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Franz Ossing

The Upcoming Revolution - Arts in the Climate Crisis

„It is basically as we are used to, namely that art reacts more quickly and anticipates the current of the times. It arrives earlier, while science still takes its time.“ (Ernst Peter Fischer)



The weather plays an obvious role in world literature. Climate, however, is almost always found only as part of landscape descriptions, but not as a subject of its own. Even Döblin, who was interested in geosciences, allows Iceland's volcanoes to melt Greenland's ice cap in "Berge Meere und Giganten" (Mountains, Seas and Giants) without the consequential sea level rising - an effect of climate change that we see with great concern today.

Climate quickly disappears from conscious awareness, not only in the arts. Although varying greatly throughout the regions of the world, climate tends to appear regionally as a given, quasi-static. This is now changing, and to an extent that is tangible, visible, palpable, even by human standards of time.

Of course, art also takes this on board, but mainly as a motif of dystopian representation. But does it thereby anticipate the changing relationship between man and nature, as E.P. Fischer suggests in his quote?

The geoscientific view is based on other scales in time and space. The climate has always changed in the 4.5 billion years of Earth's history. But humans have appeared a mere two million years ago, and *homo sapiens* existing only since a relatively short and recent 300,000 years. During this entire time, there have been cold and warm periods, but they have always arisen and disappeared at such a slow pace that *homo* has been able to adapt to them.

Our planet is unique in the universe, enabling a home for evolved life through an extremely finely-tuned, and always only temporarily stable network of relationships between its subsystems: atmosphere, hydrosphere, geosphere, cryosphere, and biosphere. In the course of only a century, these five natural subsystems have been joined by humans as a globally acting new subsystem, the anthroposphere. "Climate", seen in this way, is not a subsystem of its own, but the interface where all six of the Earth's subsystems overlap and interact with each other - all of them non-linear, highly dynamic and feedback.

What is new is that the current change in the overall Terra system is happening at an unprecedented rate. Expressed in terms of CO₂: in a good 100 years, humans have changed the subsystem atmosphere in such a way that the overall system Terra is heading towards a new state according to the laws of nature. This affects all subsystems of our planet. And we are the cause. Nota bene: humanity has never been in such a - self-generated - situation in its entire history. Nature is telling us: end of the road, one way or the other.

But is that a reason for dystopia? Here, too, the scientific view offers a good remedy for pessimism. Never before have we had so much insight into the day-to-day life process of our home planet, never before have we had so much knowledge about what needs to be done. What prevents us, apart from clinging to traditional, historically outdated forms of work, economy and life, from striding confidently into the future?

It is a task in the dimension of human history in the literal sense of the word. After sedentism, the discovery of the use of fire and the Industrial Revolution, we are facing the next upheaval in the developmental history of the species homo, forced by natural law, but at the same time made possible by our social history. We have everything we need, the knowledge, the technology, the means and, above all, the human energy, ingenuity and creativity. We have only to make a start.

The challenge that arises today is new: a change in the human habitat that is of earth-historical, geological dimensions in space and time. This is a realization that also the *literati* must absorb. It will be exciting to see how the artists will deal with this new situation which is revolutionary also for them.

Personal details: born 1949, theoretical meteorologist, Head of Public Relations at the GFZ German Research Centre for Geosciences from 1994 to 2016, still active in science communication, on the www: http://bib.gfz-potsdam.de/pub/wegezurkunst/start_en.html

Note: the opening quote is from E.P. Fischer, "Einstein trifft Picasso und geht mit ihm ins Kino" (Einstein meets Picasso and goes to the movies with him), p. 88. Eric Hobsbawm makes similar comments in "Age of Extremes. The short twentieth century ", ch.6. Thanks go to Ara Lee for her native English translation.

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