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Imagining New York 2140 as an Urban Archipelago of Climate Futures and Alternative Modernities

Amrani Mohammed[1]

Abstract

This article argues that Kim Stanley Robinson's New York 2140 creates what this article calls the "accidental archipelago," a broken and waterlogged city form that capitalism did not directly plan, but that its own excesses have unintentionally produced. Through this fragmented city, the novel creates spatial and social conditions where different forms of modern life become possible. Reading the novel through the connected ideas of the Capitalocene, critical island studies, speculative urbanism, and critical utopianism, the article makes three original contributions to existing scholarship on Robinson's novel. First, the idea of the accidental archipelago adds to the language of island studies and climate fiction by naming an urban space created by climate change; this idea does not fit ordinary ideas of the city or the island. Second, the article argues that Robinson's seven-narrator structure reflects this archipelagic logic in form: the novel itself becomes an archipelago of different voices that come together at the moment of political rupture, just as the debtors' strike brings the plot to its end. Third, the article develops archipelagic utopianism as spatial rather than temporal, uncertain rather than fixed, and relational rather than sovereign, as a useful way of imagining politics in the Capitalocene.

Keywords: *New York 2140, Accidental Archipelago, Alternative Modernities, Capitalocene, Critical Utopianism, Island Studies, Climate Fiction, Polyphony, Kim Stanley Robinson.*

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1. Introduction: The Island That Capitalism Made

Islands, as the critical tradition in island studies has long recognised, are never simply natural facts. They are produced politically, discursively, and ecologically through the relationships between land, water, power, and the social formations that inhabit and imagine them (Baldacchino, 2008; Pugh, 2013; Sheller, 2021). Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York 2140* (2017) stages an island-making of a peculiarly modern and theoretically productive kind: Manhattan becomes an archipelago not through geological process or colonial cartography but through the accumulated consequences of capitalist carbon extraction. The two catastrophic sea-level rises that precede the novel's present the First and Second Pulse have permanently flooded Lower Manhattan and rendered Midtown an intertidal zone, transforming the world's pre-eminent node of global finance into what Robinson's narrator describes as a "SuperVenice, majestic, watery, superb" (Robinson, 2017): a waterlogged, fragmented, and astonishingly vital urban formation in which vaporettos navigate former avenues, oyster farms colonize submerged columns, cooperative communities occupy the upper floors of buildings whose ground levels have become boathouses, and real estate speculators eye the intertidal zones as the site of the next financial bubble.

This transformation is the novel's central provocation, and it is one that the existing critical literature has not yet fully theorized. Ortiz (2020) has offered the most penetrating economic reading of the novel, identifying what he calls the "deadly symbiosis" between financialized accumulation and climate catastrophe in Robinson's fictional world. Colebrook (2019) has read the novel as a product of the Trumpocene, arguing that its utopian resolution reproduces the individualist and progressive assumptions of Western liberalism even as it seeks to contest them. Milner (2020) has questioned the structural plausibility of the novel's ending, arguing that the debtors' strike "comes too cheaply" given the accumulated power of the financial interests the novel has spent four hundred pages establishing. Resano (2025) has situated the novel within a broader transatlantic reading of climate fiction and populist politics. Each of these contributions is valuable, and this article builds on them all. But none of them has theorized the spatial form that Robinson's flooded Manhattan produces the form this article calls the accidental archipelago, and none has recognized

[1] Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences, Mohammed First University, Oujda, Morocco., Email: mohammed.amrani.d24@ump.ac.ma

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that this spatial form is also the formal logic of the novel's seven-narrator polyphonic structure. These are this article's original contributions.

The accidental archipelago names a spatial formation that capital produces through its own destructive excess but cannot fully control: a fragmented, discontinuous urban geography whose very fragmentation creates conditions of relative autonomy in which non-capitalist social forms can persist and develop. The concept builds on and extends the established theoretical vocabulary of critical island studies (Stratford et al., 2011; Pugh, 2013; Grydehøj, 2017; Sheller, 2021). Applied to Robinson's drowned Manhattan, this lens yields a reading of the novel that is simultaneously formal, attending to how the seven-narrator structure enacts an archipelagic logic at the level of narrative technique and politics, arguing that the novel's engagement with alternative modernities constitutes a serious contribution to the political imagination of the present.

Before proceeding, it is important to recognize a major limitation in existing cli-fi scholarship, which also applies strongly to Robinson's novel. Death (2022) and Whyte (2018) argue that Western and Anglo-centric climate fiction can repeat the same inequalities that climate justice tries to challenge. In Robinson's novel, Manhattan suffers from flooding caused by carbon emissions. Still, most vulnerable communities in the Global South contributed the least to this crisis and are already facing its worst effects. Robinson's novel primarily focuses on a North American, largely white urban community. Its alternative forms of modern life are imagined from within the same social and spatial world that has played a major role in creating the climate crisis. This article does not reject this criticism. Instead, it argues that the idea of the accidental archipelago is useful because it shows how capitalism's own destructive logic can create the conditions for resistance against it. This idea can also apply beyond the novel's immediate setting, especially to archipelagic communities in the Global South that have faced sea-level rise and climate insecurity long before Robinson's fictional Manhattan began to flood.

The article is divided into five sections. Section two situates the novel within the Capitalocene framework and the current landscape of climate fiction studies, positioning this article's contribution precisely against the existing scholarship. Section three develops the accidental archipelago concept through engagement with critical island studies and speculative urbanism. Section four presents a formal reading of the novel's many-voiced structure, showing how it reflects archipelagic logic. Section five analyses the novel's alternative modernities through the framework of critical utopianism, developing the concept of archipelagic utopianism. The final section, the conclusion, reflects on the wider political and theoretical importance of the argument.

2. The Capitalocene Condition and the Existing Critical Landscape

Robinson has been explicit and consistent about the political-generic claim that grounds his fiction: near-future science fiction has become effectively indistinguishable from climate fiction, because the pace of anthropogenic environmental change has saturated the horizon of the near future to the point where it is no longer possible to write recognizable settings without reference to ongoing climatic transformation. In his foreword to the climate fiction anthology Everything Change, Robinson describes climate fiction as having become "in effect the realism of our time" (Robinson, 2016). This is both a generic observation about science fiction's formal conditions and a political argument: climate change is not a future event but a present condition, already reshaping the material and social geographies of cities, coastlines, and communities worldwide.

The theoretical framework most adequate to Robinson's fictional world is not the Anthropocene, which locates the driving force of planetary crisis in humanity as such, obscuring the differential contributions and vulnerabilities of different classes, nations, and social formations, but the Capitalocene, as elaborated by Jason W. Moore. For Moore, capitalism functions as an ecological regime, a world-ecology in which nature, labour, and capital are co-produced through ongoing processes of exploitation and appropriation (Moore, 2016). The Capitalocene insists that the climate crisis is not the accidental byproduct of human industrial activity but the systemic consequence of capitalism's constitutive drive to externalize the costs of production onto nature and onto those social formations least able to resist such externalization.

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New York 2140 enacts this logic with considerable sophistication. As Robinson's narrator observes in one of the novel's characteristic moments of sardonic historical summary: "The surf community of New York regarded the intertidal as their own" (Robinson, 2017), a statement that captures precisely how the flooded city has been simultaneously abandoned by conventional capital and recolonized from below by those with the resourcefulness and the necessity to make it lovable. The financial district continues to function in the skyscrapers of Uptown; the intertidal has been improvised into something else entirely.

The existing scholarship has mapped this dynamic with increasing sophistication, but with significant gaps that this article is designed to address. Table 1 summarises the positioning of this article's argument against the five most directly relevant contributions to the critical literature on New York 2140.

Table 1: Positioning this article against existing scholarship on New York 2140

Study	Primary Framework	Central Argument	Formal Analysis?	Gap Addressed by This Paper
Ortiz (2020)	World-ecology; financialization	Deadly symbiosis between climate change and finance capital in 2140	No	Does not theorize the spatial form produced by that symbiosis or the alternative social forms it enables
Cooper (2021)	Uneven & combined development	Robinson's Mars Trilogy as an image of post-capitalist possibility	No	Focuses on Mars Trilogy; does not read NY2140's urban archipelago or its narrative form
Colebrook (2019)	Trumpocene; Western cli-fi limits	Robinson's utopia reproduces individualist Western logic despite a revolutionary ending.	Partial	Critiques without theorizing the spatial conditions that make collective action possible; underestimates archipelagic form
Milner (2020)	Eutopia/dystopia typology	NY2140's utopian ending 'comes too cheaply'; it lacks structural plausibility	No	Does not account for how the spatial logic of the accidental archipelago grounds the plausibility of collective rupture
Resano (2025)	Capitalocene; Trumpocene; critical utopia	NY2140 and America City as peri-apocalyptic reflections on populism and precarity	No	Reads political themes but does not develop spatial or formal argument; the archipelago concept is absent.
This article	Accidental archipelago; island studies; Capitalocene; critical utopianism	Flooding involuntarily produces spatial conditions for alternative modernities; the seven-narrator form enacts archipelagic logic; archipelagic utopianism as a distinct political mode	Yes, the central argument	All of the above: spatial theory + formal analysis + original concept = new contribution

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As Table 1 makes clear, this article's contribution is distinctive in three respects: it introduces a spatial concept the accidental archipelago that none of the existing studies employs; it offers the first sustained formal analysis of the novel's seven-narrator structure in relation to its political argument; and it develops a new theoretical concept archipelagic utopianism that specifies more precisely than existing formulations the distinctive mode of political imagination the novel enacts. These contributions do not invalidate the existing scholarship; they build on it, extending what Ortiz identifies as the deadly symbiosis of finance and catastrophe into a spatial and formal analysis that Ortiz's economic framework does not itself pursue, and addressing the formal gap that Colebrook's and Milner's critiques implicitly identify but do not theorize.

Hatzisavvidou (2024) argues that climate fiction performs a distinctive epistemic function: it renders legible, through speculative narrative, political and economic dynamics too vast and systemic to be grasped through conventional realist representation. The accidental archipelago is precisely such a rendering: it makes spatial and therefore imaginable the abstract claim that capitalism's destructive excesses produce the conditions for their own contestation. Death (2022) qualifies this argument by insisting that which forms of life are made legible and which are occluded in Western cli-fi is itself a political question. This article takes that qualification seriously throughout.

3. The Accidental Archipelago: Island Theory and Speculative Urbanism

The theoretical turn to the archipelago in recent critical thought has been driven by a recognition that the island long marginalized in Western social science as peripheral, exceptional, and analytically minor offers, precisely because of its apparent marginality, a productive site from which to think about questions of relationality, political possibility, and the limits of continental modes of thought (Pugh, 2013; Grydehøj, 2017). Stratford et al.'s (2011) foundational contribution to critical island studies established the archipelago as designating not merely a geographical formation but an epistemological orientation: a way of thinking across discontinuity, of understanding connection without requiring contiguity, and of recognising the political potential of interstitial and marginal spaces.

Sheller (2021), building on her influential work in mobility studies, has extended this archipelagic thinking to the conditions of climate change. She argues that the experiences of island communities in the Global South that have lived with sea-level rise, coastal erosion, and climatic vulnerability for generations constitute a form of political and ecological knowledge that the continental imaginary of the Global North has systematically failed to take seriously. This argument has direct implications for reading Robinson's novel: the flooded Manhattan of 2140 is, in a sense, the belated arrival of what island communities of the Caribbean, the Pacific, and the Indian Ocean have long been forced to know. The accidental archipelago of the Global North is, from this perspective, an involuntary initiation into a form of knowledge that the Global South has possessed and paid dearly for possessing for decades.

The accidental archipelago differs from classical island formations and from the archipelagos of postcolonial thought in one crucial respect: it is not a pre-existing geographical or political formation but a spatial condition produced by the destructive excess of the very system it comes to contest. The sea-level rise that transformed Manhattan's geography was the direct consequence of the carbon economy that Manhattan's financial district did more than perhaps any other single site on earth to sustain and reproduce. The archipelago is the capital's own negative creation, the spatial form produced by the system's inability to account for the full costs of its own operation.

What makes this production theoretically significant is that it generates spatial conditions that the dominant system did not intend and cannot fully control. The flooded intertidal zones of Robinson's Manhattan are, from the perspective of financialized capital, an opportunity for the next real estate cycle, as the novel makes clear when it describes uptown real estate interests targeting the cooperative buildings: "The intertidal buildings were the target of a hostile takeover bid" (Robinson, 2017). But they are also, from the perspective of those who have made their lives in them, something else: spaces of relative autonomy in which cooperative ownership, communal governance, and ecological embeddedness have developed not as ideological choices but as practical responses to the material conditions of life in a flooded city.

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The accidental archipelago is thus a site of what McFarlane (2021) calls "urban worlding," the ongoing, improvisational making and remaking of urban life from below, in the gaps and margins of dominant spatial orders. Grydehøj's (2017) argument that islands function as "urban laboratories," sites where the compression of space and the relative isolation produced by water create conditions for social experimentation, applies here with a crucial inversion: the experimental conditions have been imposed by catastrophe rather than chosen by design. This involuntary character is, the article argues, a source of strength rather than weakness in Robinson's speculative imaginary, because it grounds the novel's alternative modernities in material necessity rather than ideological preference.

4. Polyphony as Archipelago: Narrative Form and Political Enactment

One of the most persistently underrealized features of New York 2140 is its formal structure. The novel employs seven distinct narrators or focalizes, each occupying a radically different social position and relationship to the flooded city: Franklin Garr, a hedge fund trader specializing in intertidal property derivatives; Inspector Gen Octaviasdottir, a police detective; Mutt and Jeff, anarchist coders who spend the novel trying to find a systemic glitch in global finance; Vlade, the pragmatic building manager of the MetLife cooperative; Amelia Black, a wildlife documentary presenter whose airship serves as a mobile platform for rewilding projects; Roberto and Stefan, two young scavenger boys navigating the underwater ruins; and a collective "citizen" narrator who periodically interrupts the individual perspectives with historical, economic, and political commentary spoken in the first-person plural.

This formal choice is not decorative. It is, this article argues, the primary formal enactment of the novel's central spatial argument: the narrative is itself an accidental archipelago, a collection of discontinuous, heterogeneous voices that are separated by profound differences of perspective and interest but connected by their shared inhabitation of the same waterlogged urban space. Just as the flooded city brings into proximity communities that would, in the pre-flood geography of class-segregated Manhattan, have had little occasion for encounter, the novel's polyphonic structure places radically different perspectives alongside each other without resolving their differences into a unified viewpoint.

The citizen narrator deserves particular attention in this context. Unlike the novel's other voices, the citizen speaks in the first-person plural and operates at a historical and analytical scale that dwarfs the individual perspectives surrounding it. In one representative passage, the citizen narrator offers a devastating account of the political failure that produced the world of 2140:

"You can look at the history and see that people were aware of the danger they were in and what was being done to them, and yet they couldn't stop it. They couldn't stop it because they didn't control it. The powerful imposed it on the less powerful, and when the less powerful complained, those in power said it was just the market working, and when they said the market was wrong, those in power said there is no alternative." (Robinson, 2017)

This passage functions, in the novel's archipelagic formal logic, as the connective tissue between islands, the medium through which individual voices are related to the broader historical and structural forces that have shaped their world. The citizen narrator does not resolve the differences between the other perspectives; it contextualizes them, providing the historical frame within which each character's apparently individual situation becomes legible as a structural condition.

Bakhtin's (1984) concept of polyphony is the obvious theoretical reference for this formal analysis, but Robinson's polyphony has a specifically archipelagic character that Bakhtinian theory does not fully capture. In Bakhtin's account, polyphony designates a formal principle of novelistic organisation in which multiple independent consciousnesses coexist without subordination to a dominant authorial voice. In Robinson's novel, polyphony designates a political condition additionally: the incommensurability of the novel's voices, the hedge fund trader's unselfconscious immersion in financial accumulation, the anarchist coders' commitment to systemic disruption, and the building manager's pragmatic orientation toward collective maintenance is precisely the incommensurability of the social formations that the accidental archipelago brings into proximity without resolving into unity.

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The convergence of the seven voices in the novel's final sections, when the hurricane catalyzes the debtors' strike, is the formal equivalent of the political transformation that the strike enacts. The archipelago coalesces, temporarily and contingently, into something capable of collective action. Robinson describes this convergence with characteristic honesty about its fragility: even as the intertidal community coordinates the global debtors' strike that forces the nationalization of the banks, the novel insists that "there was no guarantee of permanence to anything they did, and the pushback was ferocious as always, because people are crazy and history never ends" (Robinson, 2017).

This acknowledgement of contingency directly addresses Milner's (2020) critique that the utopian ending comes too cheaply. The novel knows it comes cheaply; it says so explicitly. The point is not that the transformation is guaranteed or that the forces of capital have been permanently defeated. The point is that the transformation is possible, that the spatial logic of the accidental archipelago, combined with the right conjuncture of political crisis, creates conditions under which even a partial and reversible rupture in the financial system is achievable. This is a modest claim, but it is, Robinson insists, a real one.

5. Alternative Modernities: Cooperative Life, Governance, and Ecological Embeddedness

5.1 Cooperative Ownership and Horizontal Governance

The most sustained representation of alternative modernity in New York 2140 is the MetLife building cooperative. Unlike the intentional communities of classical utopian fiction, which typically withdraw from the dominant society to establish an alternative order in a geographically separate space, the MetLife cooperative exists within and alongside the dominant system, negotiating constantly with the financialized capital that both threatens it and, paradoxically, provides the conditions for its existence. The cooperative's governance is described through its building manager Vlade's perspective as a constant negotiation between individual interests and collective necessities: "Every building is a little nation and has to govern itself. The question is always how" (Robinson, 2017).

This pragmatic rather than ideological character of the cooperative's governance connects directly to what Escobar (2020) calls "pluriverse politics," the argument that alternative forms of social organisation are not utopian fantasies but ongoing practices, embedded in specific material conditions, that constitute actually existing alternatives to the dominant order. The MetLife cooperative is not imagining a different world; it is already, in partial and imperfect ways, living one. Its governance structures, ecological practices, and forms of mutual aid are not blueprints for a future society but descriptions of a present practice, however precarious and contested.

The precariousness is essential to the argument. The cooperative is under constant threat from the uptown real estate interests that covet the intertidal properties for the next cycle of gentrification. The alternative modernity of the accidental archipelago is always already in the process of being threatened, enclosed, and potentially incorporated by the dominant system whose destructive excess created the conditions for its emergence. This dynamic of alternative social forms persisting under constant threat within a dominant system is, Apostolidis (2022) argues, a defining feature of political life under conditions of neoliberal prevarication. Robinson's novel makes this dynamic spatially visible: islands of relative autonomy surrounded by the waters of capitalist accumulation.

5.2 Ecological Embeddedness and the More-than-Human City

A second dimension of the novel's alternative modernities is its treatment of ecological embeddedness, how the human communities of the intertidal have developed forms of life genuinely responsive to and shaped by the more-than-human ecology of the flooded city. The canals of Robinson's Manhattan are described as teeming with marine life: "The water was turbid and smelly and full of harbor seals, who hauled themselves up on the marooned cars and the floating docks to sun themselves and bark at passersby" (Robinson, 2017). This inadvertent rewilding accompanies the flooding, creating an ecology that is neither the pristine wilderness of pre-capitalist imagination nor the dead zone of maximal industrial pollution, but something genuinely new: a hybrid, collaborative, and startlingly vital urban nature.

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Neimanis (2019) theorizes the "watery logics" of climate fiction, how water, as a medium simultaneously material, symbolic, and political, enables speculative narratives to think across boundaries between the human and nonhuman, the individual and the collective, the local and the planetary. Water in New York 2140 is not simply the medium of catastrophe; it is also the medium of connection, the substance through which human and nonhuman communities are brought into new forms of proximity and mutual dependency. The rooftop farms of the cooperative buildings, which supply food, regulate temperature, manage stormwater, and create habitats for pollinators, are not ecological in any idealized sense; they are messy, imperfect, and resource-intensive. But they represent a genuine reorientation of the relationship between urban life and ecological process, one forced by the material conditions of intertidal existence rather than chosen on purely ethical grounds.

5.3 The Debtors' Strike as Political Rupture

The novel's most explicit engagement with alternative governance occurs in its final sections, when the hurricane catalyzes a coordinated debtors' strike. Citizens across the intertidal and beyond simultaneously stop paying rent, mortgages, loans, and credit card debt, causing the predatory financial sector to crash and forcing the nationalization of the banks. This event, explicitly modelled on the 2008 bailout in reverse, is the novel's most direct political proposal, and it is also its most carefully qualified one.

The debtors' strike is not a revolution in the classical sense. It does not seize state power, abolish property relations, or inaugurate a new social order. It is a moment of political rupture, a point at which the accumulated weight of cooperative practices, horizontal solidarities, and shared ecological life that have developed in the accidental archipelago achieves sufficient coherence and coordination to produce a systemic effect. The transformation is partial, reversible, and already, by the novel's final pages, under threat: "capitalism will be flattening itself like the octopus it biomimics, sliding between the glass walls of law that try to keep it contained" (Robinson, 2017).

This image, capital as an octopus, flattening itself to slip through any gap in regulation, is the novel's most important political statement and the clearest evidence that Robinson's utopianism is critical rather than naive. It directly addresses Colebrook's (2019) concern that the novel's revolutionary ending merely reproduces "the same ongoing spirit of individualism, progress, and fortune" that has characterised Western liberalism. Robinson's answer is: perhaps, but the struggle is real, the gains are real, and the permanence of neither is guaranteed. This is not the utopianism of arrival but of persistence, the utopianism, as Moylan (2014) argues, adequate to the genuinely historical character of political struggle.

Vieira (2022) has argued that the most politically productive utopian fictions locate the energies of transformation not in vanguard movements or charismatic leaders but in the ordinary practices of communal life. This is precisely where Robinson locates the sources of the debtors' strike: in the accumulated weight of cooperative practices, horizontal solidarities, and ecological embeddedness that the communities of the accidental archipelago have developed over the decades since the flooding. The strike does not come from nowhere; it comes from the ongoing, unglamorous, and politically essential work of building and maintaining the cooperative life of the intertidal.

6. Archipelagic Utopianism: Theorizing the Political Imagination of the Accidental Archipelago

This article has used the term "archipelagic utopianism" throughout to describe the distinctive political-imaginative mode of New York 2140. It is now time to specify this concept rigorously and to distinguish it from related formulations in the existing literature. Table 2 provides a systematic comparison of archipelagic utopianism with the two most relevant existing frameworks: classical utopianism and Thaler's (2019) critical dystopia.

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Table 2: Archipelagic Utopianism compared with existing utopian frameworks

Dimension	Classical Utopianism	Critical Dystopia (Thaler, 2019)	Archipelagic Utopianism (This Article)
Orientation	Temporal better society in the future time	Temporal present danger + future possibility	Spatial alternative forms persisting in present interstices
Necessity	Necessary historical progress toward a determined end	Contingent possibility without guarantee	Contingent could always have been otherwise; reversible
Community model	Sovereign self-sufficient alternative apart from the dominant order	Embedded within the dominant order but gesturing beyond it	Relational network of partially autonomous nodes within and against the dominant order
Source of transformation	Revolutionary rupture/vanguard movement	Collective awareness of danger + melancholic hope	Ordinary cooperative practices + conjunctural convergence
Formal expression in NY2140	N/A	Partial dark undercurrent in the narrative	Seven-narrator polyphony converging at the moment of the debtors' strike

As Table 2 demonstrates, archipelagic utopianism is distinguished from classical utopianism by three features that Table 2 organizes. First, it is spatial rather than temporal in its primary orientation: where classical utopianism imagines a better society in a future time, archipelagic utopianism imagines alternative social forms persisting in present spaces in the islands, interstices, and margins of the existing order rather than in a projected future that has overcome that order. Second, it is contingent rather than necessary: the alternative modernities of the accidental archipelago are not the outcome of a historical process moving toward a determined end but of specific material conditions, specific practices, and specific conjunctures of political possibility. Third, it is relational rather than sovereign: the archipelago does not imagine a self-sufficient alternative community withdrawn from the dominant order but a network of partially autonomous nodes constitutively connected to and shaped by the dominant order they partially contest.

These three features correspond to the three key characteristics of critical island studies' archipelagic thinking as elaborated by Stratford et al. (2011), Pugh (2013), and Sheller (2021): emphasis on spatiality over temporality, contingency over necessity, and relationality over sovereignty. The concept of archipelagic utopianism is thus not simply an application of island theory to a climate fiction text; the specific form of utopian imagination theorizes that the accidental archipelago makes possible.

Thaler (2019) has argued that the most politically productive speculative fictions pivot around "a type of hope that remains sensitive to the catastrophic failures of the past and alert to the immense perils of the present, without, however, foreclosing the prospect of a less oppressive, less violent, and less unequal future". Archipelagic utopianism, as theorized here, is precisely such a form of hope, but it specifies more precisely than Thaler's framework the spatial conditions under which such hope becomes politically actionable. The accidental archipelago is not merely the setting of this hope; it is its material condition of possibility. Without the flooded intertidal, without the cooperative buildings, without the rooftop farms and the mutual aid networks, the debtors' strike could not have happened. Archipelagic utopianism is a hope that knows its own spatial address.

This political modesty is also, in another register, deeply radical. It insists against catastrophist despair and techno-optimist complacency alike that transformation is possible, that the present is not the only possible, and that the resources for transformation are already present in the cooperative buildings, the rooftop farms, the horizontal solidarities, and the accidental archipelagos that capital has inadvertently made. It insists, in other words, that we already live in the conditions of possibility for a different world, if we choose to recognise and inhabit them differently.

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7. Conclusion: The Political Stakes of the Accidental Archipelago

This article has argued that Kim Stanley Robinson's New York 2140 produces and theorizes the accidental archipelago, a spatial formation that capital has involuntarily created through its own destructive excess and that generates, in its fragmentation, conditions under which alternative modernities become possible. Reading the novel through the intersecting frameworks of the Capitalocene, critical island studies, speculative urbanism, and critical utopianism, the article has made three original contributions to the existing scholarship on Robinson's novel and on climate fiction more broadly.

First, the concept of the accidental archipelago adds a new critical term to both island studies and climate fiction scholarship. It names a spatial condition: an urban geography created unintentionally by climate change, where the city becomes broken, divided, and partly connected by water. Existing concepts, including Ortiz's deadly symbiosis, Colebrook's Trumpocene, and Milner's eutopian typology, do not fully explain this condition. This concept also matters beyond Robinson's novel because it offers a useful framework for studying new forms of social experiment and collective life emerging in other climate-fragmented places around the world.

Second, the formal argument that Robinson's seven-narrator polyphonic structure enacts, at the level of narrative technique, the archipelagic logic that the novel also theorizes spatially and politically, offers a new account of the relationship between form and content in the novel that advances the critical discussion beyond purely thematic or ideological readings.

Third, the concept of archipelagic utopianism specifies more precisely than existing formulations in either utopian studies or climate fiction criticism the distinctive mode of political imagination that the novel enacts: spatial rather than temporal, contingent rather than necessary, relational rather than sovereign. This concept has implications beyond the reading of Robinson's novel; it offers a theoretical framework for thinking about the forms of political hope adequate to the conditions of the Capitalocene.

The decolonial point must be repeated in the conclusion. Robinson's flooded Manhattan is an "accidental archipelago," but for island communities in the Global South, this experience is not new. These communities have lived with rising seas, climate danger, and environmental loss for generations. In this sense, Manhattan becomes a late example of knowledge that many island and Indigenous communities have already gained through long experience and suffering. The alternative modernities imagined in Robinson's intertidal communities are also close to the cooperative, communal, and ecologically connected ways of life that Indigenous and island communities have protected against capitalism for centuries. Whyte (2018) argues that what Western climate fiction often presents as a frightening future is, for many Indigenous communities, already part of a long historical present. Therefore, a useful next step would be to read Robinson's accidental archipelago alongside other, non-accidental archipelagos, especially the communities of the Pacific, the Caribbean, and the Indian Ocean.

In a world where sea-level rise, extreme weather, and climate-related displacement are already changing cities and coastlines across the globe, the question of what kinds of social life are possible in a climate-changed world is no longer only a matter of speculative fiction. It has become an urgent practical need. Robinson's novel, through its archipelagic utopianism, its focus on water-shaped social life, and its attention to cooperation and shared solidarity in the accidental archipelago, offers a way to think about this question. It does not offer a fixed blueprint or a prediction of the future, but a form of imagination that Robinson himself presents as the realism of our time.

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