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[Dachzeile]

The Amazon - From the periphery to the centre of discussions

The behavioural and production patterns of humankind have put the world on a collision course with our planetary boundaries. As global warming leads us towards large-scale disaster, ecosystems are becoming more fragile by the day and social inequality is growing fast. We must urgently move towards a more sustainable and equitable collective existence. This text is about the consequences of current unsustainability, rather than its causes. It explores our complex predicament by contemplating how we - as individuals or governments - make sense of reality and how our conceptions can lead to convenient responses. I will also discuss why the Brazilian Amazon encompasses elements that make it a cauldron of opportunities for new ways of living. The preservation of the rainforest is a key part of efforts to protect the global climate, however, the irreconcilable views of different stakeholders present significant challenges for its conservancy. While it is true that we are “all in this together”, Brazil will play a crucial role in charting a course towards a better climate future – objectively and subjectively.

Inner fears and crossroads

Bruno Latour (2018) offers an interesting perspective on our times in his exploration of science denialism as a form of escapism from reality. Escapism takes many forms and has diverse triggers. It can be an individual response to the loss of a loved one, crushing debt, or a change in status or employment. Rather than taking responsibility and engaging with the situation, some people opt to deny reality and run from the challenges before them. Both individuals and groups can display this behaviour. We see this around our response to the unfolding climate crisis, which highlights our interdependence and strengthens the role of science in societies and on the international political stage. Systemic denialism and science scepticism represent significant challenges as action to address the climate crisis and other

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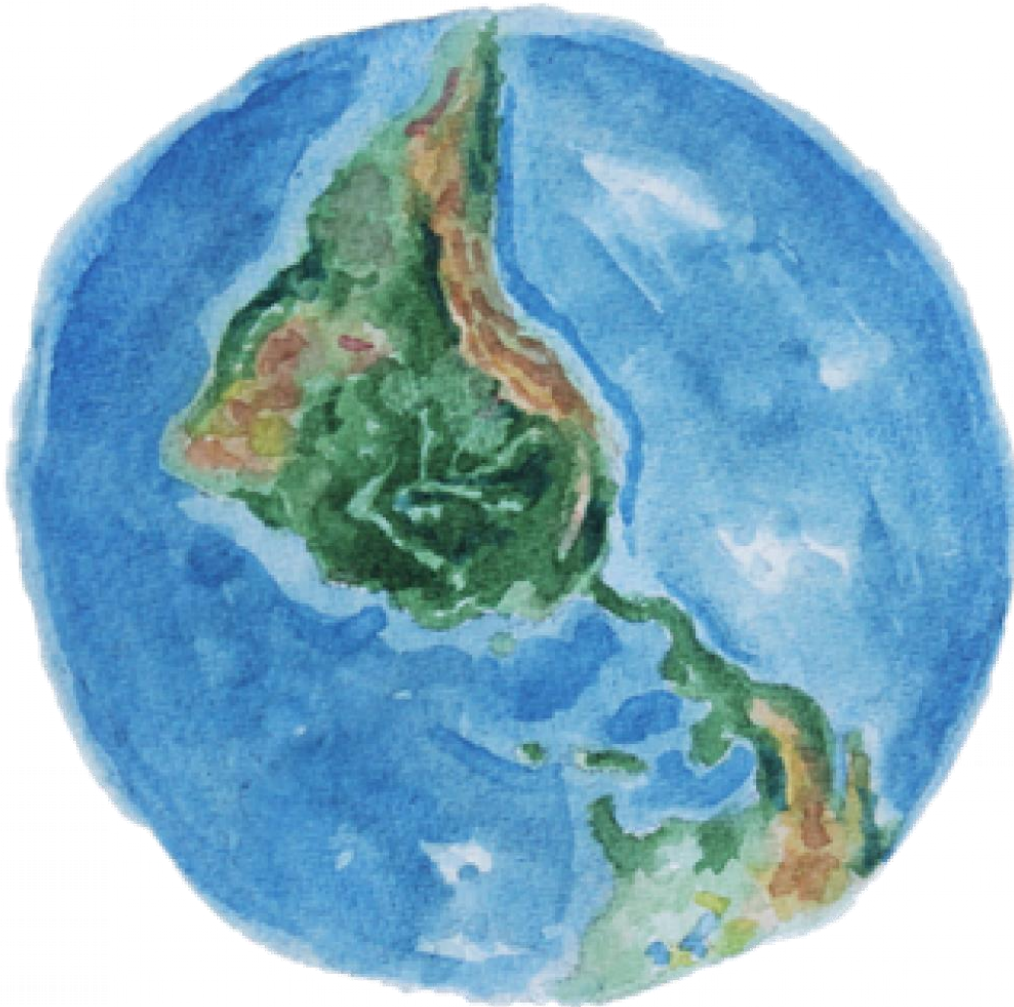


wicked problems will need to be based on a deep understanding and broad acceptance of this reality.

The obvious and unavoidable social structural crisis in which we are entangled influences key aspects of our personal and political existence, our relationship with *reality*, and the acceptance of the need for *change*. The world is structurally unfair, with segments of society facing unavoidable exclusion as the devastation of our natural world accelerates. *This is as frightening as it is evident*. We are part of a system and, as such, global justice is an ethical imperative not to be denied or postponed. The ethical and empathic weight of this fact should spur us to pursue a fairer existence. However, accepting this reality comes at a cost that few are prepared to pay: the acknowledgment that we have erred and need to change.

Sharing as we do a finite habitat, we have a personal responsibility for the well-being of people and planet. It is only through dialogue and multilateralism that we can fulfill this responsibility and tackle the challenges presented by the climate and biodiversity crises and the rise of skepticism. But forging new overarching and alternative agreements (such as the Paris Agreement) requires that we accept new views, abandon old beliefs, and change as societies and individuals. This led me to think of how individuals and social structures respond in terms of psychoanalytic concepts. Such as how the paralysis, between self-acknowledgment of inner faults and the need for positive transformations, has led us to a post-truth world. In some cases, reality is so tough and the need for action so clear that even the most excruciating delusions seem preferable.

The truth of climate change is inconvenient and new communication strategies have been used to create personalized on-demand contents and, thus, realities. For some, the control of information, regardless of its content, is an imperative and a strong manifestation of raw power. When we eschew facts for personal preconceptions and views, we close ourselves off to dialogue. In extreme cases, this fuels the rise of escapist movements, political extremism and stronger protectionism. “The Amazon isn’t burning,” “The virus doesn’t exist.” and “The earth is flat.” are arguments easily to be found, although the truth is different. That people might soon live on Mars seems, sometimes, more likely than the development of inclusive and sustainable societies.



Artur Monteiro

Where beliefs come together

The forest is valued both in terms of its material utility (as a carbon sink and a source of biodiversity and raw materials, for example) and as a cultural good. Its continued existence will depend on our capacity to cooperate and forge agreements through multilateral dialogue. Its role as a focus of dialogue might also be viewed as a value in itself. As pointed out by Carlos Rittl, IASS Senior Fellow and Associate founding member of Brazilian Climate Center and Climate Observatory Lab, the forest is facing its worst moment in 30 years, not least of all due to the [anti-environmental rhetoric of President Bolsonaro](#). The growth of land-grabbing, the persecution of environmental and indigenous activists, and the rapid pace of deforestation are not simply a reflection of Brazil's extreme political landscape or the impotence of the international community. They are, ultimately, systemic outcomes and



reflect the antagonism of irreconcilable belief systems. On the one hand, the belief in limitless growth; on the other, the finitude of resources and the imperatives of conservation and climate protection.

The continuity of the forest and the narratives that support it are the [tipping point between attachment to vicious ancient practices and the unknown human practice that will allow it to be sustained](#). Situated on the periphery of a globalized world, the Amazon is at the centre of global discussions and has the potential to respond to the conflicts facing humanity and to foster awareness of the need to reconcile antagonisms between peoples, nations, and world views. Its conservation would achieve more than preserving a cradle of biodiversity and protecting the climate, it would be a triumph of agreement-building and dialogue over fear.

Towards a sensible agreement

In light of the challenges thrown up by the Covid-19 pandemic, a number of countries are exploring the options for a ‘green’ and sustainable recovery. In the case of Brazil, the Amazon and its future must be at the centre of any recovery package. As proposed by Ismael and Carlos Nobre (2018), the [Amazon Third Way Initiative](#) would promote social and technological transformation across the Amazon through the development of a socially inclusive ‘green economy’ that is underpinned by value chains based on non-wood products. These efforts should be supported through international cooperation projects coordinated by Brazilian stakeholders.

Brazil is grappling with a host of overlapping and extreme societal dilemmas. Creating a viable alternative for the Amazon is of vital importance for humanity. Not only because of what its conservation implies objectively, but also due to the extremes seen there in the clash of belief systems, resulting in persecution, deforestation, and violence. We should devote as much effort to finding a way to conserve the Amazon as we are to studying the benefits of its conservation, because it forces us to engage in dialogue and acknowledge personal responsibility. Brazil could, once again, become a key player in conservationism and multilateralism. However, dialogue and empathy are imperatives. My remarks could be understood as denialist by not considering the tough reality of the recrudescence of nationalism (as in Brazil); however, there is no time or room for pessimism. The practice of change is a daily duty. Our personal beliefs are central and there is much to be changed, and for that we need to put the Amazon and our beliefs in the right place – front and centre.