

# Visualizing the Anthropocene Dialectically: Jessica Woodworth and Peter Brosens' Eco-Crisis Trilogy

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Angelos Koutsourakis, University of Leeds  
(a.koutsourakis@leeds.ac.uk)

## Abstract:

The ambition of this article is to propose a way of visualizing the Anthropocene dialectically. As suggested by the Dutch atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen and the professor of biology Eugene F. Stoermer, the term Anthropocene refers to a historical period in which humankind has turned into a geological force that transforms the natural environment in such a way that it is hard to distinguish between the human and the natural world. Crutzen and Stoermer explain that the Anthropocene has begun after the Holocene, the geological epoch that followed the last ice age and lasted until the industrial revolution. Drawing on a number of figures such as the “tenfold” increase in urbanisation, the extreme transformation of land surface by human action, the use of more than 50% of all accessible fresh water by humans, and the massive increase in greenhouse emissions, Crutzen and Stoermer conclude that the term Anthropocene describes aptly mankind’s influence on ecological and geological cycles (Crutzen & Stoermer, 2000, p.17). The wager of this article is that we need to identify ways to visualize the Anthropocene dialectically and I proceed to do so using as a case study Jessica Woodworth’s and Peter Brosens’s trilogy on the conflict between humans and nature, which consists of *Khadak* (2006), *Altiplano* (2009), and *The Fifth Season* (*La Cinquième Saison*, 2012).

**Keywords:** Anthropocene, Peter Brosens, Jessica Woodworth, Dialectics, World Cinema.

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We have to dig up the dead again and again, because only from them can we obtain a future. Necrophilia is love of the future. One has to accept the presence of the dead as dialogue partners or dialogue-disturbers - the future will only emerge out of dialogue with the dead. (Heiner Müller)

I would first like to clarify my understanding of what representing the Anthropocene dialectically stands for. Given that the Anthropocene is a euphemism for human-induced environmental transformation I suggest that a dialectical representation of it does not rely on abstract and ahistorical dualisms between social reality and nature, nor does it adopt representational strategies structured upon an understanding of this period in history as “a final cause”. This chimes neatly with Sean Cubitt’s thesis that eco-criticism devoid of broader political questions of colonization, class, the social organization of scarcity, and social inequality has little merit because it does not allow us to understand the historical, social, and political context behind the eco-crisis (2013, p. 279). David Martin-Jones adopts a similar perspective in his Dusselian reading of the Anthropocene that does not simply see it as a product of modernity, but places modernity along with the history of colonialism (2016, p. 66). I propose that a dialectical representation of the Anthropocene hinges on self-reflexive representational tropes. By self-reflexivity I do not imply the hackneyed reminder to the audience that they are watching a film, but a mode of representation that considers – both in terms of form and content – the causes behind the effects; namely, the ways that socially organised labour is one of the key factors in the eco-crisis, as well as the ways the medium reflects on the ecological footprint it generates. Such a dialectical approach differs from claims that cinematic depictions of nature can encourage the audience to appreciate the natural environment, and eventually to build a responsible citizenship that will lead to “a more caring relation to nature” (Hjort, 2014, p. 211). The problem with such an assertion is that it seems to reduce humans’ relationship to nature to a matter of individual responsibility without taking into account the social and labour processes which are accountable for the present impasse. Similarly, I find the argument that standardised products of the industry, e.g. Disney films, can produce an environmental sensitivity unconvincing, precisely because these objects keep away from reflecting on the fact that the media technologies deified in their narratives come at the cost of the ecosystem. Put simply, they do not seem to consider that media are, as Richard Maxwell and Toby Miller succinctly put it, “intimate environmental participants” (2012, p. 9). Such a contradiction recalls Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s critique of Disney cartoons, which initially looked

as if proposing a utopian critique of the very rationalism that normalises animal cruelty and the reduction of animals to consumer products; yet the means of production and distribution of these objects depend on market rationality and “the victory of technological reason over truth” (1989, p. 139) – the key stratagems of commodity production, which are contingent on the abuse of nature in favour of profit.

As Esther Leslie points out, a fundamental contradiction of commodity capitalism is that it can simultaneously idolize nature and exploit it as a resource for the production of commodities (2014, p. 121). Taking this into account, rethinking the question of idealism versus materialism takes a renewed degree of urgency when considering filmic representations of the Anthropocene. As much as I agree with the idea that an important step in thinking about the eco-crisis is the retraining of the audience’s perception, I do not propose that solely ‘art cinema’ or films that employ standardized art cinematic tropes can sensitize the viewer to ecological questions, as Scott MacDonald suggests (2013, pp. 17–42). I rather propose that the key to understanding the Anthropocene beyond abstract and ahistorical depictions that reduce a historical problem to a ‘final cause’ is premised upon an understanding of natural history as something inseparable from human/social history. This is an argument elaborated by Marx in *Capital* (1867/1976), where he concludes that people’s alienation from nature cannot be separated from the alienation induced by the capitalist processes of production, a point to which I shall return later on.

Another reason why the historical aspect is important is precisely because of the problematic term Anthropocene, which originates from the Greek word *anthrōpos/άνθρωπος* – literally translating to human in English – again a term of little use when attempting to think of causes that are historically induced. Thinking historically does not imply a rigid mechanical deterministic approach; it rather demonstrates a desire to return to the roots of Enlightenment thinking – obviously not Enlightenment’s justification of a universalised Eurocentric regime of truth and power –, which refuses to understand natural phenomena outside the social realm. Within these parameters one needs to historicize the eco-crisis by looking at the beginning of the Anthropocene. While Crutzen and Stoermer suggest that the Anthropocene coincides with the industrial revolution and “with James Watt’s invention of the steam” (2000, p. 18), recent work by Simon L. Lewis and Mark A. Maslin has challenged this perspective by situating the beginning of the Anthropocene in European colonialism and the annexation of the Americas, without which industrialisation would not have been possible (2015, p. 175).

In other words, the question of historically formed labour processes and the ways they transform humans' relation to nature is an important element in getting to think about climate change and the eco-crisis. Cinema, as a product of modernity, cannot ignore the question of the Anthropocene, but given the Western roots of the film medium, for the most part, industrialization has been divorced of its colonialist origins. From the Lumières' classic *La Sortie de l'Usine Lumière à Lyon* (*Workers Leaving the Factory*, 1895) we can see the medium reflecting on its industrial foundation, its reliance on industrial materials, on labour that supplants these very materials and on labour processes of leisure. Similarly, in *L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* (*The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat*, 1895) the figure of the train is, as film historians have pointed out, a metaphor for the medium itself and its ability to compress time and space. According to David Trotter, there are numerous cultural histories of modernity that understand the train as a representational medium, that is, as "a mechanism or apparatus for the production of views" (2013, p. 220). Furthermore, Trotter explains that the role of "mass-transit systems is to connect" (2013, p. 20) and connectivity was from the beginning understood as an important means of enhancing the occupation of colonised territories. What is more, the train is also a technological medium and, like the cinematograph, a machine whose emergence is directly interrelated to the extraction of metals and minerals from the earth. Thus, the French pioneers' films symptomatically refer to the roots of the Anthropocene in colonialism as well as in the medium's ecological footprints.

Questions of labour and industrialization that point to the medium's industrial basis can be identified in Michelangelo Antonioni's 1964 classic *Red Desert* (*Il Deserto Rosso*). Set in Ravenna in Italy, the film tells the story of Giuliana (Monica Vitti), who suffers from neurosis and existential angst largely to be attributed to the sudden transformation of the region that at times looks like a post-apocalyptic industrial environment. Throughout the film, one cannot dissociate the character's angst from the industrial world and the noises that it produces. As Antonioni (1996) reflected in an interview shortly after the film, the starting point for the making of *Red Desert* was the violent industrialization of the countryside around Ravenna. The transformation of the natural landscape and the resultant modernization of production have their effect on "the transformation of the spirit, of human psychology" (Antonioni, 1996, p. 284). Yet this contemplation of the effects of modern production processes on the individual and the collective psyche is also reflected in the film's texture, since Antonioni justified his shooting of the film in colour on the basis that our industrial world produces millions colourful things; industrial

living has produced an “invasion of colors” (1996, p. 283) and cinema cannot ignore this. We can therefore see how Antonioni directly connects cinema and the eco-crisis with labour processes within and outside the diegesis, and this is precisely the value of the film as a whole, its refusal to disregard labour not only within its narrative, but also in terms of the film’s own production processes, thus placing the Anthropocene in a historical context. As much as Antonioni’s understanding of cinema as an ‘environmental participant’ is historicised, one can indict him for his Eurocentric approach, since the individual’s inability to adapt to the modern environment and its alienation from nature is solely seen from the Western point of view.

McKenzie Wark (2014) argues that many of the films which are about the Anthropocene are focusing on the effects but rarely on the causes. In a way, even commercial films read symptomatically can make us think of the causes of the eco-crisis, but the problem has to do with their quasi-fatalistic portrayal of the Anthropocene as an eternal cycle of battle between humans and nature, as it is the case in box-office hits such as Alfonso Cuarón’s *Gravity* (2013), Bong Joon-ho’s *Snowpiercer* (2013), and of course George Miller’s *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015). *Gravity* and *Snowpiercer* point to themes of mass-transit and the latter has also some references to a hierarchical class system, but they both tend to employ an ahistorical distinction between nature and technological development. This is clearly indicated in the last visual of *Gravity*, where Dr Ryan Stone (Sandra Bullock) manages to survive her first catastrophic space mission by landing to an environmental utopia; similarly, in the end of *Snowpiercer* the image of the polar bear contradicts the quasi-apocalyptic class-system within the Rattling Ark. In a way, these films tend to spectacularise or ‘other’ nature and following Sean Cubitt’s critique of Jean-Pierre Jeunet and Marc Caro’s *Delicatessen* (1991), I understand them to promote a “belief in an unalienated nature” (2004, p. 280), which is historically inaccurate. Nature is represented as a state of innocence, as a safe haven outside society and history. The limited imaginary of these films is then to be attributed to an inability to think of environmental balance as something that can only be a by-product of a changed social order. They rather seem to propose a return to a “natural” unmediated reality. Finally, in *Mad Max*, as in *Snowpiercer*, there are some suggestions on the intensified class divisions in the Anthropocene, but again this is more the pretext for the action sequences that seem to be firmly in line with what Derek Gregory has called “the visual economy [of the] [...] American military imaginary” (as quoted in Mirzoeff, 2011, p. 485). Issues of technology are delinked from social and historical questions, that is, the ways that nature is transformed following changes in the social scheme of

things. The paradox then in these films is that, on the one hand, we are faced with a technophobia, as if modern machines were to be blamed for the ecological impasse, and, on the other hand, there is a fascination with modern technology as evidenced in the films' aesthetics, which relies on the deification of digital technology's ability to offer majestic visuals. This approach elides questions of material/historical conditions and somehow one notes a supernatural/teleological understanding of both technology and nature. Sven Lütticken makes a similar point when discussing media representations of climate change:

Social disasters are naturalized and 'natural' disasters are seen as manmade but not open to intervention —society in turn being perceived as subject to quasi-natural fatality. In this context, the time of capitalist modernity unfolds as a dialectic of cataclysmic repetitions and a linearity whose apparent inevitability is itself mythical, as Benjamin saw very clearly. If the culture industry's repetitions can register and suggest change, then change itself becomes another form of mythical fate, distributing wealth and health to some, disaster to others. (2007, p. 122)

Lütticken's comments offer an instructive case for understanding the depoliticised aspect of the aforementioned objects that seem to downplay the historical and political aspects of the Anthropocene, simply by proposing either a return to a state of natural innocence or to a life-style with less technology.

Contra this apolitical treatment of the Anthropocene, this is exactly what gives Woodworth and Brosens' films their edge, since their eco-crisis trilogy does not hesitate to address historical, labour, and the neo-colonial components of the Anthropocene. Woodworth and Brosens are a duo from Belgium originally shooting documentary films, who have co-directed this trilogy of films to critical acclaim. They describe themselves as "warriors" and proponents of a cinema not afraid of taking risks and producing films which are not easy to digest (2007). Before moving to an analysis of their trilogy a few words about the films' plots are in order.

The first part of the trilogy, *Khadak*, takes place in the frozen steps of Mongolia and tells the story of Bagi (Batzul Khayankhyarvaa), a young Mongolian shepherd who shares a yurt with his mother (Dugarsuren Dagsvadorj) and his grandfather (Banzar Damchaa). One day, state officials arrive to inform them about an animal epidemic. They confiscate their livestock and force them to relocate to a mining town. Bagi gets work in the mines and one day he saves the life of a coal thief, Zolzaya (Tsetsegee Byamba). They will both expose that the animal plague was a lie that aimed at the appropriation of their land and their forced entry into the industrial labour market. They team with a group of avant-garde

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musicians and a revolution ensues. During the film, a number of visuals of environmental disaster, controlled explosions by factory workers, and animal killings interrupt the narrative flow making a clear connection between environmental crises and the forcible expropriation of the farmers' land. Commenting on the film, Jessica Woodworth explained that

resonating throughout the story are issues that in reality are enraging Mongolians. The influx of mining giants has destabilised the society. Mongolia's mineral resources are vast but prospecting is tending to leave huge swathes of damaged ecosystem in its wake. (2007)

Similarly, the second film of the trilogy, *Altiplano*, draws attention to neo-colonial structures of corporate control. The film sets side by side the story of two women, Grace, a Belgian photographer (Jasmin Tabatabai), and Saturnina (Magaly Solier), a Peruvian indigenous farmer. The story starts in Iraq, where Grace accidentally takes a picture of the assassination of her local guide, Omar. Her photograph is nominated for a Pulitzer Prize but she renounces her profession and withdraws from competition. Max (Olivier Gourmet), her husband, is a cataract surgeon who moves to the village of Turubamba in Peru, a place suffering from a mercury spill from a local mine. The environmental catastrophe instigates an epidemic. Many members of the indigenous community lose their eyesight and others die. Saturnina's fiancé, Ignacio (Edgar Quispe), ends up being one of the first victims of the environmental catastrophe. The locals express their anger against the doctors (something that leads to Max's death), and then against the mining company. Following her husband's death, Grace embarks on a redemptive journey to Peru; Saturnina commits suicide and films her death in a digital camera, in protest against the violation of people's rights.

Finally, the last film of the trilogy, *The Fifth Season*, takes place in the Belgian Ardennes and its starting premise is, as the directors assert, "what if spring did not come"? It focuses on a couple of local teenagers, Alice (Aurélia Poirier) and Thomas (Django Schrevels) who live in a scenic village in Belgium. An itinerant beekeeper, Pol (Sam Louwyck), and his disabled son (Gill Vancompernelle), visit the village to participate in the festivities for the end-of-winter bonfire and to settle there for good. But the bonfire fails to burn and this anticipates the fact that the cycles of nature will be disrupted. The fields stagnate, the cows do not give milk, and the resources become rare. Thomas' father, who is a local merchant, takes advantage of this to raise the prices while Alice ends up trading her body in exchange for everyday provisions. In the end, the dissatisfied villagers put the blame on the most vulnerable, Pol, whom they unreasonably blame for their misfortunes.

### *Khadak* and the Labour Perspective

The defining characteristic of this trilogy of films is its historical vantage point and the ways it reflects on the eco-crisis as something directly interrelated to social processes. In *Khadak*, this is highlighted by the film's emphasis on the connection between the Anthropocene and the capitalist process of production, since the film calls attention to the forced industrialization of farming communities in Mongolia. This aspect of the film evokes the very beginning of capitalism, which is instrumental to understanding questions of climate change politically.

In the beginning of *Khadak*, we get to see a farming community, whose labour routine is based upon mutual respect with the environment. Indicative in this respect is a scene in the beginning of the film, where the young Bagi spends significant time to retrieve a lost sheep. When he locates the animal and finds out that it is injured he empathetically embraces it, clearly indicating the relationship of respect between the locals and their instruments of labour. Later on, three state officials arrive at the family's yurt and inform them that they shall relocate "where there is work and a roof for you". The pretext for their forced relocation to the city is an animal epidemic. Bagi's grandfather and the family respond disbelievingly to the news, retorting that their animals are healthy. But subsequently, the state officials arrive with the army and force the whole community to relocate. They even lift Bagi's grandfather from his chair, who silently protests against the appropriation of his land. When Bagi's mother asks again where they are taking them, the army officials vaguely respond, "where there is work for you".

These scenes point to practices of coerced proletarianization and the shift from production processes servicing needs (use value) to economies servicing profit (exchange value). But while this historical shift dates back to the sixteenth century, here the film refers to the present epoch and the capital's ceaseless need for expansion in places that resist assimilation to capitalist modes of production. Woodworth and Brosens summarize the endless capitalist cycle of reorganising humans' relation to nature, ingeniously suggesting the interrelationship between the eco-crisis and the establishment of capitalism. The narrative is therefore underpinned by a Marxist approach to nature, not as something separate from society, but as something directly related to human history.<sup>1</sup>

Following the forced eviction of the farmers from their land, the images that follow point forcefully to their alienation not only from their new

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1. I would like to acknowledge here a book that has significantly influenced my thinking: John Bellamy Foster's *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature* (2000).



work, but also from the natural environment with which they previously coexisted peacefully. We get to see the landscape from the point of view of a worker on a cable car. Interestingly, the land is visualised from the labourers' perspective, as it was the case prior to their eviction, but there is an element of repetition in the ways the camera pans to the left to register the landscape through the cableway, clearly pointing to the ways the locals have been estranged from their interaction with the environment. This is followed by a prolonged scene that captures Bagi and a group of workers anticipating a series of controlled explosions for mining operations. These visuals function as a temporal ellipsis showing the changed production processes. We get to see how the community's respectful use of natural resources for the satisfaction of needs has been substituted by industrial and trade operations grounded in robbing the land of its wealth. Here we come close to Marx's idea of primitive accumulation as put forward in the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> parts of the *Capital*. Marx explains how nature provides humans with the instruments of their labour and how changes in nature are the outcome of changes in production processes. The term primitive accumulation describes the process of expropriating both the land and the labour of people, who were previously "immediate producers" (Marx, 1976, p. 874). As Marx argues, this process is named primitive accumulation because "it forms the pre-history of capital, - and of the mode of production corresponding to capital" (1976, p. 875). Capitalism's development coincides with people's estrangement from nature, a social and political effect that has environmental consequences. Put simply, environmental changes cannot be understood outside this period in history in which production and the means of sustenance are turned into capital, and the 'expropriation' of the labour of the people goes hand in hand with the transformation of land into private property. Marx explains that the last part of the process of removing human producers from the soil is "the so-called 'clearing of estates', i.e. the sweeping of human beings off them" (1976, p. 889).

Yet this process of appropriating the wealth of the land is an ongoing one, and *Khadak* demonstrates this clearly by drawing attention to contemporary neo-colonial settings that perpetuate peoples' alienation from nature; the material is solidly historicized precisely because the eco-crisis is shown as the outcome of this alienation. There is no room here for ahistorical clichés predicated upon the "eternal" battle between humans and nature. But despite its grounding in history, the boundaries between past and present are somehow obscured and the film's aesthetic slowness intensifies this effect. Woodworth and Brosens have repeatedly mentioned Theo Angelopoulos and Andrei Tarkovsky as key influences and the former is renowned for his tendency to condense different time

periods in static tableaux (Mundell, 2012). In *Khadak*, Woodworth and Brosens do not simply intend to retrain the audience's relationship to the natural environment – a point made by Scott MacDonald in his discussion of ecocinema's responsibility (2013, pp.19–21) – but to offer an intricate portrayal of time. Such a complex depiction of time is not to be understood under the rubric of fatalistic repetitions, but as a means of identifying how our historical present is still marked by oppressive structures from the past, as well as by revolutionary failures and energies that can be reclaimed and transformed. Lutz Koepnick draws attention to the implications of modernist slowness and suggests that slowness aims to make us reconfigure our understanding of the present as the product of different temporal relations. As he points out:

Presentness, for the modernist advocate of slowness, does therefore neither mean grace nor ecstatic fulfillment. It means to perceive the now as an ever changing meeting ground of multiple durations and potentialities, of competing tempos and temporalities, of dissimilar narratives and visions. The present, when seen in the mode of modernist aesthetic slowness, is therefore much more than simply a site at which past and future shake hands and constitute durational experience. It is a site of conflicting logics and heterogeneous flows of time; it is a site at which space is experienced as a domain, not of fixed and immobile properties, nor as one to be traversed by a single temporal development, but of dissonant stories and itineraries. To go slow here means to recognize the contemporaneity of what resists smooth integration; it means to behold of the old and the new, the fast and the sluggish, as constitutive parts of the present moment without denying their difference; it means to recognize the now in all its discord, multiplicity, and transitoriness as the only site at which we can actively negotiate meaningful relations between past and future. (2014, pp. 36–37)

To go slow in the epoch of the Anthropocene also implies a desire to investigate social processes that produce the problematic distinction between nature and society. In other words, as Woodworth and Brosens show in *Khadak*, going slow is also a way to contemplate the past and the present so as to understand that the eco-crisis and humans' alienation from nature are not a distinctive aspect of our present reality, but the product of historical and social processes that are rooted in the past.<sup>2</sup>

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2. Jason W. Moore makes a similar point arguing that the problem of much of the conversation about the Anthropocene is that it approaches this period in history as something unique. As he writes: "Indeed, where the Anthropocene perspectives goes wrong – so very, very wrong – is in its reckoning of the present conjuncture as unique. Of course it is unique – but not simply because the data on biospheric change says so.

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This historical approach strengthens the film's dialectical standpoint particularly, because *Khadak* implies that so long as the Anthropocene's causes are social, then the situation is reversible. This is given full sway when the main character, Bagi, teams up with Zolzaya and a group of avant-garde musicians to rebel against the government and the mining companies. They realise that the animal plague was a lie aimed at forcing the population to leave their land so as to work in the mines. The collective rebellion is prefigured by a song performed by the group. Images of the female singer and the band are paralleled with images of the collective and the land. The music and the lyrics have a raw quality that bears a striking resemblance to Hanns Eisler's idea of "functional music". Drawing on a passage from Hegel's *Aesthetics* (1975), Eisler clarifies the difference between "subjective" and "objective music". Whereas the former relies on melody that aims to provoke "sympathy", the latter intends to demonstrate a feeling, e.g. grief, with the view to making the listener investigate the causes behind emotional states (Bunge, 2014).<sup>3</sup> The singer recites the lyrics and the music has a minimalistic tone reminiscent of Philip Glass' work. The lyrics connect individual grief with the environmental crisis:

I left my body in a dark corner  
Something is wrong here.  
A girl awaits the death of her mother  
Something is wrong here.  
A father awaits the death of his son  
A brother awaits the death of his brother  
Something is wrong here.  
A poet awaits the death of his horse.  
Something is wrong here.  
A woman awaits the death of her soul  
A child awaits the death of tomorrow  
Something is wrong here.  
A river awaits the death of its waters  
A sky awaits the death of dawn  
Something is wrong here.

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It is unique because we are living in the era of capitalism – an era defined by the unbroken production and reproduction of the same relation whose elements are converted into empirical facts and incorporated in reified form in the web of rational calculation" (2015, p. 78).

3. For Hegel's discussion of music see his *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art* (1975, pp. 935–936).

After the song, the camera registers the preparation of a collective rebellion. The people led by the two protagonists use mirrors to reflect the sun on the military personnel guarding the peasants' animals. The guards are temporarily blinded and the protesters set the livestock free. Here, the collective appropriates the natural resources, in this case the sun, not for the sake of capital but for the sake of sustainable labour. To recall Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt's reading of Marx, these workers reclaim their right to "living labour" (immediate production) over dead labour (social relationships, machineries, money) that alienate workers from their products (2014, p. 129).<sup>4</sup> A series of high-angle shots of the collective are followed by images showing the people reconnecting with their livestock. By the end, a battle between the people and the army ensues and Bagi, who suffers from epilepsy, has a seizure that leads to his death. The film ends ambivalently showing on the one hand Zolzaya mourning Bagi's death in the mountains of Mongolia, and on the other hand Bagi's grandfather returning back to the mountains with his livestock.

The film's narrative organisation offers insights into the origins of the Anthropocene in Europe – depeasantisation, forced industrialisation and the extraction of energy and minerals – but also an exploration of the association between neo-colonialist plundering of natural resources and the specific history of Mongolia whose speedy entry into the free market after sixty-eight years of communist rule has had negative social and environmental impacts. For the most part of the twentieth century, the country relied heavily on a collectivised livestock economy, while at the same time industrialisation was very slow (see Bold, 2001, p. 162; Sneath, 2010, pp. 1070–1071). Moreover, while the Soviets, Bulgarians, and East Germans were keen on collaborating with the country so as to profit from its natural resources, mining was not as widespread as after the collapse of the communist regime (see Murray, 2003, p. 115). The country's entry into the free market, facilitated by institutions like the IMF and the World Bank, led to a series of structural reforms, such as the privatisation of its assets and the de-collectivisation of the pastoral economy, which led to the isolation of the livestock keepers, the collapse of their support networks, the liberalisation of prices, and the cut of state subsidies in the economy. The consequences have been dire since most Mongolians became working poor, unemployment skyrocketed, and social services

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4. An important argument made by Kluge and Negt is that labour conflict indicates a desire to separate living labour from dead labour. The aim of the revolution is "to bring living labour to power". See Kluge and Negt (2014, p. 129).

collapsed. It is within this context that the mining industry has flourished and mining accounts for 50% of the country's GDP since 1998 (see Lkhasuren, Takahashi, & Dash-Onolt, 2007, p. 195). Foreign investment in mining is widespread in the country and has affected negatively its economy and its social fabric. Mining, as William Murray observes, "is capital rather than labour intensive" (2003, p. 115), creating very few jobs while appropriating at the same time the country's natural wealth. Problems have escalated due to the strong emergence of an informal mining sector that relies a lot on cheap child labour and pays very little attention to working health and safety, and environmental protection. The results are dire leading to environmental depletion as well as the corrosion of social trust and values. Mongolians either mistrust the mining companies, directing however their anger mainly on the mining workers rather than the corporations, or they simply choose to work for them and be exposed to ominous working conditions that lead to the exhaustion of the eco-system, and to long-term occupational diseases (see Lkhasuren, Takahashi, & Dash-Onolt, 2007, p. 199).

In Mongolia, therefore, history seems to repeat itself along the lines delineated earlier by Marx. Moreover, Mongolia's history is a glaring proof of the connection between the Anthropocene and neo-colonialist arrangements of land theft, coercive labour, and capital intensive investments that disintegrate the social fabric and offer very little in return to the countries from whose resources they profit. It is also a reminder that colonialism is not something to be restricted to neat temporal demarcations that clearly articulate a period before and one after economic and political exploitation. One may recall here Ella Shohat and Robert Stam's (2014) critique of the term post-colonialism for its inability to understand structural continuities that perpetuate conditions of hegemony in formerly colonised countries. For Shohat and Stam, the term limits our capacities to understand the endurance of contemporary insidious economic and political forces that are grounded in colonialist practices of land appropriation, cheap/forced labour, social dislocation, and loss of cultural identity through the universalisation of the free-market outlook. As they aptly suggest, official independence for formerly colonised nations has rarely come hand in hand with an end to external hegemonic influences (Shohat & Stam, 2014, pp. 39–40). The paradox in Mongolia's case is that, following its independence in 1945, the country enjoyed a rudimentary stability, which has been heavily threatened following what the Mongolians call "the Age of the Market" (Sneath, 2010, p. 1071). This particularity opens a way of thinking about the universalisation of the free-market as a new form of colonialism.

*Khadak's* emphasis on the effects of climate change on indigenous populations points to what Rob Nixon calls "environmental racism", that is, the Eurocentric tendency to treat indigenous and non-white communities as dispensable ones (2011, p. 59). Yet the film does not simply state a more or less known problem but explores popular strategies of emancipation that can potentially bring an end to the present environmental catastrophe. Tellingly, these strategies of emancipation are predicated on the collective and here one recalls McKenzie Wark's perceptive comment that one cannot address the Anthropocene without "constructing a labor perspective", a counter-history from the point of view of the working people. As Wark rightly points out, such a counter-history is grounded in an anti-teleological view of history; both social reality and the environment – which is also part of it – could have been otherwise (2015). *Khadak's* commitment to a counter-history from below is strongly emphasised by its suggestion that popular forms of social and environmental emancipation can only be collective in form. Thus, unlike films about the eco-crisis that employ a liberal-democratic reformist approach and are, according to Andrew Hageman, characterised by a "reactionary fear of the mob" (2013, p. 70), *Khadak* firmly suggests that it is the task of the working people to initiate social changes that can revert the impending catastrophe. This is a key reason why the film does not subscribe to the facile reformist perspective according to which more regulation and minor changes can solve the present environmental impasse.

The question that arises is whether the film then subscribes to a naïve celebration of the workers' solving the environmental catastrophe by taking over the means of production. I suggest that there is something more intricate in the film's valorisation of collective solutions here that has to do with what Rob Nixon aptly describes as "the environmentalism of the poor" (2011, p. 4) that combines environmental with social transformation. One cannot be achieved without the other for, as historical experience shows, markets do not self-regulate themselves and likewise political advocates of the free-market who share liberal environmentalist agendas do not call into question the broader socio-economic structures responsible for the eco-system crisis; at times the latter simply advocate outsourcing the problem to third countries so as to render the problem invisible.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, for the populations in third

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5. Typical in this respect is the famous Summers' memo, by the then chief World Bank economist Lawrence Summers, who supported the offloading of toxic waste in third countries (see Nixon, 2011, p. 1).

countries heavily affected by neo-colonialist economic and political models this is a matter of survival. An important theme in recent debates on the Anthropocene is that conditions of uneven development and neo-colonialist dependency render third countries more vulnerable to the negative impacts of the eco-crisis. In a recent article in *Le Monde*, Michael T. Klare (2016) described climate change as a new form of genocide. Citing the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, he suggests that new weather conditions will eventually make access to vital resources difficult, which will primarily affect the poor, the marginalised, and the indigenous populations of third countries and former colonies who do not bear much responsibility for the current impasse (Klare, 2016). Environmental change can thus turn into a new insidious means of establishing stronger class hierarchies and colonialist practices that derive from the widened gap between wealthy and poor countries.

In this context, *Khadak* seems to suggest that for the environmental poor in the global South survival is contingent on understanding the interdependence between social and ecological crises, so that eco-system changes can inspire social revolts that can hinder market expansionism and ecological catastrophe. Obviously, there is a utopian edge to the film's valorisation of active collective struggle. Yet this does not render it unsophisticated; as Timothy Morton — a scholar who persistently affirms that authentic eco-criticism needs to do away with the idea of nature and understand it instead as a historical product that is changeable — suggests, one of the aims of art concerned with the Anthropocene reality is “to encapsulate a utopian image of nature” (2007, p. 24), one that connects it with our social reality. For Morton environmental change implies therefore socio-economical and historical change, for nature is not a transhistorical universal but a historical product. One can thus legitimately affirm that such “a utopian image of nature” can be produced by those in the global South who contradict the Eurocentric understanding of the eco-system as something that needs to be harnessed and exploited. As Shohat and Stam cogently state, “indigenous peoples have often been superior custodians of natural resources” (2014, p. 33) and the environment. Taking a cue from this argument, *Khadak* invites us to consider how positive environmental change is intricately connected with indigenous resistance to neo-colonial economic and political forces.

#### **Media Materiality: *Altiplano* and *The Fifth Season***

Such a politicised view of the eco-crisis can also be identified in the other two films of the trilogy, particularly in the ways they reflect on the materiality of the media by showing the ways media are part and parcel of

an energy hunt economy. In *Altiplano*, which takes place in Peru, the filmmakers emphasise the connection between media's grounding in neo-colonial settings and their reliance on resources inhabited by indigenous populations. This bespeaks something particular about the connection between the Anthropocene and the energy consumed by the media themselves. There are some sequences in the film that stand out in this respect. From one of the very first scenes when we see the Belgian photographer Grace witnessing the execution of her Iraqi guide and photographing it with her camera, there is a parallel between neo-colonial wars motivated by the quest for minerals and the very ecological footprint of the camera itself. Later on, the photograph of the dead Omar is displayed in her room, and here the association between photography and death takes on a different valence.

Grace's husband relocates to Peru to work in a clinic that offers services to the indigenous community and the filmmakers spend significant screen time showing him and Grace exchanging Skype messages. Woodworth and Brosens thus capture the mediated nature of communication which further emphasizes the materiality of media made from minerals possibly extracted from the same country from which Max sends his videos. But while his presence there intends to provide services to the indigenous community, the locals treat him and his colleagues with suspicion. Max and the doctors end up realising that there is a growing epidemic in the community that makes the locals blind and the latter become more aggressive toward foreign presence as if acknowledging the historical roots of oppression and the environmental transformation. When Max, puzzled, asks one of his colleagues why the community does not trust them she responds ironically, "you need to read more history Max".

The epidemic is the outcome of mining operations in the area that have polluted the water and caused a major environmental catastrophe. In one emblematic scene in the film, we get to see the indigenous community – led by the young Saturnina – protesting against the presence of the mines and carrying large framed photographs of their deceased relatives. A soldier forces some of the protesters out and grabs Saturnina's picture of her dead fiancé and throws it into the river. In one of the few computer generated images in the film, we get to see the picture floating in the mercury-contaminated river. The camera lingers for a significant time on the photograph alluding to the materiality of contemporary technologies of mediation. The photograph of the dead indigenous man floats on a river polluted by the extraction of minerals, some of which are also used for the production of media technologies of visualisation, such as cameras. This image carries clear overtones of media's own



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participation in histories of colonialism and the cheap appropriation of natural wealth in developing economies.

Much work on the Anthropocene and eco-criticism has drawn attention to the fact that histories of media are directly connected with modern histories of production. Richard Maxwell and Toby Miller aptly describe that media do not simply communicate meanings, but generate “detritus and disease” too (2013, p.165). Similarly, Jussi Parikka (2015) has drawn attention to technological media’s reliance on material processes of mineral extraction that clearly link media history with earth history. Media are part of histories of unsustainable colonial and neo-colonial economic practices that rely on the appropriation of natural wealth and the underpaid labour of indigenous populations. As Parikka contends:

Besides the materials of production, media history is a story of relations between the organic and nonorganic and the waste products emerging from the use and misuse of materials. Media history participates in stories of global expansion through colonialism and the rush for resources: the invaluable materials from minerals to oil and other energy sources such as uranium —a global mapping of territories increasingly exhausted. (2015, p. 26)

In a parallel vein, Sean Cubitt (2014) has drawn attention to the need to decolonise eco-criticism by acknowledging in a Benjaminian way how progress in ‘the global North’ is the outcome of barbaric practices in the “global South”. Media technologies are the product of modern practices of massacre and expropriation of land belonging to indigenous populations (2014, pp. 275–286).

*Altiplano* tackles these questions by highlighting themes of environmental crisis, media technologies and neo-colonialist settings of capitalist expansion in Peru, a country with a history of colonial suffering. In one of the most emblematic sequences in the film, we get to see Saturnina recording her own suicide on Max’s camera, which she retrieved following the latter’s death. We see her performing a suicidal ritual from a third-person point of view, since the scene is registered by the amateurish digital camera. She records her death drinking mercury, but prior to her suicide she looks directly into the camera and makes the following speech: “I will not die in silence or invisibly. Your poison will not kill me slowly. Without an image there is no story. Mother Earth will never forgive your greed. In the stones my blood will run forever like a warrior. In the waters my shadow will run forever, like a warrior”. Saturnina reclaims the recording apparatus so as to assert her right to tell a story from the point of view of the indigenous population. One could rightly object that the shooting of this scene on the part of a European duo coming from a

country with a colonialist background raises ethical concerns predominantly on account of the fact that the filmmakers seem to reproduce the typical image of the self-extinguishing other; yet I suggest that this charge of the colonialist gaze is not applicable in this sequence chiefly because of its emphasis on visualising histories, memories, and experiences that are largely overlooked by the Western audio-visual media. This tallies with Rob Nixon's suggestion that the struggle for environmental change is also a struggle for visibility for poor and indigenous communities, which are treated by the former colonies as places where waste and toxins can be deposited. For Nixon, making the invisible lives and concerns of these communities visible is an important task in countering pseudo-scientific and market-fundamentalist responses to the people's worries and concerns. As he argues,

it is here that writers, filmmakers, and digital activists may play a mediating role in helping counter the layered invisibility that results from insidious threats, from temporal protractedness, and from the fact that the afflicted are people whose quality of life —and often whose very existence— is of indifferent interest to the corporate media. (2011, p. 16)

Countering the invisibility of the environmental poor becomes an ethical but also a political task because, contra Eurocentric accounts of the end of history, it demonstrates the persistence of historical contradictions and their material effects on the planet and on the lives of the most vulnerable who participate in the reality of administered global inequality. As Shohat and Stam rightly explain, many of the clichéd accounts of the end of history are grounded in a reductive equation of history with Europe and ignore the fact that for many people in the Third World history not only persists but its investigation turns into an urgent project of historical and representational importance (2014, p. 248).

From this perspective, Saturnina's address to the camera and her suicide cannot be reduced to a fetishisation of self-sacrifice by the European gaze. It is rather a visualisation of suppressed stories of indigenous land appropriation, environmental pollution and a form of protest against the neoliberal acceleration in the former colonies that treats the lives of the indigenous populations as expendable and invisible. Add to this that protest suicides in Peru and Ecuador that aimed at raising consciousness regarding indigenous suffering produced by climate change have largely remained invisible in the West.<sup>6</sup> *Altiplano*, therefore, asks us to remain

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6. Jessica Woodworth has spent time in these countries studying the phenomenon of protest suicide, its causes and its effects on the communities.

sensitive to the material forces that affect these people's lives, but also to questions of representation and visibility, and to go beyond what Nixon defines as "superpower parochialism" (2011, p. 35). Nixon's phrasing intends to counter Eurocentric and American exceptionalist understandings of history that tend either to treat the history of third countries with indifference, or simply to render the lives of the global poor invisible, despite the fact that their suffering is the product of Western economic intervention.

One should also add that Saturnina's death ends with a cry for resistance and not for ameliorative measures to be taken by the benevolent West, and the sequence simultaneously encourages questions of visibility and resistance. There are evident references here to the aesthetics of the Third Cinema and mainly to the films of Glauber Rocha, Fernando Solanas, and Nelson Pereira dos Santos. These references have particular relevance because they address questions of decolonisation that preoccupied the Third Cinema filmmakers and become once again pertinent when addressing the Anthropocene. As in the case of Third Cinema, the employment of a counter-aesthetics and the desire for decolonisation go hand in hand.<sup>7</sup> The filmmakers do not aestheticise the suffering of the global poor but they are at the same time committed to an aesthetics of audio-visual artifice, so that formal resistance is not equated with a counter-cinematic aesthetics of austerity. Rosalind Galt (2011) has brilliantly shown the political implications of cinematic beauty, a formal strategy that has also been endorsed by the Third Cinema filmmaker Jorge Sanjinés, who suggests that political cinema should not abandon aesthetic artifice. Sanjinés' point is founded on the premise that political cinema's beauty can contradict the oppressive reality principle of the conditions it aims to contest. For Sanjinés, the role of audio-visual prettiness plays a similar function like the one it has in indigenous communities that exercise their spirituality by means of beautiful, decorative objects (as cited in Galt, 2011, p. 210). Cinematic prettiness characterises Woodworth and Brosens' trilogy as a whole, but in the first two films that deal directly with questions of colonialism this theatrical

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7. One could interject that Woodworth and Brosens are European filmmakers and thus their films cannot be seen under the "Third Cinema Rubric". Yet, as Mike Wayne persuasively argues, the term does not "designate geographical areas, but institutional structures/working practices, associated aesthetic strategies and their attendant cultural politics. Thus, if we understand First and Second Cinema in more complexity, we will be more ready to understand that we can have First and Second Cinema in the Third World and Third Cinema in the First World" (2001, pp. 177-178). For Third Cinema Manifestos see (Solanas, Getino 1997, pp.33-58).

artifice serves also the role of affording some dignity to the environmental poor; it also urges us to see the world beyond Eurocentric ideas of aesthetic restraint.

The interconnection between aesthetics and politics is also relevant when considering the slowness that characterises these films that may well be seen in light of Nixon's idea of "slow violence". Nixon's primary argument is that in a historical period fascinated by spectacular acts of violence, which are disseminated through numerous audio-visual platforms, we have not been able to comprehend the slow violence generated by socially-induced environmental change. Such a violence is neither immediate nor instantly visible; rather, it is a slow violence whose "calamitous repercussions play[...] out across a range of temporal scales" (2011, p. 2). One of the reasons why the urgency of the present environmental devastation has not been widely comprehended lies precisely in the fact that habitat depletion, and the ensuing lack of resources that comes with it, is a slow process. For Nixon this poses representational problems when aiming to address these issues in an age accustomed to spectacular violence and it is this conditioning that may inhibit further understanding of the environmental violence that becomes visible on a slower time scale. It is in accordance with this perspective that one needs to understand the films' formal slowness that does not offer spectacular images of environmental catastrophe, but aims to identify material forces of destruction behind a landscape that seems to be functioning as usual. Indicative in this respect is Ignacio's death, which takes place in the middle of the film when he walks into the mountains to collect glacier water for his wedding ceremony. There is nothing to indicate his forthcoming death throughout his venture, nor are there visuals of a visible polluted landscape. The camera follows him slowly and his death takes place abruptly. Slowness here is committed to visualising the invisible, the material forces of slow violence on the body and the landscape.

This invites further attention, since in the era of the Anthropocene we need to comprehend questions of environmental transformation not simply from the Western point of view that tends to spectacularise the collective anxiety for an impending environmental catastrophe. Sean Cubitt, for instance, mentions Benjamin's idea that peoples' alienation has reached the stage at which they can derive aesthetic pleasure from their own annihilation (2012, p. 285). As mentioned earlier, Cubitt has proposed that we need to "decolonize" the conversation on climate change and the Anthropocene. This corresponds with Simon L. Lewis and Mark A. Maslin's (2015) argument that, by acknowledging colonialism as a major cause of the Anthropocene, we can affect the ways we perceive

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climate change, as well as our collective imaginary – the ways we represent the eco-crisis. As they suggest, the industrial revolution, which is normally seen as the start of the Anthropocene, would not have been possible without the European colonisation of the Americas (2015, pp. 177–178). The implication of their argument is that we need to adopt a historical outlook in order to understand the Anthropocene – a point that corresponds with Dipesh Chakrabarty’s Marxist contention that the Anthropocene renders canonical distinctions between human and natural history invalid (2009, p. 201).

More to the point, however, when it comes to *Altiplano*, is Nicholas Mirzoeff’s thesis that one of the ways to reclaim collective imagination and picture the planet beyond the “Anthropocene visibility” of neoliberal capitalism is to provide what he names “a countervisuality” (2014, p. 226). This “countervisuality” needs to oppose the authorities of the market and the state that profess that in the end there can be a solution that will “restore order” without radically changing the social scheme of things. Mirzoeff’s argument hinges upon the consideration that a necessary step for producing counter images that can contest the “Anthropocene visibility” is

a decolonial politics that claims the right to see what there is to be seen and name it as such: a planetary destabilization of the conditions supportive of life, requiring a decolonization of the biosphere itself in order to create a new sustainable and democratic way of life that has been prepared for by centuries of resistance. (2014, p. 230)

Mirzoeff’s comments resonate with the Third Cinema Manifestos and their understanding of revolutionary cinema as a destructive (of the colonialist and neo-colonialist visibility) and constructive process. But where the Third Cinema aesthetic meets with Mirzoeff’s assertion is in their view that the ways we visualise the world are as equally important as reality itself. For the Third Cinema filmmakers, revolutionary cinema ought to visualise those excluded by colonial history and produce stories from their own perspective. This is consistent with Mirzoeff’s Rancièrian claim that “the right to look” describes a process of reclaiming the real and can be solely achieved through strategies of visual dissensus (2011, p. 226).

In this context, Saturnina’s seizure of Max’s camera and the recording of her own suicide claims her “right to look”, but also the right of visualising history not from the liberal-democratic viewpoint that sees finance capital as second nature, but from the point of view of indigenous populations still suffering from the presence of corporate interests exploiting their resources and labour. One of the lines Saturnina keeps on repeating is that “without an image there is no story”. We could revert this and suggest

that without historicising, we cannot reach an understanding of the Anthropocene, because cinema participates both in histories of colonialism and environmental transformation through mineral extraction. To put it more prosaically, without minerals and cheap labour appropriated from the former colonies there are no visual technologies.

This sustained engagement with the association between nature and our visual technologies is something that applies to the last part of Woodworth and Brosens' trilogy, *The Fifth Season*. What makes this film stand out is how its narrative associates themes of capitalist exchange and the origins of the film medium with humans' relation with nature. Furthermore, this film returns to "the crime scene", that is, the European continent. As Woodworth and Brosens explain, unlike the two previous parts of the trilogy, the aggressor in this film is not man, but nature (as cited in Mundell, 2012). While this formulation sounds a bit weak precisely because it seems to rely on the binary nature versus society, the film aptly refutes a transhistorical conception of nature. Being the last part of the trilogy, it invites us to consider the effects of the Anthropocene in the Global North as well. Having explored the origins of the eco-crisis in colonial and neo-colonial practices of forced industrialisation, natural revolt as represented in *The Fifth Season* through nature's refusal to offer people things that they take for granted, is anchored in material forces produced by social labour. The spring does not come and the environmental crisis that ensues provides the village's merchant, Lyc, with the opportunity to take advantage of the scarcity in products so as to accumulate provisions and raise the prices. Eventually, the village's economic activities assume the form of a pre-capitalist economy based on the exchange of products, and not the purchase of commodities. Farmers exchange potatoes for fertilizers, Pol – an itinerant beekeeper – exchanges honey for some plastic flowers and Alice ends up selling her body in exchange for basic supplies, such as sugar.

A distinguishing feature throughout the film is its emphasis on carnivalistic images and rituals that bring to mind the prehistory of film and the medium's reliance on natural energy. In the beginning we get to see the villagers preparing for the end-of-winter bonfire by participating in a series of collective rituals. In one emblematic sequence, the camera frames in a static tableau the villagers dancing on the snowy landscape. This collective ritual recalls the early days of the medium and its roots in visual attractions. But this is exemplified more powerfully in a sequence later on where we get to witness the failed sacrificial burning of the effigy of winter. The villagers carry torches and one of them starts a speech condemning winter "for the crimes of the past year". This is a ritual that aims to celebrate the farmers' imminent labour in the spring. The

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collective participates in the ritual by yelling approvingly and raising their torches, while a number of giant carnivalesque puppets are also participants in the sacrificial festivity. But when a young boy steps in to light the bonfire, they realise that the eco-system does not respond.

Nature refuses to provide the necessary energy for the completion of the festival, and the people's inability to visualise the end of the winter overlaps with the fact that the winter never ends. The sequence neatly demonstrates how visual representations mediate, as Parikka maintains, our relationship with the earth (2015, p. 12). Visual representations and festivities were promoted by images from the natural cycles of life and relied on raw materials from the earth prior to the discovery of our technological media. Alexander Kluge has also proposed that the prehistory of cinema has its origins in the Ice Age and "the invention of the film strip, projector and screen only provided a technological response" (1981, p. 209). W.J.T. Mitchell reminds us that visual culture is from its inception at the interface between nature and culture, and our screen technologies capitalise on the dialectic between the natural and the artificial (2013, p. 239). Pushing this further, one can deduce that techniques of visualisation were always contingent upon energy transmitted by the earth. Sean Cubitt encapsulates this aptly:

For although it is the most ancient of all the arts, the moving image is also the most modern. Its relation to the commodity fetish becomes only more apparent in the mysteries of its origins. Before it was technological, before history began, there were firelight and shadows, gestures of the shaman, strides of the dancer, puppetry of hand-shadows cast on the walls at the rough dawn of consciousness. In these oldest arts, the immediate world became image, an altar, for a god or a throng of gods to inhabit. (2004, p. 5)

Cubitt's comments on the origins of the moving image attest to the ways visual representations reflected the natural cycles and labour processes between humans and nature. Still the material ecologies of our visual imaginary are directly interconnected with labour, what Marx describes as "a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature" (1976, p. 283). For Marx, humans cannot simply change nature without changing themselves, and *The Fifth Season* demonstrates how natural revolts against specific material practices bring about changes in labour and social relations. The film's pessimistic tenor derives from the fact that individuals do not seem to understand the social dimensions of environmental disruption and they tend to perpetuate practices of wealth accumulation that simultaneously create wealth and poverty. The previous processes of wealth production become more aggressive in character and this makes

any form of environmental restoration impossible because the material practices employed are more extreme than the ones that caused the problem in the first place. What follows is a violent process of exchange, according to which the ones that have accumulated scarce supplies oppress the poverty-stricken ones. At some point in the film, young Thomas takes a jar of sausages from his father's store to offer it to Pol and his disabled son. After being reprimanded for his "charity", his father concludes, "at least make yourself useful. Try to get his honey". The repercussions in social relationships are grave: humans cannot keep on using the soil to produce wealth, and end up robbing each other from all that has been left. These social practices deepen the environmental crisis, precisely because it is a social one and corresponds with Timothy Morton's view that the eco-crisis is "a crisis of reason" (2007, p. 27), since humans fail to construct a different production process that can guarantee their own survival. This crisis of rationality is brilliantly visualised in the film, whose emphasis on the environmental crisis as a social one refrains from producing an ahistorical image of nature, and from adopting ameliorative regulation as the key to overcoming the impasse.

But the film also offers a compelling case about thinking how our techniques of visualising the world are to be seen in the broader context of the labour processes between humans and nature. In one characteristic sequence towards the end, the villagers in masks march the itinerant beekeeper to his death. Superstition has made them blame him and his paraplegic son for the eco-catastrophe. The scene is replete with carnivalesque visuals as the collective carries Pol to burn him at the stake. Once again, people are incapable of lighting a fire in the open field and they end up burning Pol alive in his caravan. The failed collective ritual dedicated to the celebration of life and the harvest in the beginning of the film has been replaced by a collective ritual of death. Enlightenment rationality has given place to practices that recall the Middle Ages. Or one could possibly suggest that such a historical turn shown in the film is exactly the product of too much Enlightenment rationality dedicated not to rational/sustainable social organisation, but to robbing natural resources for the sake of profit, a labour process from which visual technologies cannot be separated. At the same time, *The Fifth Season* is straightforward in its mistrust of a simple return to a pre-Enlightenment social setting and frame of mind (e.g. the small community and its traditional rituals) as a solution to a complex problem that has political roots.

What are then the ethics of representation? I would like to underline that the originality of these three films hinges on their refusal to separate human from natural history, by drawing attention to the ways that the collapse of ecological order goes hand in hand with the collapse in social relationships.



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But most importantly, Hollywood's treatment of the eco-crisis as a "final cause" that comes ex-nihilo is replaced by narratives that strongly emphasise the historical origins of the Anthropocene, such as forced industrialisation, colonialism and neo-colonialism, as well as the ways our visual technologies participate in these histories. In many respects, the films' strong grounding in history is expounded by their refusal to deify survival politics in the era of the Anthropocene. Antithetically, the trilogy's interest in making us think of the Anthropocene historically articulates a denial to "bury the dead". Woodworth and Brosens seem to suggest that a historicised perspective needs no narratives of survival. Survival is not problematic per se, but when it comes to the Anthropocene survival without intrinsic social change perpetuates the crisis of reason – to invoke Morton once again –, which sees nature as something dissociated from history. Even in *Khadak*, where the Belgian duo articulate the potential of collective struggle, the relative success of the minor rebellion does not guarantee the return to stable social conditions. In fact, Bagi is one of the victims of the new environmental changes and in the end of the film he dies as a result of a terminal condition that seems to be associated with the eco-crisis. Woodworth and Brosens maintain, in a Benjaminian mode, that we need to reclaim the failures of the dead (and here the dead refer to the victims of primitive accumulation, the colonised indigenous communities, as well as the global underclass, which are amongst the first to experience the immediate effects of the Anthropocene) so as to be able to learn from them and politicise the Anthropocene conversation beyond idealist separations between natural and human history. In doing so, following Jason Moore's point, we might come to understand that the problem is not the age of *ἄνθρωπος* but the "Age of Capital. Not Anthropocene, but Capitalocene" (2015, p. 70).

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