des Klimawandels, was ja voraussetzen würde, nicht weniger als die Welt als Ganze wahrzunehmen.”

exactly “how such a planetary transformation might affect particular places and individuals; therefore, [imagining it] amounts to a paradigmatic exercise in ‘secondhand nonexperience,’ envisioning a kind of change that has not occurred before” (Heise 206). There is a prognostic and therefore imaginative dimension inherent also in scientific texts, which could therefore be called, rather polemically, “science fictions.” The phenomenon of climate change thus not only challenges our understanding of science as an objective truth, but it further questions our understanding of what is real and what is constructed. Climate change becomes the epitome of Latour’s “quasi object” (*We Have Never* 64 et seq.) or “matters of concern” (*Politics of Nature* 24). Thus, a phenomenon that simultaneously belongs to and is constituted by nature, the collective (society), and discourse. In order to understand global warming, then, we should not only consider its scientific explanations but also see it within a broader network of discourses and social practices.⁶

This discursive dimension of global warming has also been recognized in the cultural sphere and has been the source of inspiration for a variety of works ranging from film to photography and literature. Especially in literature we can find innovative approaches to the topic. Unlike the scenarios presented by means of abstract graphics and charts in *global emission reports*, literary works often elaborate on those effects of climate change that are difficult to quantify.⁷ They project stories about how the individuals' lives are challenged and changed when their environments are transformed. As Johns-Putra has pointed out, “the dramatic and emotional contours of climate change have to do with the future, not the past or present, for, although climate change may be happening now, it is what this changing climate will result in—its predicted impacts—that are of concern” (749). She thereby alludes to a genre that has often been discredited by literary scholars (and particularly ecocritics) but which shows an explicit preoccupation with the future: science fiction. Johns-Putra furthermore explains that ecocritics who want to engage with climate change might find interesting and original approaches to the topic by looking at genre fiction.

However, although contemporary science fiction increasingly deals with issues of climate change—in works such as Kim Stanley Robinson’s “Science in the Capital Trilogy,” A. Winterson’s *The Stone Gods*, or Bruce Sterling’s *Heavy Weather*—the planetary dimension remains difficult to grasp even within the imaginative realm. Literary scholar Ursula Heise argues in *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* that most literary representations of climate change fall short of engaging with the global. To exemplify her critical term eco-cosmopolitanism—an “environmental world citizenship” (10) which proposes an understanding of the interconnectedness and mutual conditioning of human and non-human, natural and cultural places worldwide—she

⁶ For a more thorough discussion of the discursive power of climate change, see Hulme’s *Why We Disagree About Climate Change*.

⁷ The IPCC created a special report on emission scenarios in order to project future climate changes. These reports combine biophysical models and socio-economic as well as political trends. For further discussion on scenarios, see Pulver and VanDeever. For more information on the global emissions report, see *IPCC Global Emissions Report 2000*.

turns to works by Don DeLillo or Richard Powers, but points to the difficulties of offering examples drawn from climate change fiction.

Turning to a recent work of German science fiction might be enlightening in this context, not only to explore eco-cosmopolitanism in climate change fiction further, but also to give imaginative insight into what the global climate change politics that Giddens and others are calling for could look like. Dirk C. Fleck's recent SF novel *Maeva!* (2011), a sequel to his well-known work *Das Tahiti Projekt* (2008), which won the German Science Fiction Award in 2009, shows the multi-faceted and complicated relationship of local versus global actions in a future world affected by global warming. While *Das Tahiti Projekt* focused on a small island nation, far away from the environmental catastrophes other countries around the world are facing, which attempts to restructure itself based on ideas of *equilibrism*,⁸ *Maeva!* zooms out from the local to provide a world perspective.

Before analyzing Fleck's latest work more in depth, however, it seems valuable to briefly reflect upon the particularity of this writing project. Dirk Fleck, a journalist and author, has so far dedicated a great part of his career to exposing and critically discussing environmental problems, thereby expressing his political engagement and personal conviction openly. His most recent novels, which engage in the topic of climate change, emerged out of an initiative by the Equilibrism Association, which also funded them. The books form part of a variety of activities, ranging from an interactive blog in which Fleck discusses the ideas proposed in his works to public debate groups and readings. According to Fleck, the critical exchanges in these various forums in turn find their way into the fictional worlds of his novels. In the afterword to *Maeva!*, he points to another crucial aspect of his work: "I was talking about the lucky circumstances that accompanied the production of this book. One of them is the fact that more and more people feel the need to network in order to fight effectively against the madness that is destroying living conditions on the planet" (330-1).⁹ In an increasingly connected world, active networking thus becomes an essential part of his writing project. His novels do not take place in some science fictional "other world"—another planet or a place which no longer resembles Earth—but bear a strong resemblance to the real world in their settings. Fleck refers directly to existing political institutions (e.g. the United Nations) and alludes critically to current renewable energy projects, for example the DESERTEC endeavor, a European solar energy project in the deserts of Northern Africa, and the hydro-power plant at the Three Gorges Dam in China. He thereby presents a nuanced picture of a climatically changed world, in which the expansion of renewable energy cannot serve as the only solution to the problem.

⁸ Equilibrism, based on holistic ideas, seeks sustainable solutions to global problems by looking concurrently at their social, political, economic and ecological roots. For more information on the concept, see Freystedt and Bihl.

⁹ "Ich sprach von den glücklichen Umständen, die das Buch begleiten. Einer dieser Umstände ist die Tatsache, dass immer mehr Menschen das Bedürfnis verspüren, sich zu vernetzen, um dem Wahnsinn, der die Lebensgrundlagen auf der Erde zu zerstören droht, effektiv entgegenzuwirken." All translations from the novel are mine.

The narratives themselves and the discursive worlds surrounding them—in chat rooms, marketing events and public discussion forums—combine to give Fleck’s book project a unique character. Because of its journalistic dimensions, *Maeva!* forms part of a larger political project of narrating near-future worlds on Earth. It becomes an attempt at *imagineering*—creating a manual for critical intervention derived from creative ideas.¹⁰ Fleck’s climate-change fiction is meant to serve as a nodal point at which the readers reflect on the narrated future outcomes and re-consider their own way of life. It thereby contributes to an understanding of climate change as a magnifying glass for the long-term implications of our short-term choices and as a mirror to re-consider what we really want to achieve for ourselves, processes that Hulme considers crucial in the engagement with climate change (xxiii). An equilibrist approach, according to Fleck, could then become part of a solution to impending environmental crisis. As climate change goes beyond the boundaries of one discursive realm, so some of its literary depictions, like *Maeva!*, engage in a multi-faceted approach. This border-crossing is also reflected in Fleck’s experimental style: he alternates between third-person narration, which focuses on a great variety of places and actors, and first-person narration in the diary entries of one of the characters, Cording. While the plot develops in a linear fashion, the collage-like storytelling within each chapter requires an attentive reader who must connect the short paragraphs into a coherent story of planetary scope.

Correspondingly, dissolving borders, whether national or textual, are prominent elements in Fleck’s novel. The dissolution of formerly known borders does not entail the emergence of utopias or “no-places” but rather the invention—or imagineering— of new spaces of critical intervention on Earth. In *Maeva!* this is only possible if the global perspective is embraced. In this essay I will therefore explore the ways in which Fleck envisions new transnational forms of solidarity and political action in a world affected by climate change.¹¹ As *Maeva!*’s eco-cosmopolitan manifesto emerges as the only true political vision to deal with the ecologically changed world of tomorrow, the new political space it creates remains contested and fragile through the constant renegotiation of local and global interests.

Fleck’s novel takes the reader to the year 2028. Water shortages, droughts, conflicts over resources and natural catastrophes have taken center stage in a world affected by global warming. In this constant state of crisis, most of the industrialized nations have increased their military presence as a means to control “tortilla riots in Mexico,” “pasta demonstrations in Italy,” and other hunger protests around the world. Environmental activists are considered terrorists, and whereas enclaves and gated communities provide sanctuary for the rich and politically influential, climate refugees are sent to detention camps (*Maeva!* 1-16). Multinational corporations such as Global Oil

¹⁰ I am borrowing the term “imagineering” from Walt Disney Studios.

¹¹ I use the term “transnational” to refer to concepts of space as well as identity that describe a way of life that cannot be anchored in just one national context. “Transnationalism” and “cosmopolitanism” form part of a series of terms in globalization studies that attempt to acknowledge the multi-positionality of individuals and places within a globalized world (see Mayer; Pries; Giddens, *Consequences*; Robbins and Cheah).

and GENius determine world politics; their dominance over the Earth's most important resources compels most of the political leaders to agree to all of their proposals. Former international institutions such as the UN have been discredited due to their continuous failure to implement their aims and to work collaboratively, and the departure of member states such as the United States and Japan has further weakened their position. Against this background, Maeva, president of Tahiti and recently appointed head of the URP (United Regions of the Pacific), takes on the challenge of fighting against further exploitation of natural resources by multinationals and embarks on a "journey of hope."

During her URP inaugural speech, Maeva points to the ideas that will soon become the credo of her quest for ecological justice: a world in which local solutions according to the Tahitian model will lead to global improvements, a collaborative transnational institution which enforces a life in greater balance with nature, and most importantly the belief in the possibility of change:

Only if we start to perceive ourselves as one constituent part of this earth system [. . .] can our position in and towards the world be changed [. . .] For the first time in history we are confronted by an anthropogenic destruction of all biological resources. No previous generation had to deal with such a threat. The question that we are faced with now is collective suicide or spiritual renewal. It is this question, my dear friends, which also offers an enormous opportunity. And who, if not the ones who have already come to their senses, could lead the way?¹² (65)

In the last sentence, Maeva refers to the already "converted" members of the URP who can serve as role models in trying to overcome this crisis. While the Russian president belittles Maeva's "naïve and exotic ideas" (86), the powerful in Fleck's novel soon come to realize that Maeva's "preaching" could really threaten their status quo. She sets free the power of hope, which according to Jose Ernesto Sabato, president of the international seabed authority, should not be underestimated. Mark Dowie, head of Global Oil, also admits the threat that emerges from Maeva's statements: "This preacher is dangerous [. . .] Very dangerous. Peaceful resistance is a powerful weapon in our militarized world" (145).¹³ While this paradoxical statement gives insight into the functioning of a world in which everything is turned upside down, the peaceful protest Maeva is planning relies on something much more powerful: a form of transnational

¹² German original: "Erst wenn wir bereit sind, uns als Bestandteil eines lebendigen Erdkörpers zu verstehen [. . .] wird sich unsere Stellung in der Welt grundsätzlich verändern [. . .] Zum ersten Mal in unserer Geschichte sind wir mit der selbst verursachten Zerstörung aller biologischen Grundlagen konfrontiert. Keine Generation vor uns hatte eine solche Bedrohung auszuhalten. Die eigentliche Frage, die wir uns also zu stellen haben, lautet: kollektiver Selbstmord oder geistige Erneuerung? In dieser Frage, meine lieben Freunde, liegt eine ungeheure Perspektive. Wer, wenn nicht wir, die uns bereits besonnen haben, könnte ihnen eine solche Perspektive bieten?" This passage as well as several others in the novel may legitimately be criticized for Fleck's emphasis on a 'natural' and 'spiritual' connectedness between women and the earth.

¹³ German original: "Diese Predigerin ist gefährlich, Bob. Äußerst gefährlich. Gewaltlosigkeit ist eine starke Waffe in unserer hochgerüsteten Welt."

solidarity emerging out of a “world risk society.” According to sociologist Ulrich Beck, who has most prominently elaborated this idea, modern societies have entered an era in which they are confronted with hazards that result from their own processes of modernization. As Beck explains, this “risk society is a catastrophic society. In it the exceptional condition threatens to become the norm” (Beck, *Risk Society* 24). The risk society is no longer defined by national borders but “its challenges are dangers produced by civilization which cannot be socially delimited in either space or time” (Beck, *World Risk Society* 19); hence, it becomes a “world risk society.”

In a private conversation with her brother Omai, former president of Tahiti, Maeva explains how the current situation could become a turning point in history:

At these crossroads we are saying good-bye to who we once were. We greet the new person that we are becoming. The fears that we are experiencing in this situation are similar to the ones before our own death. It is important to me to emphasize this. It is crucial that people realize that they are not alone with their fears, but that this anxiety is something which takes hold of all of us but which we can therefore share. We have to realize that the upheaval of the old order releases an immense potential for life, which then enables us to create something completely new.¹⁴ (55)

In Fleck’s novel, the risks of climate change at first lead to a paralysis of society: emancipatory struggles are suppressed and overshadowed by an all-encompassing fear. As a variety of critical theorists have pointed out, this paralysis in the face of disaster results in a crisis of hope (cf. Jameson, Kompridis). Amsler explains, “the crisis of hope is twofold. For social theorists, it implies that systemic changes in economy, politics and culture are closing down spaces for radical freedom. In everyday life, however, it is experienced more symptomatically as a sense of individual powerlessness in the face of uncontrollable and often nebulous forces including climate change” (Amsler 132, sic). Fleck’s novel alludes to this reaction, but challenges the crisis of hope by describing a way of dealing with the underlying fear. Maeva ultimately recognizes and identifies the potential that lies within a world population which is tired of a constant “dwelling in crisis” and which craves agency for new positive changes. On the one hand, she encourages her audience to embrace their ability to change, and on the other hand she gestures towards the empowerment offered by the possibility of being part of a transnational group of global transformation (i.e. the URP). She thereby challenges the dominant rhetoric of looming apocalypse and the resulting paralysis. Furthermore, Maeva emphasizes that the individual is not static but continuously becoming and thus

¹⁴ German original: “An solchen Wendepunkten nehmen wir Abschied von der Persönlichkeit, die wir waren. Wir begrüßen die Person, die wir gerade werden. Die Ängste, die uns in einer solchen Situation heimsuchen, entsprechen denen, die wir vor unserem Sterben entwickeln. Dies heraus zu schälen ist mir wichtig. Es ist mir wichtig, dass die Menschen begreifen, dass sie nicht alleine sind mit ihrer Furcht, dass die Angst uns alle erfasst, aber dass wir sie miteinander teilen können. Wir müssen erkennen, dass die Erschütterungen der alten Ordnung ein gewaltiges Potenzial gebundener Lebenskraft freisetzt, das uns nun befähigt, etwas völlig Neues zu schaffen.”

able to change and create something new. In the words of critic Frederick Buell, the “perception of deepened environmental crisis thus does not have to lead to political passivity [. . .] Dwelling in crisis that is firmly perceived as such, coupled with the exploration of a new economy of feeling, opens up a very different set of possibilities for care, commitment, and doing all one can” (208). Maeva personifies this “new economy of feeling.” Affect and shared risk perception become intimately intertwined and powerful tools in her campaign for new members of the URP, as she describes experiences of local danger and then connects them to a *sense* of planet throughout her journey. Her political project becomes the epitome of an “eco-cosmopolitan manifesto” as she calls for a transnational community of solidarity emerging on the basis of shared risk exposure (cf. Heise, Beck).¹⁵ In letting Maeva campaign for this manifesto, Fleck acknowledges that climate change calls for a “new dialectic of global and local questions which do not fit into national politics” (Beck, *World Risk Society* 15).

In order to increase the membership of the URP and to truly transform the organization into a transnational governing body, Maeva decides to gather a team around her and to embark on an eco-quest around the globe. The make-up of the team already symbolizes transnational co-operation on a micro-level as she is joined by Cording, her German partner, who is a pessimistic former eco-journalist now living in Tahiti; Steve Parker, a young British creative director of the innovative eco-justice show *GO!*; Shark, the famous, radical and self-proclaimed misanthrope and star of the show; and John Knowles, US American and former *New York Times* journalist. It is not only the diversity of the team that makes her trip so fruitful but also the international route that Maeva takes. The journey provides her with global insight into the effects of climate change and gives her an idea of the mitigation measures and adaptations to a climatically changed world. She encounters a German architect explaining the workings of his sea star refugee camp in Australia, which is built on the principles of bionics, as well as an Egyptian who describes how he will apply the successful agricultural techniques that he learned at his father’s farm in Egypt to the deserts of Australia. Furthermore, an international Red Cross team takes them to the dramatic disaster scene in the wake of the failure of the Three Gorges Dam in China. These are only some of the diverse und interconnected encounters that encourage Maeva to continue her journey in order to extend the influence of the URP. Most important, however, is her realization that Steve’s continuous news coverage of the places they visit is reaching all parts of the world. Her local actions are thus translated to a global scale.

Maeva’s embrace of the world stands in stark contrast to the interests of the Tahitian shaman Rauura and the island’s secret warrior society (the Arioi), who believe that Tahiti must remain Maeva’s sole priority. They see the island’s independence threatened by an interaction with other nations. Eventually, Rauura and Omai arrange for a coup and suspend Maeva from the presidency for as long as she continues to serve

¹⁵ For a further elaboration on the concept of the cosmopolitan manifesto, see Beck’s *World Risk Society*; for its relation to eco-cosmopolitanism, see Heise’s *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*.

as head of the URP. Even though the clash between her local and global responsibilities is inevitable, Maeva does not abandon her journey, and her persistence is validated when Steve lets her know that she still has the support of the majority of the Tahitian population, who follows her actions on the internet.

The World Wide Web and digital media play a decisive role in Fleck's *Maeva!* and figure as important tools to ensure a global perspective. One of Cording's favorite entertainment programs is GO!, an internet show with several hundreds of millions of clicks for each broadcast. The show is appealing due to its interactive and multi-faceted format, its uncompromising exposure of the latest crimes against the environment, and its presentation of positive ecological visions along with a high level of entertainment (the show includes sub-categories such as GO!-Heroes, GO!-Visions, GO!-nature, GO!-press review). Shark, the show's presenter, impersonates the diversity of his program—being at once radical interviewer, sentimental listener, courageous whistleblower, and fragile host. Cording occasionally suspects that Shark is a persona created by a psychologist in order to engage the audience emotionally. As Shark's environment takes on various shapes, he also changes into various characters to the effect that an "original" Shark is no longer recognizable—the internet show thus becomes a means of communicating his multiple identities to the outside. One could also argue that the performative character of his identity mirrors on an individual scale the performativity and multi-positionality of the world.

The show serves as a global news station and as such combines information about local events from around the world within a larger framework. Internet viewers are informed about world-wide environmental catastrophes, and they themselves are meant to connect the dots so as to understand the global scope of the problem. GO! furthermore promotes the idea of the global network by allowing its viewer to connect via the show, presenting their own stories or commentaries in discussion forums. As Thomashow explains in his work on the perception of global environmental change, "one's experience of globality entails a series of conceptual leaps which require metaphor, ideology, and cognition, what historian Benedict Anderson describes as 'imaginary linkages.' Forms of mass communication, such as the newspaper, television, and the internet catalyze these linkages" (22). In the novel, GO! constitutes one of the media through which these imaginary links are established.

Most importantly, GO! promotes a new form of communication: politicians and big news corporations are no longer the only ones to communicate about the functioning of the world, as the internet includes the "voices from the gaps."¹⁶ GO! amplifies the voices of victims of environmental disasters from the remotest areas of the world. Fleck criticizes the agenda-setting and framing functions of big news organizations, which at times can be counter-productive for environmental change, while also acknowledging that journalism is an important tool for networking and

¹⁶ I am borrowing this expression from the "Voices from the Gaps" project at the University of Minnesota, which provides an academic platform for the often marginalized voices of women artists of color. In this context, I am broadening its meaning to the voices of marginalized individuals in general.

empowerment. Fleck's emphasis on the power of journalism in this particular text is also present in the rest of his work: most of his main characters are somehow involved in journalism, and media attention to Maeva's journey plays a crucial role in her success. Short internet films about the various places she travels to ensure her growing popularity around the world. As Cording realizes, "there has been a considerable number of charismatic leaders in world history, but the Maeva-myth was only made possible by cyberspace" (170).¹⁷ The internet is thus the space in which power is formed and through which global change is ultimately enabled. Ana Mariana Sanchez de Varona, president of Cuba in *Maeva!*, also emphasizes the political importance of the World Wide Web. During Maeva's visit to the island, she explains that she only became president because she promoted her political ideas over the internet and engaged intensively with the blogging scene. The net provided a platform for the open public debates that were formerly missing. She elaborates: "In the beginning, secret service still tried to block the internet platforms, but that only made the virus of freedom of speech spread more rapidly. They could not silence us. Through cyberspace discussion forums, Cuba has become part of an international network" (226).¹⁸ When she was elected president—as head of an internet party—she looked to Tahiti and its newly established socio-ecological model, and ultimately adapted and implemented those ideas successfully in Cuba. Once again, the internet is presented as the space of global connection and political empowerment.

As Maeva's popularity around the world increases, she gains greater confidence in pushing her eco-cosmopolitan manifesto and calls openly for the end of the age of oil (145) and finally for the dissolution of the nation-state:

We have become a power on this planet, we have outgrown our name. Therefore, I rename the *United Regions of the Pacific* the *United Regions of the Planet*. I am inviting every region of the world to join our organization, regardless of whether they are part of a nation state or not. This system of nation states has been overtaxed for a long time. It is therefore the right of every region to follow the path of its own convictions.¹⁹ (Fleck 209)

Various regions (Alaska in the United States and Dithmarschen in Germany, South Tyrol in Italy and many more later) follow her advice and begin to declare their independence

¹⁷ "Charismatische Persönlichkeiten gab es in der Menschheitsgeschichte zur Genüge, aber der Maeva-Mythos ist erst im Cyberspace möglich geworden."

¹⁸ "Anfangs hat der Geheimdienst noch versucht, die internet-Plattformen zu blockieren, aber das hat nur dazu geführt, dass sich das Virus der freien Meinungsäußerung immer rasanter ausbreitete. Wir waren nicht mehr zum Schweigen zu bringen. In den Diskussionsforen des Cyberspace hat sich Cuba international vernetzt."

¹⁹ "Wir sind eine Macht geworden auf diesem Planeten, wir sind herausgewachsen aus unserem Namen. Darum benenne ich die *United Regions of the Pacific* um in *United Regions of the Planet*. Ich lade jede Region der Welt ein, unserer Organisation beizutreten, unabhängig davon, ob sie Teil eines Nationalstaates ist oder nicht. Die Staatengebilde sind seit Langem überfordert. Es ist daher das gute Recht einer jeden Region, ihren eigenen überzeugten Weg zu gehen."

from their nations in order to join the URP.²⁰ As the status quo of the nation-state is threatened, presidents and multinationals alike become alarmed, seeing their own power diminished. With a desperate assassination attempt they try to rid themselves of this dangerous enemy. However, the attempt on Maeva's life fails and hits Shark instead. This set of events marks the beginning of the end of her journey: at the height of their global momentum, Maeva's team begins to break apart. The disastrous reality of the state of the world weighs down on Maeva's ideals, a general feeling of guilt overcomes the whole group, and jealousy grips the male team as they struggle for recognition from Maeva. Finally, Omai and the Arioi succeed in convincing Cording to betray Maeva and to work as their spy. Though national and corporate interests increasingly seem to threaten her project, Maeva is not yet willing to give up.

Fleck powerfully juxtaposes different forms of environmentalism and different ways of dealing with a climatically changed world in his narrative. But the novel also emphasizes that local and regional solutions, though important, will not be enough to address a planetary crisis such as climate change. Following equilibrist ideas, Fleck endorses a paradigm shift that incorporates ecological alternatives into all areas of life, sustainable financial and resource use, a natural recycling economy, and *world citizenship* (*Equilibrismus* "Konzept", emphasis added). Ultimately, all regions, nations, and individuals that join the URP must agree to these principles. Thus, in Maeva's plan to unite people around the world through common ideals and a sense of solidarity for the human and non-human alike, the nation no longer plays a role. Her call for a post-national world, in which the URP serves as a transnational supra-government enforcing her eco-cosmopolitan manifesto and the internet provides the means for global connectedness, stands in strong contrast to the vision of the Ecoca eco-dictatorship (formerly the US states of California and Oregon). Ecoca radically enforces ideas of deep ecology, pushing them to the extreme by postulating that concerns of the Earth are of primary importance and should come before human interests. Thus, any use of natural resources is strictly regulated and a transgression of the implemented eco-laws is severely punished. While these kinds of politics have actually led to a recovery of the ecosystems in the republic, the system only worked because of its overemphasis on place and its seclusion from the outside world: using the internet and any kind of travel or ties beyond the borders of Ecoca are forbidden. The people of Ecoca thus live in isolation, which is further deepened by the government's encouragement of denunciation. After Maeva visits this republic, which has sacrificed democracy for a restored environment, she rejects the admission of Ecoca to the URP. A sense of planet, Fleck implies, should be achieved voluntarily, without relying on totalitarian environmentalism.²¹

²⁰ Though the dissolving of the nation-state is a prominent theme in *Maeva!*, Fleck does not always clarify how the regions that join the URP come to make political decisions.

²¹ This Ecoca subplot could be read as Fleck's response to Callenbach's *Ecotopia*, which describes a society similar to Ecoca, as well as to the widespread caricature of Deep Ecology as fascist. I am indebted to Mike Ziser for this comment.

While Ecoza aims at a version of the “Khmer Rouge of ecology” (246), Cuba builds on an internationally connected radical eco-matriarchy, and Bolivia balances issues of social equality and further national exploitation of resources. The scenarios that Fleck develops explore the diverse environmentalisms and eco-political reactions to growing environmental crises in a climatically changed world, while at the same time emphasizing the cultural contexts that constitute but also constrain these developments. Some of the regional movements are more reluctant to commit to a transnational program than others, but Maeva’s manifesto is the only one that places participation in a global biospheric community at the center of its politics. It entails “building upon, qualifying, and supplementing (rather than replacing) the principle of belongingness with the principle of affectedness” in its establishment of the transnational United Regions of the Planet (Eckersley’s elaboration on transnationally oriented green states in Heise, 157).

Maeva’s journey, however, is brought to an abrupt end when she is kidnapped by Rauura’s group of warriors and banished to an island where she is supposed to rid herself of the worldly temptations by reconnecting with earth, in Rauura’s words. Rauura’s decision is based on a very strong sense of place, in which only a Tahitian island can serve as the source of spiritual renewal, while the outside world is portrayed as a corrupting force. This turn of the plot foregrounds the conflict between local interests (impersonated by Rauura) and global necessity (impersonated by Maeva). The people are left in the belief that Maeva has been the victim of a plane crash. But this does not imply the end of her eco-cosmopolitan project. The news of her death in fact reinforces it as more and more regions decide to break away from nations to join the URP. Finally, several politicians who have been accused of participating in a secret plot to kill Maeva agree to some of the ecological strategies proposed by the URP in an attempt to improve their public image. While Maeva becomes stylized as an environmental Jeanne d’Arc, it also becomes obvious that she will never be able to return to the public, as Knowles acknowledges: “Omai should re-consider if he ever lets Maeva off Rapa Iti. This might sound heartless, but it actually should also be in her interest. She has never been as valuable as she is today” (307).²² Though betrayed, Maeva does not succumb to despair. She survives on the one hand through her “posthumous” international political success and on the other by exercising the ability to change that she had emphasized in her inaugural speech. She goes through a spiritual transformation, during which she receives a traditional full-body tattoo that bears witness to her story in symbols. She thereby becomes a Tupapa’u, a Tahitian spirit and mythical avenger for the pain she has suffered. This transformation enables her to break her incarceration on the island and to once again move beyond externally imposed boundaries. Her transformation becomes her re-empowerment.

²² German Original: “Übrigens sollte sich Omai überlegen, ob er Maeva je wieder von Rapa Iti entlässt. Das mag zwar herzlos klingen, aber eigentlich müsste es in ihrem Interesse sein. Nie war sie so wertvoll wie heute.”

The narrative comes to an abrupt end with a dramatic encounter between Maeva and the people who had betrayed her, but Fleck leaves it open if and how the story will be continued. Though readers may hope for a continuation, considering Fleck's list of publications so far (*GO! Die Ökodiktatur* and *Das Tahiti Projekt*—both of which differ from *Maeva!* in their emphasis on place and political solutions to the environmental crisis), it seems difficult to predict how the story will unfold. Fleck's work mirrors the unpredictability and uncertainty in the face of climate change, the outcomes of which depend mainly on our own actions. Looking at the marketing slogan of the novel, "The story continues when we start to act" in the context of this open ending further underlines that the novel waits to be resumed, with the plot depending on our actions.²³

Blurring the lines between fact and fiction, between the possible and the imagined, the novel nevertheless follows a clear political agenda: to promote a climate for change. For Fleck, this is only possible if we understand ourselves as part of a global community, encompassing the human and the non-human alike. In *Maeva!* he portrays various environmentalisms and shows how national eco-political reactions to a climatically changed world are often culturally determined. His work, however, goes beyond mere illustration of a multicultural side-by-side of different environmentalisms or endorsement of international institution-building along the lines of the European Union. Instead, Fleck demonstrates how local actions based on equibrist principles, global thinking and transnational regulation form the basis for a United Regions of the Planet. Moreover, Maeva's eco-cosmopolitan manifesto suggests that such local efforts become much more consequential when they move across sociocultural boundaries, since climate change ultimately forces us to consider ourselves as world citizens. Even though the evolution towards a planetary understanding of the world does not occur without friction and conflict, Fleck's characters, their travel routes, Maeva's political quest, and the work's emphasis on the internet converge on the conclusion that a global perspective and accountability are necessary to come to terms with a climatically changed world.²⁴

Received 30 January 2012

Revised version accepted 10 September 2012

Works Cited

- Amsler, Sarah. "Bringing Hope to Crisis." *Future Ethics: Climate Change and Apocalyptic Imagination*. Ed. Stefan Skrimshire. Continuum Inter. Publishing, 2010. 129-153. Print.
- Beck, Ulrich. *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*. Sage Publications Ltd, 1992. Print.
- . *World Risk Society*. Blackwell Publishers, 1999. Print.
- Buell, Frederick. *From Apocalypse to Way of Life: Environmental Crisis in the American*

²³ German Original: "Es beginnt, wenn wir anfangen zu handeln."

²⁴ I would like to thank Mike Ziser and Hal Crimmel for their helpful comments and proofreading. Thanks are also due to the anonymous peer reviewers for their insightful remarks as well as to Ursula Heise for her editorial guidance.

- Century. Routledge. New York, 2004. Print.
- Callenbach, Ernest. *Ecotopia*. Bantam, 1997. Print
- Clark, Timothy. *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*. Cambridge University Press, 2011. Print.
- Eckersley, Robyn. *The Green State: Rethinking Democracy and Sovereignty*. MIT Press, 2004. Print.
- Equilibrismus e.V. "Konzept". *Equilibrismus*. Web. 20 May 2012.
- Fleck, Dirk. *GO! Die Ökodiktatur*. Hamburg, 1993. Print
- . *Das Tahiti-Projekt: Roman*. Pendo, 2008. Print.
- . *MAEVA!* Greifenverlag, 2011. Print.
- Freystedt, Volker, and Eric Bihl. *Equilibrismus. Neue Konzepte statt Reformen für eine Welt im Gleichgewicht*. Wien: Signum, 2005. Print.
- Giddens, Anthony. *Consequences of Modernity*. New. Blackwell Publishers, 1991. Print.
- . *The Politics of Climate Change*. Cambridge, Mass.: Polity, 2009. Print.
- Heise, Ursula. *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: the Environmental Imagination of the Global*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. Print.
- Hulme, M. *Why We disagree About Climate Change: Understanding Controversy, Inaction and Opportunity*. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Print.
- Jameson, Fredric. *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*. London: Verso, 2005. Print.
- Johns-Putra, Adeline. "Ecocriticism, Genre, and Climate Change: Reading the Utopian Vision of Kim Stanley Robinson's Science in the Capital Trilogy." *English Studies* 91 (2010): 744-760. Web. 10 Nov. 2011.
- Kompridis, Nikolas. *Critique and Disclosure: Critical Theory between Past and Future*. The MIT Press, 2006. Print.
- Latour, Bruno. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Harvard University Press, 1993. Print.
- . *Politics of Nature*. Harvard University Press, 2004. Print
- Leggewie, Claus, and Harald Welzer. *Das Ende der Welt, wie wir sie kannten. Klima, Zukunft und die Chancen der Demokratie*. Frankfurt M.: Fischer-Taschenbuch-Verl., 2011. Print.
- Mayer, Ruth. *Diaspora: Eine kritische Begriffsbestimmung*. Transcript, 2005. Print.
- Pries, Ludger. *New Transnational Social Spaces: International Migration and Transnational Companies in the Early twenty-first Century*. Routledge, 2001. Print.
- Pulver, Simone, and Stacy VanDeever. "Thinking About Tomorrows: Scenarios, Global Environmental Politics, and Social Science Scholarship." *Global Environmental Politics* 9.2 (2009): 1-13. Print.
- Robbins, Bruce, and Pheng Cheah, eds. *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*. Univ of Minnesota Pr, 1998. Print.
- Sarewitz, Daniel. "Science and Environmental Policy: an Excess of Objectivity." *Earth Matters*. Ed. Robert Frodeman. Prentice Hall, 2009. 79-98. Print.
- Schneider, Birgit. "Ein Darstellungsproblem klimatischen Wandels? Zur Analyse und

Author: Mehnert, Antonia. Title: Climate Change Futures and the Imagination of the Global in Maeva! by Dirk C. Fleck

Kritik wissenschaftlicher Expertenbilder und ihren Grenzen." *Kritische Berichte* 3 (2010): 80–90. Print.

Thomashow, Mitchell. *Bringing the Biosphere Home: Learning to Perceive Global Environmental Change*. The MIT Press, 2003. Print.

Trexler, Adam, and Adeline Johns-Putra. "Climate change in literature and literary criticism." *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change* 2 (2011): 185-200. Web. 4 Nov. 2011.