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**The End of the World Viewed, or The Wind in the Things:  
On Nikolaus Geyrhalter's *Homo Sapiens***

By Tiago de Luca

Every image is an object, every object is an image

André Bazin

When a photograph is cropped, the rest of the world is cut *out*

Stanley Cavell

The end of the world is everywhere. Though apocalyptic representations are not exclusive to our time, there is no question that an increasing awareness of the so-called Anthropocene, according to which anthropogenic impact on Earth has become a geological force, has boosted fatalistic imaginings in cultural and knowledge production. Books such as Alan Weisman's *The World without Us* (2008) and Jan Zalasiewicz's *The Earth after Us* (2008) strive to imagine the scenarios described in their titles through an attempt to think according to a planetary rather than a human scale.<sup>1</sup> Photographic projects such as Edward Burtynsky's series *Oil* (1999 – 2010) and Tong Lam's *Abandoned Futures: A Journey to the Posthuman*

*World* (2013) portend a not-so-distant global cataclysm through images of desolate industrial landscapes. And within the domain of cinema, a number of recent films have staged end-of-the-world catastrophes, from Hollywood blockbusters such as *2012* (2012) and *After Earth* (2013) to the auteurist fare of Lars von Trier's *Melancholia* (2011) and Abel Ferrara's *4:44 Last Day on Earth* (2011). At the same time, the idea of a "world without us" has found its philosophical iteration in contemporary branches of thought such as speculative realism, new materialisms, and object-oriented ontology.<sup>2</sup> While these currents diverge in important respects, they are bound together through a concern with debunking what they often refer to as correlationism, according to which the world can only be grasped through the filters of human subjectivity.<sup>3</sup> They instead emphasize that we must do well to reflect on the ontologies and materialities of nonhuman entities even if those entities are not entirely available to consciousness. Since its emergence in 2007, speculative realism has attracted both detractors and advocates, the former calling attention to the impossibility of escaping human thought, the latter underlining that this impossibility does not mean that one cannot speculate about nonhuman forms, especially when humanity is under threat.<sup>4</sup> Speculative realism has equally found a fertile ground in film studies, with a number of articles testing or critiquing its usefulness in relation to films and film theory.<sup>5</sup>

While recognizing some of speculative realism's limitations, this essay partakes in its upholding assumption that to think beyond the human is no longer something we can dismiss, given the present global ecological crisis. However, here I am less interested in championing or attacking a speculative realist thought than I am in examining the way in which a speculative realism can manifest itself in the cinema and how cinema can contribute to its program and to an ethical project committed to making us see the world-in-itself. I argue that the film *Homo Sapiens* (2016), by Austrian filmmaker Nikolaus Geyrhalter, provides an especially productive lens through which to explore these questions because of its original

filmic rendition of a world-without-us, which asks us to reflect on an object-oriented ontology from the ontological perspective of cinema as a recording technology.

A documentary comprising static, wordless shots of empty derelict places around the world, *Homo Sapiens* is simultaneously a work of fiction in its intimation of a postapocalyptic era when the human is no more. The film thus proposes a quasi-hallucinatory viewing experience in which documental images of our world are, miraculously, made available from a future world-without-us for us. This conflation of the fictional with the documentary offers the opportunity to revisit questions dear to film history and theory, including spectatorship and indexicality, while at the same time opening up avenues into the conceptual domain of new realist philosophies. Looking at the film's fascination with recording the wind as a differential force that triggers encounters between material things, I contend that *Homo Sapiens's* version of a speculative realism is one that is articulated through the realism of the film medium; or to put it differently, that its world-without-us is one that sends us back to this world. As such, the film begs to be aligned with André Bazin's and Stanley Cavell's theories of cinematic automatism, both of which postulated what I refer to as a "world-oriented ontology" in their emphasis on a world--our world--that automatically reveals itself to the camera.

### **An Imaginary Documentary**

To properly understand the aesthetic complexity of *Homo Sapiens*, it is first helpful to turn to the book by which it was inspired. Weisman's best seller *The World without Us* starts from the following premise:

Suppose that the worst has happened. Human extinction is a fait accompli. Not by nuclear calamity, asteroid collision, or anything ruinous enough to also wipe out most everything else, leaving whatever remained in some radically altered, reduced state. Nor by some grim eco-scenario in which we agonisingly fade, dragging many more species with us in the process.

Instead, picture a world from which we all suddenly vanished. Tomorrow.<sup>6</sup>

Reliant on the reader's power of imagination to envisage the future, the book thus invokes visualization in its most literal sense, that is, "as the formation of a mental image of something."<sup>7</sup> In the film, however, a mental process of picturing is necessarily thwarted, for as with most films, *Homo Sapiens* already gives us preformed indexical images. But because the film refuses to contextualize such images within a register that would explain their abandonment, it would be disingenuous to see it simply as a documentary of contemporary ruinous sites and accordingly deny its force as a fictional text that refers to a time beyond the human. This oscillation between cinematic modes produces a temporal indeterminacy whereby the status of the image as a document of the past is constantly haunted by its future posthuman implications; in other words, the film documents an imaginary situation that is embedded in present-day reality.

That *Homo Sapiens* is officially classed as a documentary elicits little surprise when we consider that Geyrhalter's oeuvre does not include a single fiction film to date. Moreover, this is not the first time the director has shot in many locations across the globe; previous examples include *Elsewhere* (2001) and *Our Daily Bread* (2005). Whereas *Elsewhere* takes the turn of the millennium as the starting point for a trip encompassing twelve countries with the aim of registering the disappearance of local cultural habits in the face of globalization, *Our Daily Bread* offers an unflinching look at the high-tech food industry across Europe.

*Homo Sapiens* appears to naturally evolve from these two films. If *Elsewhere* endeavors to map out the disappearance of human-related cultures on the margins of globalization and *Our Daily Bread* endeavors to look at the relationship between the human, the inhuman(e) and the nonhuman, *Homo Sapiens* builds a world in which only the last two have survived.

Filmed in a number of locations in many countries in Europe as well as in Argentina, Japan, and the United States, *Homo Sapiens* can be seen as a visual catalog of contemporary ruinous sites, some of which may be recognizable to the viewer, such as the Buzludzha monument in Bulgaria, which bookends the film (Figure 1); the abandoned building blocks in the Hashima Island and the streets of Fukushima in Japan; Kolmaskop, a German ghost mining community in the desert of Namibia (Figure 2); and the Cavern of Lost Souls, a famous underground car graveyard in Wales. The presence of these sites contributes to a perception of *Homo Sapiens* as *documenting* the world we live in as authenticated through indexical imagery. But because the film refuses to identify these sites through written titles, interviews, voice-over, and the like, it struggles to fit into the *documentary* mode.

As is well known, the term "indexicality" derives from Charles S. Peirce's theory of signs, the index being the sign that attests to the existence of its referent through a physical connection, as seen in footprints, sundials, and photographs. In the 1960s, Peter Wollen borrowed the term to account for André Bazin's concept of the "ontology" of the photographic image, which rests, as in Peirce's index, on the idea of a direct link between reality and its imprint in photographs and films.<sup>8</sup> Documentaries often bolster this link in order to lay claims on the real, even though, as Philip Rosen has shown, the indexicality of the image alone is "insufficient in itself" when its functional role in documentaries is at stake: "[Indexicality] must immediately be explained, sense must be made, the very shape of the image requires verbal explication and pinpointing."<sup>9</sup> In this sense, Rosen goes on, indexical images must somehow be converted "into sense" by signifying devices and structures, for

"the closer the image comes to being reduced to *pure presence*, the more it threatens to become unreadable and requires explication."<sup>10</sup>

Such statements resonate with *Homo Sapiens*, since here the image here does often come quite close to being reduced to pure presence. This is not only because the film refuses to provide verbal commentary to the images it combines but also because of its durational quality. With shots lasting on average twenty-five to 30 seconds, duration in the film is made palpable thanks to silence, emptiness, and an imperturbably stationary camera. When combined, these features solicit a mode of spectatorial apprehension whereby viewers are asked to study objects and spaces as they appear divorced from their functional status and alienated from human meanings.

In fact, given its highly symmetric compositions, *Homo Sapiens* might be viewed as the embodiment of what is now commonly referred to as "ruin porn," a term that aims to account for the perceived exploitation on the part of some photographic projects whose interest would reside solely in the aesthetic dimension of ruins while disregarding its socio-economic and political context. This phenomenon is often approached via the conceptual framework of the sublime, according to which the aestheticizing of ruination would act as a filter through which viewers can take pleasure in such sights at a remove. As Dora Apel explains:

This understanding of the sublime as aesthetic experience arrived at through contemplation made possible by safety and distance – the sublime as a "taming category" by which the terrifying is made enjoyable – helps to explain the compelling power and pleasure of contemporary ruin gazing and ruin imagery.<sup>11</sup>

Such a statement may well apply to *Homo Sapiens*, yet, as we will see, the film complicates a sublime optics by implicating the viewer within the structure of the image. We should also not lose sight of the fact that *Homo Sapiens* is more than a documentation of ruins, and that, indeed, it is the decontextualized quality of sites that allows the film to be taken as a postapocalyptic film of sorts. In this, the film suggests that if a planetary catastrophe were to inexplicably assail the Earth, the specificity of ruins, their particular causes and contexts, would indeed lose their significance, with all now levelled out from the perspective of a planet following on its course. *Homo Sapiens* thus might be said to provide a figuration to what Dipesh Chakrabarty, in his essay “The Climate of History,” defines as a “negative universal history,” insofar as “climate change poses for us a question of a human collectivity, an us, pointing to a figure of the universal that escapes our capacity to experience the world. It is more like a universal that arises from a shared sense of catastrophe.”<sup>12</sup>

From this perspective, the Earth itself is the film’s main character, reclaiming its formerly occupied surface as nature takes over human-made settings and structures. This is conveyed by ruinous sites in accelerated process of decay, often overgrown with mold and vegetation, and populated with insects and birds. Nature is also attributed agency through an emphasis on elemental forces such as the wind (more of which later), snowstorms and downpours, all of which are enhanced by the soundtrack. In fact, Geyrhalter has admitted that sounds were not captured as direct sound in the actual locations because he “didn’t want any human noises to be heard at all.”<sup>13</sup> While there is a match between the visual and aural tracks, sounds were recorded separately and then amplified at the editing stage by Peter Kutin and Florian Kindlinger. Most notably, the film’s careful ordering of shots imparts a sense of narrative progression. Whereas it starts with short-distance images of human figures inscribed in the tiled walls of the Buzludzha monument, to then proceed in its first hour by showing the inside of buildings – ranging from a cinema, an office, a hospital, a church, a

dance club and so on – the film’s last 30 minutes gesture towards a more complete takeover on the part of our planet. This is especially conveyed through outdoor shots in which the signs of human civilization become less prominent, with some images even displaying houses and buildings submerged in sand and snow (Figure 3; Figure 4).

When examined within a larger chronological narrative of takeover, *Homo Sapiens* calls to mind what Nigel Clark conceptualizes as the “earth’s eventfulness,” that is to say, the idea that “instability and upheaval, rhythmical movement and dramatic changes of state are ordinary aspects of the earth’s own history,” a history that has run and will continue to run its course irrespective of human presence.<sup>14</sup> The film’s closing shot is telling in this context, for it goes back to the Buzludzha monument, only now is it recorded from outside, engulfed in winter fog. Eventually the screen becomes completely white, implying a sense of closure to this process of repossession – as if humanity was nothing but an interlude in the planet’s temporal trajectory, with the Earth, now freed of humans and human signs, carrying on its business as usual.

### **Whose Vision Is This?**

To see *Homo Sapiens* within a fictional domain, however, still leaves questions unanswered. Most notably, the complete absence of humanity onscreen in the film translates into a self-reflexive mode of spectatorship that raises questions about the act of looking at the world when there is no human on Earth to see it. Put simply, if this is a world without us, whose vision is this that we are asked to assume as spectators?

The ending of Lars von Trier’s *Melancholia* offers a useful starting point for this discussion. We see sisters Claire (Charlotte Gainsbourg) and Justine (Kirsten Dunst), alongside Claire’s son Leo (Cameron Spurr), sitting under a makeshift “magic cave”

constructed of bamboo sticks and waiting for the planet Melancholia to collide with Earth. The three of them hold hands: Claire is in tears, whereas Justine has a more resigned look, both of them in close-up. As the film cuts to a long-distance shot showing the three characters sitting atop a plateau in the foreground, the viewer sees Melancholia fast approaching in the background and filling up the frame until it hits the camera, the resulting explosion signaling both the end of the world and the end of the film. Unlike most apocalypse films, then, *Melancholia* does not rely on human survivors that would serve as the anchors around which we the viewers see the world after it has come to an "end." Nor does it show what happens after that end, which brings the film to a halt and denies visual access to the aftermath of the destruction.

Here, the end of the world thus means, quite literally, the end of vision, a collision that spectacularly interrupts ocular representation. As Peter Szendy notes, "*Melancholia* will perhaps have been and may perhaps forever be the only film to respond so purely and absolutely to the demand that is proper to apocalypse-cinema: that the last image be the very last image, that is, the last *of them all*--of all past, present, or future images."<sup>15</sup> Through this ending, moreover, *Melancholia* effectively transposes to the faculty of vision that old thought experiment proposed by philosopher George Berkeley: "If a tree falls in a forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?" The film's negative reply to this question seems in accordance with Berkeley's own reflections. Once humans are no longer here, the planet ceases to exist by virtue of the fact that we can no longer perceive it. No more humans, no more world, no more cinema.

The project of speculative realism, conversely, is to affirm that things are not only perceived by other nonhuman entities but also exist in and of themselves and may even have their own point of view, irrespective of a human perspective. Given that *Homo Sapiens*, unlike *Melancholia*, depicts the world in the seeming aftermath of a planetary catastrophe

and thus affirms the continued existence of images in a posthuman scenario, we would be forgiven for assuming that the film crystallizes a speculative realist project through a nonhuman regime of vision. However, as I explore below, this reading cannot be so readily substantiated, given the film's connections with anthropomorphic perceptual models. Let us first turn to the two main branches of speculative realism, which Steven Shaviro usefully describes as 'eliminativism' (associated with Ray Brassier and Quentin Meillassoux) and 'panpsychism' (identified with Ian Hamilton Grant and Graham Harman).

Certainly *Homo Sapiens* cannot be the filmic rendition of the former, which, at least in its formulation by Meillassoux, starts from the premise of a world in which vision, subjectivity, thought, and life are all snatched away. For Meillassoux, the only way out of the correlationist circle is to envisage an "ancestral" world that is "posited as anterior to the emergence of thought and even of life--posited, that is, *as anterior to every form of human relation to the world.*"<sup>16</sup> As Eduardo Viveiros de Castro and Déborah Danowski note, "The world without us that we are dealing with in this case is a world independent from all experience, prior to any actual or virtual description. A world without observers, defined essentially, and not just accidentally, by the absence of perspective. A world, in fact, that is radically dead."<sup>17</sup>

The other alternative would be to consider *Homo Sapiens* as the figuration of a panpsychism, according to which, conversely, "every entity in the world has its own point of view," be it humans, nonhuman animals, or things.<sup>18</sup> Yet such an assumption would also struggle to stand up to close scrutiny, not least in view of the film's starkly rectilinear symmetry. Whether we look at a bowling alley, a hospital flanked by rows of beds on each sides (Figure 5), the nave of a church, or the corridor of a prison (Figure 6), the images in *Homo Sapiens* are centrally framed and precisely lit, with the director even confessing that he rearranged objects for the sake of composition.<sup>19</sup> In this, the film produces a perspectival

system of vision that reinforces the centrality of the human eye to which these images are directed, calling to mind Jean-Louis Baudry's famous assertion that the camera "specifies the position of the 'subject,' the very spot it must necessarily occupy."<sup>20</sup>

In emphasizing how perspective is underlined in *Homo Sapiens*, my intention is not so much to posit the film as participating in the ideological project apparatus theory deemed constitutive of cinema's technological mechanisms, as it is to situate its images within a visual genealogy that relies on the human eye as its model and center. The point to remember, in any case, is that ocularcentrism has been contested across film history. As Peter Wollen has noted, "It is within the avant-garde that we find resistance to the perpetual anthropomorphisation of technology in the cinema," whether we think of "flicker films that counteract the use of the shutter" or Dziga "Vertov's rhapsodies on the camera-eye."<sup>21</sup> Vertov is a relevant example here, for his belief in the superior abilities of the "kino-eye" when compared to human perception arguably prefigures a panpsychist worldview whereby the camera's eye morphs into the vision of other beings and entities. In a famous passage, Vertov notes:

Now and forever, I free myself from human immobility, I am in constant motion, I draw near, then away from objects, I crawl under, I climb onto them. I move apace with the muzzle of a galloping horse, I plunge full speed into a crowd, I outstrip running soldiers, I fall on my back, I ascend with an airplane, I plunge and soar together with plunging and soaring bodies.<sup>22</sup>

In effect, then, here Vertov champions a multiperspectival cinematic vision that resonates with recent experiments with miniature equipment such as GoPro and "lipstick" cameras, seen in audiovisual texts as disparate as the experimental documentary *Leviathan* (2012), the

BBC televisual series *Planet Earth 2* (2016), and the art video *Waiting for High Hater* (2005). Displaying images recorded through cameras attached to nonhuman animals and entities, these examples resonate with what Joanna Zylińska theorizes as a "nonhuman" perception that is "*unfixed, nonlinear, embodied, and mobile*" and thus "challenges the mastery of the vanishing-point of vision and reminds us that there other ways of constructing the world."<sup>23</sup>

By contrast, through its reliance on a stationary camera that continually makes itself present, *Homo Sapiens*'s visual regime can be described as resolutely fixed, linear, disembodied, and still. Indeed, it is crucial to note that the film does not attempt to construct a human perspective as if simulating a corporeal point of view, as its use of wide-angle lenses translates into pronounced perspectival images that are distorted when compared to the way humans see things. Rather, the film's assertion of the camera's mechanical eye, its machinic vision, constructs an ocular regime that implicates in the structure of the image a human subject but never fully assumes a human perspective. One way of seeing this tension in the film's visuality may be in terms of what Chelsea Birks theorizes as "a new ecological ethics that recognizes the limits of human perceptions and concepts but also asserts the existence of a world beyond them."<sup>24</sup> In the case of *Homo Sapiens*, this has further implications when we consider the film's ties with a sublime aesthetics, which, as mentioned earlier, necessitates a mode of vision that produces a safe distance from which to view terrifying sites. A useful point of comparison here is Edward Burtynsky's famous elevated and aerial photographs of post-industrial sites, often conceptualised in relation to a post-apocalyptic sublime. For T.R. Kover, in their adoption of "a God's-eye purview," such photographs allow "the viewer to inhabit a disembodied perspective, hovering safely out of sight. The threat is thus alleviated and we are free to focus on an appreciation of its terrifying beauty."<sup>25</sup>

While *Homo Sapiens* also displays a disembodied perspective (that of the camera), its vision never allows the human off the hook in the way a God's-eye perspective would. On the contrary, the film's rectilinear and stationary perspectivalism continually implicates the viewer in the ruinous sites it shows. This may go some way to explain why the film partly deflects an aesthetics of sublimity, given that we are never "safely out of sight." It also leads us to dispel the idea that *Homo Sapiens* builds a panpsychist world and to conclude, indeed, that it nods to the phenomenological basis of the cinema-viewing situation by reaching out to the human on the other side of the screen. But let me take a brief detour through Christian Metz's spectatorship theory in order to clarify this last point. Metz writes:

At the cinema . . . I take no part in the perceived, on the contrary, I am *all-perceiving*. All-perceiving as one says all-powerful (this is the famous gift of 'ubiquity' the film makes its spectators); all-perceiving, too, because I am entirely on the side of the perceiving instance: absent from the screen, but certainly present in the auditorium, a great-eye and ear without which the perceived would have no one to perceive it.<sup>26</sup>

While Metz's transcendental spectator has been replaced, with good reason, with a corporeal mode of spectatorship by film phenomenology,<sup>27</sup> his reflections on the viewer's identification with the act of perceiving as an all-perceiving entity that is separated from the perceived still holds theoretical value and provides a fruitful angle from which to explore *Homo Sapiens*'s proposed spectatorial contract.

First, this is because the film radicalizes what Metz calls the spectator's "primary identification" with the camera, which in his view is often superseded in fiction and documentary films by a "secondary identification" with the human form through point-of-view structures and editing patterns. Thanks to the perpetual immobility of the recording

device, the protracted length of shots, and the absence of humanity onscreen, the viewer has no choice than to assume the point of view of the camera in *Homo Sapiens*. Worthy of note here is that a number of images allude to the spectatorship and institution of cinema, including shots of an empty theater auditorium, a projection room (Figure 7), a flooded cinema auditorium (Figure 8), and the entrance hall of a cinema theater (Figure 9). By foregrounding the viewing process, *Homo Sapiens* recalls Metz's idea that "the 'there is' of phenomenology proper (philosophical phenomenology) as an ontic revelation referring to a perceiving subject (= 'perceptual *cogito*'), to a subject for which alone there can be anything, has close and precise affinities with the installation of the cinema signifier".<sup>28</sup> To such an extent, Metz goes on, "the cinema really is the 'phenomenological art' it has often been called."<sup>29</sup>

Second, and more remarkably, *Homo Sapiens* is a film whose end-of-the-world universe starts itself from the premise that the spectator viewing it is "a great-eye and ear without which the perceived would have no one to perceive it," or at least no humans to do so. In other words, it is within a fictional register that *Homo Sapiens* doubles down on the idea of a subject for which a world reveals itself through its implication that these are images impossibly emanating from a world after the human. Another way of putting this would be to say that this is a film that activates an awareness of our detachment from the world seen onscreen both on a phenomenological and an epistemological level while at the same time conflating the two. As viewers, we are granted an impossible and thus indeed, as Metz would have it, a transcendental spectatorial position: the pure act of perception of a future to which we do not belong.

### **The Wind in the Things**

*Homo Sapiens*'s rendering of a speculative realism must thus be reconciled with the way it anticipates a human subject in the structure of the image. This is further complicated by the fact that humanity is a conspicuous absence in the decaying institutions we see onscreen, such as prisons, hospitals, churches, offices, schools, factories, and airports. In both cases, the human is an invisible force that haunts the film's look and its audiovisual content. But what about what we see and hear onscreen? For, whereas *Homo Sapiens* activates a mode of vision that has anthropomorphic echoes, this remains the vision of a machine and does not translate into an *anthropocentric* worldview. In fact, if as Shaviro notes, the aims of speculative realism as a philosophical program is 'to get at the strangeness of things in the world', to 'positively conceive the existence of things outside our own conception of them', and to realize that 'even the things that we have made ourselves possess their own bizarre and independent existence', then *Homo Sapiens* contributes incisively to this enterprise.<sup>30</sup>

An emphasis on objects as existing actively within relational entanglements is observed on two main levels in the film. The first relates to the hybridities of organic and nonorganic matter commonly found in dilapidated sites. The film's protracted focus on ruinous places, with their unexpected arrangements of matter, capitalizes on the excessive, even uncanny materiality of such places, with their disorderly combination of the strange and the familiar. At one point in the film, for example, we see the remnants of a bar as if through a process of mutation, with the stools, covered with green mold, lined along the counter (Figure 10). Another shot shows an oversized plant in a vase inside an abandoned office, the gigantic branches growing on both sides, forcefully reminding the viewer of its will to live. As Tim Ederson argues, to encounter a world in ruins is to attend to the heightened and hybrid physicality of a new ontology of things:

Things in ruins . . . are charged with a more radical alterity. Lacking any obvious meaning, feeling different, unclear in their function, aesthetically indecipherable and out of place, these artefacts pose an alternative way of relating to objects that goes beyond buying and possessing them, domestically displaying and enfolding them, and using them as common-sense fixtures around which everyday life is organised.<sup>31</sup>

In *Homo Sapiens* this becomes especially pronounced in shots that, in surrealist fashion, show objects in unexpected places or juxtapositions, such as a boat strewn in a field (Figure 11), a giant teddy bear collapsed on the floor in an abandoned theme park (Figure 12), a car inside a cave illuminated by a beam of sunlight, and a rollercoaster on seashore partly submerged in water, no doubt the film's most remarkable shot (Figure 13). Although the implication that the director may have tampered with reality to achieve some of these juxtapositions cannot be discounted, many images call attention to the evidentiary qualities of the image by instilling a sense of surprise, such as that of the rollercoaster, in reality pushed into the sea by Hurricane Sandy in Seaside Heights, New Jersey.

*Homo Sapiens* further underlines the ontological relationality of things by rendering them--literally--in constant movement as they are propelled by the wind, which was in many cases artificially produced with leaf-blowers (more of which later).<sup>32</sup> Whether we think of softly rustling leaves, swaying foliage, rattling blinds, screeching rotating bird cages (Figure 14), long strips of paper dragging laterally across the floor (Figure 15), fluttering plastic bags, scattered book pages, rolling plastic balls – the entities on display in *Homo Sapiens* are far from dormant. In so doing, they lend visual form to what Timothy Morton conceptualizes as "interobjectivity," according to which objects relate to each other in a mode of causality and in so doing become "a whole new object with a whole new set of relations to the entities

around it."<sup>33</sup> Tellingly, Morton illustrates his concept with *Homo Sapien's* real protagonist, the wind:

When you hear the wind, you hear the wind in the trees--the trees dendromorphize the wind. You hear the wind in the door: the door doormorphizes the wind. You hear the wind in the wind chimes: the chimes sample the wind in their own unique way. . . .

Another way to say this is that the wind *causes* the chimes to sound. The wind *causes* the doorway to moan softly. The wind *causes* the trees to shush and flutter.<sup>34</sup>

In *Homo Sapiens*, the wind causes the blinds to rattle, the bags to flutter, the book pages to flap, and the strips of paper to drag across the floor. The film thus makes us aware of how each object "samples" the wind in their own unique way, whether in terms of the sounds the wind produces or the unexpected movements and qualities it brings out in objects – as when a multitude of bird cages, swirling around in synchrony, seem to morph into one single, gigantic metal entity; or when paper strips seem to take on zoomorphic qualities. For Morton, these "nonhuman interventions" constitute what he calls the "aesthetic dimension" of the world: "Then we realize that nonhumans are also doing art all the time, it's just that we call it causality."<sup>35</sup>

That *Homo Sapiens* foregrounds the assemblages of objects via their interaction with a material force such as the wind is further significant in a number of ways. First, as Cymene Howe and Dominic Boyer note in relation to what they call "aeolian politics," "In a time when carbon incineration has been exposed as among the greatest ecological threats to humanity and other life on the planet, renewable energy forms, like wind power, are

commonly assumed to have a clear, logical, and obvious salvational purpose."<sup>36</sup> In *Homo Sapiens*, the view that the wind might "redraft the energetic relationship between humanity and the environment"<sup>37</sup> is given an ironic twist precisely because this element is depicted not as a planetary saving grace but instead as an element that will simply continue to exert its force after the human world is long gone. Second, the wind gains significance here in the light of the fact that, like film, it is also an indexical medium: "the wind is elusive to the visual domain except in places where it touches and moves something else . . . [and] through its impact and influence on other matter, other materials, and other beings."<sup>38</sup>

To think of the wind as an indexical medium and of its impact on materials and beings is to enter into the conceptual domain of the trope of "the wind in the trees." As the story goes, when confronted with one of Auguste and Louis Lumière's first films, *Le repas de bébé* (1895), audiences were more interested in the blowing leaves behind the eponymous baby and his feeding parents.<sup>39</sup> And as with many anecdotes surrounding early cinema, the trope of the wind of the trees is less important for its unchecked veracity than it is for its signifying force. Fluttering in spite of the camera operator's intentions, the moving leaves figure as a reminder of the material world's own doings--its indifference to humanity--as well as cinema's ability to record such doings in lifelike manner. The significance of the wind in this context is that it doubles up the indexicality of the image. As Nico Baumbach observes, "Not only is a film an index for a pro-filmic event, but moving leaves are an index of the wind," which is to say that the "wind arrested by the film is an index of an index."<sup>40</sup>

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the trope of rustling leaves has received renewed theoretical attention over the last two decades thanks to the threat posed by digital technology to indexicality, which though it persists in digital capture is lost in computer-generated imagery (CGI). Thus, in a book that bears "the wind in the trees" in its title, Christian Keathley conceptualizes a cinephilic viewing mode that, like early cinema spectators fascinated by

moving leaves, is attentive to the appearance of unprogrammed moments that shine through the indexical image.<sup>41</sup> More recently, Jordan Schonig has taken issue with the idea that the index alone can explain the spectators' fascination with movement in early cinema. For Schonig, such fascination must be explained with reference to the fact that rustling leaves--alongside undulating waves, moving clouds, and rising dust--are less "*unplanned*" natural incidents so much as they are defined by "*unplannable*" movement; that is, the attraction to these motion forms "is not a matter of capturing their contingent existence but instead a matter of capturing the contingent manner in which they *move*."<sup>42</sup>

By according the wind a position of centrality in its textual makeup, *Homo Sapiens* intervenes in these discourses of the index past and present. The first thing to note is that the wind here is no longer the background or an "incidental," to use Dai Vaughan's famous expression, against which human activities are framed, as was the case in the Lumières' film.<sup>43</sup> This has important implications, for if the appeal of moving leaves in early cinema was in some ways connected with their sheer indifference to the human--that is, with the fact "that nature leaves its mark whether or not a subject perceives it" and that the "wind blows the leaves of trees even if no camera is there to film it"<sup>44</sup>--then *Homo Sapiens* asks us to return to this idea precisely because the film starts from the premise that nature, as personified in the wind, will go on leaving its mark whether or not a subject perceives it; or to phrase it differently, that nature will go on leaving its mark even if only a camera is there to film it.

The point to remember, however, is that the wind in *Homo Sapiens*, unlike that of early cinema, is also not *accidental*, which complicates its indexical import. While a few scenes depicting sandstorms and gales were likely spontaneous recordings, many things in the film move with a wind created with leaf-blowers. Such tampering with reality would seem to sit uneasily with the logic of the cinematic index, which, as exemplified by the wind

in the trees, is often conceptualized as the irruption of the contingency of the real world into the image.<sup>45</sup> That said, insofar as what we see onscreen attests to an occurrence at profilmic stage in which objects were lifted, raised, and blown as the result of the imprint of air movement in front of the camera, the images in *Homo Sapiens* are still indexical. Another way of putting this would be to say that this is not the indexical record of the unprogrammed reality of leaves spontaneously moving with a natural wind, but it is the indexical record of a partially programmed reality of objects spontaneously moving with an artificially created wind.<sup>46</sup>

The decision to create the wind through leaf-blowers gains in significance when we consider the way in which this natural force often figures in promotional discourses of digitally simulated cinema that laud their ability to render the wind's "contingent motion" with utmost realism.<sup>47</sup> Of course, like any film these days, *Homo Sapiens* was not immune to digital interventions, with the director even confessing that a few images were digitally touched up.<sup>48</sup> That said, the film no doubt attests to a fascination with *recording* the wind as an elemental entity whose vectors and directionalities are ultimately impossible to predict whether the wind is natural or mechanically produced. This is compounded by the fact that the "visibility" of the wind in the film is made novel as the air interacts not only with trees and leaves, but also humanmade objects, such as plastic cups, plastic bags and bird cages. The film's tampering with profilmic reality to make these objects move onscreen is of course still a trick, but one that, in Bazinian fashion, respects in some measure the reality of the filmed event. One is reminded of Bazin's essay on Albert Lamourisse's *The Red Balloon* (1956), which encapsulates his ideas on the relationship between the imaginary and the real in the cinema – a relationship that is also key for an understanding of *Homo Sapiens*. Bazin writes:

Lamorisse's red balloon actually does go through the movements in front of the camera we see on the screen. Of course there is a trick in it, but it is not one that belongs to cinema as such. Illusion is created here, as in conjuring, out of reality itself. It is something concrete, and does not derive from the potential extensions created by montage.

What does it matter, you will say, provided the result is the same, if, for example, we are made to accept on the screen the existence of a balloon that can follow its master like a little dog? It matters to this extent, that with montage the magic balloon would exist only on the screen, whereas that of Lamorisse sends us back to reality.<sup>49</sup>

If on the one hand *The Red Balloon* is nothing but “a tale told in film, a pure creation of the mind,” on the other its “photographic respect for the unity of space” ensures that we believe “in the reality of what is happening while knowing it to be tricked.”<sup>50</sup> It follows that the film is “the picture of a story or, if you prefer, an imaginary documentary,” since “the screen reflects the ebb and flow of our imagination which feeds on a reality for which it plans to substitute.”<sup>51</sup>

Bearing in mind the aesthetic gulf separating both films, with Bazin we can say that the objects we see in *Homo Sapiens*, through tricks during the shoot, do “go through the movements in front of the camera we see on the screen.” More importantly, if clearly this is an imagined world-without-us, such a world nevertheless “feeds on a reality for which it plans to substitute” through images that indiscernibly conflate the reality of indexical reproduction with the imaginary of a posthuman fable. As such, if montage assumed the role of a counterpoint against which Bazin could define and appraise the concrete realism of *The*

*Red Balloon's* imaginary tale, *Homo Sapiens's* filming choices provide a similar opportunity to assess the film's ethics as a world-without-us that sends us back to *this* world.

### **A World-Oriented Ontology**

*Homo Sapiens's* authentication of its illusionary tale of planetary destruction through recourse to indexical images can be said to differ from the way in which ecological destruction and catastrophe are often visualised in contemporary fictional cinema. As Selmin Kara notes:

The proliferation of films with ecological disaster and extinction narratives in recent years suggests that the Anthropocene might also signal a new epoch in the ecology and temporality of cinema. Through the aid of new technologies and CGI, films increasingly stretch the boundaries of cinematic time and space across deep pasts, vast futures, and previously unmappable topographies in order to project visions of humanity under constant threat by factors of its own making.<sup>52</sup>

Looking specifically at *The Tree of Life* (2011) and *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (2012), Kara proposes that it is their "digitally composited sequences that point to a non-indexical, speculative realism by referencing evolutionary biology and cosmic origins."<sup>53</sup> David Martin-Jones, while interrogating the political efficacy of speculative realism as a critical framework, similarly gives pride of place to CGI in its ability "to render visible humanity's excluded ecological others" in films like *Troll Hunter* (2010) and *The Hunter* (2011).<sup>54</sup>

In *Homo Sapiens*, by contrast, speculative realism is imbricated with its indexical counterpart. This is not to say that the film was immune to interventions at both profilmic and postproduction stages, but rather that it is a film whose aesthetic principle springs from an

impetus to reflect on the camera's ability to capture worldly spaces and objects. In particular, through its implication that an autonomous camera records the world without humans, *Homo Sapiens* can be illuminated in relation to Bazin's and Stanley Cavell's theories of cinematic automatism, both of which put forward what I call a "world-oriented ontology" in their emphasis on a world--our world--that automatically gives itself to be viewed by the camera.

I now turn to these theories in the hope of demonstrating, by way of conclusion, the manner in which the film, through its commitment to letting the unseen world be seen, compels us to think of ontological realism in the cinema as itself a speculative realism of sorts.

Bazin famously writes in his "Ontology" essay, originally published in 1945: "For the first time, between the originating object and its reproduction there intervenes only the instrumentality of a nonliving agent. *For the first time an image of the world is formed automatically*, without the creative intervention of man."<sup>55</sup> The photograph is not a subjective interpretation of reality, however faithful in likeness that may turn out to be, but an object that astonishes us, since we are "forced as to accept as real the existence of the object reproduced, actually *re-presented*, set before us."<sup>56</sup> Photography thus "produces an image that is a reality of nature, namely, an hallucination that is also a fact."<sup>57</sup> Inspired by Bazin, Cavell similarly marvels at the fact that photography "does not present us with 'likeness' of things; it presents us, we want to say, with the things themselves."<sup>58</sup> Ultimately the only certainty we have about photographs is that they "are not hand-made; they are manufactured. And what is manufactured is *an image of the world*."<sup>59</sup> Through eliminating the human agent, Cavell concludes, photography "overcame subjectivity," so much so that it "maintains the presentness of the world by accepting our absence from it."<sup>60</sup>

For both thinkers it is therefore imperative to consider the ontology of photography--and consequently cinema--as resulting from an *automatic* process whereby it is the world that

presents itself to the camera and gives itself to be viewed. As such, not only is their thought still relevant to the digital capture of reality, but it also endows the world with a sense of agency and intentionality in the forming of its own image. This has tremendous philosophical implications, as Lisa Trahair notes in her analysis of the connections between both thinkers:

The world that reveals itself to the camera, and whose candour rests on the fact that nothing it reveals to the presence of the camera is lost, repudiates the teaching of modern philosophers. . . . Just when modern philosophy lost faith in nature's capacity to disclose itself to us . . . along comes film and, by virtue of its automatism, flourishes, undiminished by the problems of scepticism that beset philosophy. As Cavell tells it, the mechanical reproduction of the world independent of subjective interference gives the "unseen" view of the world that Kant, Locke, and Hume had thought was beyond our empirical reach and that Hegel, Marx, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche thought beyond our metaphysical reach.<sup>61</sup>

Though Trahair does not engage with speculative realism per se, it is not difficult to see the way in which such a description tallies with the speculative realists' quest to debunk the idea that one should give up access to the world insofar as we are inescapably invested in it subjectively. Inasmuch as cinema overcomes subjectivity by its very mechanism of production through which images of the world are formed automatically, and insofar as cinema does not reproduce the things but indeed presents us with the things-in-themselves, for Bazin and Cavell, cinema is a world-oriented ontology.

Now, this is certainly not an all-seeing and all-knowing vision of the world, and indeed if Bazin defines the "myth of a total cinema" in terms of a desire to achieve a

complete reproduction of reality--an "integral realism, a recreation of the world in its own image, an image unburdened by the freedom of interpretation of the artist and the irreversibility of time"<sup>62</sup>--such an idea, in its dream of totality, remains a myth given the technical limitations of cinema and the fact that there are subjective elements in the image. By the same token, if for Bazin cinema is an "asymptote of reality," this is because cinema, however near it may get to the real world, will never truly become it, not least because "cinema is also a language," as he famously concluded the "Ontology" essay in its 1958 version.<sup>63</sup> As Birks rightly notes, Bazin's realist theory straddles a fine line between objectivity and subjectivity, a tension that, when put in dialogue with more radical iterations of speculative realism (such as Meillassoux's), complicates its quest to transcend human perception in order to arrive at the things-in-themselves. She writes: "Bazin's realism . . . rests not on the simplistic idea that cinema is able to give us direct access to objective reality but on the fact that it provides a subjective impression of objectivity."<sup>64</sup> This is because "like ours, cinema's view of the world is only partial, deficient, and incomplete. Its objectivity does not imply totality"<sup>65</sup>

That said, I would maintain that in Bazin (and Cavell), the limited perspective of the camera as well as its subjective connotations (including perspective) is no impediment to recognizing the agency of reality, its will to imprint itself on film, via cinema's mechanical process. In other words, I would like to emphasize that for both theorists it is the world itself that shapes its own image, which has important consequences in terms of how we see the world as an entity in its own right in their thinking about cinema. In this sense, the cinematic image, for both thinkers, does imply a totality of the world that is left out of the picture. As Cavell notes, unlike painting, "a photograph is *of* the world," since "the implied presence of the rest of the world, and its explicit rejection, are as essential in the experience of a photograph as what it explicitly presents. A camera . . . holding on an object is holding the

rest of the world away."<sup>66</sup> Something similar is at stake in Bazin's concept of total cinema, which while recognizing that a complete reproduction of the world is ultimately impossible nevertheless concedes that cinema's ultimate goal is the idea of a "world in its own image."<sup>67</sup>

No doubt both thinkers championed the cinema in relation to its values and benefits for a human subject and therefore as a phenomenology: in Bazin a subject in fear of the inexorability of time that finds in cinema's reproduction of duration a way of deferring anxiety about death<sup>68</sup> and in Cavell a subject whose consciousness has been unhinged from the world and who finds solace in the cinema precisely as cinema mechanically seals this unhinging "through no fault of my subjectivity."<sup>69</sup> But if Bazin and Cavell assessed the cinema in relation to a human viewer, it was precisely because cinematic images of the world are not subjectively formed; cinema is valuable not so much because it allows us to see the world in different ways but instead because it allows the world to reveal itself in its own terms for a nonhuman entity: the camera.<sup>70</sup> While acknowledging Bazin's indebtedness to Merleau-Ponty, I believe that this point complicates a straightforward phenomenological reading of his theory.

Not unlike contemporary philosophers of realism, then, for Bazin and Cavell the world first and foremost *is*, it exists before its appreciation by a human subject. Cinema is important because as a "succession of automatic world projections," it allows the sheer immanence of the world to be viewed.<sup>71</sup> As Cavell noted in the enlarged edition of *The World Viewed* (1979), his book was in part a reaction against the "pervasive intellectual fashion, apparently sanctioned by the history of epistemology and the rise of modern science, according to which we never really, and never really can, see reality as it is."<sup>72</sup> And insofar as speculative realism has been met with similar suspicions, I would argue that a reading of Bazin and Cavell within such a context gains in significance precisely because for these

thinkers, cinema settles this discussion. Cinema, by its very mechanism, proves that the world-in-itself exists. That is its unparalleled power.

If I have dwelled at some length on these reflections, this is because I believe that *Homo Sapiens* activates these discourses and reflections in significant ways. It does so, first, through its fictional universe, which manufactures the world as a world in which only the world, without humans, exists. And, second, this is a world that makes itself available in visual form through the lens aperture of film cameras whose perspectival vision, in turn, reminds us of the role cinema once played by and for humans in an unspecified past. *Homo Sapiens* thus reduces a Bazinian-Cavellian ontology of cinema to its most fundamental principle by imagining a scenario that strips down the mechanical process of cinema as involving only the world (the producer of images) and nonhuman film cameras (the recipient of images), while at the same time highlighting in the composition of the image the importance cinema once enjoyed for humanity.

The uncanny mode of spectatorship that this film promotes is therefore connected with the epistemologically restless recognition that as viewers, we are not simply witness to a world without us but are also witness to a world that produces its own images, on its own, without us.

The beauty of *Homo Sapiens* is that its end-of-the-world fable is wholly inseparable from the camera's act of recording: they are one and the same thing. This means that as we are confronted with the fictionalization of what a cinematic image is in a posthuman scenario, we are reminded that at its most basic, this is what a cinematic image really is. And this means that as we are confronted with images from the future, visual records of a gone world, we are simultaneously made to confront our own world as it makes itself visible through durational images of sand, water, railways, rain, cinemas, mountains, plastic balls, plastic bags, rollercoasters, trees, offices, birds, desks, books, beds, sunlight, lamps, churches,

computers, beaches, seas, tanks, chairs, airports, ships, buildings, and the wind. To say that for now we still have this world and that it is our only world should be enough to demonstrate the ethical dimension of this film.

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<sup>1</sup> Alan Weisman, *The World without Us* (London: Virgin Books, 2008); Jan Zalasiewicz, with contributions from Kim Freedman, *The Earth after Us: What Legacy Will Humans Leave in the Rocks?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Steven Shaviro, *The Universe of Things: On Speculative Realism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014); Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, eds., *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier (London: Continuum, 2009); Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013); Graham Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything* (London: Penguin, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> For the sake of convenience I use the term "speculative realism" throughout the essay, given its wider usage. However, I am mindful of the many conceptual divergences animating these different philosophical strands and spell them out whenever necessary.

<sup>4</sup> The founding event of speculative realism was a conference held at Goldsmiths College in London in April 2017. Participants included Brassier, Harman, Meillassoux, and Grant. For a critique of speculative realism's anti-Kantian stance, see Andrew Cole, "Those Obscure Objects of Desire: Andrew Cole on the Uses and Abuses of Object-Oriented Ontology and Speculative Realism," *Artforum* (Summer 2015), 318-23.

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<sup>5</sup> See Selmin Kara, "Anthropocenema: Cinema in the Age of Mass Extinctions," in *Post-Cinema: Theorizing 21st Century Film*, ed. Shane Denson and Julia Leyda (Falmer, UK: REFRAME Books, 2016), 750-784; David Martin-Jones, "Trolls, Tigers and Transmodern Ecological Encounters: Enrique Dussel and a Cine-Ethics for the Anthropocene," *Film-Philosophy* 20, no. 1 (2016): 63-103; Chelsea Birks, "Objectivity, Speculative Realism, and the Cinematic Apparatus," *Cinema Journal: The Journal of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies* 57, no. 4 (2018): 3-24.

<sup>6</sup> Alan Weisman, *The World without Us* (London: Virgin Books, 2008), 3-4.

<sup>7</sup> "Visualization," Lexico, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/visualization>.

<sup>8</sup> See Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meanings in the Cinema* (London: BFI, 1976), chap. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Philip Rosen, "Document and Documentary: On the Persistence of Historical Concepts," in *Theorizing Documentary*, ed. Michael Renov (New York: Routledge, 1993), 62.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 63-64 (my emphasis).

<sup>11</sup> Dora Apel, *Beautiful Terrible Ruins: Detroit and the Anxiety of Decline* (New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 17.

<sup>12</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'The Climate of History: Four Theses', *Critical Inquiry* 35: 2 (Winter 2009), 197-222; 222. Not coincidentally, Chakrabarty develops this idea in relation to Weisman's *The World Without Us*.

<sup>13</sup> Qtd. in Karen Schiefer, "Interview with Nikolaus Geyrhalter," *Homo Sapiens* Press Release, [http://www.kimstim.com/assets/homo-sapiens-press-release\\_web.pdf](http://www.kimstim.com/assets/homo-sapiens-press-release_web.pdf), 8 (accessed February 2019).

<sup>14</sup> Nigel Clark, *Inhuman Nature: Sociable Life on a Dynamic Planet* (London: SAGE Publications, 2011), xi.

<sup>15</sup> Peter Szendy, *Apocalypse-Cinema: 2012 and Other Ends of the World*, trans. Will Bishop (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 2 (emphasis in the original).

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<sup>16</sup> Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 25 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>17</sup> Eduardo Viveiros de Castro and Déborah Danowski, *The Ends of the World* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2017), 31. As Castro and Danowski go on to note via Shaviro, the curious consequence of this radical removal of perspective is that it reinstates anthropocentrism, for in affirming that to get at the heart of the things-in-themselves any human characteristic must be extinguished, such a position reiterates human exceptionalism in its assumption that human qualities are exclusively the attribute of humans.

<sup>18</sup> Shaviro, *The Universe of Things*, 61.

<sup>19</sup> Courtney Sheehan, "Nikolaus Geyrhalter confronts *Homo Sapiens*," *The Independent*, February 28, 2016, <http://independent-magazine.org/2016/02/nikolaus-geyrhalter-confronts-homo-sapiens/>

<sup>20</sup> Jean-Louis Baudry "The Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," *Film Quarterly* 28 no. 2, 39–47 (1974), 41.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Wollen, "Cinema and Technology: A Historical Overview," in *The Cinematic Apparatus*, ed. Teresa de Lauretis and Stephen Heath (London: Macmillan, 1980), 21.

<sup>22</sup> Dziga Vertov, *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, ed. Annete Michelson, trans. Kevin O'Brien (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 17.

<sup>23</sup> Joanna Zylińska, *Nonhuman Photography* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017), 37, 31 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>24</sup> Birks, "Objectivity," 3. Birks advances this argument in relation to *Tectonics* (2012) and *Jauja* (2014), both of which share similarities with *Homo Sapiens* in their simultaneous nod to the human and the nonhuman in their formal construction.

<sup>25</sup> T.R. Kover, 'Are the Oil Sands Sublime?: Edward Burtynsky and the Vicissitudes of the Sublime' in Robert Boschman and Mario Trono (eds) *Found in Alberta: Environmental*

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*Themes for the Anthropocene* (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2014), 125-148; 136.

<sup>26</sup> Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, trans. Celia Britton et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 48 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 50. See, e.g., Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 53, emphasis in original.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 53, emphasis in original.

<sup>30</sup> Shaviro, *The Universe of Things*, 66-7.

<sup>31</sup> Tim Edensor, *Industrial Ruins: Space, Aesthetics and Materiality* (Oxford, UK: Berg), 123.

<sup>32</sup> Cristopher Heron, "How Dying Feels: Nikolaus Geyrhalter Interview (Homo Sapiens)," *The Seventh Art* (online), available at <http://theseventhart.org/nikolaus-geyrhalter-interview-homo-sapiens/>, October 19 2017 (accessed May 16 2017)

<sup>33</sup> Timothy Morton, *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality* (Ann Arbor, MI: Open Humanities Press, 2013), 122.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 120 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>36</sup> Cymene Howe and Dominic Bower, "Aeolian Politics," *Distinktion: Journal of Social Theory* 16, no. 1 (2015): 32.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>39</sup> Georges Méliès was among such an audience. See Nico Baumbach, "Nature Caught in the Act: On the Transformation of an Idea of Art in Early Cinema," in *Cinematicity in Media History*, ed. Jeffrey Geiger and Karin Littau, 107-116 (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2013). In 1944 the trope of the moving leaves was given a new lease by D.

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W. Griffith, who would claim on his deathbed that films lacked the "beauty of the moving wind in the trees" (107).

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>41</sup> Christian Keathley, *Cinephilia and History, or The Wind in the Trees* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

<sup>42</sup> Jordan Schonig, "Contingent Motion: Rethinking the 'Wind in the Trees' in Early Cinema and CGI," *Discourse* 40, no. 1 (2018): 32 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>43</sup> Dai Vaughan, *For Documentary: Twelve Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 4.

<sup>44</sup> Baumbach, "Nature Caught in the Act," 114.

<sup>45</sup> See Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

<sup>46</sup> To an extent, the same is true of the sounds we hear in the film. While they are not the actual sounds produced by the object we see onscreen, they are nonetheless indexical recordings of real interactions and events.

<sup>47</sup> For an excellent account of these discourses, see Schonig, "Contingent Motion".

<sup>48</sup> Sheehan, "Nikolaus Geyrhalter confronts *Homo Sapiens*" (online).

<sup>49</sup> André Bazin, *What Is Cinema?*, Vol. 1, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 45.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 46; 48.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 46; 48.

<sup>52</sup> Kara, "Anthropocenema," 753.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 760.

<sup>54</sup> Martin-Jones, "Trolls, Tigers and Transmodern Ecological Encounters," 92.

<sup>55</sup> Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, 13 (my emphasis).

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>58</sup> Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 17.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 20 (my emphasis).

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>61</sup> Lisa Trahair, "Being on the Outside: Cinematic Automatism in Stanley Cavell's *The World Viewed*," *Film-Philosophy* 18 (2014): 135. As Trahair further notes, however, the concept of automatism is not restricted to film's mechanical reproduction of reality in Cavell's work and is conceptualized in other ways as well.

<sup>62</sup> Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, 21.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>64</sup> Birks, "Objectivity, Speculative Realism, and the Cinematic Apparatus," 9.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>67</sup> Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, 21.

<sup>68</sup> See Philip Rosen, *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), chap. 1.

<sup>69</sup> Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 23.

<sup>70</sup> Here is where, moreover, Bazin and Cavell in my view depart from what Malcolm Turvey defines as "the revelationist tradition" in film theory, with respect to Jean Epstein, Dziga Vertov, Béla Balázs, and Siegfried Kracauer. Turvey describes this tradition, based on these thinkers' writings, as film's "ability to uncover features of reality invisible to human vision." The crucial thing for both Bazin and Cavell is not so much that the camera acts as a superior eye when compared to human vision, but rather, that the knowledge that the world we see

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onscreen has been automatically formed. See Malcolm Turvey, *Doubting Vision: Film and the Revelationist Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3.

<sup>71</sup> Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 166.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.