

OFF SCREEN, UNSIGHTED, UNTHOUGHT

Adriana Johnson

The omission is indeed dyed into most narratives
by metaphors assimilating peasant revolts to natural
phenomena: they break out like thunderstorms,
heave like earthquakes, spread like wildfires,
infect like epidemics. In other words, when the proverbial
clod of earth turns, this is a matter
to be explained in terms of natural history.

Ranajit Guha, “The Prose of Counterinsurgency”

In this much-cited passage, Ranajit Guha comments on the tendency in writings about subaltern rebellion to apprehend metaphorically the unforeseen irruption of violence—its agential effects there, where no rational and political human agency has been recognized—by so many comparisons to natural phenomena.¹ The metaphors work to organize the perception of what is thereby figured as non-human, giving shape to events that are at once opaque and spectacular. By contrast, Rob Nixon’s concept of “slow violence” attempts to name a reverse violence wrought upon the environment as well as upon certain human communities that is anything but spectacular. If violence is slow enough—that is, accretive and dispersed across time (and space)—it can’t be identified as a demarcated event. If environmental damage sometimes takes so long to unfold that we struggle to perceive it, then it presents challenges to our capacity for comprehension as well as to our very definition of violence.² Nixon’s use of *slowness* thus points to a temporal scale that falls outside the range of our senses and poses representational challenges that he associates with a spectacle-driven corporate media. His book *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* pursues examples of environmental writer-activists who work against the limits of the “sensation-driven technologies of our image-world” often through non-fiction forms.³

Although Amitav Ghosh’s *The Great Derangement* similarly takes up the

question of representational limits to environmental destruction and climate change, he hones in more specifically on a deeper and older question of writing-based genres and forms instead of examining the dictates of media spectacle. Ghosh's central claim is that climate change is a crisis of culture and the imagination, in part because the contemporary narrative imagination has inherited a grid of literary forms and conventions—a cultural matrix—that has propagated “modes of concealment that prevented people from recognizing the realities of their plight.”⁴ One key example is the modern European realist novel's exclusion of non-human agency in its effort to make its diegetic world believable. The argument is not that climate change is unrepresentable—Ghosh admits both that climate change has been taken up in the genre of nonfiction such as the language of science, and also that it has been addressed more readily in television, film, and the visual arts than in literary fiction—but that certain valued narrative forms have exerted an infrastructural drag on our capacity to imagine otherwise. This argument depends on a division Ghosh establishes between the serious modern novel and “generic outhouses” such as sci-fi, epic tales, gothic, fantasy, horror, melodrama, magical realism. Although these other forms don't have the same in-built impediments to narrating climate change, the problem for Ghosh is that they would locate climate change in an imagined other world or time apart from ours and therefore, on some level, would not sufficiently unsettle what has been decreed as our world. Therefore, the challenge he grapples with, both in books such as *The Great Derangement* and more recently *The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis* (2021) as well as in novels like *Gun Island* (2019), is how to concatenate the construction of a believable reality with phenomena that exceed its contours—that are uncanny, strange, or disorienting.

I take Ghosh as my starting point precisely because it is genres like sci-fi or horror that Brazilian filmmaker Kleber Mendonça Filho draws on to stage the interruption of a presumably settled real by opaque externalities. As important as what Kleber Mendonça frames on screen through these genres is what happens off screen, such that his films might be characterized as staging the problems of the overspill or fallout of all that we cannot see or that is beyond our sensory ken. Mendonça Filho has received international acclaim for his feature length films *O Som ao redor* [*Neighboring Sounds*] (2012), *Aquarius* (2016), and more recently *Bacurau* (2019), codirected with Juliano Dornelles.⁵ In all of these films, violence is scripted largely as a latent colonial and racial violence that has been given new form in combination with real estate speculation, cancerous urban growth, practices of value extraction, military technological advances, and new forms of spectacle and entertainment. In his early short *Recife Frio* [*Cold Tropics*] (2009), on the other hand, the city of Recife is subjected to an unexplained environmental change and suddenly becomes “the independent republic of cold weather in the midst of a tropical

country.”⁶ Although *Recife Frio* is the most awarded Brazilian short film since Jorge Furtado’s *Ilha das Flores* [*Isle of Flowers*] (1989), it has not received as much critical attention as the director’s other films. As a sci-fi farce of climate change within a larger corpus of work, it presents the opportunity for thinking the narrativization of colonial/neocolonial violence alongside figurations of environmental change. As in many of Kleber Mendonça’s other films, an off-screen or invisible element abruptly invades the diegetic world, reframing the genres that seemed to be staging that world and raising questions about the carrying capacity of our narrative forms and the way intelligibility is plotted. Put otherwise, the eruption of an off-screen element into the frame of a particular genre points not to the sudden capture of what was previously unknown or unknowable, but instead to something closer to the figure of subalternity: in Gyan Prakash’s words, an “*externality* to dominant systems of knowledge and power [which] surfaces *inside* the system of dominance” as a trace of all that eludes it.⁷ If wildfires and earthquakes were, in Guha’s epigraph above, available as metaphors for this externality insofar as they were calculated to pertain to nature, in *Recife Frio* there is no such certainty.

“What’s With the Penguins?”

Recife Frio follows a putative unexplained local instance of climate change. Sometime in the near future the tropical city of Recife, Brazil finds itself suddenly enveloped in clouds and cold. This is climate change writ small: the shift is not so catastrophic that human society cannot survive it, nor does it “destabilize [the] conditions . . . that work like the boundary parameters of human existence.”⁸ The emphasis in the film is on the fallout of this event, depicted via an array of responses to the situation that are transmitted in most of the film through the pretext of a foreign (Argentine) news program, called “The World in Motion,” that is covering the story. The sudden onset of cold weather amplifies problems of social injustice, such as homelessness; bodies pile up and morgues overflow; the tourist economy that depended on sun and blue skies skitters to a halt; hotels are empty. Cultural responses, ways of adapting to and making sense of the change, vary. Every religious denomination responds to the crisis in its own way: Catholics discuss guilt, while Evangelicals focus on exorcising evil. Tropical nostalgia is everywhere: the city’s inhabitants keep returning to images and memories on their cellphones of weather patterns that might never be seen again; the film cuts to these cellphone screens—mini, personal archives that hold on to the *before* of blue skies.

Mendonça Filho’s interest in architecture as a materialization of social relations is visible here, articulated both in terms of location (beach front value) as well as in the way the internal distribution of space carries forward social arrangements from the past. A society whose spatial relations are organized

around a tropical climate finds itself turned upside down: the coastal apartments and architecture designed for maximum coolness in the blazing heat are now completely unsuitable for the cold. As the grounds for this organization dissolve the film wittily articulates the change as a dislocation in genre which also serves as a clue for reading the film's own genre-plays: we are told that a book titled *Roteiro para construir no nordeste* [*A Guide to Constructing in the Northeast*] from the 1970s that laid out plans for a vernacular, human, and generous architecture now feels like "impossible poetry." The connection between spatial and social structures is materialized in a news segment that covers the story of how small, stuffy "maids' quarters," the legacy of slavery, now become prime real estate within those apartments, with their former inhabitants kicked out and made to sleep in their employer's spacious yet freezing rooms. In an interview, one such maid declares that she feels like a "fish out of water" in the cold new space. Although the logic of the previous spatial configuration has become undone, the social hierarchies not only persist but are intensified: the maid's fish metaphor carries the weight of her further displacement.

At the same time, the film also catalogues inventive popular culture responses to the changed circumstances: merchants commercialize their reinterpretation of the cold, selling clay figurines of people in winter clothes (rather than scantily dressed or naked); houses now have chimneys, and families are depicted gathering in front of fireplaces (the merchant comments that such scenes were previously seen only in movies from Switzerland or the U.S.). In a similar vein, viewers follow a news segment of a man who worked as a professional Santa Claus at Christmas and who is now delighted because he no longer faints in the heat. It is hard to imagine that this segment is not slyly citing Gilberto Freyre's "Manifesto Regionalista" (1926), which sharply criticized the Brazilian anxiety to copy Europe, exemplified in the fact that cafés in Recife in the 1920s were too embarrassed to offer local sweets and instead took to serving French pastries. Rather than looking to a future in which the northeast—or Brazil more generally—would ever more resemble Europe and the United States, Freyre advocated an eye attuned to the singularities of local history and culture. In his manifesto he specifically noted the absurdity of a Santa Claus who, wearing "boots designed for sleds and snow," "crushes the old Brazilian nativity scenes," which are "green and scented with summer, adding a note of ridicule to our family Christmas now decorated with little foreign trees brought from Europe or United States."⁹ But Mendonça Filho turns Freyre on his head: the singularity of the local is unstable; what was in place is now out of place, and vice versa, under changing weather conditions. Climate change—the arrival of a cold front that turns Recife into a version of French Brittany—therefore works on a double register. On the one hand, something that has seemingly dropped from the sky disrupts the organizing parameters of local human society. On the other hand, the Santa's delight, the new pleasure

in hearth-organized houses, and the comment of one socialite that “the cold makes poor people more elegant” also inscribe the incoming cold as an ironic iteration of a long series of colonial desires to copy the Global North and shrug off the stigmata of the torrid zone. Climate is deeply cultural.

As noted above, it is the aftermath of this phenomenon, rather than its cause, that matters the most in the film. Indeed, the cause or origin of the changed climate is barely registered on screen, if at all. The film begins with a feint of sorts, mimicking to some extent the expectation that narratives will start at an origin, or that whatever comes first logically precedes what follows. It kicks off with an ominous soundtrack from the film *The Brain that Wouldn't Die* (1962), one of the many horror movie genre references that permeate Mendonça Filho's films. We see a flash of light stream across the screen, followed by a quick cut to a montage of stills as well as moving images of men dressed in white hazmat suits on a beach (Figure 1).



FIGURE 1. Still from *Recife Frio*

The first words we hear are from a narrator speaking Spanish, the putative TV reporter of an Argentine news program, informing us that a meteor has struck Maria Farinha beach, 13 miles north of Recife, killing three people who were singing at a beach party.

Yet this montage of images, which presumably serve to string together the beginning of a linear sequence, is immediately followed by an affirmation that refuses such linearity: no scientific evidence links the meteor to the cold front,

says the narrator; for the scientists, it was only a meteorite. The more substantial event, which happened a few weeks later, he explains, was the arrival of the penguins. The cause of the sudden onset of the cold is therefore opaque, mysterious, and unexplained by science in the film. Indeed, the comet is duplicated or redoubled in the penguins in such a way as to complicate causal scientific narratives. That is, there are not one but two appearances, two arrivals, that mark the onset of the cold—the penguins and the comet—but the penguins are at best a symptom rather than a cause of the event. Their structural similarity as arrivals from elsewhere in a temporal coincidence or conjunction with the cold therefore destabilizes the possibility of pointing with certainty to the comet as the cause and origin of the climate change. The illegibility of the phenomena to science is emphasized in a later cut where we see members of the international scientific community at a meeting declaring that it doesn't make any sense, and that "it is just silly" to conjecture that either the comet or the penguins have anything to do with climate change.

This bracketing of scientific knowledge contrasts, for example, with the recent film *Don't Look Up* (2021), which is also a farse about climate change under the guise of a large, impending planet-killing meteor. But in *Don't Look Up*, the science is clear and predicts the path of the meteor, just as the scientific community predicts climate change. The problem is that no one heeds or believes the information about the meteor and won't make changes to avert the impending catastrophe. What is silly or ridiculous are the reactions of people who don't accept what is obvious, even as scientific methods and calculations grasp the real. In *Recife Frio*, on the other hand, the event is in the past, rather than the future, and no one disputes that something has happened. In an ironic and inadvertent conjunction between both films, prisoners in the earlier *Recife Frio* organize an online photo exhibit of strange cloud formations brought on by climate change titled *Olha pra cima, irmão* [*Look Up, Brother*]. They do look up, and they do see the clouds, but they don't know why they are there. The clouds are documented, but only as aesthetic forms. The film circles around the reactions to and consequences of something, but the "it" itself remains offscreen, unseen, unregistered. It falls out of the realm of "sense," and science has little to offer.

We do also see the multivalent penguins, however. Thanks to their visible presence on screen, it is they, rather than the fleeting, half-seen comet, that represent the strongest figurations of an unexplained "arrival." But it isn't clear what we see when we see them. The story of the penguins is refracted through that of a French hotel owner whose business has fallen apart. He blames the media coverage of the mysterious cold for the cancellation of all his reservations, particularly a Discovery Channel report on the penguin invasion. "I don't know where these penguins come from," he says in perplexity to the TV reporter interviewing him. "Frankly, I know nothing about penguins, even in

Brittany I've never seen a penguin." This alien invasion leads to a fast-growing penguin colony, an arrival of unwanted bodies that indexes both delegitimized human flows—an uninvited immigration—as well as a dislocation in what is meant to be still and not move. The penguins are a sign that nature is out of place, not a case of a fish out of water, but water where it shouldn't be, so to speak. The penguins now sit where the dolphins and coconut trees expected by tourists were supposed to be. In his struggle to find a way to respond to the changing reality, the hotel owner attempts to capitalize on the penguins by setting up a penguin adoption project (one euro per penguin). Faced with the obvious excess and potency of bodies out of place, he clings not only to a capitalist logic but also to a rhetoric of scarcity: the birds are not endangered here but they must be elsewhere, he says (Figure 2). As living agential beings, the penguins are a metonym of both the comet and the cold, an index of an off-camera, non-human agency capable of both wrecking and furthering human plans.



FIGURE 2. Still from *Recife Frio*

The World in Motion

Roughly three-fourths of the short is framed within the conceit of a news program “El Mundo en Movimiento” (“The World in Motion”). This frame is marked with the program’s logo: the letters MM in a circle, visible on the lower right-hand corner of the screen. The title is double-voiced: on the one hand, it references clichéd sound bites about a globalized imaginary that conjugate two key components: world and motion. In this reading, where the term world projects what is presumably a horizon of the largest human scale possible—the time-space compression of new technologies that made the entire planet knowable as a single thing—*motion* references both physical movement and

temporal change cast in the positive terms of globalization-speak: fast travel multiplying the connections that knitted together the planet as a thriving single marketplace of entangled cultures, the happy end-point of civilizational progress. But the title of the news program can also be read in the key of the Anthropocene, insofar as the term conjures up a new epoch in which the impact of human activity has reached a scale of such magnitude that it will be legible in the planet's geological record. In "Anthropocene Time," Dipesh Chakrabarty cites a resonant fragment by Edmund Husserl to make a point regarding assumptions about the planet as ground prior to the Anthropocene: "It is on the Earth, toward the Earth, starting from it, but still on it, that motion occurs. The Earth itself, in conformity to the original idea of it, does not move, nor is it at rest; it is in relation to the Earth that motions and rest first have sense."¹⁰ Read alongside Husserl's assertion, the phrase "World in Motion" might be understood in a second, more literal and profoundly destabilizing key in which it is precisely the ontic certainty that the planet constitutes stable and unshakeable ground that is put into question. If, according to Chakrabarty, our "political thought has so far been human-centric, holding the 'world' as a constant outside human concerns, or treating eruptions into the time of human history as intrusions from an 'outside,' it is this 'outside' that no longer exists in the time of the Anthropocene."¹¹ Thus, what is being moved or refigured is the very notion of world itself: the penguins and pieces of other worlds from outer space, such as the comet, metonymically represent this larger displacement.

I will return more directly to the question of the Anthropocene further on, but for now I want to suggest that the many figurations of cancerous urbanization throughout Kleber Mendonça's films insistently raise, even if on a smaller scale, the question of the ongoing construction/destruction of our surrounding environments. Although climate change in *Recife Frio* seems to come from afar and be tied to non-human agency, it is layered onto forms of preceding environmental degradation identified as being of human origin: they fortuitously meet or coincide in the film but belong to separate logics that are not otherwise brought together.¹² The first iteration of environmental degradation is human waste: tropical Recife (before the cold) is described as reeking of sea, fruits, and urine, a Brazilian Venice traversed by a dark sludge that was once a river. The second iteration places, side by side, a "paralyzing fear of violence" and a "taste for the ugly and aggressive architecture common to Latin American cities," where this architecture is both a defensive move against a perceived violence (the construction of vertical fortresses that offer security) as well as, in its own aggression, a channel for another kind of violence. The result is described by the TV reporter as a sterile cityscape of straight lines and right angles that is seemingly accepted without question ("without anyone thinking it was strange"). This overproduction of straight lines echoes the description of urbanization by geographer Mazen Labban as the "stratification of the built

environment.” Labban also specifically describes urbanization as a “geological process” insofar as it involves excavating the planet, interrupting material flows, and capturing materials and energy from diverse milieus which are then *expressed* as “quasi-stable layers upon the earth,” leading to a “thickening” upon the body of the earth.¹³ For Labban, too, following David Harvey’s appreciation of the inherently destructive nature of urban processes under capitalism, this thickening upon the body of the earth is at the same time a constantly becoming-waste.¹⁴ In *Recife Frio* this thickening, in its vertical iteration, is cast as inhospitable and uninhabitable to the human element, a “flattening” of the human.

The deserted streets of Recife prompt the television crew to search for the missing people: Where are the people? They are at the shopping mall. A reconstructed and inhospitable verticalized city has seemingly ejected humans into shopping centers as spaces of refuge. The sequence of images takes us from deserted streets and rows of cars to throngs of people in clothing stores, and then to a generalized and fragmented multitude engaged in “interiorized activities” and overlaid onto Beethoven’s Seventh Symphony.¹⁵ Our view of these multitudes prioritizes fragments of bodies rather than individuals—we see, for example, a series of legs or feet from ground level, or many hands holding bags—until the camera cuts to images of children in giant plastic bubbles floating on water or ice skating. The inverse of the desolate outdoor spaces are the crowded man-made indoor spaces, the multiplication of forms of enclosure (the cars, the bubbles), whose artificiality is emphasized and whose organizing logic is capitalist consumption. If the outside feels amputated or threatening, this human-created, capital-driven enclosed ecosystem doesn’t appear any more habitable or immune from disconnection: the image of the children in the giant plastic bubbles, where they “move on water without getting wet,” only emphasizes the point.¹⁶ Therefore, although climate change and destructive human terraforming seem to run on parallel tracks, the film *Recife Frio* layers them upon each other like a palimpsest, without explicitly establishing a causal relationship between them.

The aggressive transformation of cityscapes via development and real estate investment is a minor point in *Recife Frio* but is more central in other films like *O som ao redor* and *Aquarius*. Neither environmental damage nor climate change are present in the latter two films. Nonetheless, the recurring preoccupation with adverse urban transformation in all three films invites us to read them in relation to each other, as a series or as iterations of an ongoing reflection on urban change which shuffles through different temporal scales and formal choices.

In *O som ao redor* the negative externalities of modernization are made palpable through sound. On screen the emphasis is placed on the continuities harbored by what seems otherwise distinct: the tall buildings are but another

er version of the colonial great house, embodying class and racial hierarchies anew. Thus, film critic Ismail Xavier describes *O som ao redor* as an exercise in “archeology” that allows for the “perception of layers of time that accumulate in the social fabric of large cities, making evident the survival of power relations and forms of sociality.”¹⁷ For example, the landowner and modern-day feudal lord Seu Francisco not only owns rural properties but also makes his living through owning, selling, and renting apartments in an upper-class neighborhood in Recife. And although his urban property portfolio seems worlds away from the rural landscape shown in black-and-white photographs at the outset of the film, what is laid bare by the end is that two of the security guards who work within Seu Francisco’s network are children of a man he killed years back on the plantation and who are here in the city to avenge their father’s death. The rural violence that occurred offscreen in the backdrop of the movie—suggested in the gaps between those black-and-white photos—suddenly invades the screen with Seu Francisco’s presumed death at the end. We don’t see it happen, but we hear what sounds simultaneously like a gunshot and fireworks. As has been much noted in the critical reception of the film, sound—particularly acousmatic sound—carries the weight of pointing to the larger offscreen diegetic world. Michel Chion’s distinction between the different fields of extension conjured by visual and sonic tracks in cinema is a useful reference point here: if in cinema “to look is to explore, at once spatially and temporally, in a ‘given-to-see’ (field of vision) that has limits contained by the screen, . . . listening, for its part, explores in a field of audition that is given or even imposed on the ear; this aural field is much less limited or confined, its contours uncertain and changing.”¹⁸ What “the image” designates in the cinema, Chion writes, is not content but container: the frame. But for sound, he says, there is neither frame nor preexisting container.¹⁹ Thus, on one level, sound works as a counterpoint to the constriction of visuality effected by the verticalization, or even containerization, of social life: the walls block sight, creating new landscapes of segregation, even as one lives in proximity to other bodies that one can hear. Sound bleeds through the walls; it surrounds us, as the film’s title suggests. At the same time, the use of sound in the film has been read as pointing to a reality beyond the camera’s frame, beyond what the viewer can see, a reminder of all that “escapes a perspective that is mimetically realist.”²⁰ In particular, for Pires, acousmatic sound functions as a counter-register to the work of the visual in promoting miscegenation as an ocular proof of the absence of racism. That is, the sonic register, particular in its use of motifs and sounds associated with the genre of terror, functions as a mode of racialization to critique the myth of racial democracy.²¹ As Pires notes, “[t]he specters of bodies that should be absent become perceptible with the disquieting materiality of sounds through *acousmatization*.”²² Although Pires’s argument stresses the use of sound to specifically counter a narrative of racial democracy, sound also functions more

generally as the register of a latent reality that has not been buried by the ever thickening layers of skyscrapers.

Like *O som ao redor*, the plot of *Aquarius* also revolves around real estate speculation and hyperdevelopment. In this case, the movie takes the form of one older woman's (Clara's) resistance to the overgrowth that is destroying her city's past and present as she refuses to sell her beachfront apartment in the two-story Aquarius building, which developers want to tear down and replace with a modern high-rise "New Aquarius." After various increasingly aggressive attempts to get Clara to sell, she discovers that a colony of termites has been brought in to decimate the vacant apartments. With the building structure deemed unsafe, the construction company would have legal grounds to evict Clara and demolish the old Aquarius. As in *O som ao redor*, this secret other life has been there throughout the film but off-screen and unsighted, concealed behind locked doors and within the walls of the building. When Clara is finally alerted to the termite scheme and has someone else break down the doors so that she can bear witness to it, she walks into rooms where the colonies of termites are first revealed only through brown, web-like tracings that cover the walls. At first glance, the small bodies of the termites themselves pass below the threshold of vision even as the tracings show they are there. In what feels like a strange change in register, the camera then zooms into the termites to show a swarm of bodies moving purposefully and busily along their tracks. This register of termite life returns in the very last scene when Clara requests a meeting with the representatives of the construction company. Clara, who is a cancer survivor, announces that she will be giving them cancer, at which point she opens up a travel suitcase and spreads several infested blocks of wood onto the table of the meeting room. The film's final shots return to a close-up of the termites, paired with the song "Hoje" ["Today"] by Brazilian songwriter Tanguara (released in 1969), whose lyrics echo Clara's nostalgic point of view, turning on a comparison of a present moment to a lost past love. Although Clara claims that she is subjecting others to cancer, it isn't clear that this is a real answer to her dilemma in the movie or that her world isn't ending in any case. If the apartment building has been infested with termites, she is likely not able to stay there, and even if she has brought termites to the developers' building, they can always fumigate or tent the office building once she leaves. At best, the gesture seems symbolic. But it allows for a slide into a different register of liveliness: that of the termites, which are oblivious to their agential impact on human habitation and unconcerned with the human dramas that have driven the plot. Underneath it all, residing within the walls, these creatures go unperceived by most of the characters at the heart of the film as well as by the viewers. Their humming presentness is at odds with the sense of temporality and historicity evoked by the song which accompanies them, beginning with the first lines: "I carry in my body the marks of my time, my

despair, life in a moment, an abyss, hunger, a flower, the end of the world.”²³ To switch into the world of termites is to perceive another kind of end of the world. Not an end that evokes a nostalgia for the 1980s, torn down and built over by development, but a sense of a reframing of human affairs within a larger ecology, or within a “world where humanity is absent; a world crammed with things and events that are not the correlates of any manifestation; a world that is not the correlate of a relation to the world.”²⁴ In both films, then, the final scene involves a change in register and the realization that an off-screen element has been operating its logic throughout the movie. In *O Som ao redor* the sonic register holds clues to the specters of a violent past that continue to haunt the present. In *Aquarius*, however, the shift is to the busy movement of a non-human element and logic, an alien life form, and one that was not anticipated within the frame of the film. Instead of a feeling of resolution—in which one can finally connect what the sonic register was predicting with what one sees—the sense is, rather, of dislocation. *Aquarius* does not, as Gayatri Spivak puts it, allow us to rest with the “protection of women (today the ‘third-world woman’) . . . [as] a signifier for the establishment of a good society (now a good planet).”²⁵ Although Clara temporarily enlists the termites’ potential for destruction, the alliance seems brittle or weak, insofar as the historicity that drives her is irrelevant to them. The penguins in *Recife Frio* may be considered an early avatar of these termites. Unconcerned with how the cold has upset and unsettled human forms of life in Recife, they have simply arrived. Although they are not themselves a destructive force to human forms of habitation, they are indices of a world in movement.

Genres Interrupted

The term *Anthropocene* was coined by Paul Crutzen, an atmospheric chemist, to refer to a “human-dominated geological epoch, supplementing the Holocene—the warm period of the past 10–12 millennia.”²⁶ Although one of the main points behind Crutzen’s use of the term was to signal a scaling-up of human impact on the planet—from affecting other living organisms to changing the very chemistry and geology of the earth—it also implies a historical narrative. As such, the concept has been subject to a number of debates concerning the causal narrative or positing agency it projects. Some of the strongest critiques argue that the very term *Anthropocene* occludes the responsibility of specific historical configurations such as capitalism, attributing to a species (*Anthropos*) what is in reality the product of the system of capitalism.²⁷ What Chakrabarty has brought to the debates in a series of publications on climate change, however, is an attention to history-writing as a particular form/genre that I want to connect back to his participation in the project of subaltern studies. There is a significant thread between Chakrabarty’s early subaltern

studies writings and his more recent writings on climate crisis that I would argue has everything to do with an appreciation of genres. Subaltern studies posited historiography as a particular knowledge system, a kind of genre with clear formal structures and limits and presumed subject-positions, rather than an elastic and omnivorous form that could potentially account for all phenomena in time. Chakrabarty's project in *Provincializing Europe* was precisely to delineate how historiography was constructed according to the grammar of certain transition narratives (development, modernization, capitalism), which would always ultimately privilege Europe as the sovereign theoretical subject of all histories.²⁸ *Provincializing Europe* was about undoing or pushing back on a "nineteenth-century European discourse that universalized the mode of production narrative."²⁹ According to the grammar of historiography, subaltern constructions of self and community could therefore only be spoken *about* through these transition narratives, but they could not speak *of themselves*, as theory. Cast as anti-historical, neither could these constructions generate narratives recognizable as history. Chakrabarty's more recent work on climate change continues to tread around an absent presence, that which falls out of, or is incompatible with, the writing of history but nonetheless exerts pressure on it. It is no longer about subaltern constructions of self, however, but about vast temporal scales and non-human agentiality.

If Guha pointed out above that in writings about subaltern rebellions the equation of these events with natural phenomena such as wildfires and earthquakes was a sign of the denial of their praxis, will, and reason, it is the presumed distinction between natural history and human history underwriting Guha's examples that collapses with climate change.³⁰ In Chakrabarty's words, the Anthropocene challenges both "ideas of the human that usually sustain the idea of history but also the analytic strategies that postcolonial and postimperial historians have deployed in the last two decades in response to the post-war scenario of decolonization and globalization."³¹ If subaltern agents were denied a subject position in historiography, a historical writing of changes to the planetary system has to grapple with the agential effects of what, in "old Althusserian terms," constitutes "a 'process without a subject.'"³² So vast is the scale at which geological change happens that it comprises a "conceptual-temporal place where the 'meaning making' of human history . . . ceases to work."³³

For Chakrabarty, then, to narrate Anthropocene time means concatenating incompatible scales, walking a tightrope between intellectual formations in tension with each other such as species thinking *and* critiques of capital.³⁴ The injunction echoes Prakash's well-known rebuttal of Rosalind O'Hanlon and David Washbrook's critique of subaltern studies for thinking, simultaneously, two modes that O'Hanlon and Washbrook deemed incompatible: post-structuralism/deconstruction and Marxism. Prakash's response was: "let us hang on to two horses, inconstantly."³⁵ Likewise, Chakrabarty writes that while there

is no denying that climate change is profoundly bound up with the history of capitalism, “a critique that is only a critique of capital is not sufficient for addressing questions relating to human history once the crisis of climate change has been acknowledged and the Anthropocene has begun to loom on the horizon of our present.”³⁶ Although “the story of capital, the contingent history of our falling into the Anthropocene, cannot be denied by recourse to the idea of the species,” nonetheless the current situation is “not a crisis for the inorganic planet in any meaningful way.”³⁷ Or, put it otherwise, even as critiques of capital, colonialism, and racial violence belie narratives of humanity as a singular category, to the extent that the geological record registers the imprint of the human species as an aggregate it posits a category if only in terms of a negativity: thus, “the mode of being in which humans collectively may act as a geological force is not the mode of being in which humans—individually and collectively—can become conscious of being such a force.”³⁸ As a way of straddling these incompatible scales, Chakrabarty proposes something like a “negative universal history,” which eludes our capacity to experience or conceive it but is projected through a shared sense of catastrophe, not unlike, perhaps, the way subaltern rebels were deemed to express a negative class consciousness through insurgency.³⁹

I want to argue that Mendonça Filho’s interplay between what is on-screen and off-screen follows a similar negative logic, particularly when the gap between the two is qualitative. That is, a fundamental discontinuity is posed such that the off-screen world is not merely an extension of the on-screen one, or simply a question of shifting the camera to the right or left, but one in which the very framing of the screen is revealed in its partiality. One of the procedures through which Mendonça Filho gestures to what is missing or out of frame is through genre play. Like his other films, *Recife Frio* shuffles through a variety of genres: most prominently it starts off with the frame of a news broadcast, a genre that is based on documenting and transmitting real events but here functions at a certain remove from incidents playing out in Recife because the broadcast is Argentine.⁴⁰ If for Nixon the dilated and dispersed scales of environmental destruction and climate change mean that violence upon the earth doesn’t adhere to the status of an event, as would a spectacle-driven news programs, the speculative dislocation of science fiction in *Recife Frio* creates a phenomenon that can, in fact, catch the attention of such a program. That is, the phenomenon in question is sudden and strange enough to draw notice but since it is also small and contained in space (only the city of Recife) it does not evoke a language of absolute catastrophe (Figure 3). As such, too, it does not trigger the imaginary of an apocalypse that some critics associate with the cinematic instantiation of a death drive and with political paralysis.⁴¹ Most of the film is structured through a double frame, with each frame destabilizing the other. The sci-fi scenario is subject to the documentary impulse and language

of a news broadcast, rendered strange by normative constructions of reality. At the same time, the documentary impulse of the television broadcast proposes the film's science fiction premise as something plausible and believable, situating it in our world rather than in another imagined universe. While the news broadcast follows a correct compositional form (a point *Penteado de Faria e Silva* makes with regard to a later Brazilian newscast featured in the film), the science fiction content of the phenomenon is permeated with irony and "points to the fictional narrative that is inherent in a short fiction film."⁴² The reality effect of the news broadcast is thus nested within and displaced by the frame of a short fiction film. The device of the TV reporter also accomplishes a doubled function to the extent that he embodies a junction between the film's viewers and the events presented onscreen. On the one hand, he is our conduit or interface with the events. The bizarre phenomenon is filtered and organized through the overarching authority of his voice, explaining what we see and stitching together the various micro-phenomena, generating the pretense of a unified narrative. On the other hand, by playing the role of a (foreign) spectator of the change in climate, the Argentine TV reporter is an avatar for the distance of the viewer, so that we are twice removed from the inexplicable cold. The translation between the Portuguese of the inhabitants and the Spanish language of the newscast only adds to the distance.

As a framing device, the pretext of the television news program also sets itself up as a container for a variety of other perspectives and registers. The non-local viewpoint of the Argentine news reporter houses the local viewpoints of the people being interviewed. And the documentary impulse of the television news camera registering changes in society is multiplied or enhanced by a series of other modes of registering or documenting these changes. These modes include street security cameras, which catch early reactions to the cold on street—such as people suddenly hugging themselves to keep warm—as well as user-based archives like YouTube, which transmit the historic images of the arrival of the freak cold front being captured on phones. The film jumps between different modes of registering the change—people's memories of before (on their cameras), the actual shots of clouds arriving (anonymously, individually shot), but then also the surveillance images that show people reacting to temperature change, an indication of a city-wide infrastructure of visibility that is able to register the index of this change. All of these modes are, however, embedded and justified within the frame of the foreign television news program.

Although this broadcast framework holds throughout most of the short film, it is displaced at the end precisely following the sequence of images of people in the mall. *Penteado de Faria e Silva's* sharp and granular description of the shift is as follows:

The camera, still from the documentary with the MM logo, focuses on an electronics store with televisions on. At 18m 47s, one of



FIGURE 3. Still from *Recife Frio* in which the change in weather is contained in what looks like a white cotton-ball that has settled over Recife.

these television screens becomes the screen of the short film itself, as the logo disappears. We are now inside a Brazilian newscast. At the top right of the screen, the inscriptions “Channel 7/News” appear. The transition from foreign television to local television news carries marks that make its borders clear. As spectators, we come out of the hybrid construction in which the documentary overlapped with the narrative short film itself. Clearly we are still in the short film, but no longer under the effects of a documentary genre.⁴³

To use Penteadado de Faria e Silva’s felicitous term, this sequence functions like a “corridor,” referring both to the means for exiting the closed space of the mall as well as the transition of the documentary frame of *The World in Motion* to an “external” scene provided by “a *ciranda* led by Lia de Itamaracá, a recognized singer and popular artist in the region.”⁴⁴ Sound serves as the thread that pulls us through this transition from the inside of a nested television broadcast to the putatively external scene: the *ciranda* is overlaid first onto the image of the weather reporter speaking—we still hear him faintly in the background—before shifting to images of the beach and then finally to Lia de Itamaracá herself. As Penteadado de Faria e Silva suggests, the move from the artificial constructed inner world (the genre of the mall) to the external scene on the beach also marks a passage from a world of individuals isolated from each other (like the children in the bubbles) to a “circular dance that requires the union of people.”⁴⁵ The camera circles around the people in an imitation of their movement. Finally, this shift beyond the frame of the genre that has organized the film up to this point is also marked by the sudden absence of the narrative voice that up to now has structured, explained, and reflected on the images being shown to us. Instead, we are now mute, witnesses to the circle of dancers on the beach, hand in hand, in an echo of a beach party (one we never saw) that was cut short

by the comet. Bereft of the authoritative narrator, the purpose of the sequence is not clear, although there is the suggestion that we may be witnessing an effort to conjure away the cold since we see a shaft of sunlight pierce through the clouds and the group of people run towards it, before a cut to the credits.

This passage outside the doubled frame that organized most of the film, a passage from straight lines to circles, doesn't mean we have exited form and genre or that we have reconciled the problem of climate change staged in the film. The *ciranda*, after all, is another genre among others, a popular form deployed here to register and respond to climate change.⁴⁶ So too, we might realize, are the altered ceramic figures and the songs proffered earlier by a duo on the street even if they do not carry the association with documentation and the claim to the real that the cellphone videos and photographs do. We are teased into thinking that a non-scientific solution has been found to the problem or that popular culture and performance present solutions to the insufficiencies of genres associated with realism and documentation, but the final shot belies such facile assumptions. After the credits have rolled, after the presumed end of the film—or after exiting yet another frame—we see an image of a completely frozen Recife. Although there are things that arrive from an outside, there is no way out of the problem once they are here.

Conclusions

Mendonça Filho's genre-play raises the question of the limits of our narrative forms, genres, and conventions to grapple with climate change. We circle in the film through a series of modes of registering the change in weather, from scientific discourse to television broadcast, to surveillance cameras, to more popular forms like songs, ceramics, and performance. Although the more authoritative discourses—those associated with strategies of documentation—seem to provide a stable container for the other genres, the end of the film overturns that presumption, without ever settling on one of the genres as giving us the closest access to the phenomena. Spivak has described “the epistemic history of imperialism ... [as] the story of a series of interruptions, a repeated tearing of time that cannot be sutured.”⁴⁷ Rather than trying to rewrite this history, to restore to the surface a buried and repressed reality or mend the tears, Spivak welcomes instead a relation of haunting to what has come before, a relationship that wouldn't suture the “radical series of discontinuous interruptions.”⁴⁸ We might by analogy note that in staging a discontinuous series of genres, Kleber Mendonça likewise suggests that our historical relationship to what we have understood as nature and our surroundings, is such that the story of climate change can't simply be rendered through an on-screen visualization. What is off-screen and unsighted might be felt only negatively in the gaps between genres, forms, and registers. While off-screen phenomena are some-

times legible within historical time, as products of the violence of colonialism, racism, capitalism, and the construction/destruction of the environment, his films also gesture to the existence of other scales and other phenomena in an off-screen field, indifferent to us and below and beyond our thresholds of perception—too small, too slow, too large—but leaving uncanny traces in our world.

NOTES

¹ Ranajit Guha, “The Prose of Counterinsurgency” in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, eds. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Spivak (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), 46.

² Nixon writes that “violence is customarily conceived as an event or action that is immediate in time, explosive and spectacular in space, and as erupting into instant sensational visibility.” That which is slow-paced and open-ended eludes the containment and closure “imposed by visual orthodoxies of victory and defeat.” *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 2.

³ Nixon, *Slow Violence*, 3. Nixon observes, for example, that chemical and radiological violence is “driven inward, somatized into cellular dramas of mutation that—particularly in the bodies of the poor—remain largely unobserved, undiagnosed, and untreated” (6). What happens, he asks, “when we are unsighted, when what extends before us—in the space and time that we most deeply inhabit—remains invisible? How, indeed, are we to act ethically toward human and biotic communities that lie beyond our sensory ken? What then, in the fullest sense of the phrase, is the place of seeing in the world that we now inhabit? What, moreover, is the place of the other senses? How do we both make slow violence visible yet also challenge the privileging of the visible?” (14-15).

⁴ Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (Chicago, IL; University of Chicago Press, 2017), 11.

⁵ *Bacurau* won the Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival and Best Film at the Munich Film Festival. Kleber Mendonça Filho began his career as a film critic and journalist writing for newspapers and magazines, as well as for his own website *Cinescópio*. He experimented with fiction, documentary, and video-clips in the 1990s, first in video and then eventually in digital and 35 mm films. He produced award-winning short films include *Vinil verde* [*Green Vinyl*] (2004), *Eletrodoméstica* [*Household Appliances*] (2005), and *Recife Frio* [*Cold Tropics*] (2009) along with the feature-length documentary *Critico* (2008) about film criticism. *O som ao redor* (2012) was his first feature-length film and received a tremendous amount of critical attention. Maurício Puls (Folha de São Paulo) writes that: “Após tantos prêmios, não resta dúvida de que ‘*O Som ao Redor*’ é o filme brasileiro mais significativo desde ‘*Cidade de Deus*’ (2002). Nenhuma outra obra dos últimos anos produziu retrato tão abrangente da sociedade nacional, que de certo modo condensa a trajetória do país no período republicano.” [“After so many prizes, there is no doubt that ‘*Neighboring Sounds*’ is the most significant Brazilian film since ‘*City of God*’ (2002). No other work of art of these past few years produced such a comprehensive portrait of national society, one that, in a way, condenses the trajectory of the country in its republican phase.”] Almeida and Pelegrini, “Os textos críticos sobre o filme *O Som ao redor*, seus pressupostos estéticos e desdobramentos hermenêuticos,” *Palavra Chave* 19, no. 3 (2016), 731. Unless otherwise noted all translations are mine.

⁶ *Recife Frio*, directed by Kleber Mendonça Filho, (Cinemoscópio Productions, 2009). In this essay, I will be citing the English translation of the film.

⁷ Gyan Prakash, “The Impossibility of Subaltern History,” *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, no. 2 (2000), 288. Emphasis in the original.

⁸ Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History: Four Theses,” *Critical Inquiry* 35 (2009), 218.

⁹ “Esmagando com suas botas de andar em trenó e pisar em neve, as velhas lapinhas brasileiras, verdes, cheirosas, de tempo de verão, está dando uma nota de ridículo aos nossos natais de família, também enfeitados agora com arvorezinhas estrangeiras mandadas vir da Europa ou dos Estados Unidos.” Gilberto Freyre, “Manifesto regionalista,” *Manifesto regionalista*, ed. Fátima Quintas (Recife: FUNDAJ/Massangana, 1996), 47-75. Text is also available at <https://www.ufrgs.br/cdrom/freyre/freyre.pdf>.

¹⁰ Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Anthropocene Time,” *History and Theory* 57, no. 1 (2018), 29. Original fragment in Jacques Derrida’s *Edmund Husserl’s Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*, trans. and preface by John Leavey Jr., ed. David B. Allen (New York: Nicholas Hay, 1979), 83-84.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 30

¹² Nonetheless, the film largely keeps within a “vision of men ‘as a prisoner of the climate’ rather than as a maker of it,” as Dipesh Chakrabarty puts it, quoting Alfred Crosby’s *The Colombian Exchange*. Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History,” 206.

¹³ Mazen Labban, “Rhythms of Wasting/Unbuilding the Built Environment,” *New Geographies 10: Fallow* (2019): 36-37.

¹⁴ Labban cites a dictum by David Harvey (from *The Urban Experience*) such that “capital builds physical landscapes appropriate to the conditions of its reproduction at a particular moment, only to destroy them subsequently to reestablish the necessary conditions of its reproduction.” Labban, “Rhythms,” 37.

¹⁵ Sze Tsung Leong, “Readings of the Attenuated Landscape,” in *Slow Space*, eds. Michael Bell and Sze Tsung Leong (New York: Monacelli Press, 1998), 186-213.

¹⁶ Adriana Pucci Penteadó de Faria e Silva, “Hybridization and Speech Genres in Recife Frio by Kleber Mendonça Filho,” *Bakhtiniana* 15, no. 2. (2020), 115.

¹⁷ “arqueologia que permite observar as camadas de tempo que se acumulam no tecido social da grande cidade, evidenciando a sobrevivência de relações de poder e for mas de sociabilidade.” Ismail Xavier, “*O som ao redor*: arqueologia do vertical moderno no

Recife,” *Galáxia* 46 (2021), 2. Film critic Cesar Zamberlan characterizes the movie as “um dos poucos, pouquíssimos, filmes no Brasil contemporâneo que dá conta destas relações que marcam o país pós-Lula: esse crescimento econômico maluco que vem modificando a paisagem urbana e provocando algumas mudanças sociais bastante interessantes.” [“One of the few, very few, films in contemporary Brazil that give an account of the relations of the country after Lula: this crazy economic growth that has been modifying the urban landscape and generating social changes that are quite interesting”]. Cited in Almeida and Pelegrini, “Os textos críticos,” 732.

¹⁸ Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 33.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 66-67.

²⁰ Francisco Quinteiro Pires, “Ruídos raciais: A experiência sonora e violenta da miscigenação em *O som ao redor* de Kleber Mendonça Filho,” *Luso-Brazilian Review* 57, no. 2 (2020), 137.

²¹ Pires writes: “A ênfase do filme nesse desenho de som e numa paisagem sonora associada ao gênero do terror revela a audição como um sentido racializante e possibilita à crítica a democracia racial brasileira, um mito cuja força depende da leitura histórica da miscigenação como uma prova ocular da ausência de racismo” [“The emphasis of the film on sound design and a soundscape associated with the genre of terror reveals hearing as a racializing sense and opens up the possibility of a critique of Brazilian racial democracy, a myth whose strength depends on the historical reading of miscegenation as ocular proof of the absence of racism.”] “Ruídos raciais,” 33. The sounds generate a negative counterpoint, pointing to all that is left out of a visually oriented myth of racial democracy. In *Audio-Vision*, Chion calls attention precisely to the existence of “negative sounds in the image (the image calls for them, but the film does not produce them for us to hear) and negative images in the sound—present’ solely in the suggestion the soundtrack makes. The sounds that are there, the images that are there often have no other function than artfully outlining the form of these ‘absent presences,’ these sounds and images, which, in their very negativity, are often the more important” (192).

²² “Os espectros dos corpos que deveriam estar ausentes para prevalecer os processos de racialização se fazem perceber com a materialidade perturbadora dos sons por meio da *acousmatization*.” [“The specters of the bodies that should be absent for the processes of racialization to prevail become perceptible with the disquieting materiality of sounds through *acousmatization*.”] Pires, “Ruídos raciais,” 49.

²³ I reproduce the entire song here to give a fuller sense of the nostalgia that permeates it:

Trago em meu corpo as marcas do meu tempo / Meu desespero, a vida num momento / A fossa, a fome, a flor, o fim do mundo / Trago no olhar imagens distorcidas / Cores, viagens, mãos desconhecidas / Trazem a lua, a rua às minhas mãos / Mas hoje

/ As minhas mãos enfraquecidas e vazias / Procuram nuas pelas luas, pelas ruas / Na solidão das noites frias por você / Hoje / Homens sem medo aportam no futuro / Eu tenho medo acordo e te procuro / Meu quarto escuro é inerte como a morte / Hoje / Homens de aço esperam da ciência / Eu desespere e abraço a tua ausência / Que é o / que me resta, vivo em minha sorte / Ah, sorte / Eu não queria a juventude assim perdida / Eu não queria andar morrendo pela vida / Eu não queria amar assim / Como eu te amei / Ah, sorte / Eu não queria a juventude assim perdida / Eu não queria andar morrendo pela vida / Eu não queria amar assim / Como eu te amei.

I bear on my body the markers of my time / My despair, my life in a moment, / The abyss, the hunger, the flower, the end of the world / I bear in my sight distorted images / Colors, voyages, unknown hands / Bring the moon, the street to my hands / But today / My weakened and emptied hands / Search naked through moons, through streets / In the solitude of cold nights, for you / Today / Men, without fear, contribute to the future / I am afraid, I wake and look for you / My dark room is as inert as death / Today / Men of steel await on science / I despair and embrace your absence / Which is what is left to me, I inhabit my luck-fate / Oh luck-fate / I didn't want my youth lost this way / I didn't want to go around dying for life / I didn't want to love / As I loved you / Oh luck-fate / I didn't want my youth lost this way / I didn't want to go around dying for life / I didn't want to love / As I loved you

²⁴ Quentin Meillassoux. *After Finitude: On the Necessity of Contingency*, (London: Continuum Press, 2010), 26. In the book Meillassoux lays out a project to abandon or think past the “co” (co-givenness, co-relation, co-presence) that is the “chemical formula” of modern philosophy. (5-6) That is, for Meillassoux, modern philosophy is built on the assumption of a necessary correlation between subject and world, so that “we only have access to the correlation between thinking and being, never to either term considered apart from the other” (5) and thus never to the world in-itself. This poses a problem, he says, for the status of statements in science bearing upon the age of the universe, the formation of stars, or the accretion of the earth. Meillassoux uses the term “ancestral” to name that which is anterior to the emergence of the human species, or even of all life and to point to an exteriority that is not simply the correlate of our existence, an outside that is indifferent to its own givenness and that is also radically contingent. See also Catherine Malabou’s “Can We Relinquish the Transcendental?” for a reading of Meillassoux in *Plasticity: The Promise of Explosion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), 2022.

²⁵ Spivak, “History,” *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 288.

²⁶ Paul Crutzen, “Geology of Mankind,” *Nature* 415, 23 (2002).

²⁷ Perhaps the most well-known argument is that of Jason Moore. See his “The Capitalocene, Part I: On the Nature and Origins of our Ecological Crisis,” *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 44, no. 3 (2017), 594-630.

²⁸ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton University Press, 2007.

²⁹ This is how Gyan Prakash sums up the project in “Can the ‘Subaltern’ Ride? A Reply to O’Hanlon and Washbrook” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 34, no. 1 (1992), 168.

³⁰ Guha, “The Prose of Counterinsurgency,” 46.

³¹ Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History,” 198.

³² Chakrabarty, “Anthropocene Time,” 25.

³³ *Ibid.*, 23.

³⁴ Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History,” 213.

³⁵ Prakash, “Can the ‘Subaltern’ Ride?” 184.

³⁶ Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History,” 212.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 219, 217.

³⁸ Chakrabarty, “Anthropocene Time,” 28.

³⁹ Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History,” 222.

⁴⁰ The effect is convincing enough that when I taught the film in a class on climate change, a number of students initially assumed that the film was a realistic documentary that included footage of an actual television broadcast.

⁴¹ I am thinking in particular of Max Haiven’s essay “The Damned of the Earth: Reading the Mega-Dam for the Political Unconscious of Globalization” in *Thinking with Water*, eds. Cecilia Chen, Janine MacLeod, and Astrida Neimanis (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2013), 213-231. In the essay, Haiven makes the argument that mega-dams concretize global power relations and as such function as resonant signifiers of a capitalist worldview of causality. Filmic blockbusters in which dams are blown up thrive “on something like a cultural death drive that expresses itself through our desire to see the dam collapse. While we fear the breach of the mega-dam at the core of the economic, cultural and social ontology of the present moment, we also desire, perversely, to see this final scene, this unspeakable catastrophe, replayed and replayed” (226). Such witnessing is not transformative, he says: we are “addicted to images of our own annihilation” (227).

⁴² Penteadó de Faria e Silva, “Hybridization,” 116.

⁴³ Ibid., 115.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 116.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 120.

⁴⁶ I am indebted to PhD student Isabella Vergara for this excellent observation.

⁴⁷ Spivak, "History," 208.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 208.